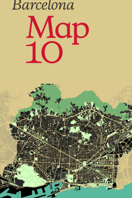
A Literary Map of Barcelona

Map 10



Area 1:

El Besòs and el Maresme

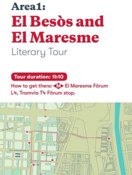
BARCELONA CULTURA | Ajuntament de Barcelona

Area1: El Besòs and El Maresme

Literary Tour

Tour duration: 1h10

How to get there: Ⓜ El Maresme Fòrum L4, Tramvia T4 Fòrum stop.



1. Plaça de Llevant
2. Parc del Camp de la Bota i Pequín
3. Carrer d'Anaïs Nin
4. Carrer de Francesc de Borja Moll
5. Rambla de Prim
6. Besòs Residents Association
7. Carrer de Marsala
8. Carrer de Cristóbal de Moura, 230
9. Ramon d'Alòs-Moner Library
10. Carrer Bolívia
11. Avinguda de la Catalana

1.

Plaça de Llevant

(Next to Museu Blau, the Natural Sciences Museum of Barcelona)

The Besòs neighbourhood —along the river— and El Maresme —along the wetlands that used to cover the entire area— have some 25,000 inhabitants and border the town of Sant Adrià de Besòs. This point, specifically at the Hotel Barcelona-Princess, marks the beginning of one of Barcelona's most well-known avenues: La Diagonal.

"'Barcelona has changed so much in just a few years,' sighed Father Romanyà, at the spot where Avinguda del Diagonal meets the ring road. 'So many changes, for better and for worse! You might not remember, but here, where you now see these feats of modern architecture, there used to be shacks! Those skyscrapers are so obscene in their beauty! You can't imagine how much sweat and blood went into building them. The miracle of our development! Fools!'"

(**José Luis Giménez-Frontín**, *El idiota enamorado*, 1982.)

Leaving the Museu Blau behind you, continue walking towards the sea until you reach the Fraternitat monument.

2.

Parc del Camp de la Bota i Pequín

***Carrer Bolívia*, by Maria Barbal is one of the most prominent literary works written on the district of Besòs. Born in Tremp (Pallars Jussà) in 1949, she reached major international success with her first novel, *Stone in a Landslide* (1985). While her first novel was set in the post-war period, all the events of *Carrer Bolívia* (1999) take place in the 1960s. The main characters, Lina and Néstor, are a married couple from Linares (Jaén) who decide to move to Barcelona in search of a better future. This was the girl's first impression of the district:**

"We got off at a stop for the number seventy bus [...] All four of us started to walk, Néstor carrying Carlota on his shoulders, crossing patches of open ground full of dry mud and weaving between blocks under construction. Pepita wondered aloud if this, too, was Barcelona, mira tu [well, I never], and after some discussion, Tomás jumped in and began to share some entertaining stories about Franco and the dictator's speeches."

(**Maria Barbal**, *Carrer Bolívia*.)

The Camp de la Bota and the Pequín were two shantytowns that occupied part of the area of what is now the grounds of the Forum. During the Civil War and the Franco regime, the fascists used this site to shoot Republicans.

"When the weather turned warmer, we'd go to the beach. Sierrita leading the way, we would cross Carrer Llull and always end up at Camp de la Bota. [...] When I had almost forgotten about it, because we had bathed and even had a bite to eat, she told me that she had seen them fall that way, just a little ways further up, 'not far at all,' one day at dawn when she was awakened by shots and ran out into the street, and she saw men falling just like that, and then right away the shooters had dragged the bodies away and loaded them onto a truck, having barely disturbed the sand. She had never forgotten how they fell to the ground. She was sixteen years old at the time, and sixteen years had passed since then, because it was shortly afterwards that they'd moved to the Besòs. I asked her who they were, but she didn't know. 'It's better not to know who they were, don't you think?' she said to me."

(**Maria Barbal**, *Carrer Bolívia*.)

In 1992, the monument *Fraternitat* (referring to the Camp de la Bota shootings) by Valencian artist Miquel Navarro, was erected here. At the foot there is a plaque with a poem, *Aniversari*, written by Màrius Torres a few months before his death:

"In my years, may joy return without
removing any scars from my spirit.
O Father of the Night, of the sea
and of silence, I long for peace,
but we must not forget."

Go back along the path to Plaça de Llevant, and take a right onto Avinguda d'Eduard Maristany, then cross over and a few metres further on the left hand side you will find Carrer d'Anaïs Nin.

3.

Carrer d'Anaïs Nin

At the age of 10, Anaïs Nin (1903–1977) lived for a time in Barcelona. It was 1913, and her mother, the opera singer Rosa Culmell, had moved into her parents-in-law's house with her three children (Carrer de Llúria, 52) to escape an unhappy marriage with musician Joaquim Nin. In an attempt to tell herself that life was an adventure, but also as a means of communication with her absent father, the little girl began writing her thoughts down in French. This was the start of her famous diary, with its first entry on the 25th of July, 1914, with a heartfelt farewell to the city of Barcelona:

"Last look at Barcelona and last thoughts. The mountains rise up in majestic beauty. The setting sun shows its last pale rays. Here and there, the blue sky holds little white clouds. As I look at this landscape, my mind is crowded with thoughts. We are going to leave Barcelona, leave this beautiful country. No more shall we see this blue sky which delights me so. No more shall I be able to touch my lips to the sweet face of my dearest Grandmother. No more shall I be able to surrender to nameless thoughts that always come to me in the evening when I lean on the railing of our balcony, in the silence of the night. And last of all, I am sad to think that we are leaving a country that has been like a mother and a lucky charm for us."

(*Linotte: The Early Diary of Anaïs Nin: 1914–1920*.)

Walk a few metres up until you come to Carrer de Pierre Vilar, on the left hand side. Keep going until, shortly afterwards, you come to the perpendicular street, Carrer de Francesc de Borja Moll.

4.

Carrer de Francesc de Borja Moll

Francesc de Borja Moll (1903–1991) was a Menorcan philologist, dialectologist, and publisher. Born into a working class family, his life took a turn when in 1917, he met the priest, writer, and philologist, Antoni Maria Alcover. Recognizing the young man's potential, Alcover asked for his help in the production of a great work he had on his hands: the Catalan-Valencian-Balearic dictionary. When Alcover died, Moll continued as the only writer of the dictionary, now deservedly known as the Alcover-Moll. In 1962, after working on it for 45 years, he finally completed the project. It totalled 9,850 pages divided into ten volumes and contained over 160,000 articles.

"That spring, the long-awaited moment came when I printed the final page of our Catalan dictionary. With the word zumzumejar, one that I had so often dreamed to see in print, our dictionary was finally complete. A work that had seemed unattainable for being too long, too controversial, and that ran the high risk of being interrupted indefinitely by my own death or disability, had come to fruition. I could not get over my amazement. It was a feeling of liberation and victory that was impossible to express in words."

(**Francesc de Borja Moll**, *Els altres quaranta anys*, 1975)

Continue along the street until you reach Carrer Llull. Walk on the left hand side until you find Rambla de Prim.

5.

Rambla de Prim

Faced with a new wave of immigrants arriving during the fifties, Barcelona City Council decided to develop some of the fields located between Poblenou and the river Besòs. The Rambla de Prim boulevard was not developed until 1982. Up until then, the Horta stream ran through what would later become the boulevard, so when there were heavy rains, everything in that area would become flooded. People needed housing desperately:

"We were surrounded by dust and mud, by mountains of construction material and by buildings that would appear in a twinkling. There was such a need for flats that people would even light fires to dry the material so they could move in as soon as possible."

(**Maria Barbal**, *Carrer Bolívia*.)

Walk up to number 64 Rambla de Prim.

6.

Besòs Residents Association

Rambla de Prim, 64

For years, the public administrations would announce the construction of new schools, but they never materialised. To compensate for the lack of schools, shacks went up that had been used previously by the builders, and people were not happy.

"When we reached Carrer Prim, we saw a group gathered around a shack. Outside, the words 'Provisional schools' were written on a blackboard. Someone was taking measurements with a tape measure. Carlota started playing with some classmates from school, while Daniel's neighbour, whom she'd only known for a few days, told me about her father, who hadn't left the house since they'd moved from Pontevedra. I'd noticed an old man staring aimlessly from the balcony opposite mine. There were more and more people around the shack, especially women and children, and I saw Sierrita in the group that started up chants calling for better conditions in schools. Suddenly I noticed that Carlota was out of sight and I couldn't move. Daniel's neighbour kept talking about how her father was acting like a child, sulking like that. As the police emerged from two vans parked just a few yards away, you could hear a pin drop. 'Time goes by, but nothing changes,' I thought to myself."

(**Maria Barbal**, *Carrer Bolívia*.)

Keep walking up until you come to Carrer de Ferrer Bassa, on the right hand side. Take it for 280 metres until you reach Carrer de Marsala, on the left hand side.

7.

Carrer de Marsala

Majorcan writer Miquel Bauçà (1940–2004) named his first novel after this street: *Carrer Marsala*. Although the street is not mentioned at any point in the novel, we know he chose it because his friend and fellow writer, Jordi Coca, lived here. Not easily categorised, the book is written in a modern, pure and authentic Catalan.

The diary-like text shows us the thoughts of the main character, a person who reads Ausiàs March and Jordi de Sant Jordi, lives isolated on the outskirts of the big city, and avoids his neighbours at all costs.

"Why can't I be cheerful? Nothing's keeping me from it. Everything encourages me to become it. In the end, it's up to me. All I have to do is stop covering my mouth, close my umbrella, walk without being blinded, put away the cornet, unfold the curtains, and light the fire. Businesses should be left to lawyers' children: they know how to play the piano —or at least a polka. They can, if they want to. They have to be coaxed sometimes, especially when a smiling girl steps to the centre, brandishing a gardenia. That's a real challenge for them. Then they play. The thought comes to me: We should destroy the leaning Tower of Pisa accompanied by Diana Ross The trouble is she's often on tour and me in the hospital. The nurses ignore me. It's not enough to faint, you've got to know how to drop the glass without cutting yourself."

(**Miquel Bauçà**, *Carrer Marsala*.)

Go up Carrer de Marsala and once you reach Carrer de Pere Moragues, walk up to the left until you find Carrer de Messina on the right. After a few metres, you will reach Carrer de Cristóbal de Moura. Number 230 is located on the left a few metres up.

8.

Carrer de Cristóbal de Moura, 230

In May 1977, on number 230 Carrer de Cristóbal de Moura, residents had to evacuate the building as fast as they could. Due to the bad settlement of the foundations, which were laid on part of the old Besòs delta, large cracks had developed in the walls of some of the flats. Following protests by the neighbours, the City Council saw to it that the affected buildings were structurally renovated. One of the architects working on these renovations was poet Joan Margarit.

"The windows at night, with their yellow
light, are eyes outlined with the asphalt's
mascara. I remember the flat:
a light-bulb gone, dogs and babies
on a mattress.
In the putrefying kitchen, with no door,
mould on the stacks of unwashed plates,
a boy listening to an old record player
that's playing records from a junk shop,
all of them Bach. The black high-tension
cables shine in the moonlight
over the river. Beneath the raised-up
sweep of motorway, the desolate
no man's land, second-hand car pound.
For this world, no other future
but Bach."

(Recordar el Besòs (1980), a *Els motius del llop* (1993).)

Continue walking up Carrer de Cristóbal de Moura until you reach Rambla de Prim again. Walk some 100m and on the left hand side you will reach building number 87-89.

9.

Biblioteca Ramon d'Alòs-Moner

This library is named after Ramon d'Alòs-Moner (1885–1939), a man who was strongly linked to Catalan literature. D'Alòs-Moner, who worked at the Biblioteca de Catalunya, was in charge of organising an exhibition on Catalan books during the First International Congress of the Catalan Language (Barcelona, October 1906). He was the general secretary at the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (Institute of Catalan Studies) and was a scholar of the work of Arnau de Vilanova, Ramon Llull and Dante Alighieri, as well as the figure of Saint George and the related medieval legends. Specialised in flamenco, the library has a collection of CDs and technical books on this genre of music and dance, as well as novels. There are many Catalan authors who incorporated flamenco scenes into their work, such as: Gil de Biedma, Pla, Mendoza, Matute, Laforet, Candel, Els Goytisolo, Marsé, etc. As well as Montserrat Roig, who describes a scene from a marriage in El temps de les cireres (1977) in the following way:

"Someone began to shout, 'Long live the happy couple!', and a young man, thoroughly drunk, bellowed incessantly, 'go on, kiss! And everyone began to laugh [...] Encarna's sister suddenly got up and climbed on top of a chair. She pulled up her skirts, 'how vulgar,' said the pale-faced girl, and Rosalia, her skirts raised, shook her flabby thighs and rocked her arse like a boat on the high seas and in the middle of a storm. They photographed the scene of Rosalia wagging her arse. A man in a beret, his skin red as a tomato, grey moustache and crooked lips, shouted, 'show us the other leg!' Encarna was pale, dizzy, and that clasp that stuck in her thigh hurt like hell! The drunken boy continued to shout,'Long live the happy couple!' answered by the echo, 'go on, kiss!' Another man, with long, curly blond whiskers, played the guitar and his wife, surrounded by little kids, looked at him with the air of a lost dog. She looked like a little girl. The husband sang serranes. On the other side, a man with small widely-spaced eyes and a flattened nose was demanding to hear some soleares."

(**Montserrat Roig**, *El temps de les cireres*.)

Continue on up Rambla de Prim until after some 150 metres you reach Carrer de Bolívia on the left hand side.

10.

Carrer de Bolívia

This is the street Maria Barbal named her novel after. Carrer de Bolívia is a street of low-rise houses built for the working classes during the 1920s. In fact, this is the oldest part of the neighbourhood.

"The neighbourhood was filling up with people and, although the years passed, the smell of dust and concrete still dominated. [...] In the brand new buildings the first cracks began to show, and our Carrer Bolívia, along with Carrer Marroc and the parallel streets, formed an ancient, strange and tiny oasis between two giant blocks. Families were still arriving, fleeing from places worse than the Besòs, which they in turn made better. After years of hard work they could manage to pay the deposit on a small apartment. Later on they would discover that there were no schools, parks, or hospital clinics in the vicinity, that stores were scarce and that the only things that proliferated in the area were the bars, noisy and dirty, full at all hours, enlivened at intervals with the jingle of a slot machine."

(**Maria Barbal**, *Carrer Bolívia*.)

The first brick was laid in the district on the 23rd of September 1959, marked by a small ceremony included in the then timid celebrations of the Mercè festival. A little over a year later, in December 1960, the keys had been handed over for the first 536 homes. Construction work was so constant, as Barbal reflects in her novel, that weekend silence was welcomed with delight:

"I remember a splendid afternoon. On Sundays construction work on the surrounding blocks came to a temporary halt, there was no noise of concrete mixers, picks, trucks, or, naturally, the voices of workers. [...] We went up to the roof and we spent a good amount of time leaning against the white railing breathing in the clear air. Néstor smoked and talked about his dream, Linares, and a labour union there. In those days, Carrer Bolívia and the four streets that surrounded it seemed to form an island. All around it, an ocean of earth or mud."

(**Maria Barbal**, *Carrer Bolívia*.)

Go back to Rambla de Prim, cross over and up and take Carrer de Lluís Dalmau, until you reach Carrer d'Alfons el Magnànim. Start going down towards the sea until you get to Cristóbal de Moura. Go up this street leaving the Parc del Besòs on your left, go under the railway line and Ronda Litoral ring road until you come to a roundabout. On the left hand side, Avinguda de la Catalana takes you to the river Besòs.

11.

Avinguda de la Catalana

This tour began by the sea and ends up in front of the river that gives the neighbourhood its name: El Besòs. Some say the name comes from "twice" in Latin, and "willow grove": the river of the two willow groves. This river appears as one of the characters in the novel Los príncipes valientes, by Javier Pérez Andújar. The author speaks of the surrounding landscape where the river meets the sea.

"We call it reading, and it's really us: we are the ones who run between the blocks of buildings, we shake the trunks of rain-soaked trees, we hunt the spiders in their webs, we collect the caps of milk and champagne bottles, and seek out copper, the copper coils that have fallen among the bushes that grow in the empty lots, next to the orchards and in the direct sun of the dumps that border any construction site. My friend and I are there, taking it all in, we are pulsating and reading at the same time, and making ourselves as tenacious as the tenacity of the nettles, of the amaranth, of the mallows that grow on the edge of the train tracks, or in the garbage dumps, or at the foot of factory walls, and imbuing us with the savagery of the reed beds and the willows of the river bank and the vertigo of the electrical towers seeping over us. And all this we will believe it to be reading in our endless act of reading, without noticing that at the same time we are pulsating as a neutron star pulsates with its regular pulsation or the white light of a lighthouse slowly turns. Because what we do is breathe, we can be ourselves at all hours, speak with curiosity and look with eyes wide open, for example, when we enter the modest room of the school library and we stop undecided before a handful of illustrated books, arranged in their metal shelves of bolts and holes, through which the ends of the highest volumes protrude. Thus it was that we would head off in search of the secret of the afternoons, and sought to capture the clarity of those days, and together we walked through the quiet of the school, and everything else we are headed towards."

(**Javier Pérez Andújar**, *Los príncipes valientes*.)

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Map 10

Barcelona Ciutat de la Literatura UNESCO

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