

Language and the Tourist Experience in *Paralelo 35* (1976) by Carmen Laforet in the Context of the Travel Books to the United States in the 1960s

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to analyze Carmen Laforet's traveling experience in the book *Paralelo 35* (1967). Published in a context in which the travelogue to the United States has already established itself as a literary tradition with an audience, Laforet's book distinguishes itself from those of its contemporaries by adopting a polyphonic perspective and by thematizing the linguistic aspect of the cultural experience. This paper will be divided into three parts: the first part serves as an introduction to travel writing to the United States; the second part focuses on the chronicles published in the 1960s by Josep Pla, Miguel Delibes and Julián Marías, and the third part analyzes *Paralelo 35*. In this study, we will consider: 1) the set of themes from which the European literary imagery on the United States has been constituted; 2) the use of genres related to autobiography, essay and journalism; 3) the construction of a literary image of the writer, identifiable or comparable with that of the traveler, tourist or interpreter.

Key words

Travel literature, imagology, transfiction, gender studies, Carmen Laforet, Josep Pla, Miguel Delibes, Julián Marías

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Introduction

Travel literature to the United States constitutes a rich and abundant literary tradition, the imagery of which allows us to delve into the social, economic and cultural changes taking place both in the United States and in the country of origin (and return) of the traveler. As it is known, the tradition of travel narrative to the United States began in Europe in the nineteenth century.¹ From then on, coinciding with the emergence of large metropolises, journalists, diplomats and scientists who traveled for professional reasons, exposed their outlook on the country based on issues such as ethnocultural minorities, the media, advertising, industry, transport, religion, public space, cities, education, landscape, women and leisure.² Travel literature to the United States gained scope in the early twentieth century, when New York became the iconographic synthesis of the country, thanks to the development of the film and advertising industry.

As a whole, the period covering the 1910s to the 1930s is the one that has generated the most bibliographical interest. At that time, the literary imagery about the United States was built from books such as *Diario de un poeta recién casado* (1916), by Juan Ramón Jiménez, *Un año en el otro mundo* (1917) and *La ciudad automática* (1932), by Julio Camba, *Poeta en Nueva York*, by Federico García Lorca (with poems written between 1929 and 1930), and Enrique Jardiel Poncela's chronicles (published in the weekly *Nuevo Mundo*).³ In these works, New York was an emblem of a controversial modernity. Its iconography, despite being associated with the set of sociocultural values through which artistic avant-garde renewal took place, was also linked to a series of distressing and dehumanizing elements. Specifically, it was seen as a fragmentary and pathetic world city, governed by the automatism of Fordist mechanics, and characterized by endless streets, where fleeting images of its people and its buildings were scattered.

All this interest is maintained and transformed from the 1940s, especially after the Second World War. Despite the fact that Spain in the 1950s was experiencing serious economic hardship, and the reception of North American culture was gradual and partial, this situation changed radically in the early 1960s. American cultural productions became popular, especially westerns and film noirs (which will be claimed by postwar critics such as Claude-Edmonde Magny as the basis of the objective novel). In Spain, it is from 1953, the year of bilateral agreements between both countries, when there is a progressive Americanization of certain social, cultural and institutional spaces, in parallel with the gradual introduction of the commercial philosophy of free trade.⁴

The Stabilization Plan of 1959 brought about unprecedented economic growth, which led to an increase in consumption and a greater diversification of leisure possibilities. In the cultural field, this favored a greater openness to the social and cultural currents of the moment, as we see in the books under study, where writers are interested in the movement for civil rights of Afro-Americans or feminism. In this context, the Hispanic imagery of the United States is part of the set of signs through which the country wants to modernize, although, as reflected in the books by Delibes and Marías, in Spain the vision of the American world was full of shadows.

The list of authors who relate their American trip is long. In the 1940s, we have to highlight the chronicles of Juan Larch (*Siluetas de América. Impresiones recientes de un periodista español*, 1943), Gaspar Tato Cumming (*Nueva York. Un español entre rascacielos*, 1945), Diego Hidalgo (*Nueva York. Impresiones de un español del siglo XIX que no sabe inglés*, 1947), Luis Amargós (*Estados Unidos. Viaje de un turista curioso*, 1947) and Joaquín Calvo-Sotelo (*Nueva York en retales*, 1947). In the 1950s, a key role is assumed by intellectuals and writers such as Fernando Díaz Plaja (*La vida norteamericana*, 1955), Julián Marías (*Los Estados Unidos en escorzo*, 1957), José Luis

Castillo-Puche (*América de cabo a rabo*, 1959) and Josep Pla (*Viaje a América*, 1960), among others.⁵ All of them travel to the “new” continent with the commission of publishing journalistic chronicles about the reality of the country; later their articles are collected in book form.⁶ Over time, this literature becomes a fashion that attracts professional journalists and amateurs, who justify the journey alleging the need to explain their direct experience of the place.

From the 1960s, travelers who succumb to the American temptation often have a well-known career. Among the names of the period 1960-1975, we find the following: the art critic José Antonio Campoy (*Norteamérica a vista de pájaro*, 1962), the novelists Miguel Delibes (*USA y yo*, 1966), Carmen Laforet (*Paralelo 35*, 1967), Camilo José Cela (*Viaje a U.S.A.*, 1967), Jaime Ferrán (*Angel en U.S.A. (Norte)*, 1971), and Terenci Moix (*Terenci als USA*, 1974).⁷ Despite the fact that in the Hispanic world between 1941-1980 there was an increase in travel stories authored by female writers, Laforet is one of the few women who traveled to the United States in the 1960s.⁸ In the same decade, two authors from a previous generation, Josep Pla and Julián Marías, revisit the country they discovered in the mid-1950s and dedicate three books to it: *Cap a Amèrica, encara per la ruta del petroli* (1960) and *Petites reflexions sobre un viatge als Estats Units* (1963), both by Pla, and *Análisis de los Estados Unidos* (1968), by Marías. Despite coinciding in the titles (where the place name is underscored) and in the covers (which reproduce maps, elements of North American iconography and/or the author’s photo), the content of the literature of the 1960s usually implies changes with respect to the imagery of the 1950s, adapting to the new social reality of the moment. It is not surprising, in this sense, that these works, which appeared in the midst of the boom of the tourism industry, reflect a society in crisis, whose contrasts and contradictions are laid bare by the civil rights movement, the women’s liberation movement and the gay power protests. These

transformations force narrators to modify the language with which reality is treated, including phenomena (and codes) typical of the new consumer society and its cultural productions.

In the long tradition of travel narrative to the United States, female travelers are scarce. In the postwar period, the exception is Simone de Beauvoir, who was invited by the United States State Department and explained her experience, in a very personal and enthusiastic tone, in *Amérique au jour le jour* (1948). In the Hispanic peninsular sphere, the case of Rosa Chacel should be pointed out. The writer, who was in exile in Brazil, made a stay in New York, funded by the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, between the end of 1959 and November 1961.⁹ Chacel, however, did not describe her experience in any travelogue, thus we must consider *Paralelo 35*, Carmen Laforet's book published in 1967, as the first female-written travel narration published in postwar Spain. As in Beauvoir's case, the trip is the result of an invitation from the State Department of the United States government.

What perspective does Laforet take in her narrative? To what extent does her experience differ from that disclosed by other writers during the 1960s? What points of interest is her trip based on and how is her imagery built? The objective of this article is to answer these questions from the analysis of *Paralelo 35*. To do so, we will take into account four more travel books: *Cap a Amèrica, encara per la ruta del petroli* (1960) and *Petites reflexions sobre un viatge als Estats Units* (1963), by Josep Pla, *USA y yo* (1966), by Miguel Delibes, and *Análisis de los Estados Unidos* (1968), by Julián Marías. The comparative interpretation of these four books will allow us to deal with the following topics: 1) the representation of U.S. society and racial conflict, 2) the technological and economic development, 3) U.S. values and their historical background. In the article, we

will assess whether the gaze that Laforet projects on these issues differs from the previous literary tradition, both from a cultural and a discursive aspect.

Laforet's experience reminds us that, as Bassnett noted,¹⁰ there are few cases of women travelling on commission. Most of them travel for personal reasons and, if they move for professional motives, they feel compelled to assume and justify a certain role. In *Paralelo 35*, the narrator insists on the idea of discovering a mediated reality through the interpreters and the successive guides who accompany her. Her trip is based on a built itinerary, organized by Jerome Margolius, from the State Department, often done in a hurry and with little choices. One of the themes that reappear in the book is communication. Laforet does not understand English, and this forces her to rely on to the available guide of the moment, whose name is usually made explicit. Unlike Pla and Delibes (who also travelled accompanied and did not speak English), Laforet reveals a common problem in travel narrative which, incomprehensibly, usually disappears in most accounts: perception and the relationship with the foreign language. As we will see, the approach of Laforet's chronicle is that of a traveler who goes with the flow and discovers a culture and a society which until then is little known to her.

Four Travel Books from the Sixties

The books *Petites reflexions sobre un viatge als Estats Units* (1963) by Josep Pla and *USA y yo* (1966) by Delibes are articulated as travel chronicles. Both writers explain their experience as testimonies of the country, constructing stories that, as Alburquerque-García recalls,¹¹ are usually characterized by factuality, description and objectivity.¹² In their works there is no reference to the communicative dimension of the experience or to the difficulties of not understanding English well (only Pla makes a brief reference to the

nasal timbre of North Americans). Throughout the chapters, Pla and Delibes mention the people who accompany them on the journey, without including—in most cases—more information than their initials. Using formulas such as “el meu amic F.,” “el meu amic nord-americà M. L.,” “observadores de la vida del país [...] extranjeros residentes” or “mi amigo de Bloomington,” they specify that their account comes, in part, from the interaction with people who live in the United States, North Americans or Spanish residents, mainly. Mariás, for his part, in *Análisis de los Estados Unidos* (1968), limits himself to saying in the prologue that the book is the result of “largas conversaciones” with people from different social and professional backgrounds. As we will see, the vision they offer of the United States is conditioned by the informative will of the three travelers, in which a domesticating perspective predominates. References to the “lector” are recurrent in Pla and Delibes, and show the need to adapt to the horizon of expectations of the country of publication of their works, where their style and language are well known and represent, in fact, a means of attracting an audience.

Throughout the 1960s, Pla travelled twice to the United States and explained his experience in two reports which, before being published in books, appeared as articles in *Destino*. The first journey, which takes place between May, June and August 1960, is made on an oil tanker, leaving Ceuta and arriving in Philadelphia passing along the Delaware River. In 1958, Pla had sailed from Ferrol to Kuwait, covering the first part of the so-called *oil route*. With the 1960 trip to Philadelphia (published under the title *Cap a Amèrica, encara per la ruta del petroli*), he covers the other part of this itinerary following the route of crude oil transportation. The interest of the trip is, therefore, twofold: on the one hand, to describe life on the Norwegian oil tanker—the food, silence and contemplation of the sea—and on the other hand, to explain the circuit of the most precious fuel of the day, the consumption of which had increased through the use of the

automobile and the agitation “en gran part inútil, que caracteritza la nostra època.”¹³ In the final part, the narrator, after listing different wars and economic achievements with which the United States has consolidated its strategic hegemony, considers that Europe’s subordination to this new world power will intensify in the future.

Three years later, Pla returns to North America. This time he travels by plane and visits New York, Washington, Annapolis, South Carolina and Miami. The titles of the 34 chronicles that make up the report show the interests that motivate it. They are, above all, social motives linked to daily life and gastronomy. The reportage also deals with two of the most burning issues of the 1960s, which had been neglected in *Week-end (d’estiu) a Nova York* (1955): “La qüestió racial” and “Els contingents d’emigració als Estats Units.” As for discrimination against Afro-Americans, Pla considers it a “problema legal” that concerns “l’ordre públic” and thinks that despite the measures in favor of equality implemented by the Kennedy administration, it is still there because of the rejection of integration by a part of white society. The immigration is, from his point of view, the result of capitalist development, which gave rise to a highly flexible society (or “societat plàstica” in Pla’s terms) favoring change and dynamism.¹⁴

On this trip, made after 45 years of experience as an active journalist, Pla discovers the East coast of the country, from New York to Miami. The author stresses his amazement at the material wealth of the United States, an indication of its unstoppable “ascensió.”¹⁵ His vision is conditioned by reading one of the most influential works on the United States—Tocqueville’s *La démocratie en Amérique* (1835)—and the recognition of the role that Jefferson and Franklin played in its creation.¹⁶ According to him, the founding of the United States meant overcoming three monstrous European episodes: the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Baroque, characterized by “el dolor, la sistemàtica injustícia i una intermitència assegurada i ràpida de la mort.”¹⁷ Despite

being a country “without a past,” in Pla’s observations about the American reality we find many European elements, such as the idea that the architectural neoclassicism of Philadelphia and Washington is *post-Bismarckian*, because it reproduces a “hel·lenisme passat per Alemanya.”¹⁸

Although the book is full of anecdotes, told by his interlocutors (friends, intellectuals and journalists), Pla’s travel literature focuses on the collective—its material and social basis. The “Ells i nosaltres” chapter allows him to criticize the representations of the Americans made by European visitors like him. His criticism focuses on the anti-American sentiment of many speakers, whose speech is “monolític, fanàtic i admirador d’ell mateix.”¹⁹ Although some characteristic elements of these discourses (such as materialism or the importance of technology) also punctuate Pla’s text, the narrator usually gives them a positive tint. The United States, he says, produces the effect of a “continent buit,” with “una geografia encara no saturada per una densitat humana determinada” and which justifies the “tendència a l’abundor i a la malversació.”²⁰ Farmers have a good standard of living, and Americans, in general, can meet their needs without difficulties thanks to good wages. Even a phenomenon like bourgeois tourism in Miami does not imply saturation.

Delibes, who had already visited South America and published a book about it,²¹ describes his first North American experience in *USA y yo* (1966, reissued in 1980). His trip is motivated by an academic initiative: his appointment as a visiting professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures of the University of Maryland.²² Over one semester (from September to December 1964) Delibes gave a course on the contemporary Spanish novel, funded by a Fulbright Grant, and took the opportunity to visit New York and the “rascasuelos” of Washington,²³ among other places. As with Pla and Marías, his experience was divulged in the form of newspaper reports (in *El Norte de*

Castilla, La Vanguardia and *Destino*).²⁴ The book, published in April 1966 and illustrated with photographs by Oriol Maspons, had various misprints.²⁵

In the chronicle, Delibes, who travels by ocean liner, considers himself more of a journalist than of a writer. In his opinion, his experience (which excludes the academic part) is, like Pla's, that of an astonished traveler. Adopting the standpoint of a "hombre habituado a los amplios, inacabables horizontes de Castilla" allows him to offer a personal vision of the place (explicit in the title's "yo"), which, in turn, is shaped by his frame of cultural and social references.²⁶ As in Pla's book, the relating of the trip is constructed from thematic nuclei (many of them of a social nature), introduced in the 33 chapter titles.

Delibes's account reflects many of the topics advanced by much of the prewar travel narrative, such as the grandiosity of New York ("capaz de engullirse [...] al pusilánime"), the tendency to rush, to the machine and to the novelty of the American, the importance of education and the abundance of religions.²⁷ As in most Spanish books, he omits the subject of the Cold War and Franco's dictatorship, and when discussing the economic system, considers that the Kennedy government has managed to stop the "avidez imperialista americana."²⁸ He also devotes some attention to the racial problem (which appears in the chapter "La integración social") focusing on one of its causes: Civil War. In the chapter "La piel," he deals with a topic that he had already addressed in *Diario de un emigrante*: migration. Whereas in the 1958 novel he explains the cultural shock experienced by a Spanish emigrant to Chile, in *USA y yo* he denounces the scarce possibilities of success of the immigrants who arrived in the United States in 1964, with the exception of two groups: scholars and servers.²⁹ Although Delibes's book contains a few literary and/or cultural references, when dealing with the problem (common among many African-Americans and immigrants) of poverty, the work by the sociologist Michael Harrington *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (1962) is referred

to. In this study, very influential during the Kennedy presidency, Harrington denounced the existence of an “invisible poverty,” which was not manifested in the street (such as the misery that affected some places in Spain) but in housing or in the lack of social security.³⁰

Unlike many of the travel books of the 1950s (where there was more admiration than social criticism), Delibesian imagery is full of nuances and includes peculiarities that need to be understood against the backdrop of the author’s interests. His portrait of American reality is, in fact, deeply social. The narrator admires the Americans’ organizational spirit,³¹ their capacity for improvement,³² the “[f]omento del sentido de responsabilidad” and the “[d]esarrollo del espíritu creador y de iniciativa.”³³ But he is also concerned about not seeing passersby on the streets,³⁴ the development of a “intimidad acorazada” which causes sentimental inhibition,³⁵ and an increase in the number of divorces.³⁶ His gaze is that of an European who comes to a country whose history is the “historia apresurada de pueblo en formación.”³⁷ In addition to lacking a “tradicción [...] de piedras milenarias,”³⁸ Americans lack, he thinks, the “viejas normas inmutables de solidaridad Española,” whose fruits are, for instance, the existence of “abuelas españolas,” ready to take care of the grandchildren.³⁹ The contrast between both value systems implies a critical accent which is skillfully attenuated by the writer’s fine humor.

Delibes’s narration reveals, in turn, the sensitivity of the author to the country (in “Un campo próspero”) and children (to whom he dedicates a homonymous chapter).⁴⁰ As he states, the North American countryside has undergone a series of reforms that have turned it into a source of fertility and wealth. When dealing with university education (full of comforts), he compares the American university student with the tourist in Spain, since both are subject to all kinds of pampering.⁴¹ His opinion about American society is,

in general, not a very enthusiastic one because, once compared to the Spanish one, it lacks many values that for Delibes are fundamental. The chapters dedicated to loneliness, old age, fear and death are undoubtedly conditioned by this slant, which expresses a pessimism that intensifies in the final chapter, “Adiós a Norteamérica,” where he describes the raw misery of Bowery Street in New York. The cover of the book, where black threatening skyscrapers are reproduced, also evokes this negative emotional impact.

Twelve years after the appearance of *Los Estados Unidos en escorzo*, Marías published the book *Análisis de los Estados Unidos*, some fragments of which had previously been published as articles in *El Noticiero Universal*. As the author indicates in the preface, “Este libro es enteramente distinto del primero: lo son sus temas, lo es su estilo, y lo es también su perspectiva.”⁴² Surely the main change from the previous account is the tone: in the first book, Marías defends that it is necessary to have a direct knowledge of American life in order to explain it. In 1967, Marías no longer needs to display what the United States is because European society has been adopting North American social and cultural forms. His essay aims to combat certain European anti-Americanism by providing information of general interest on the current situation in the country, avoiding—to a certain extent—the personal filter. That is why elements such as humor (very present in Pla’s and Delibes’s books) disappear in the book, which adopts a more informative-interpretive than descriptive viewpoint.

Marías’ writing is, in this sense, more journalistic than literary and can be understood as a response to *Le défi américain*, the 1967 best-seller by French journalist Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, where he denounced the penetration capacity of the United States in European industry, technology and politics. This study, in fact, is later mentioned by Marías in his chronicle and referred to as a novelty on the back cover of the book.⁴³ Providing economic and sociological data, Marías defends Americanism,

understanding it as part of Europeanism and remembering that the country is “la proa del mundo actual.”⁴⁴ In his opinion, what happens in the United States, a country in continuous growth, anticipates what will happen in Europe in the future; it is for this reason that Europeans should try to understand it. The writer, who admires American society for its youth, power and the speed of its development,⁴⁵ explains it in 15 thematic chapters, some of which are subdivided into sub-chapters. This structure, more typical of essays (or manuals) than of travel books, allows him to prioritize some topics over others.

As in the case of Pla and Delibes, the narrator deals with topics such as “el problema negro,” “la vida cotidiana” (which includes the reference to the suburban life and the hippie way of living in Greenwich Village in New York) and the economic world (he highlights the importance of individual initiative, the American organization of work and the utilitarianism underlying the economic aid provided by the United States government to Europe and Latin America). His point of view, based on access to public sources and information released by the government itself, does not differ from that of his fellow writers. Thus, we see that a subject such as discrimination against Afro-Americans (absent in *Los Estados Unidos en escorzo*) occupies a good part of the first part of the book, where its interest is justified as a result of the emergence of the civil rights movement and the dissemination of the problem by the news. In this sense, his account draws attention to the progressive importance of the media in the propagation of certain topics (and codes) of the day. In the late 1960s, the mediators of United States imagery are no longer travel books but popular audiovisual culture, including newspapers and propaganda (of decisive importance to the opposition movement to the Vietnam war).

Among the changes that have occurred in American society, there is, states Mariás, the emergence of a criticism, non-existent in Europe, which “invade y domina todo,”⁴⁶ and that concerns problems such as war or poverty. The spirit of dissent is

criticized by the narrator and is part, according to him, of an ambivalent attitude in Americans: on the one hand, it is the result of their faith in the ability to solve problems and, on the other, it stems from a certain passivity when solving them.⁴⁷ His overview includes a section dedicated to the American literary tradition—configured by adventurous authors, whose works have been able to “*interpretar y proyectar la vida*”⁴⁸ and another dedicated to the university system, characterized by the freedom granted to students.⁴⁹

Despite the fact that Mariás starts from the description of the peculiarities of the United States—underlining, for example, its little centralized structure—his narration cannot help but show his personal value system, as is also the case in Pla’s and Delibes’s books.⁵⁰ What is seen as unique in the American world is contrasted to the Spanish, which is presented as an alternative to the reality described. As Cronin recalls, travel allows not only a greater self-awareness but also a greater capacity for describing one’s own culture.⁵¹ In doing so, Mariás displays his cultural thinking framework. Some examples of this way of proceeding (which involves contrasting with the other to enhance one’s own) are his allusions to the safety of Spanish cities (because they have a bigger population) or his preference for peninsular hours (because they aid socializing more). On the negative side, the economic dependence of Spaniards on the family and the lack of a spirit of self-improvement (an opinion that, applied to women, reveals a clear misogyny) is criticized: “*el español está casi siempre por debajo de sí mismo; y esto es más verdad aún de la española.*”⁵² In some of his observations we find personal prejudices, such as his defense that the North American spirit of coexistence brings the country closer to the mentality of Christian countries⁵³ or the idea that at college women learn some “*primores de la feminidad*” that with marriage they lose.⁵⁴

Paralelo 35

In the late 1960s, when she travelled to the United States, Laforet was a well-known writer, the author of four volumes of short stories and four novels, the first of which (*Nada*, 1944), was considered one of the main postwar literary milestones. In April 1967, she published *Paralelo 35*, the result of her North American journey, whose title was chosen by the editor, José Manuel Lara. The cover of the book illustrates its content in a very graphic way, reproducing on a map the itinerary of the trip, started and completed in the same city (New York). A year earlier between August and November, a first version of 16 chapters of the volume appeared in the newspaper *La Actualidad Española*.⁵⁵ In 1981, the book was reissued with the title that Laforet wanted: *Mi primer viaje a USA*, an epigraph that, as we see, is perfectly in tune with those of the travel stories of the 1960s that we have commented on before.

At the time of the trip, the author was in a period of creative crisis because she was unable to continue “Tres pasos fuera del tiempo,” her trilogy project, started in 1963 with *La insolación*. As her biographers have highlighted, Laforet considered herself fundamentally a novelist and saw her dedication to journalism (continued in those years) as circumstantial.⁵⁶ In her correspondence with the novelist Ramón J. Sender, who she met during the trip, she explains that journalism helps her as an “ejercicio de redacción” and is a good resource from an economic point of view, although it takes time away from literary creation.⁵⁷ In this sense, Laforet’s book diverges from the journalistic and informative purposes of Pla, Delibes and Marías, inasmuch as the author sees in the commission an alternative to her true vocation: to write narrative.

Unlike her colleagues, who aimed to offer a comprehensive, updated and historical overview of the country, Laforet’s gaze is clearly partial, fresh and fun. Her

journey is a continuous discovery, where the traveler tackles “solamente con la aventura de unos encuentros al azar.”⁵⁸ Presented as a “relato de un viaje,” where the main character is born to “una nueva vida y a unos nuevos horizontes,” Laforet writes it in the following year of the journey, based on notes taken during the trip. Starting from “la primera impresión fresca y viva con paisajes y personas y ambientes desconocidos,” Laforet intends to develop “un relato objetivo de unas aventuras y unos encuentros,” which are disclosed with “la sorpresa del turista.”⁵⁹ Her chronicle, presented as a “puro relato,” is the result of what she has been told and therefore offers different perspectives on the same reality.⁶⁰ The book is, without a doubt, a polyphonic journey, where a great diversity of interlocutors are interrelated. Although this approach has obvious limitations—in terms of space, time and points of view—it allows it to gain in objectivity, by constituting a multifaced look at the country.

Laforet travels for three months, from September to December, by train and bus, through a total of 13 cities: New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Springfield, Kansas City, Boise, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New México, Houston, New Orleans and Saint Augustine. One of the most relevant features of her experience is that she always travels with company. Her guides, professional and volunteers provided by the State Department itself and members of the Spanish-American community, influence and mediate her gaze on what she visits. In this sense, the account not only reflects a certain cultural context (as we have also observed in the books of Pla, Delibes and Marías), but it highlights a determining affective component, conveyed by the mediators. As Pazzoli points out, the relationship between the writer and her guides is based on a pact of reliability and faithfulness, which conditions the experience and the way it is described.⁶¹

Our reading of *Paralelo 35* will be based on the study of the importance of mediation and language in the narrative of the travel experience. Based on the studies of

Cronin and Pazzoli, who analyze the role of translation in travelogues, we will delve into the idea that Laforet's journey connects different frames of reference (hers and that of her mediators) with their respective historical and sociocultural specificities.⁶² The knowledge generated by this interaction between interlocutors will be analyzed from two angles. First, we will focus on the role of mediators (understanding them as "interpreters") in the narration. Second, we will study how language (and communication difficulties) becomes one of the main subjects of the book. In our opinion, these two elements allow, in Laforet's account, the development of an alternative writing to the tradition of travel literature to the United States, insofar as they introduce significant changes in the transmission of some cultural and political representations that had generated a special interest in the Americanized Europe of the 1960s.

We must also remember that the meaning of Laforet's trip is not only touristic but also institutional and diplomatic: in the midst of the Cold War, the State Department financed it for propaganda and economic purposes. The writer is an "honorary guest of the country."⁶³ This condition allows her to discover spaces inaccessible to most citizens, which do not appear in the other chronicles and are related to the American economic, industrial and technological fabric. Thus, Laforet, in addition to visiting the main attractions of New York, Boston and San Francisco, discovers a soybean farm, an IBM branch and an aircraft factory.⁶⁴ Apart from being invited to many of the Hispanic Studies departments of universities on both coasts, she is introduced to scientific spaces, such as a hospital in Houston or the NASA headquarters in Cape Kennedy, where she receives detailed technical explanations, which are divulged in the book.⁶⁵ Finally, to complement the tourist experience, she is taken to natural spaces such as the desert in Boise, the Grand Canyon of Colorado and the Rio Grande.⁶⁶

A characteristic feature of Laforet's book is its ability to associate different American tourist spots with Hispanic cultural spaces. Although some associations are explained in relation to migration and exile—such as references to the Basque community in Idaho, Canary Islanders on Delacroix Island in New Orleans, Catalans in Houston, or Menorcans in Saint Augustine—others reflect how Laforet interprets reality from the coordinates of her place of origin or from information provided by locals. Thus, for example, the city of Kansas is compared to Seville, Colorado with Guadarrama and Cocoa Beach with the Mediterranean.⁶⁷ These links imply both a familiarization with the places visited and an oversimplification of reality by typifying it (especially in the use of cultural adjectives such as *typical Basque*, *Aragonese*, etcetera, which favors the creation of cultural stereotypes and domesticates the tourist place).

The Mediated Experience

The continued reference to mediators in Laforet's account is, in part, a result of her adoption of the role of "idle writer." Although her trip responds to a commission, her inexperience in the world of journalism and her youth (in relation to Pla and Marías, who were already over 60 and 50 years old respectively) make her question the hierarchy that usually governs the tourist relationship with the guide/interpreter. The writer lets herself go, without controlling the itinerary. In the book she collects her spontaneous impressions in the daily experience of the passage, giving more prominence to relationships than is usual in the accounts of male travelers.⁶⁸ In this sense, her writing connects with the tendency, in women travelers at the end of the twentieth century, to "focus more on the relationship between the individual and the societies through which she travels" or to be "more concerned with people than place."⁶⁹

Laforet describes the daily life of her hosts in great detail, reproducing many of the conversations she has with them. With this, she manages to create an alternative mapping of the experience, by “tracing patterns from the most banal and trivial everyday events.”⁷⁰ This inclusion of the voices of the interpreters can be understood, in turn, as a response to a double need: on the one hand, to create a voice of her own as a writer who makes herself known in the field of journalism; on the other, to break with conventions related to Hispanic travel writing (very marked by the appearance, in the 1950s and 1960s, of the books by Pla, Delibes and Marías) and with the prejudices against women writers in Francoist Spain. In this sense, Laforet’s book is the result of the tension between the cultural stereotypes of the moment and the expectations that her literature had generated, together with the necessity to adapt to a genre that was new for her, which implied much more self-consciousness than the novel.⁷¹

The visibility of the interpreters can be related at the same time to a feature of travel writing: the fact that its narrative form suggests “authenticity, and reliability of the accounts presented.”⁷² Laforet achieves this authenticity in the interplay between the observer and the observed, by mixing the observed’s impressions with her own thoughts. The opinions conveyed by the mediators, together with the author’s confessions, are strategic instruments at the service of the veracity of the text, which make it more plausible and acceptable to the reader.⁷³ Hence, we see that “The protagonist engages in conversations that introduce a range of other characters into the narrative, and the reader is expected to believe that such conversations which apparently transcend any language barrier are recorded rather than invented.”⁷⁴

With the adoption of a multifaceted perspective, Laforet involves the interpreter in the mechanisms of textual credibility. Following Cronin, interpreters (or guides) assume, in their work as cultural mediators, complex functions as they not only translate

the reality of the place, but also their own.⁷⁵ More specifically, the interpreters select from what they know and interpret what the tourist “sees,” orienting with their answers the imagery that he or she is building during the trip. In order to fulfil their goal of cross-cultural transmitters, guides must develop narrations identifiable as “authentic” and “plausible.” For this reason, they have often been considered (like some travel writers) “dubious cultural transgressors, who give voice not to the authentic experiences of their compatriots, but to the self-aggrandizing views of pro-Western cosmopolitan elites.”⁷⁶

As Chesterman explains in his study of translators, they are likely to be analyzed from three perspectives: cultural, cognitive and sociological.⁷⁷ In our analysis (applied to the study of the tourist guide or interpreter) we follow the cultural approach, that is, the one that concerns values, ethics, ideologies, traditions and history. Both Laforet and her guides are aware of the role they assume as cultural mediators and act according to the social and ideological codes expected on an official trip, not exempt from warnings: her first guide, for example, warns her of the risks posed for a woman in going out alone at night.⁷⁸ We must also remember that the official interpreters not only assume the function of making the country known, but as professional companions, they must ensure the comfort of the guests and satisfy their curiosity. In *Paralelo 35*, the guides are key to two topics that are of particular interest to Laforet: 1) how Americans live and interpret their historical and social reality, 2) how Spaniards have adapted in the United States.

Before Americans, Laforet manifests herself as someone suspicious who, little by little, lets herself be guided by her hosts, whose work is considered essential to her. The narrator reproduces conversations with some of her companions, such as Mr. Fuers or Mr. Ball, in the form of a dialogue. The book is full of allusions to the mediated character of the narration: “Me contaron,” “tantas visitas y charlas, traducidas por Eliana,” “Eliana me explicó rápidamente, en un aparte, que Mr. Lane era muy criticón y estaba criticando

todo lo americano.”⁷⁹ The author collects the data communicated to her by her interlocutors, which is in many cases associated with the places she visits. Topical issues such as racial conflict, American women, food and milk consumption and civic education are introduced through the opinions (and experiences) of her interlocutors. Meeting Sender (with whom she will establish a cordial and friendly correspondence) also allows her to address the issue (recurring in the book) of the nostalgia of the Spanish emigrant.

Communication and Language as a Subject

From the beginning, Laforet sees herself as a traveler-tourist. The writer enjoys this condition, since despite the hustle and bustle, it allows her to live an idle, carefree and formative adventure. Her view over the United States is undoubtedly determined by the tourist standpoint. Following Maccannell, tourist movements imply an aestheticization of everyday life, which is the result of the flow of movements that, in the 1960s, involved capitalist development and the conception of the tourist experience as a consumer experience.⁸⁰ In *Paralelo 35*, this “aestheticization” is present in the positive attitude of the author, whose account lacks the critical tone of Delibes or the chiaroscuros of Pla and Marías, and concerns Laforet’s interest in language.

In the case of *Paralelo 35*, interpretations provided by mediators are the result of an implicit linguistic negotiation. Laforet does not understand English, so she only accesses the information translated to her into Spanish and, to a lesser extent, the data that she can find directly in this language, introduced by Spanish-speaking migrants. In total, the writer has two official guides: first she is accompanied by “Miss PB,” but the misunderstandings in the relationship (partly created by the image that the interpreter had built of the novelist, based on *Nada*’s main character, Andrea) result in her being relieved by Eliana Romencin. With the latter, a “jovencita morena con mucho sentido del humor,”

the relationship becomes much more informal and fun—and therefore, also more influential. Apart from these two interpreters, Laforet meets American and Hispanic volunteers, whose role is more limited in time (they invite her to their homes, their classes or at receptions), but also important in the construction of the imagery of the trip.⁸¹ Among the names that come her way are those of Marion Manent (who also hosted Delibes), Josep Ferrater Mora and Josep Carner Ribalta (in Philadelphia), Juan Ramón Jiménez (in Maryland), Josep M. Massip and Ramona Torrent (in Washington), Gonzalo Sobejano (in New York), Jorge Guillén (at Harvard), Ramón J. Sender and the consul Eduard Toda (in Los Angeles).

As a tourist who does not speak English, Laforet often refers to the communication problem. This problem is usually solved by turning to Spanish speakers: “[n]ecesitaba serenarme, saber cómo hablar para que no hubiese malas interpretaciones. Prefería tener mis primeros contactos en aquella ciudad [Boston] con personas que hablasen español.”⁸² Laforet insists that she needs someone to interpret her tastes well and help her understand the information she receives about the country.⁸³ When this is not the case, she complains: “a través de la traducción [the explanation] me había parecido muy vago y confuso.”⁸⁴ From the beginning she realizes that some issues invisible on the street (such as racism) can only be understood by locals acting as interpreters: “Tenía razón quien me dijo que sin hablar con la gente no me enteraría de nada en Estados Unidos.”⁸⁵

Despite her initial reservations, gradually Laforet manages to understand and be understood. Thus, on her visit to Springfield, she remarks that she understands what they tell her without knowing English: “[t]odo lo decía tan expresivamente, que yo lo comprendía antes de que miss P. B. lo tradujera.”⁸⁶ In her account we also observe a common phenomenon in the traveler who does not know the language of the country

he or she is visiting: the sharpening of sensitivity.⁸⁷ A good example of this is found in the following paragraph, which reproduces sensations related to three senses (taste, smell and sight):

Como a buena turista, a mí me gustaba todo. El té de jazmín, aunque es amargo, y la ensalada y el pescado y vegetales que había que mojar en una salsa especial; y el plato que se cocinó a nuestra vista en un infiernillo de alcohol y que era una mezcla de vegetales y carne; y hasta un vino caliente, especial, cuyo nombre no recuerdo.

Al salir era casi media noche y el barrio chino seguía iluminado, lleno de gente, de brillo, de lujo y de limpieza escrupulosa.⁸⁸

It is also important to note that Laforet reproduces some foreign words (marked in italics). This illustrates Cronin's idea that in travel literature "[t]he language of the narration must somehow capture the foreignness of the experience in the familiar words of the tribe."⁸⁹ These Anglicisms collected by the writer do not assume any symbolic or argumentative function in the story but serve to give more emphasis to some elements of the description. These are also words that are easy to understand for the Spanish-speaking reader, often close to Spanish, many of them will even be incorporated, with the adapted spelling, into the dictionary of the Real Academia de la Lengua. Some examples are the adjective *shocking*, the expressions *All-right!* and *welcome*, and cultural references concerning means of transport (the luxury train *super chief*, the *bus* or *ferry-boats*, the *free-way*, and the *subway*), food and drinking (*whiskies*, *self-service*, *coffee*), art and music (*pop-art*, *blues*, *jazz*), architectural elements (*saloon*, *bungalows*, *hall*), education (*high-school*) and popular culture (*beatniks*, *cowboy*).

Conclusions

Representative of a decade of cultural and social change, the five travel books that have been the subject of this article show different answers to the same problem: how to represent a culture seen as foreign through travel narrative. Delibes and Pla, authors versed in the cultivation of the travel writing genre and skilled in creating a certain image of themselves (recognized and recognizable to readers) opt for literary journalism. Mariás, however, distances himself from autobiographical forms by adopting a form halfway between journalistic reporting and essay. Finally, Laforet, being forced to develop a genre that is new to her, elaborates a writing where the voice of the other is frequently introduced through indirect speech or the reproduction of specific dialogues. Although she resorts to her voice (presented as the first-person narrator) for narrative development, her account includes a multifaced perspective. In her book, she not only creates a turning point in the travel literature on the United States of the time (where the other's voice was marginal) but also finds a plausible solution to a literary problem: explaining a society that is new to her as she begins to discover it and making it credible to her audience.

The five books constitute five excellent interpretations of an (eminently social) reality that we must contextualize in a certain historical and cultural moment, which is reflected by the language of the writers. Of the four, Laforet is the only one who is interested in the linguistic dimension of the experience, in particular, by making the communicative problem explicit. By seeing herself as an idle tourist, Laforet makes herself aware of the nuances of language, by understanding it as a non-neutral cultural construct. Her references to the guides allow her, at the same time, to emphasize one of the most important (and most silenced) themes of the travel experience: the relationship between displacement and interpretation. Throughout *Paralelo 35*, the author creates an evolving image of herself (moving from mistrust to acceptance and openness), depending

on the relationship she establishes with her interpreters, many of whom explain personal aspects of their life to her that become part of the book. In this way, these mediators become, along with the culture they carry, the great protagonists of the travelogue.

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Notes

¹ David Miranda-Barreiro, *Spanish New York Narratives 1898-1936. Modernization: Otherness and Nation* (London: Legenda, 2014); Kate Ferris, *Imagining "America" in Late Nineteenth Century Spain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

² Isabel García-Montón, *Viaje a la modernidad: la visión de los Estados Unidos en la España finisecular* (Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 2002).

³ Rafael Alarcón Sierra, "Llámalo sueño: Nueva York en la narrativa española," *Ínsula* 821 (2015): 11-16.

⁴ Antonio Niño, *La americanización de España* (Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata, 2012).

⁵ Maria Dasca, "El relat del viatge a *Weekend (d'estiu) a Nova York* (1955) de Josep Pla," *Llengua & Literatura* 28 (2018): 101-25.

⁶ Maria Dasca, "El imaginario de Estados Unidos en dos libros de viajes de Julián Marías y Josep Pla de los años cincuenta," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 96, no. 8 (2019): 835-50.

⁷ About this last book see Maria Dasca, "Tourism, Mass Culture and Literature. Two travel books by Terenci Moix published in the 1970s", *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 2021. DOI: 10.1080/14753820.2021.2000747

⁸ Julio Peñate Rivero, *Introducción al relato de viaje hispánico del siglo XX: textos, etapas, metodología*, I: 1898-1980 (Madrid: Visor Libros, 2012), 414. In his study, Peñate Rivero only mentions one Spanish

female writer whose travel accounts were published between 1941-1980: the Valencian Carmen Llorca Vilaplana.

⁹ Carmen Morán, “Viajeros españoles en EE.UU. (1950-1970): Julián Marías, Rosa Chacel y Miguel Delibes,” *Artifara: revista de lenguas y literaturas ibéricas y latinoamericanas* 13 (2013): 17-35.

¹⁰ Susan Bassnett, “Travel Writing and Gender,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 225-41.

¹¹ Luis Alburquerque-García, “El ‘relato de viajes’: hitos y formas en la evolución del género,” *Revista de literatura* 73, no. 145 (2011): 15-34.

¹² Following Youngs, we can also understand travel literature as “predominantly factual, first person prose accounts of travels that have been undertaken by the author-narrator.” Tim Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3.

¹³ Josep Pla, *Cap a Amèrica, encara per la ruta del petroli* (1960) in Josep Pla, *Obra completa*, vol. XXXIV: *Les Amèriques* (Barcelona: Destino, 1978), 237.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 438-39.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 339, 374.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 376-79.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 379.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 325, 333.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 399.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 420.

²¹ Miguel Delibes, *Un novelista descubre América* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1956), reissued and extended in *Por esos mundos: Sudamérica con escala en Canarias* (Barcelona: Destino, 1961).

²² Carmen Morán, “Viajeros españoles en EE.UU. (1950-1970): Julián Marías, Rosa Chacel y Miguel Delibes,” and Blanca Ripoll Sintés, “Del ‘manejo de espárragos’ a la ‘piña de rascacielos’ de Nueva York: las máscaras viajeras de Josep Pla y Miguel Delibes” in *Jospe Pla y Miguel Delibes. El escritor y el territorio*, ed. Xavier Pla and Francisco Fuster (Madrid: Sílex Universidad, 2018), 73-90.

²³ Miguel Delibes, *USA y yo* (Barcelona: Destino, 1966), 64. The book was reissued in 1980 with a preface of the autor.

²⁴ Ramón García Domínguez, *El quiosco de los helados. Miguel Delibes de cerca* (Barcelona: Destino, 2005), 279-82.

²⁵ Morán, 28-29; Miguel Delibes and Josep Vergés, *Correspondencia, 1948-1986* (Barcelona: Destino, 2002), 274.

²⁶ Delibes, 13. Cf. Ripoll Sintes, 82.

²⁷ Delibes, 21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 181.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 200-01.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

³² *Ibid.*, 70.

³³ *Ibid.*, 122.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 174.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 213-22, 117-23.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁴² Julián Marías, *Análisis de los Estados Unidos* (Madrid: Guadarrama, "Colección Punto Omega," 1968), 11.

⁴³ The Spanish version of the book by J. Ferrer Aleu was published in 1968. Its title was *El desafío americano* (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 1968).

⁴⁴ Marías, 218.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 71, 74.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 173-85.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 154-56.

⁵¹ Michel Cronin, *Across the Lines* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), 97.

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- ⁵² Marías, 201.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 169.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 204.
- ⁵⁵ Ana Caballé and Israel Rolón-Balada, *Carmen Laforet, una mujer en fuga* (Barcelona: RBA, 2nd ed. revised and extended, 2019), 390.
- ⁵⁶ Caballé and Rolón-Balada, 373-410, and Teresa Rosenvinge y Benjamín Prado, *Carmen Laforet. Vidas literarias* (Barcelona: Ediciones Omega, 2004), 96-98.
- ⁵⁷ Carmen Laforet, letter to Ramón J. Sender, February 10th 1967, in *Puedo contar contigo. Correspondencia* (Barcelona: Destino, 2003), 96.
- ⁵⁸ Laforet, *Paralelo 35*, 5.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.
- ⁶⁰ In 1961 the writer published *Gran Canaria* (Barcelona: Editorial Noguer, Colección “Andar y ver. Guías de España”), a tourist guide to the island where she spent her childhood and adolescence. In this book, Laforet plays the “guide” role by introducing the main sightseeings of the island to tourists.
- ⁶¹ Loredana Pazzoli, “Translation, Travel, Migration,” *The Translator: Studies in Intercultural Communication* 12, no. 2 (2006): 171.
- ⁶² Cronin, *Across the Lines*. Pazzoli, “Translation, Travel, Migration,” 169-88.
- ⁶³ Laforet, *Paralelo 35*, 12.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 94-95, 146, 167.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 232, 270.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 130, 203, 209.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 113, 203, 262.
- ⁶⁸ Bassnett, “Travel Writing and Gender,” 227.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 237. Kristi Siegel, “Introduction: Intersections. Women’s Travel and Theory,” in *Gender, Genre, & Identity in Women’s Travel Writing*, ed. Kristi Siegel (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 5.
- ⁷⁰ Bassnett, “Travel Writing and Gender,” 230.
- ⁷¹ Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (London/New York: Routledge, 2011), 196.
- ⁷² Clare Broome Saunders, “Introduction,” in *Women, Travel Writing, and Truth*, ed. Clare Broome Saunders (London/New York: Routledge, 2014), 3.
- ⁷³ Kristi Siegel, “Introduction: Intersections. Women’s Travel and Theory,” 1-11.

⁷⁴ Bassnett, "Travel Writing and Gender," 235.

⁷⁵ Cronin, 72.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁷⁷ Andrew Chesterman, "The Name and Nature of Translator Studies," *Hermes – Journal of Language and Communication Studies* 42 (2009): 13-22.

⁷⁸ Laforet, *Paralelo 35*, 16. Siegel, in examples like this, uses the concept "rhetoric of peril," "Introduction: Intersections. Women's Travel and Theory," 4.

⁷⁹ Laforet, *Paralelo 35*, 214.

⁸⁰ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist. A New Theory of Leisure Class*, foreword by Lucy R. Lippard, epilogue by the author (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1999), 84.

⁸¹ Most of the anonymous guides who accompanied her were volunteers of the Visitor Reception Committee.

⁸² Laforet, *Paralelo 35*, 60.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁸⁷ Cronin, 76-81.

⁸⁸ Laforet, *Paralelo 35*, 154.

⁸⁹ Cronin, 96.