

**CARMEN LAFORET:  
DESPUÉS DE *NADA*, MUCHO  
NUEVAS PERSPECTIVAS AL CONMEMORAR  
EL CENTENARIO DE SU NACIMIENTO  
(1921-2021)**

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## Introduction

THE centennial of Carmen Laforet's birth in 2021 presented a unique opportunity for casual readers, students, professors, bibliophiles and literary critics alike to revisit the corpus of this Spanish author's work and remind ourselves that despite the blinding impact of her national award-winning novel in 1945, there was and still is, despite the 1958 assertion by Juan Goytisolo, *mucho después de "Nada."*<sup>1</sup> Yet, there continues to be universal fixation on Laforet's seminal work that unfortunately reinforces the oversight of her subsequent four novels, numerous short stories, "novelas cortas," and articles, all of which are essential works to refine not only our understanding of, and appreciation for, the development of Laforet's writing, but also her place among Spanish writers of her time.<sup>2</sup> With an amplification of the critical view of Carmen Laforet's contributions, this commemorative edition serves in part to revisit her first novel, but more importantly to reexamine the often forgotten/omitted literary contributions of this significant Spanish author, whom we might consider parallel to U.S. literature's J.D. Salinger, author of the classic *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951).

However, revisiting/re-examining Laforet's work required careful consideration of those who might contribute notably to this important endeavor, which is why as this volume's co-editors, we are proud to showcase an accomplished and diverse cast of 17 Hispanists, to include Laforet's own son Agustín Cerezales along with internationally acclaimed and upcoming Laforetian scholars representing Italy, Mexico,

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<sup>1</sup> In his 1958 article "La literatura española," Goytisolo wrote with respect to Laforet's first novel: "Después de *Nada*, nada" (16).

<sup>2</sup> The MLA (Modern Language Association) International Bibliography reflects this pervasive focus: at the time of this writing, nearly two of every three entries are studies focused on Laforet's *Nada*.

Poland, Spain, the U.K. and the U.S. Of this edition's 17 essays, 13 lend a critical eye beyond Laforet's first novel with fresh angles and insights that will undoubtedly bolster an appreciation for the wealth and depth of this important Spanish author's work.

Few scholars have paid sufficient attention to the use of irony in Laforet's writing even though it is a standard feature of her novels and short stories as well as her journalism. Agustín Cerezales provides a fresh approach to understanding Laforet's deployment of irony through an analysis of his mother's unique sense of humor that emerges across her fiction and, in particular, her articles for the magazine *Destino*. Again referencing Laforet's *Destino* articles as well as her novels, Blanca Ripoll Sintes explores the theme of wandering or *vagabundeo* as a recurring trope that can be linked back to the dominant theme of freedom that Agustín Cerezales described in referring to his mother as "el único espacio en que se puede respirar" (6). Caragh Wells also examines several of Laforet's articles to reveal their importance to our understanding of Laforet's craft as a writer and her perceptive social criticism that was often deftly contained behind an ironic mask. The freedom that dominates Laforet's writing is displayed in the range of topics broached within her journalism and her refusal to hold back where she wishes to make a stronger intervention, particularly on the topic of women writers. These articles also reveal some of the many literary influences on Laforet as a writer: Patrizia Prati provides a detailed exploration of the impact of *La Divina Comedia* and draws attention to Laforet's 1949 *Destino* article "De la mano de Dante" as the starting point for her discussion. Prati expands with reference to ideas on the *Comedia* that Laforet jotted down in a notebook in 1956. These chapters illustrate the importance of cross-referencing Laforet's newspaper articles with her creative writing as they provide a rich source of information on a range of topics, literary influences and societal issues.<sup>3</sup>

Luis Quintana and Ellen Mayock turn their attention respectively to Laforet's short fiction, also a relatively neglected area of critical study within her literary *oeuvre* apart from the studies by Johnson (1981), Del Mastro (2005) and Ferretti (2013). Quintana addresses some of the formal features and narrative stylistics of Laforet's short fiction as well the

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<sup>3</sup> All of Laforet's articles written for *Destino* have now been collected in Ana Cabello and Blanca Ripoll's impressive volume entitled *Carmen Laforet: Puntos de vista de una mujer* (2021).

theme of unrequited love, while Mayock explores new readings on the trope of “la chica rara” in several short stories from the collection *Carta a Don Juan* (2007).

Three chapters in our collection focus on Laforet’s famous first novel *Nada*, and each critical interpretation orbits around the theme of the senses, which is encapsulated beautifully in the novel’s epigraph from a poem by Juan Ramón Jiménez. The world of the senses and non-conceptual reasoning are foundational in our understanding of Laforet’s representational aesthetics; however, although sensory experience can lead to “la verdad no sospechada,” this deeper truth of cognitive and bodily sensation can never be fully articulated in a language that satisfactorily conveys such moments of pure experience. Verónica Del Valle Cacela provides an intricate reading of the issues faced by *Nada*’s Italian translators when seeking equivalent modes of expressing the sensory aspects of Laforet’s writing. Renee Congdon examines the themes of smells and sounds of post-war Barcelona in her penetrating reading of *Nada* and the links that these representations of the senses have to trauma at both personal and national levels. Mark P. Del Mastro’s chapter engages readers with a nuanced study of Laforet’s focus on hands, particularly those of Andrea’s uncle Román, while considering the connections between the protagonist’s desire for human connection and association that feeds into her own psychological development amidst the doubly inhospitable environment of the Aribau apartment and Francoist society of the 1940s.

Alongside Del Mastro, several chapters in this collection pay close attention to the social critique found in Laforet’s fiction and writing, particularly with reference to women’s place within the patriarchal constraints of the Franco regime and the gender norms of the time. Samuel O’Donoghue posits *La mujer nueva* as an example of Laforet’s desire to expose religious hypocrisy in 1950s Spain as delivered through the story of Paulina’s religious conversion. In her exploration of female emancipation and spiritual empowerment, Laforet draws inspiration from the Spanish mystics Santa Teresa de Jesús and San Juan de la Cruz to forge a critique of the decadence and moral bankruptcy of mid-20th-century Spain. Roberta Johnson returns to the theme of the role of women in her chapter and explores Gabriel Miró’s paired novels *Nuestro Padre San Daniel* and *El obispo leproso* as possible sources of influence on *La mujer nueva*, suggesting that the intertextual links between the novels highlights Laforet’s underlying feminist aims in her fiction, despite the fact that Laforet avoided declaring herself a feminist.