



CARMEN, MARTÍN GAITÉ

A PARADIGMATIC WOMAN OF LETTERS

TEMPORARY EXHIBITION

**18 / 12 / 2025
14 / 06 / 2026**

WITH A GAZE DOMINATED BY CURIOSITY and a desire to bear witness to the changing face of the Spain in which she lived, Carmen Martín Gaite (1925–2000) is a paradigmatic example of what could be called a *woman of letters* in terms of her intellectual concerns in the history of Spanish culture. Her literary interests were wide-ranging and developed in various directions: from traditional genres (short stories, novels, essays, poetry and theatre) to the hybrid that her daughter christened *Notebook of everything*, encompassing from historical research to literary criticism, and from theatrical adaptations of the classics and television scripts to literary translation from six languages (English, French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian and Galician). It is difficult to find another example of a writer with such a wide variety of intellectual interests in 20th-century Spain.



Carmen Martín Gaite's sixth year at the secondary school for girls (Salamanca, 1941–42).

In the school photographs, Carmen (seated, second from left) nearly always appears beside her friend Sofía Bermejo, with whom she invented the island of Bergai.

Archivo Carmen Martín Gaite
(Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG,82,31



Carmen Martín Gaite with several classmates from the faculty of humanities outside the Anaya Palace: María Dolores Ruiz Olivera, Ignacio Aldecoa and Federico Latorre. Salamanca, 1944.

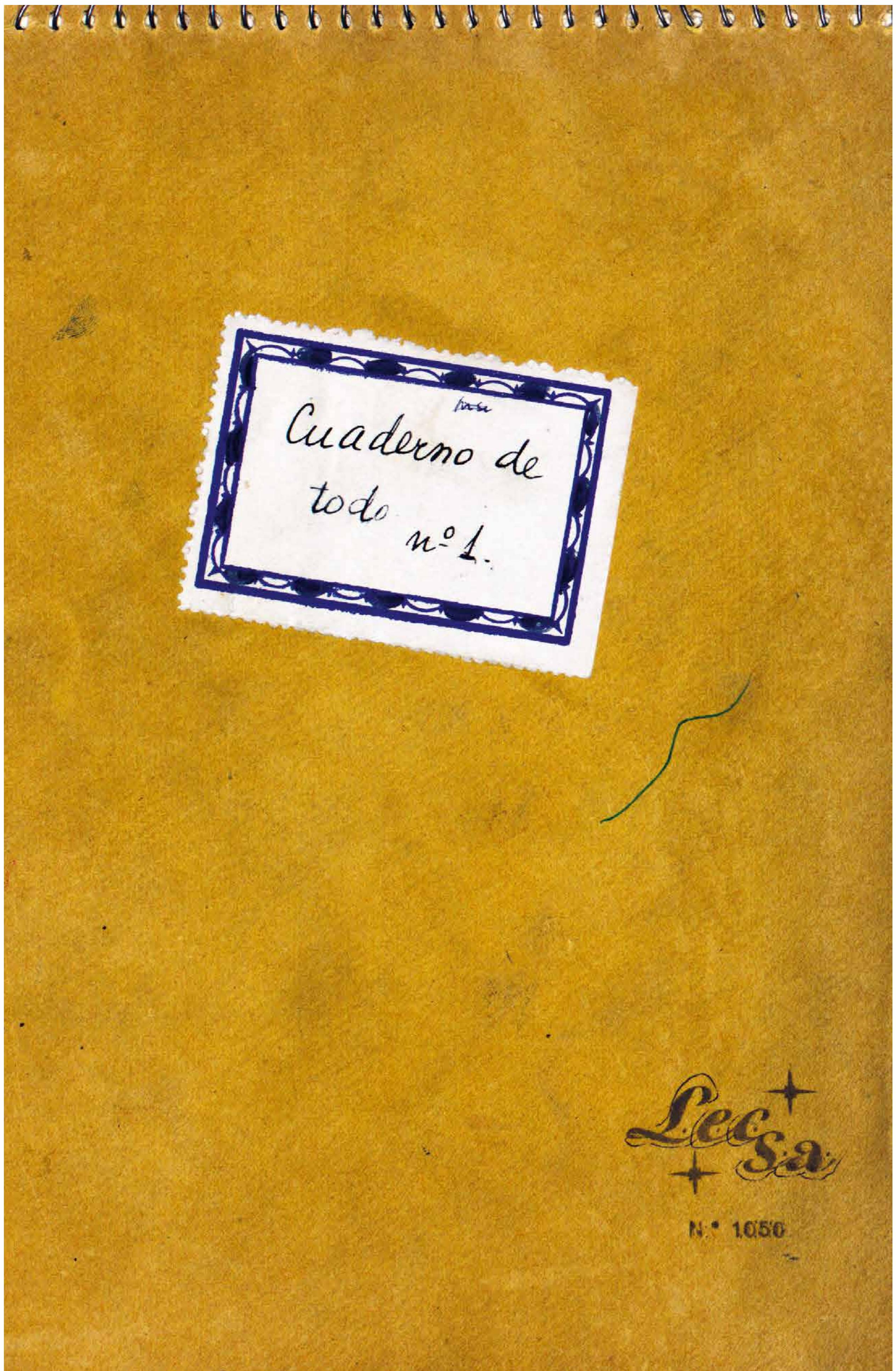
Archivo Carmen Martín Gaite
(Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG,95,114



Carmen Martín Gaite, Ignacio Aldecoa and Alfonso Sastre.
1954. Archivo Carmen Martín Gaite
(Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG,81,166.



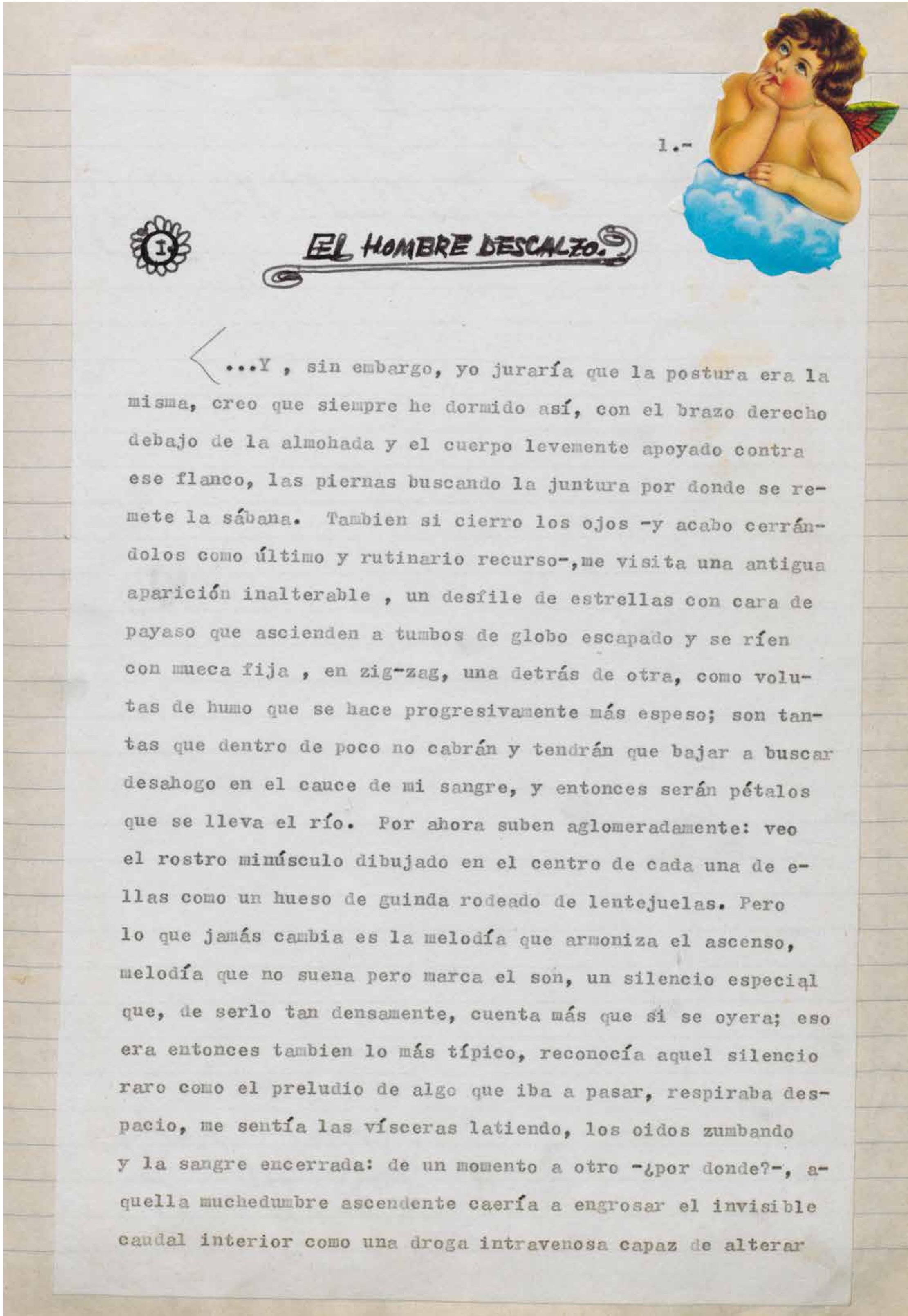
Entre visillos [Behind the Curtains]. Winner of the 1957 Nadal Prize (first edition). BNE, DL/555860.



Cuaderno de todo [Notebook of everything], No. 1.

Gift from Marta to her mother (Calila) on 8 December 1961. Carmen had used notebooks since her youth, but always for specific topics. From this date onwards, there was a substantial difference, as a *notebook of everything* could contain all kinds of topics and types of writing.

Archivo Carmen Martín Gaite
(Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG,16,11.



Manuscript of *El cuarto deatrás* [The Back Room] (November 1975–April 1978). Archivo Carmen Martín Gaite (Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG,5,6.

Despite this heterogeneity, Carmen's literary output is a unified and coherent whole where all genres converge and are intertwined. As an essayist, historian, literary critic, poet, translator and practitioner of other forms of intellectual creation, Martín Gaite never relinquished her status as a storyteller: she turned any subject into a narrative. For her everything was a story that had to be well told: reading material, love, her own and other people's lives, dreams, history.



Martín Gaite visiting the Statue of Liberty during her first stay in New York. April 1979. Archivo Carmen Martín Gaite (Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG, 87,41.

The frame of reference for her literary world was organised through a category called *experience*. Even in her historical research and literary criticism she felt the need to describe in detail her particular relationship with the character portrayed, the period studied or the book reviewed. By placing emphasis on manner, she found harmony, and by seeking a pleasurable and meaningful way of telling things to herself, she simultaneously stumbled upon her utopian listener. Interlocution and method merge in her writings as two sides of the same quest.



Collage for *Caperucita en Manhattan* [Little Red Riding Hood in Manhattan] (c. 1988). 'Manhattan is a metaphor for the forest, where it is as easy to dream of freedom as it is to get lost', wrote Martín Gaite in a travel notebook. Archivo Carmen Martín Gaite (Junta de Castilla y León).
ACMG, 44,37.



For Martín Gaite, the Madrid Book Fair signified the fresh excitement of putting faces to her readers. She described this as her greatest accolade in 'The Age of Deserving' (May 1999). Archivo Carmen Martín Gaite (Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG, 88,193.



Prewar Parker fountain pen that she received from her father (including a cloth case made by the writer herself). This pen was the 'compass' that guided her writing.

Archivo Carmen Martín Gaite
(Junta de Castilla y León). ACMG, 42,42.

Her style is communicative and affective due to the presence of the reader, whom she seeks to involve in the journey: *interlocution* and *affection* were terms that had very bad press among the great male icons of her generation. For her, writing literature presupposed the presence of the other – there was always a recipient. She understood artistic truth to be a shared representation. Her intellectual output also reveals a keen awareness of intergenerational conflicts. That is why we are celebrating the centenary of a writer who is culturally alive. This exhibition showcases the life and intellectual legacy of Carmen Martín Gaite in the following sections, from which we have selected an image.

CARMEN MARTÍN GAITÉ

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From December 18, 2025
to June 14, 2026

BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL DE ESPAÑA
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