

The Censorship of a Closeted Spain: The Case of Elena Fortún (1886–1952)

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This article focuses on how self-censorship and state censorship have shaped the literary legacy of the Spanish author of children's books, Elena Fortún. The homosexual closet is presented as a key concept for understanding the impact of censorship on the work of a lesbian writer such as Fortún who has contributed to various narratives of Spanish femininity over the course of almost a century. The first of these is the narrative of gender dissidence during the Second Republic (1931–1939); followed by the narrative of the wife and mother belonging to the Franco Regime (1939–1975); and finally the LGBTQ inclusiveness of the new millennium in Spain (2005–2022). The works included in the analysis are varied, spanning from Fortún's children's books to her correspondence and finally two posthumously published novels. This reading of Fortún's texts reveals how censorship works as a controlling gaze that not only operates from the outside, but is also internalized in the individual, maintaining the doors of the homosexual closet closed from the inside.

Keywords: Spanish literature / Spanish women writers / Fortún, Elena / sexual identity / lesbianism / Franco regime / censorship

The name Elena Fortún (pseud. of Encarnación Aragoneses Urquijo 1886–1952) is well known in Spain from the covers of her children's books, and especially her series about the curious and unruly girl character Celia. Until recently, however, the person behind the name Elena Fortún was quite unknown to most of the readers who had grown up with the characters from her books. This changed in 2016, more than half a century after her death, when two literary scholars, Nuria Capdevila-Argüelles and María Jesús Fraga, decided to posthumously publish two of Fortún's manuscripts that revealed her hidden life as a lesbian.¹

¹ The pseudonym Elena Fortún derived from a character in a novel by the author's husband Eusebio Gorbea, *Los mil años de Elena Fortún: Magerit* (*The thousand years of*

Fortún's literary career begins in Madrid in 1929 with her debut as author of the children's series about Celia, at the same time as she lived a secret life as part of Madrid's sapphic circles. Both her life and career changed drastically in 1939 when she went into exile in Argentina due to the installation of the fascist Franco regime in Spain (1939–1975). From her exile, she continued publishing her Celia books in Spain under the pressure of censorship in her home country. The final years of Fortún's trajectory take us into a new millennium with the publication of her posthumously published novels, *Oculto sendero* (*Hidden Pathway*, 2016) and *El pensionado de Santa Casilda* (*Saint Casilda's Pension*, 2022). The first, *Oculto sendero*, has been interpreted as an autobiographical novel that depicts the life of a young homosexual woman in Spain. Its protagonist, a painter named María Luisa Arroyo, lives a life that in many ways parallels the author's own. *El pensionado de Santa Casilda* portrays a group of young women attending a boarding school in Madrid at the beginning of the twentieth century, some of whom have lesbian love relationships, sometimes simultaneously to their engagements with male partners. As Capdevila-Argüelles explains in her introduction to the novel, the young women portrayed here bear many similarities to the members of the sapphic circles that Elena Fortún frequented in Madrid during the years prior to the Franco regime. If the focus of *Oculto sendero* was on the hardships of living as a lesbian in a heteronormative society, *El pensionado de Santa Casilda* is more focused on the relationships between the women and includes joyful and explicit references to their love lives.

The exposing of Fortún's life as a lesbian through the posthumous publication of *Oculto sendero* in 2016 can be described using the well-known metaphor of "coming out of the closet," a saying that highlights homosexuality as a concealed condition, and the breaking of this concealment as a public act. In the case of Elena Fortún, it would perhaps be fairer to say that she was brought out of her closet, since it happened more than half a century after her death. As Capdevila-Argüelles has shown in her studies of the author, the closet is also a useful concept for shedding critical light on the life and work of an author who in many ways both defied and conformed to the gender norms of her times (Capdevila-Argüelles, "The Dissidence"). The aim of this article is, on the one hand, to develop an understanding of how the author's closeted condition was formed by censorship, but also how censorship

Elena Fortún: Magerit, 1922). Throughout this article, the pseudonym will be used to refer to the author, since she also used it in her private life, for example when signing personal letters.

contributed to integrate Fortún's work into three different narratives of Spanish femininity, belonging to three different versions of the Spanish nation: from the gender dissidence of the progressive Spanish Republic (1931–1939), through the Catholic feminine values of the Franco regime (1939–1975), to finally arrive at the open closet of LGBTQ-inclusive policies that arrived with the new millennium in Spain.²

In her queer theoretical classic *Epistemology of the Closet* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points to the closet as a metaphorical representation of the binary *hetero/homo*, describing it as one of the major nodes of thought that has structured modern society. According to Sedgwick, the whole idea of the closet is built on the need to silence—or censor—certain sexual behaviors, creating the closet as a spectacle on which authority is being manifested: "... the establishment of the spectacle of the homosexual closet as a presiding guarantor of rhetorical community, of authority—someone else's authority—over world-making discursive terrain that extends vastly beyond the ostensible question of the homosexual." (Sedgwick 230)

The rhetorical community of authority that Sedgwick refers to is described as one that does not include the closeted homosexual. Rather, it is "someone else's authority"—in our case, the Spanish nation and its narratives of femininity. To pinpoint the way that Elena Fortún has been both included in and excluded from this community, I turn to Benedict Anderson's idea of the modern nation as an imagined community, a rhetorical construct built on shared stories and images that create the illusion of sameness within a nation. However, as Anderson stresses in *Imagined Communities*, the idea of the nation is also dependent on the suppression of the narratives that cannot be allowed to have a place in the formation of the nation as one people (Anderson 1–7; 187–206). In the case of homosexuality, Sedgwick's idea of the closet might represent this suppressed narrative of the nation, the *homo* that needs to be hidden so that its imagined counterpart, the *hetero*, may come to the fore as the only possible, universal sexuality.

In Fortún's case, censorship has been one of the foremost guarantors of the homosexual closet that conditioned her trajectory as an author,

² In recent years, Elena Fortún and her female contemporaries have provided material for a renewed interest in Spanish popular culture through the lives and endeavors of the groundbreaking Spanish women who questioned gender norms and explored new ways of living and loving during the first four decades of the twentieth century. Examples of this include TV series based on their lives, such as *Las chicas del cable* (*Cable Girls*, Netflix 2017–2020), and the documentary *Las sinsabreru* (*The Hatless Women*, RTVE 2015–2021).

both during her lifetime and after her death. However, the workings of the censoring mechanisms that kept her inside of the closet are not easily placed outside of it, since it is difficult to pinpoint specific censoring actors that would have had direct influence over her decisions as an author. Rather, the way that censorship is interiorized in the lesbian subject in Fortún's texts resembles the panopticism described by Michel Foucault as a cornerstone of the modern idea of discipline, an invisible authority that is not directly seen by the controlled subject, but always present as an imagined controlling gaze (Foucault 199–230). In the following paragraphs, we will observe how censorship is manifested in Fortún's texts: sometimes as a generalized and invisible controlling state, sometimes in the form of external actors such as family members, but mostly as self-censorship, an interiorized control that keeps the walls of the lesbian closet intact from within.

The gender dissidence and open secrets of republican Madrid (1931–1939)

The late 1920s and early 1930s in Spain, when Elena Fortún started her career as an author of children's books, was dominated by the liberal and left-wing political coalitions of the Spanish Second Republic that was proclaimed in 1931 and ended in 1939 after a bloody civil war. This period was characterized by progressive reforms that changed the conditions for women and girls in the country, giving them rights to vote, to divorce and to education. During these years, Elena Fortún was an integral part of the feminist movements that promoted such reforms, for example at the Lyceum Club for women in Madrid, which she attended together with other salient intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s (Leggott). In public life, Fortún was a married woman, living a heterosexual life as a wife and mother, but in the 1920s—the same decade when she started to publish stories for children in the press—she also started to frequent the sapphic circles of Madrid (Capdevila-Argüelles, "Introducción" [2022] 39–63)

In many ways, the girl character Celia that Fortún created in her first book for children, *Celia, lo que dice* (*What Celia Says*, 1929), and then continued to recreate in several more books during the 1930s, personified the gender dissidence that characterized the Madrilenian feminist communities of the Second Republic. In the books that Fortún published in the Celia series during this period, the young female protagonist constantly defends her position as an individual on

her own terms, questions the rules of adults around her and defies gender norms. Celia also displays many of the characteristics of the modern figure of the New Girl that appeared in Western culture at the turn of the twentieth century as an ideal of a reformed girlhood: a girl who defends her rights to an independent self, who studies, plays and questions traditional norms of feminine obedience to patriarchal authority (Driscoll; Puchau de Lecea; Lindholm). There is also an adult character in the books from this period who stands out as a representative of the modern woman, namely Celia's mother Pilar de Montalbán, a woman who spends a lot of her time outside the house instead of dedicating it to her family. In fact, she resembles the author herself by attending the Lyceum Club, just like Elena Fortún did, to have tea and discuss important topics of the day with other members of Madrid's feminist intelligentsia (Fortún, *Celia, lo que dice* 74; Martín Gaité 17–20).

Despite the disdain for homosexuals in Spanish society, urban life in the Spanish capital during the decades prior to the Franco regime offered small spaces of a certain tolerance towards women who pushed the boundaries of ladylike behavior, especially among circles of avant-garde artists and authors, where pushing boundaries was part of the common artistic project. On the other hand, the left-wing and liberal movements that dominated the political life of the Second Republic were not necessarily harbors of tolerance towards homosexuals (Carretón Cano). In sum, despite her social life among the progressives of Madrid's feminist avant-garde and her success with the Celia books, there was a secrecy surrounding Fortún's life as a lesbian, even among the more politically progressive communities of which she was a part. The lesbians who engaged in the activities at the Residencia de Señoritas (Residence for young ladies) or the Lyceum Club in Madrid often met with prejudice from other women who frequented these hotspots for development of feminist thought, who expressed open disdain towards what they perceived as their "masculinized" fellow feminists ("masculinizados," Moreno-Lago 228).

Eva Moreno-Lago describes the strategy that lesbians among Madrid's feminists adopted to survive as "an open secret" ("un secreto a voces," Moreno-Lago 219), keeping the knowledge of their intimate relations within a tight web of sympathizers. Sedgwick also alludes to the notion of the open secret in her definition of the homosexual closet, and in fact puts forward homosexuality as "*the* open secret" of modern society, emphasizing homosexuality as something that must be hidden and yet visible in order to define heterosexual normativity (Sedgwick 22). In this manner, the presence of women who loved women within

Madrid's intellectual circles made the homosexual closet visible in the urban space as an unsettling presence of sexual others among the otherwise heteronormative feminists of the intelligentsia. They were talked about and named but had to be kept hidden in their closet to keep the narrative of the progressive Spanish femininity of the Second Republic within the realms of heteronormativity.

Fortún's posthumously published autobiographical novel, *Oculto sendero*, provides an insight into this spectacle of the closet that surrounded female homosexuality in Spanish urban life at the beginning of the twentieth century, where self-censorship seems to have been a strategy used to handle the strong attraction to other women that she describes in the novel. The love relationships depicted in *Oculto sendero* in many ways seem to mirror descriptions of the lesbian communities of Madrid in which Elena Fortún took part, and cross-dressing is perhaps the most salient marker of sapphic identity in the novel. Playing with gender identities through clothing was indeed an integral part of avant-garde aesthetics during the 1920s and 1930s, both in Madrid and elsewhere in Europe, and as Purificació Mascarell states in her analysis of *Oculto sendero*, clothes and appearance play an important part in the novel as a means of representing gender norms and the protagonist's yearning to overcome them (Mascarell).

In *Oculto sendero*, Elena Fortún depicts the presence of homosexuality as an open secret, where censorship and silencing on the part of the protagonist's family members work as markers of the limits between permitted heterosexuality and forbidden homosexuality, where their censoring actions indicate the limits of the homosexual closet. One passage in the novel where this becomes evident depicts the protagonist—Fortún's alter ego María Luisa—as a child accompanying her family to a hotel restaurant where they are celebrating the parents' wedding anniversary. The scene begins with María Luisa's mother asking her daughter to put on a traditionally girlish dress to wear to the celebration, which María Luisa objects to. She prefers a sailor's uniform "with a hat and all" ("con gorra y todo," Fortún, *Oculto sendero* 74), a proposal to which her mother responds with threats of sending her daughter to boarding school if she does not keep quiet: "—Let's see how you shut up! Right now, girl! Look, if you carry on like this I'll send you to a boarding school tomorrow ... Did you hear? Shut up I said! Don't let me hear you anymore ... Go away!" (74)³

³ "—¡Vamos a ver cómo te callas! ¡Ahora mismo, niña! Mira que si sigues así te mando mañana a un colegio interna ... ¿Has oído? ¡A callar he dicho! Que no te oiga más ... ¡Vete!" (All translations from Spanish are my own.)

With harsh words and explicit threats, the mother gets her way, and María Luisa wears the dress while the family has dinner at the restaurant. Both María Luisa's dress and the image of the two parents celebrating their marriage in the presence of their children stand out as symbols of the traditional, heterosexual nuclear family. The sense of heterosexual completeness at the dinner in the hotel is however suddenly broken when María Luisa is struck by the arrival of two young women. One of them is dressed in elegant, traditionally male attire, with a short haircut. The women are described as elegant and rich, but also as breaking social norms, smoking and crossing their legs in public at a "time when women wore dresses to their feet, and no decent woman crossed her legs in public" (83).⁴ The narrator, the pre-adolescent María Luisa, also hints at an intimate relationship between the two women who "looked at each other without saying anything, and in their gaze there was something new and incomprehensible to me" (83).⁵ The boundary that is manifested between the heteronormative family and María Luisa's homoerotic perception of the two women is reinforced by her family members who talk disparagingly of the women and of their unconventional behavior. As the narrator, María Luisa secretly takes the two women's side, but does so silently. In the contrast between the family's open disdain towards the women and María Luisa's silence, Fortún manages to illustrate how the heterosexual family works as a censoring authority that turns any norm-breaking expressions of gender or sexuality into a visible spectacle by naming them openly as deviant. María Luisa's defense of the two women, on the other hand, is manifested in silence, as if kept in secrecy behind the doors of the homosexual closet.

The passage where María Luisa watches the two modern women in the restaurant stands out as the pivotal moment where the protagonist steps onto the hidden sapphic life path of the novel's title, constantly silencing herself in order to survive in a world run according to the rules of heteronormativity. Elena Fortún herself married at the age of 20, and marriage is the only possible life path presented to her alter ego in *Oculto sendero*. Through her fictitious double, Fortún explores the hardships of a lesbian woman who is forced into a heterosexual relationship—for example, her experience of her wedding night, narrated from María Luisa's perspective:

⁴ "... época en la que las mujeres llevaban los vestidos hasta los pies, y ninguna mujer decente cruzaba las piernas en público."

⁵ "... se miraban sin decir nada, y en su mirada había algo nuevo e incomprendible para mí."

I stepped out onto the balcony that had a view over a patio and looked down at the ground ... To think, if I were to let myself fall! It was the third floor and I would be killed. All finished! How wonderful! No husband, no house, no children ... What a relief! [...] And what did it matter? My body, intact the day before, felt outraged ... (302)⁶

In the novel, María Luisa is frequently urged to marry by her family and friends, who repeatedly sing the praises of heterosexual love. María Luisa sometimes tries to tell the people around her about her feelings, her wish to pursue a career as a painter rather than to marry, and her instinctive revulsion at the thought of sex with men. At times, these passages where María Luisa questions the idea of traditional marriage as the only path for her to follow resemble the young Celia's objections when adults make plans for her, or request that she behave in a traditionally girlish manner against her will. However, there is no room for this kind of youthful rebellion in the adult life that Fortún creates for María Luisa in *Oculto sendero*. Rather, the message María Luisa receives from other women, and from the romance novels she reads, is that of heterosexual love as an all-encompassing truth. An example of this appears in a passage when María Luisa, before her wedding, tries to share her worries with her aunt Manuelita:

—Well ... I don't like men ...

—I'm glad! If you like your husband, that is more than enough for you. (301)⁷

The aunt's response indicates monogamous, heterosexual sex as the only option for a woman, but it also illustrates how women in María Luisa's family act as censors who keep any thought of escaping heterosexual monogamy from being uttered. When faced with this impossibility of even expressing a thought that goes beyond the boundaries of marriage, the protagonist of *Oculto sendero* accepts a closeted existence within the boundaries of heterosexual marriage as the only possible way of life for a lesbian woman.

⁶ "Me asomé al balcón que daba sobre un patio y miré al fondo ... ¡Si me dejara caer! Era tercer piso y me mataría. ¡Todo acabado! ¡Qué bien! Ya ni marido, ni casa, ni hijos ... ¡Qué descanso! [...] Y ¿Qué importaba? Mi cuerpo, intacto la víspera, se sentía ultrajado ..."

⁷ "—Pues ... que a mí no me gustan los hombres ... —¡Me alegro! Con que te guste tu marido te basta y te sobra."

The catholic feminine values of the Franco regime (1939–1975)

When Franco took power in Spain in 1939, the small pockets of relative tolerance that lesbians had found in Madrid during the 1930s disappeared completely, and the strict heteronormativity expressed by María Luisa's family in *Oculto sendero* became official policy, enforced by the regime through state censorship. The same year, Elena Fortún and her husband fled to Argentina, mainly because of her husband being a member of the defeated Republican army. In her biography of Elena Fortún, Marisol Dorao describes how the community of women intellectuals that had gathered around the Lyceum Club was scattered in exile, finding refuge in France, Mexico, Chile, or Argentina (Dorao 166). As Sarah Leggott explains, the Lyceum Club as a vibrant hub for the development of feminist thought had since its opening been criticized by the Church and other conservative elements of society. With Franco's takeover, the club was closed, its records destroyed, and the building that housed it was taken over by the Women's Section (Sección Femenina) of the fascist party, Falange. If life in the closet had already been a reality for lesbian women before 1939, its doors now closed on any woman who aspired to an existence beyond the traditional Catholic ideals defended by the regime. Kathleen Richmond has pointed out the pivotal role of the fascist Women's Section in their efforts to remodel the public image of Spanish femininity. As Richmond puts it, characteristic to the new dictatorial regime, was its "determination to turn back the clock [...] on the lives of women" (Richmond 14). Together with representatives of the Catholic Church, the Women's Section with the regime's support, wanted to shift the paradigm from the politically active and educated woman that had been promoted by the feminist movements of the Second Republic, to a more traditional ideal of the girl as future mother and wife (Richmond 14–51).

Like other totalitarian regimes, under Franco the state used censorship to maintain control over the stories that construe the nation's shared narrative. The national narrative was to be kept under the auspices of the ruler to prevent alternative stories from threatening the one narrative that justifies the regime's power over the people. According to Jesús A. Martínez Martín, who has studied the Franco regime's influence on publishing, Catholicism has never penetrated the totality of Spanish society in such a profound manner as during the first and most repressive two decades of the Franco regime. Practically all printed matter had to pass through the censorship apparatus of the

regime, but the criteria for application of the censorship law remained imprecise and vaguely formulated around issues regarding sexual morals, Catholic dogma, and the political principles of the fascist Falange. When it was carried out, censorship was at times meticulous and severe, at others more benevolent and mild (Martínez Martín 38). Even if the state was the main censorship authority in Spain during the Franco regime, other groups of interest could also act as censors by banning texts or other forms of cultural expression, such as representatives of the Church or other political and religious organizations with close ties to the regime. Altogether, the different actors who had an influence on state censorship in Spain during the Franco years formed a complex and non-transparent web of relations (Martínez Martín; Thompson).

The indirect and unpredictable ways in which the mechanisms of censorship interfered in the publishing strategies of Elena Fortún, illustrates the entangled web of relations that Jesús A. Martínez Martín observes in the censorship apparatus of the Franco regime. Instead of transparency and predictability, the fear of an unpredictable authority and of the punishments that awaited those who transgressed its invisible limits caused authors and publishers to integrate the censorship apparatus into their own view of the work at hand. Fortún's documents from this period testify to an interiorized adaptation to the new standards, one similar to the internal senses of shame and distancing that Foucault describes in the context of modern penal systems as the interiorized authoritarian gaze of the panopticon, where the invisibility and arbitrariness of surveillance turns the controlling authority into a powerful fiction in the prisoner's mind (Foucault 204–206). To grasp the mechanism of censorship and how it affected Elena Fortún's situation as an author during these years, it is helpful to put her published work from the post-war period in contrast to her unpublished manuscripts and letters.

Looking at Fortún's publishing record during the Franco years up until her death in 1952, the all-encompassing and unpredictable censorship culture fostered by the regime and its supporters seems to have added yet another layer to the young lesbian woman's self-censorship, which her posthumously published novel *Oculto sendero* testifies to. Fortún published just a few more books in her popular Celia series in Spain after 1939, and by the publication of the last one in 1950, she had already returned to Spain from her exile in Argentina two years earlier in 1948. If the curious, self-asserted girl had been the ideal that shaped the character of Celia during the era of the Second Republic, the Franco regime brought with it new standards to follow. In the books

from this period, Celia grows up into a young woman, more adapted to the new regime's narrative of Spanish femininity. In contrast to the mischievous girl from the earlier books, this more mature version of Celia holds the maternal values fostered by both the Church and the Women's Section of Falange.

The first Celia book to hit the Spanish market after the fall of the Second Republic appeared as early as 1939, entitled *Celia madrecita* (*Celia, Little Mother*). Here, Celia's mother has died, and Celia is now an adolescent, taking on the maternal responsibilities of the household. As Capdevilla-Argüelles points out in her re-edition of *Celia madre-cita*, Fortún not only reshapes the rebellious girl character from the earlier books, but also symbolically represents the downfall of the modern Spanish woman with the death of Celia's mother, who had been a fictitious member of the likewise defunct Lyceum Club (Capdevilla-Argüelles, "Introducción" [2015] 7–17).

Five years passed between *Celia madrecita* and *Celia institutriz en América* (*Celia, Teacher in America*), where Celia becomes a teacher for poor children in Argentina. Despite the caring characteristics that Fortún would continue to foster in Celia as a young teacher, the working and intellectually developed Celia, who also has a boyfriend in the book, apparently did not conform to the standards of the Church in Spain. The book was not formally banned, but in 1945 the organization Consejo Superior de Mujeres de Acción Católica (Women's Superior Council of Catholic Action) classified it together with *Celia en el colegio* (*Celia at School*, 1934) as "inconvenientes" (inappropriate) in their catalogue of children's books (Consejo Superior de Mujeres de Acción Católica 147).⁸ This catalogue, produced by religious organizations close to the regime, was intended to guide authors and editors in the production of morally, religiously and patriotically correct children's literature (García Padrino 42–43). Indeed, the indexing of prohibited or "inappropriate" books has a long history within the Catholic Church in Spain, where the listing of texts deemed threatening to the Catholic doctrine was an integral part of the inquisition (Petley 34–35).

It is hard to establish whether the inclusion of Fortún's books in the list of the Consejo Superior de Mujeres de Acción Católica was pivotal to the decisions made regarding the publication of the last two books in the Celia series, *El cuaderno de Celia* (*Celia's Notebook*, 1947) and *Celia*

⁸ None of Fortún's Celia books was included in the highest category in the catalogue, "recommended," but both *Celia, lo que dice* and *Celia madrecita* were included in the second highest category as "acceptable," whereas *Celia en el mundo* and *Celia y sus amigos* were included in the third category as "tolerable."

se casa (*Celia Gets Married*, 1950). Both these books suited the regime's standards of religiosity and traditional feminine values. The first, *El cuaderno de Celia*, depicts Celia's conversations on matters of virtue and religion with a nun, Sor Inés, who Nuria Capdevila-Argüelles identifies as a representation of the last love in Elena Fortún's life, Inés Field, whom she met in Argentina (Capdevila-Argüelles, "Introducción" [2017] 17). From Fortún's return to Spain in 1948 up until her death in 1952, she maintained close contact with Inés Field in Argentina by correspondence. The religious turn in the Celia series with *El cuaderno de Celia* is mirrored in Fortún's letters to Field during these last years of her life, of which some are full of regrets and self-contempt concerning her earlier way of life.⁹

Judging from the letters to Inés Field, the censorship of the Spanish regime was both an external reality to be dealt with when sending or receiving mail, and something that became manifest as an interiorized, ever-present, and sometimes even paranoiac sense of being watched. Fortún's correspondence reveals how the pressure of censorship affected both her personal life and the literary work that she published, or chose not to publish, during the Franco years. For example, the fear of state censorship is to be perceived in Fortún's letters to Field in Argentina straight after her return to Madrid in 1948, where she was expecting to be accompanied by her husband, Eusebio Gorbea. In a letter from December 16, Fortún gives Field instructions for helping her husband to sort out which papers and manuscripts he may take with him from Argentina to Spain.¹⁰ Among the manuscripts that should not accompany him on the journey is the one containing *Celia en la revolución* (*Celia in the Revolution*), yet another unpublished book in the Celia series that portrays Celia and her family during the civil war.¹¹ Among the manuscripts that Fortún had left behind in Argentina were also those containing explicit references to lesbianism, posthumously published as *Oculto sendero* and *El pensionado de Santa Casilda*. However, Fortún never mentions them explicitly in her letter to Field. Instead, she writes: "It is possible there are some books that will not pass the censorship. It is easy to recognize them." (Fortún, *Sabes quién soy*

⁹ The letters from Fortún to Field have recently been published in two volumes, *Sabes quién soy* and *Mujer doliente* (*You know who I am* and *Aching woman*, both 2021). Unfortunately, there are no records of Field's corresponding letters to Fortún.

¹⁰ The day after this letter to Inés Field was written, on December 17, 1948, Fortún's husband Eusebio Gorbea committed suicide in Argentina.

¹¹ *Celia en la revolución* was published for the first time in 1987.

60–61)¹² The trust that Fortún shows in her friend may be interpreted as a sign of their close friendship, and that Field would probably have had knowledge of the possible lesbian content of some of the manuscripts that Fortún had left behind when she returned to Spain.

The all-encompassing fear of the regime and its censorial power expresses itself in a generalized suspicion throughout Fortún's correspondence to Inés Field, as in a letter sent from Orange, New Jersey on April 11, 1950, during a stay there with her son and niece. In it, she expresses her concern that the censorship of the Spanish regime might even extend to the letters Inés sends to her from Argentina to the United States: "I no longer have any doubt that your correspondence is being tapped ... I don't know by whom or why." (Fortún, *Sabes quién soy* 255)¹³

The pressure on Fortún to adapt her last Celia book, *Celia se casa*, to the standards of the regime can also be seen in her correspondence to Inés Field, where Fortún gives an account of the negotiations with her publisher Manuel Aguilar in Spain. In a letter from Barcelona on February 5, 1951, she mentions the manuscript for *Celia, bibliotecaria* (*Celia the Librarian*) "that I did not finish because Aguilar insisted on marrying her straight away" (Fortún, *Mujer doliente* 184).¹⁴ Fortún had already made plans for finishing the series with a book where Celia ends up working as a librarian. Among Fortún's unpublished manuscripts, there was an unfinished manuscript for *Celia, bibliotecaria*, but instead of finishing the series by giving Celia a profession, Fortún complied with the demands of her editor; judging from the letters, she even seems to have accepted this fate for her famous girl character as a suitable one. *Celia se casa* appears as a combination of what Yuval Beniziman would term political self-censorship and commercial self-censorship: the first being a result of political pressure on the author, in this case the social normativity approved by the Franco regime, and the second being the will of Fortún's editor, Aguilar, to please the presumed expectations of a Spanish audience who would prefer a married Celia to a working one (Beniziman 212–214).

¹² "Es posible también que haya algunos libros que no deje pasar la censura. Es fácil conocerlos."

¹³ "Ya no me cabe ninguna duda de que tu correspondencia está intervenida ... no sé por quién ni por qué."

¹⁴ "... que no acabé porque se empeñó Aguilar en que había que casarla enseguida."

The open closet of a new millennium (2005–2022)

On May 8, 1952, four years after her return to Spain from Argentina, Elena Fortún passed away. Continuing our use of the closet as a concept for capturing the censorship and silencing that conditioned Elena Fortún's life as an author, we now observe how the closet doors would become even thicker after her death, that was followed by more than four decades of public silence regarding the author's persona. Despite of this, her children's books continued to be read and appreciated by young readers in Spain during the last two decades of the Franco regime, without people really knowing much about the person behind the name on the book covers. However, in the 1980s, a time when Spain had just started its transition to democracy after more than three and a half decades of dictatorship, women scholars in Spain started to slowly dismantle Elena Fortún's closet, the walls of censorship that both Fortún herself and others around her had built over the years. The first of these was Marisol Dorao, one of the many admirers of Fortún's Celia character who by the 1980s had grown up and graduated in literature and was seeking out more information on the author for her doctoral thesis. As Dorao explains in the prologue to her biography of Fortún, finding material about the person behind the name that appeared on the beloved Celia books of her childhood was not an easy task.

In her quest to retrieve Elena Fortún's biographical remains, Dorao managed to get in touch with Fortún's niece in the United States, whom she travelled overseas to visit and who gave to her a bag that had belonged to Fortún, full of papers and unpublished materials (Dorao 11). Dorao's quest then took her to Argentina, where she visited the author's friends from her years in exile, Inés Field and Manuela Mur. In the introduction to her edition of *Oculto sendero*, Nuria Capdevila-Argüelles quotes from Dorao's notebook from her journey to Argentina, where she recalls how she got hold of the two manuscripts of *Oculto sendero* and *El pensionado de Santa Casilda* from a very nervous Manuela Mur, who had got them from Inés Field (Capdevila-Argüelles, "Introducción" [2022] 18–19). Both manuscripts contained explicitly lesbian content. They were typed and signed with the name Rosa María Castaños, seemingly yet another censoring strategy used by Fortún to disguise herself even in the afterlife. However, as Capdevila-Argüelles states, the style that characterized the manuscripts was unequivocally Fortún's, even down to the grammatical errors, which had not yet been corrected as in her other manuscripts. Near the end of her life, in a letter to Inés Field dated July 23, 1951, Fortún expressed

her wish that her friend in Argentina would burn her manuscripts, a final act of self-censorship that would have deprived the world of these two rare testimonies from inside the sapphic circles of early twentieth century Spain (Fortún, *Mujer doliente* 224).

Against the explicit wish of her dying friend, Inés Field kept the manuscripts for *Oculto sendero* and *El pensionado de Santa Casilda*. Marisol Dorao never published them, a choice that might be interpreted as respecting the author's wishes without destroying them. However, before she died in 2017, Dorao handed the materials over to her two younger colleagues, Nuria Capdevila-Argüelles and María José Fraga, who decided that the time was ripe to open the closet and finally let Elena Fortún out. In 2016 they published *Oculto sendero*, presenting it as an autobiographical novel. *El pensionado de Santa Casilda*, published in 2022, is a novel of a more erotically explicit content; part of it is attributed to Matilde Ras, who was one of Elena Fortún's closest friends and perhaps even intimate partner (Capdevila-Argüelles, "Introducción" [2022]).

The ethical question remains whether the author's wishes to have the manuscripts destroyed should have been respected after her death in 1952. On the other hand, several people who have taken possession of them over the years have made the same decision not to, from Fortún's friends in Argentina to the literary scholars in Spain into whose hands they eventually passed. If the timing was not right for opening up Fortún's homosexual closet when Dorao was working on her biography in the 1980s, it certainly was so by the time *Oculto sendero* and *El pensionado de Santa Casilda* were published. Spain had entered the new millennium, taking giant steps away from the intolerance of the Franco regime towards acceptance of homosexuality. For example, Spain was among the first countries in the world to permit same-sex marriage in 2005, and in 2022 the Spanish government approved a draft law which would allow transgender people to change their legal gender. In light of these new policies regarding LGBTQ rights in Spain, Elena Fortún yet again provides material for narrating Spanish femininity—this time for a Spain of the third millennium, more open to alternative sexual and gender identities.

In this article, we have seen how Elena Fortún's literary work has become part of three different narratives of Spanish femininity over almost a century, from the 1930s to the present day, but also how these narratives hold hidden stories of deviant sexualities or inappropriate expressions of gender identity that must be kept inside the homosexual closet in order to keep the shared narrative of the nation unified under

the banner of heterosexuality. Elena Fortún's closeted existence as an author during the 1930s and 1940s illustrates the complex workings of modern censorship. It appears as a form of prohibition that may well be enforced by authorities within the government or the family, but which is also effectively interiorized within the closeted subject's mind as a self-censoring, panoptic mechanism that keeps the doors of the closet shut from the inside.

Also, efforts to posthumously bring Elena Fortún out of the closet by publishing her unpublished manuscripts appear as a process that has run parallel with tendencies in Spain's public life at the turn of the millennium, where Fortún once again offers stories that are ripe to be integrated into the contemporary narrative of Spanish femininity. Letting stories such as Fortún's out into the open allows us to study the closet as a spectacle, in Sedgwick's terms, to learn more about the censoring mechanisms that keep its walls intact. The knowledge that Fortún's writing provides from inside the closet may eventually even help us keep its doors open, never to close again on anyone's life story of same-sex love.

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Cenzura zaprte Španije: Primer Elene Fortún (1886–1952)

Ključne besede: španska književnost / španske pisateljice / Fortún, Elena / spolna identiteta / lezbištvo / frankizem / cenzura

Članek se osredotoča na to, kako sta samocenzura in državna cenzura oblikovali literarno zapuščino španske avtorice otroških knjig Elene Fortún. *Klozet* je predstavljen kot ključni koncept za razumevanje vpliva cenzure na delo lezbične pisateljice, kot je Elena Fortún, ki je skoraj stoletje prispevala k različnim pripovedim o španski ženskosti. Prva med njimi je pripoved o disidentstvu spolov v času druge republike (1931–1939); sledi pripoved o ženi in materi, ki pripada Francovemu režimu (1939–1975), in nazadnje pripoved o vključevanju LGBTQ v Španiji v novem tisočletju (2005–2022). Dela, vključena v analizo, so raznovrstna, saj segajo od avtoričinih otroških knjig do njene korespondence in dveh posthumno objavljenih romanov. Branje besedil Elene Fortún razkriva, kako cenzura deluje kot nadzorni pogled, ki ne deluje le od zunaj, temveč je tudi ponotranjen v posamezniku in ohranja vrata klozeta zaprta od znotraj.

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