

**REDEFINING THE WOMAN: SEXUAL DISSIDENCE AND IDENTITY
AT THE ONSET OF SPANISH MODERNITY IN THE WORKS OF
ÁNGELES VICENTE, CARMEN DE BURGOS, AND ELENA FORTÚN**

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uOttawa

~ For all the women whose stories were never told.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines a selection of works written in the first half of the 20th century by three Spanish authors—Ángeles Vicente (1878-c. 1918-1932), Carmen de Burgos (1867-1932), and Elena Fortún (1886-1952)—who pursued a literary career despite the many obstacles women faced in society. Indeed, while Spain was undergoing a contested process of modernization, these authors wrote short stories and novels in an attempt to cement themselves within the fabric of public and cultural life. Unfortunately, the fall of the Second Spanish Republic and the nation's turn to fascism would largely erase their contributions and even force Fortún into exile.

Although distinct in style and background, these authors address many of the same themes and, most notably, they frame their narratives through (pseudo)scientific, medical, and religious discourses on bodies and minds, gender roles, and sexual conducts. This dissertation first considers a selection of texts by Vicente: her novellas *Teresilla* (1907) and *Zeze* (1909) and the feminist and supernatural short stories “Alma loca,” “El huerto encantado,” “La derrota de don Juan,” “La última aventura de don Juan,” and “Sombras.” Publishing in the first two decades of the 1900s, Vicente, still relatively unknown, serves as a precursor to the others, offering an early feminist perspective on issues like marriage, education, (in)sanity, and same-sex desire that continued to develop over the years. Next, we examine how Burgos's novelette *Ellas y ellos ó ellos y ellas* (1916) and her novel *Quiero vivir mi vida* (1931) respond to growing anxieties around gender, sexuality, and Spain's national identity, demonstrating both the author's feminist beliefs and her ambivalence toward “deviant” sexuality. The dissertation concludes with the analysis of Fortún's posthumous sapphic novels *Oculto sendero* (2016) and *El pensionado de Santa Casilda* (2022) which, like *Zeze*, give a voice to same-sex desire while simultaneously defending women's rights to artistic and intellectual vocations.

Drawing on key concepts from Gender Studies, Queer Theory, and Cultural Studies to explore representations of female and/or queer identities, experiences, behaviours, and spaces, this dissertation ultimately seeks to highlight these authors' contributions to early 20th-century debates on gender, sexuality, and modernity.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine une sélection d'œuvres écrites dans la première moitié du XX^e siècle par trois auteures espagnoles – Ángeles Vicente (1878-c. 1918-1932), Carmen de Burgos (1867-1932) et Elena Fortún (1886-1952) – qui ont poursuivi une carrière littéraire malgré les nombreux obstacles auxquels les femmes étaient confrontées dans la société. En effet, alors que l'Espagne passait par un processus de modernisation controversé, ces auteures ont écrit des histoires et des romans dans le but de s'ancrer dans le tissu de la vie publique et culturelle. Malheureusement, l'effondrement de la Seconde République espagnole et le virage fasciste du pays ont largement effacé leurs contributions et ont contraint deux d'entre elles à l'exil.

Bien que leurs styles et leurs origines soient différents, ces auteures abordent bon nombre des mêmes thèmes et, surtout, elles inscrivent leurs récits à travers des discours (pseudo)scientifiques, médicaux et religieux sur le corps et l'esprit, les rôles de genre et les conduites sexuelles. Cette thèse examine tout d'abord une sélection de textes de Vicente : ses nouvelles *Teresilla* (1907) et *Zeze* (1909) et les récits courts féministes et fantastiques « Alma loca », « El huerto encantado », « La derrota de don Juan », « La última aventura de don Juan » et « Sombras ». Encore relativement méconnue, Vicente publie au cours des deux premières décennies du XX^e siècle et s'impose comme une figure précurseure en proposant une perspective

féministe précoce sur le mariage, l'éducation, la folie et le désir homosexuel – des enjeux appelés à se développer au fil des années.

Nous examinons ensuite comment la nouvelle *Ellas y ellos ó ellos y ellas* (1916) et le roman *Quiero vivir mi vida* (1931) par Burgos répondent aux inquiétudes croissantes autour du genre, de la sexualité et de l'identité nationale espagnole, ce qui permet de saisir à la fois les convictions féministes de l'auteure et son ambivalence envers la sexualité « déviante ». La thèse se termine par l'analyse des romans saphiques posthumes de Fortún, *Oculto sendero* (2016) et *El pensionado de Santa Casilda* (2022) qui, comme *Zeze*, donnent une voix au désir homosexuel tout en défendant les droits des femmes à des vocations artistiques et intellectuelles.

Cette thèse mobilise des concepts clés issus des études du genre, de la théorie queer et des études culturelles pour explorer les représentations des identités, des expériences, des comportements et des espaces féminins et/ou queers. Elle vise ainsi à mettre en lumière les contributions de ces auteures aux débats du début du XXe siècle sur le genre, la sexualité et la modernité.

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Content Warning

This dissertation explores a variety of difficult themes portrayed in the studied works, including intimate partner violence, sexual violence, homophobia, and suicidal ideation. If you or someone you know needs help, here are some Canadian resources to consider:

- Assaulted Women's Helpline: 1-866-863-0511
- Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre: 1-877-392-7583
- The Youth Line (LGBTQ+ Support): 1-800-268-9688
- Suicide Crisis Helpline: 9-8-8

The dissertation also covers brief descriptions of traumatic pregnancy and childbirth, as well as sensory deprivation and other forms of torture of a minor. Please read with caution.

Chapter 1 – Introduction: Making Space for Women in Literature

Historically, Europe has done little to encourage women's intellectual pursuits, instead basing its literary tradition on groundbreaking *male* authors belonging to varied countries and sociopolitical backgrounds. Conversely, women have had to fight for space in the public intellectual sphere, making an impact where they could—think of British author Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), French playwright George Sand (1804-1876), and Spanish novelist Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851-1921), for example. Throughout most of history, women with the desire to write not only faced social pressure to disregard intellectual pursuits, but also had little feminine literary tradition on which to base themselves. In their landmark study on 19th-century British literature, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar examine questions of female authorship, highlighting the relationship between women writers and the perception of writing as an essentially male power.¹ An abundance of female characters conceived by male authors puts forth a distorted ideal of womanhood in which the women themselves are far from active participants in their own stories; rather, they are the fictional and physical property of their creators who sit atop the gender hierarchy and condemn any female who dares to challenge the status quo (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 9-10). As such, the women who ventured into literary circles did so unassumingly, mainly contributing to the “lesser” genres of children's books, letters, and diaries (*Madwoman* 72), or adopted androgynous or masculine pen names.² Some, like Radclyffe Hall (1880-1943), took this social identity even further by presenting as male.³ Indeed,

¹ Among the many tales comprising madwomen locked in attics are Charlotte Perkins Gilman's (1860-1935) “The Yellow Wall-Paper” (1892) and Charlotte Brontë's (1816-1855) *Jane Eyre* (1847).

² Several celebrated female writers used male names to disguise their gender; examples include George Sand (Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin de Francueil, France), Ellis Bell (Emily Brontë, England), Fernán Caballero (Cecilia Böhl de Faber, Spain), and Luciano San-Saor (Lucía Sánchez Saornil, Spain).

³ Marguerite Antonia Radclyffe-Hall, before her pen name became her primary identity.

the cross-dressing British lesbian author recognized for her 1928 novel *The Well of Loneliness* was among the first to change her nation's perceptions of gender identity and performance through her controversial masculine fashion.

In spite of society's insistence that writing is an exclusively male form of creative output, a shift in Western notions of gender eventually took place; more and more women began writing, especially into the 20th century, and either identified themselves with traditional masculinity or were criticized for their "freakish" conduct as female writers. While the women authors of the 1800s often had to self-censor the themes of their work—resorting to a sort of "doubletalk" to ensure their writings were focused on the human (male) experience rather than women's topics in order to prove themselves worthy of intellectual pursuits (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 74)—their successors in the 1900s were able to begin building a literary tradition depicting the uniquely female experiences that occur in the margins of a patriarchal society.

Within this European framework, Spain occupies a distinctive position due to its colonial history, religious inclinations, and governmental structures. At its peak in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Spanish empire comprised territories across the Americas, the East Indies, and the Caribbean, bringing riches to the European powerhouse and facilitating the spread of both the Spanish (Castilian) language and strict Catholic doctrines. But as the world began to change again in the 1700s and 1800s, so too did this once vast empire and its sense of national identity. Centuries of monarchical succession and traditional Spanish morality shifted towards new forms of government in the 20th century, impacting society in immeasurable ways and, most importantly for this dissertation, reshaping women's conduct, education, and social functions.

1.1 Spanish Women at the Turn of the 20th Century

The early 1900s saw immense transformations across the planet, from the Wright brothers' first flight (1903) to a slew of wars in Africa under Western imperialism and World War I (1914-

1918), from the Spanish Flu outbreak (1918-1920) to the Russian Revolution (1917). New inventions, political models, and international alliances and conflicts altered the course of our nascent global society, within which paradigms of womanhood also began to shift. In the West, during World War I, women were for the first time working outside of the home on a monumental scale, prompting the emergence of a modern woman who impacted perception of gender roles. Once the war was over, European and North American women alike rejoiced in the economic growth and euphoria of the Roaring Twenties, a golden age that gave birth to the rebellious flappers and boomed with jazz, radio, new art styles, and cinema. The flapper, also called the *garçonne*, is defined by her distinct style—short, straight-fitting dresses that allowed freedom of movement, and hair in a bob—and rebellious behaviours. Unencumbered by the corsets and heavy skirts of the past, flappers “smoked in public, drank alcohol, danced at jazz clubs and practiced sexual freedom that shocked the Victorian morality of their parents” (“Flappers”), thereby changing perceptions of femininity. For María Rocío Cobo-Piñero, they sought to “escape the limitations that circumscribed femininity and break with social taboos in order to claim intellectual and public social spaces, such as the streets and cafes, that had long been dominated by men” (56).

This model of womanhood spread to Spain as well thanks to the advent of African American jazz and blues in Spanish radio, musical theatre, and cinema, with prominent figures such as Josephine Baker (1906-1975) heavily influencing perceptions of what a “modern” woman looked and acted like (Cobo-Piñero 57).⁴ Baker and other vaudeville, jazz, and blues figures exhibited a behaviour that subverted conventional gender roles—primarily within the realms of fashion, artistic prowess, and public appearances—and bolstered Spanish women in their journey

⁴ The United States, “fuente de entretenimiento y escuela de modernidad, con sus películas, sus rascacielos, su sentido dionisiaco de la vida y sus personajes reales y de ficción” (Fuentes 14), was an important influence on Spain. Juan Francisco Fuentes proposes that Spain looked to America as a model of civilization and culture (14).

towards the same freedoms (60). The younger (and often more educated) generation especially embraced this picture of modernity and rejected traditional values in favour of a more liberal and global identity (Prescott and Cornejo-Parriego 86).

Looking at the early 1900s, Spain was in a process of modernization in the sense that values, gender roles, and society at large were shifting away from tradition as the nation sought to catch up to its European neighbours. But an important obstacle stood between the Iberian Peninsula and modernity: the Catholic Church. Transformed by the bourgeoisie into an “oligarquía hegemónica en el campo cultural y en la dirección de las conciencias, al darle el monopolio práctico de todo tipo de explicación y casuística de los diversos comportamientos públicos y privados” (Yetano 8), this religious authority was largely responsible for the nation’s education. Nevertheless, according to Ana Yetano, the rise of rationalism, liberalism, socialism, and other new schools of thought that questioned its omnipresent role of guide and mentor explains the Church’s defensive mentality and its opposition to the values of modernity (11). While other European nations revolutionized and secularized their educational systems, the Spanish clergy worked to maintain and even increase its influence through its regulation of education (13). This control extended to dictating what girls should learn in the classroom, fostering a mentality of inferiority that favoured domestic pursuits. In the first decade of the new century, explains Ángela Ena Bordonada, “todavía se mantiene el tradicional rechazo de la educación y la culturización de la mujer, exaltándose, por el contrario, la ignorancia como virtud femenina” (“La invención” 27). Paired with clerical control of female morality—as Víctor J. Ortega Muñoz notes, Christian values surrounding behaviour served to limit female mobility and ensure their subordination to men (455)—the lack of educational and vocational opportunities for women drastically decelerated the nation’s progress. With the debilitating loss of the last Spanish colonies in 1898, the country’s authority figures sought to restrict what they still could: education, culture, faith, and women. And

yet, posits José Álvarez Junco, there was no significant damage to the monarchy or the economy—the biggest impact was ideological in that Spain’s international reputation and national identity were fractured by the loss of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines, and Cuba (73, 75). At the same time, internal power structures began to shift, with political and economic elites desperately holding onto the positions they had occupied for decades.

In the conflict between tradition and modernity that characterized this period, the ideas of German philosopher Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781-1832) had a profound impact on Spain, especially in regards to the construction of a model for liberal social progress, which included the separation of Church and State.⁵ Krausism took hold as a supporting argument for those desiring a secular culture, blaming ecclesiastic influence for Spanish society’s lethargic development compared to other European nations. This school of thought inspired the creation of several highly influential secular academic institutions, such as the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (1878-1939) and the *Residencia de Estudiantes* (1910-present), attended by renown cinematographer Luis Buñuel (1900-1983), surrealist painter Salvador Dalí (1904-1989), and playwright Federico García Lorca (1898-1936), among others.⁶ Many of the *Institución*’s members saw “the diffusion of culture as the key to the transformation—and modernization—of society” (Graham and Labanyi 2).⁷ With Krausism’s influence on the Spanish intelligentsia and society at large, a new model of

⁵ Though Krausism is widely known, Krause himself has mostly been forgotten. Ironically, the movement had a much greater impact in Spain than in Germany.

⁶ Krausism also inspired the creation of the *Misiones Pedagógicas* of volunteers who journeyed to rural areas of the nation to help combat illiteracy and spread cultural knowledge through travelling libraries, art exhibitions, musical performances, and school visits that served to further the instruction of the teachers and students (Fayanás Escuer).

⁷ For example, amidst a small crew of 19th-century feminists, writer, journalist, and legal activist Concepción Arenal firmly defended feminine education and, aided by Krausist influences, served to pioneer the fight for women and girls’ education that continued into the 1900s.

Spaniard was born, and citizens in (especially urban) regions aspired to become a cultured elite to cement themselves in European innovation.

But some entities, primarily the Church, the military, and landowners, rejected the development of a liberal bourgeois culture, creating additional challenges for the industrial, commercial, and agrarian sectors that were attempting to form allegiances within a mostly rural Spain (Graham and Labanyi 8). For the upper class and even the newly formed middle class, the “social and cultural anxieties of modernity were rooted in a fear of losing control” over less privileged groups and the uncertain search for an alternative to religion as a value system (14). Tradition and modernity clashed as women’s movements challenged religion, law, class divides, and gender expectations in the first decades of the new century. And the proclamation of the Second Republic in 1931 only highlighted the country’s continued political, socioeconomical, and ideological polarization.⁸ The Republic worked to improve conditions for working-class citizens, the LGBTQ+ community, Spain’s autonomous regions, and women; in other words, it embarked on a project to modernize the country through equal rights and secular education. Regrettably, it was disbanded after the Francoist victory in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).⁹

Moreover, academic and cultural organizations and publications played a quintessential role in the development of a greater female intellectual scene and new models of womanhood, while also ratifying “a shift in social policy concerning women” (Johnson, *Gender* 24). Most

⁸ At the turn of the century, the queen consort to the deceased King Alfonso XII (1857-1885), Austrian-born María Cristina de Habsburgo-Lorena (1858-1929), was serving as regent (1885-1902). In 1902, her son Alfonso XIII (1886-1941) took the throne, intervening in the established parliamentary systems and facing multiple assassination plots, then staying neutral during World War I. In the seven years predating the Second Republic, Miguel Primo de Rivera (1870-1930) operated a right-wing dictatorship (1923-1930) with the approval of the last sovereign ruler.

⁹ A coup d’état launched on July 18, 1936 resulted in a three-year civil war in which “las dos Españas” clashed—on one side, the Republicans, and on the other, the Francoists, supported by the Church, the *Falange* (fascist political party), the army, the economic elites, and Italy and Germany.

importantly for this dissertation is the growth of the literary canon, which began to include female voices on a larger scale. Twentieth-century *autoras* surpassed their 19th-century foremothers' obstacles, writing somewhat more freely about women's issues and even publishing their own periodicals (Bellver 36). In fact, Catherine Bellver notes that between 1900 and 1929, women founded 36 new periodicals and participated in the creation of mainstream journals such as *Héroe* (Concha Méndez and husband Manuel Altoaguirre) and *Octubre* (María Teresa León and husband Rafael Alberti) (32, 36). After the success of the feminist newspaper *La voz de la mujer* (1917), editor Consuelo González Ramos (1877-1956?)—pen name Celsia Regis—and businesswoman María Espinosa (1875-1946) instituted the women's rights group *Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Españolas* (ANME), which lasted from 1918 to 1936 and included its own periodical, *Mundo Femenino* (1921), and political party, *Acción Política Feminista Independiente* (1934) (Johnson, *Gender* 25).¹⁰

Similarly, to support women's university education, María de Maeztu (1881-1948) founded the *Residencia de Señoritas* (1915-1939) as the feminine version of the *Residencia de Estudiantes*. According to Thérèse Coureau, the former was one of the most important entities involved in "structuring ... feminist and lesbian networks of the 1930s," while Victorina Durán's (1899-1993) *Círculo sáfico de Madrid* (1920s-1936) and similar groups in other countries helped cultivate a feminist lesbian culture that transcended national boundaries (196).¹¹ Even author

¹⁰ For more on *Mundo femenino*, see Matilde Eiroa's "La popularización del saber y la «Generación de las modernas»."

¹¹ Durán's circle, in spite of its minimal financial resources compared to similar groups in other countries, "compuso un modelo de feminismo político-literario, de «misión educativa» en el que pudieran reflejarse otras mujeres y en el que no cabía el escándalo" (Carretón Cano 20). Indeed, during the 1920s and 1930s, many queer intellectual women connected over discussions of feminist and lesbian activist writing, with Argentina serving as a hotspot for engagement. After the fall of the Republic, several members of *Las sinsombrero* and the *Círculo sáfico* fled to Argentina, including Maruja Mallo (1902-1995) in 1936, Durán and Margarita Xirgu (1888-1969) in 1937, Elena Fortún in 1939, and María Teresa León (1903-1988) in 1940. See more on the

Carmen de Burgos, subject of this dissertation, led a feminine suffrage organization, the *Cruzada de Mujeres Españolas* (1921), and “unequivocally declared herself a feminist” in the 1920s (Johnson, “Issues” 247). The *Lyceum Club Femenino* (1926-1939), meanwhile, defended women’s rights to education and cultural activities. Shirley Mangini explains that Spanish women’s increasing involvement in the public sphere, and in groups such as the Lyceum Club, allowed them to “create personal bonds and become more aware of how to improve the social condition of their gender” (“El Lyceum Club” 125). Mercedes Gómez Blesa describes this institution as a “lugar que se convirtió en un espacio femenino propio, donde hallaron salida las inquietudes intelectuales y las necesidades formativas de muchas mujeres que todavía no contaban en casa con una «habitación propia»” (204-205). The Lyceum Club was also a (relatively) safe space for the “modern” women who shied away from heterosexual marriage, though openly admitting to lesbian or bisexual desire was not yet accepted (Mangini, *Las modernas* 79; 100-101). Sadly, none of these groups survived beyond the Civil War, and feminist advances were replaced by traditional gender roles and queer oppression under the dictatorship (1939-1975) led by self-proclaimed *caudillo* Francisco Franco (1892-1975), whose military coup in 1936 fundamentally altered every aspect of Spanish society for the next 40 years.

1.1.1 A Closer Look at Spanish “Feminism”

We have established that Spain differs from other European territories in terms of politics and religious influences—so it stands to reason that its women’s rights activism would also be unique. Roberta Johnson explains how our preconceptions on Western feminist theory actually impede our study of its Spanish counterparts. She points out that “Fiction, memoirs, letters, and interviews may not appear to engage in the kinds of conceptualizations we expect of theory or

Círculo sáfico in Paula Villanueva’s *El Círculo Sáfico: Lesbianismo y bisexualidad en el Madrid de principios del siglo XX*.

quasi-philosophical discourse, because we have been conditioned by the practices of feminist thought in other countries to consider only a recognizable essay to be the proper source of feminist theory” (“Issues” 248). Spanish activism is more historical, sociological, political, and even literary in character than the abstract thought in neighbouring nations (247). As such, women’s writings are primordial in reconstructing turn-of-the-century “feminism” on the Iberian Peninsula.

Starting in the late 1800s, female participation in modernity inevitably altered the traditional social identity of “woman” (Gómez Blesa 64), their contributions to the literary sphere making up an important portion of this involvement. At the same time, many texts linked women reading to “a sure path of sexual deviance and criminality” (Tsuchiya 16), thereby contributing to general rejection of female intellectuals in Spain. But despite widespread social condemnation, many women began and continued to write, meeting with their peers and supporting each other in the development of a female literary tradition and addressing feminist issues in their publications and public presence. Pardo Bazán and Rosalía de Castro (1837-1885) are recognized as the main literary foremothers of Spain—the two wrote at a time when the Spanish literary canon comprised few female voices.¹² Pardo Bazán addressed feminist themes in her naturalist/realist works that set a precedent for literature touching on the unique experiences of women; the 1883 short story “El indulto,” for example, decries domestic violence and the lack of legal support for women, while *Memorias de un solterón* (1896) challenges contemporary constructions of gender, masculinity, and femininity. Castro’s first novel, *La hija del mar* (1859), depicts a tyrannical husband exerting his masculine power over his wife and the orphan girl she is raising, with a prologue defending women’s intellectual pursuits; similarly, her essay “Las Literatas. Carta a Eduarda” (1865) criticizes the obstacles to female authorship.

¹² See “Nineteenth-Century Women Writers” by Charnon-Deutsch for a more exhaustive list.

The next generations of women writers, now with the beginnings of a female literary tradition in their nation, included similar themes and many more, as we will see with the three authors studied in this dissertation: Ángeles Vicente, Carmen de Burgos, and Elena Fortún. These women wrote during what is known as the Silver Age of Spanish literature alongside the notable *Generación del 27*, though never gaining the same prominence as their male counterparts—Rafael Alberti (1902-1999), Luis Cernuda (1902-1963), and García Lorca, among others.¹³ Nicknamed *Las sinsombrero*, these female vanguardist novelists and playwrights (Rosa Chacel, Victorina Durán, María Lejárraga, Isabel Oyarzábal), poets (Ernestina de Champourcín, Josefina de la Torre), artists (Margarita Gil-Roeset, Maruja Mallo, Margarita Manso), and essayists (Margarita Nelken, María Zambrano) were typically mentioned in relation to celebrated men, if at all (Gómez Blesa 155).¹⁴ The *sinsombrerismo* movement began with Méndez, Mallo, and Manso refusing to wear a hat in public like “respectable” women always did, challenging both gender and class expectations (Cobo Piñero 62) and serving as a visual metaphor for breaking free of the limits for women in Spanish society.

In the following chapters of this dissertation, we will examine some of the fundamental feminist issues that figure among the texts and speeches created by important female activists at the time, namely marriage and motherhood, intimate partner violence, educational and vocational opportunities, and “deviant” sexuality. And while the most pressing debates of the initial decades

¹³ The *Edad de plata* of Spanish literature covers the period from the late 1800s to approximately 1936, though exact start and end dates are debated. For more on why women were often excluded from the *Generación del 27*, see María del Mar López-Cabrales, “Tras el rostro/rastro oculto de las mujeres en la Generación del 27.”

¹⁴ Writer María Lejárraga (1874-1974) participated in many feminist organizations, including the Lyceum Club. In the 1950s, it was discovered that she was the author of many works attributed to her husband Gregorio Martínez Sierra (1881-1947). Similarly, many activists have been overlooked, including Benita Asas Manterola (1873-1968), a teacher and suffragist who made strides in women’s rights.

of the 20th century, feminine suffrage and divorce, do not figure prominently in our corpus, our authors were still exposed to and shaped by these disputes; in fact, Carmen de Burgos was a committed supporter of divorce legislation in her writings and her political activism. Both matters turned in favour of feminist progress: Spanish women obtained the right to vote in 1931, though the first election in which they participated was in 1933, and divorce was legalized in 1932, then suppressed under the Francoist dictatorship, during which no elections were held.¹⁵

Spanish feminism is inherently political in nature, an example of which is the October 1, 1931 debate on female suffrage between two lawyers and politicians of different liberal leanings, Clara Campoamor (1888-1872) and Victoria Kent (1891-1987).¹⁶ Both, alongside Margarita Nelken (1894-1968), another leading feminist voice, were elected to the Spanish Congress before women had obtained the right to vote. While Kent advocated for postponement of female suffrage, claiming that due to ecclesiastical influences, women needed more time to discover why the Second Republic's ideals worked in their favour before Spanish society could risk allowing them to vote against it, Campoamor firmly defended women's decision-making capacities, citing *obreras* and *universitarias* as proof. Helen Graham explains that different factions looked to female voters as agents of change. On one hand, centrists attempted to impart Republican values on bourgeois women not for their own sake, but so they would educate their children with the desired political leanings; on the other hand, the right encouraged rural and working-class (often

¹⁵ Also in 1932, women won the right to sign contracts, manage estates, and be legal witnesses, and could no longer be dismissed from a job because they had married (Graham 101).

¹⁶ Kent, the first female lawyer in Spain, spent over 20 years with her partner, the American philanthropist Louise Crane (1913-1997). Their story was published in 2016 by Carmen de la Guardia Herrero: *Victoria Kent y Louise Crane en Nueva York. Un exilio compartido*.

illiterate and uneducated) women to vote according to their conservative, religious upbringings (103-104).¹⁷

However, until the 1930s, early 20th-century feminism was largely reserved for upper-class women—literate, even university-educated (Graham 103). While according to Burgos, “feminism first arose among women of the lower classes (‘mujeres del pueblo’) because they were the most affected by economic problems, especially in the cities” (Johnson and Castro 226), the truth is they were seldom the focus of feminist efforts among the bourgeois and upper-class women who fought for emancipation. Johnson and Olga Castro posit that Burgos was the only feminist of her generation who argued from a legal standpoint, and in spite of crediting the “mujeres del pueblo” with the rise of early feminism, she focused less on the working class than other writers like Nelken (228). The latter believed that “women’s work is so disparaged and ill paid that women’s only options are to sell their bodies to strangers or to a husband” (222). Similarly, in her novel *La rampa* (1917), Burgos describes marriage as both slavery and the “única liberación” from poverty and shame (151). The issue of marriage also appears in texts by authors like Luisa Carnés (1905-1964), a writer and communist supporter of the Republic who belonged to the working class, a perspective that defines her texts. The author’s only novel published during the pre-war period, *Tea Rooms* (1934), delves into the life of the working-class Spanish woman, critically exploring marriage and subordination, class differences, religion, and prostitution.¹⁸ These novels remind us

¹⁷ This sort of conflict appears not only between activists and writers but within their own stances; María Zambrano (1904-1991), for example, an active supporter of the Republic, did not look fondly upon divorce—for women in general, as she notes in an unpublished 1931 diary entry or letter, or for herself, given that her husband divorced her in 1957. See more on Zambrano in Goretti Ramírez’s “El pensamiento en el exilio: María Zambrano.” Comparatively, the communist leader Dolores Ibárruri (1895-1989) was more conservative in themes of motherhood, even taking on the image of mother to the Republican soldiers and of a martyred, suffering widow (Byron 138; 151). She separated from her husband in the 1930s after having six children (“Dolores Ibárruri”).

¹⁸ In addition, *Tea Rooms* dialogues with different international revolutionary theories on workers’ and women’s liberation.

that women's rights are inexorably linked to class struggles—true emancipation means freedom for all women, regardless of socioeconomic status.

In contrast to the bourgeois feminism of Kent, Fortún, and their peers, the anarchofeminist movement held the intersection of class and gender in a higher regard. The *Mujeres Libres* anarchist organization, co-founded in 1936 by poet Lucía Sánchez Saornil (1895-1970), soon comprised around 30,000 participants (Berrueta).¹⁹ While the general anarchist effort pushed for liberation from capitalism, outdated bourgeois morality, and religious authoritarianism through changes in the individual, *Mujeres Libres* in particular fought for *women's* emancipation on three fronts: replacing ignorance with secular education, and liberating them from their enslavement to a) capitalism and b) patriarchy. Murray Bookchin explains that Saornil and many others “opposed the marriage ceremony as a bourgeois sham, advocating instead a free union of partners, and ... regarded sexual practices as a private affair, governable only by a respect for the rights of women” (11-12). Anarchists encouraged Spaniards to learn about sexuality and their own bodies, though heterosexuality remained the dominant discourse into the late 1930s (Cleminson, “Beyond” 122).²⁰ They also promoted contraception to protect against venereal disease and pregnancy, thus distinguishing between sex for procreation and pleasure and earning the distrust of religious powers (121).²¹ The movement mainly considered Church-sanctioned marriage “unnatural and

¹⁹ The other founders were Amparo Poch y Gascón (1902-1968) and Mercedes Comaposada Guillén (1901-1994). Together they built an intersectional federation that recognized the unique challenges working women face. Unfortunately, the organization did not survive the Civil War. After a short exile in France at the end of the war, Saornil and her partner América Barroso returned to Valencia, Spain, in 1942 to live in a new form of exile: secrecy. This poet's lesbianism was seldom discussed and often denied, even by her own relatives, due to her femininity and close *friendship* with América (Hermida Martín 305-06). And though Saornil tried to reignite the *Mujeres Libres* spark after her return, the federation never regained the momentum it lost in 1939.

²⁰ Abortion was legalized in Catalonia in 1936, though its lack of publicization meant fewer women knew it was an option and thereby did not choose it (Cleminson, “Beyond” 121-22).

²¹ Tatiana Sentamans adds that the apparition of contraceptives in Spain gave women “acceso a una información que, en el caso de que no fuera leída, se transmitía de boca en boca por los patios

restricting, shoring up a society based on inequality and power: the power of one sex over the other” which it connected to the evils of capitalism, where one class controls another (121). Mary Nash adds that many Spanish anarchists judged marriage and prostitution as two sides of the same coin and that marriage itself was “una unión conyugal de conveniencia económica” (*Mujer* 30), much like sex work. For this reason, several literary texts establish this same connection between marriage and prostitution, directly or indirectly highlighting how class struggles intersect with women’s issues such as limited opportunities outside the home and patriarchal manipulation and abuse within it.

1.1.2 The Fluctuations of Queer Politics

Other factors that heavily influence women’s rights challenges, in addition to class, are sexual orientation and gender nonconformity. Although there is comparatively little data on homosexuality in pre-war Spain (as opposed to during Francoism and especially beyond), we must consider how different sectors of Spanish society addressed questions of sexuality. María Martín Sánchez traces the legal history of homosexuality in Spain, noting that in the Middle Ages, the Spanish Inquisition condemned it, but primarily persecuted individuals who were *also* heretics (254). Once the old regime fell and the Inquisition was abolished, the (barely implemented) 1822 Penal Code—inspired by the Napoleonic Code of 1810—decriminalized homosexuality (Martín Sánchez 254; Cleminson and Vázquez García 34). Successive Spanish Penal Codes (1848, 1850, 1860, and 1870) made no major changes to this law, reserving their jurisdiction for public crimes rather than private vices including sodomy (Cleminson and Vázquez García 34). This is not to say, however, that homosexuality was permitted during the 19th century; many queer men were still

de luces y los salones de tertulia, y que le permitiría tener un mayor control de su cuerpo, haciendo posible que el coito heterosexual no estuviera abocado a la productividad (embarazo), sino que pudiera ser realizado por placer” (55).

punished for “escándalo público o faltas contra la moral y las buenas costumbres” and sodomy still figured in Military Codes (254). Then, the Primo de Rivera dictatorship reinstated homosexuality as a crime in 1928 under the clauses of “delito de abusos deshonestos y ... de escándalo público” for which punishments—generally fines—increased in case of same-sex involvement until the Republic’s Penal Code removed it again four years later (255). Under Francoism, homosexuality was once more criminalized, with “perpetrators” sentenced to prisons or forced labor camps and submitted to torture under the 1954 reform of the *Ley de vagos y maleantes* (1933) and the new *Ley de peligrosidad y rehabilitación social* (1970).²²

Turning from the legal field to medicine and culture, at the onset of the 20th century, gay men occupied a more prevalent spot in Spain’s national discourse as their perceived femininity was linked to the country’s weakness on the global stage—which we will explore in section 3.2—and their nontraditional sexuality was often categorized alongside pedophilia (Vázquez García 156-157). Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García explain that unlike the United States and certain European nations, in Spain the thought process from “sodomy” to “inversion” to “homosexuality” was far from linear; in fact, “what predominates during the period 1850-1939 in Spain is a proliferation of terms designating same-sex sexuality and the concepts that they struggled to contain” which ultimately returned to “sodomy” under Francoism (96-97). If we look at the period between 1900 and 1920, particularly relevant for our study, a new scale of the psychopathologies of sexual perversions was diffused across Spain, and “invertidos” were most often blamed for abuse and sexual violence against children (158-159). Moving into the 1920s,

²² The 1933 *Ley de vagos y maleantes*, which during the Republic detailed the treatment of vagabonds, pimps, and other unsavoury characters, was modified by the dictator to include penalties for homosexuality including prison time and electroshock therapy. Fast-forwarding to 1970, a new law replaced the *Ley de vagos y maleantes*: the *Ley de peligrosidad y rehabilitación social*, which labelled homosexuality and prostitution equal crimes and proposed “re-education”—read: incarceration, torture, and sexual violence—for those afflicted.

male homosexuality became especially visible (Cleminson, “El libro” 985), and differentiating between types of gay men had an impact on public reaction to homosexuality (986). For example, sexologist Ángel Martín de Lucenay (1890-1960) sought to distinguish innate versus acquired queerness, because in the latter case, it stands to reason that homosexuality could spread, highlighting the necessity of legal recourses for prevention (986). Indeed, sexology and psychiatry, the main fields that addressed same-sex sexuality, emerged and flourished in this era in response to the questions the bourgeoisie and perhaps even homosexuals themselves were asking regarding medical beliefs on sexual deviance (Cleminson and Vázquez García 98). For this reason, the figure of the homosexual played an important role in the configuration of the limits of acceptable sexuality in 1920s and 1930s Spain (Cleminson, “El libro” 986), which was especially reflected in the number of publications on related topics.

In fact, while historically Spaniards lacked knowledge around sex due to overbearing Catholic morals (Cleminson, “Male” 262), sexual reform, as Rafael Huertas and Enric Novella explain, bloomed in the 1920s and 1930s, which is evidenced by numerous publications, campaigns and organizations promoting hygiene and sex education, classes and conferences, and the support of prominent Spanish doctors such as Gregorio Marañón (1887-1960) (3).²³ According to Nerea Aresti, some doctors and biologists claimed that hardly a week went by without a new publication on the mysteries of sexuality, most often on the “différences entre les sexes, le rôle des instincts dans la vie sociale, le mariage, la prostitution, la pornographie, les « maladies vénériennes », les soi-disantes « perversions » sexuelles, le malthusianisme, l’eugénisme...” (48; emphasis added).²⁴ Indeed, among the many topics the medical, political, and cultural fields

²³ In fact, of the 70 works released in 1933 by Ediciones Morata, 44 addressed matters of sexuality (Aresti 48).

²⁴ There were translations of texts by specialists such as Havelock Ellis (Britain, 1859-1939) and Auguste-Henri Forel (Switzerland, 1848-1931) as well as domestic writings by members of the

addressed within this burgeoning fascination with deconstructing human sexuality, several authors dedicated chapters upon chapters to homosexuality. Marañón, an example from the medical sphere, published a plethora of works including *Tres ensayos sobre la vida sexual* (1926) delineating his beliefs on gender, motherhood, prostitution, queerness, the human body, clothing, and many more themes connected to human sexuality and the factors that influence it—always including gender nonconformity and sexual orientation. Politicians such as the young Hildegart Rodríguez (1914-1933) also publicly voiced their opinions on sexuality in Spain.²⁵ Rodríguez, for example, published articles and books such as *La rebeldía sexual de la juventud* (1931), ardently criticized prostitution, and argued that homosexuality and polygamy could be as natural and heterosexuality and monogamy (Huertas and Novella 3).

Opinions on same-sex attraction also appeared in publications in the press, like the anarchist journal *La revista blanca* (1898-1905, 1923-1936), where in the 1930s the term “homosexuality” was increasingly used and without so much condemnation (Cleminson, “Male” 266). However, while a 1935 article called for Spain to allow “inverts” their “freedom of sexuality,” other articles in *La revista blanca* still did not consider homosexuals “real men” or adopt a broad stance of tolerance toward them (267). Finally, from a more literary standpoint, it is worth mentioning that the *Generación del 27* included several homosexual authors such as Vicente Aleixandre (1898-1984), Emilio Prados (1899-1962), Cernuda, and García Lorca (Pérez-Sánchez

Instituto de Medicina Social de Madrid, for example Doctor of Medical Jurisprudence Antonio Piga Pascual (1879-1952) and psychiatrist César Juarros (1879-1942). At the same time, sexuality figured in popular literature such as the *revista sicalíptica* with suggestive texts and images (Sentamans 72).

²⁵ Rodríguez was conceived by a eugenicist single mother attempting to create the perfect militant feminist to carry on her work. By age 11, Rodríguez was presenting on feminist issues in multiple languages. But when she was just 18 years old, her mother shot her four times in her sleep, killing her. Her story has been recently adapted for the big screen in *La virgen roja* (Dir. Paula Ortiz, 2024).

443-444). Even the heterosexual Ramón del Valle-Inclán (1866-1936), who belonged to the previous generation, introduced many queer characters in his works, among them a bisexual marquis; he also satirized and denigrated his homophobic characters (444).

Although there are numerous journalistic, literary, cultural, political, and medical examples of both negative and positive depictions of (most often male) queerness, and although gay and lesbian artists frequented queer circles and wrote their experiences into their literature, we must note that there was no mainstream LGBTQ+ activism equivalent to the working-class and feminist movements of the early 20th century. Nor was there a “conscious, active urban homosexual minority demanding recognition” (Cleminson, “Male” 262). Vázquez García highlights that without explicit laws against homosexuality, it is logical that it had no vocal supporters or political movements defending and developing it (160). Most significantly for this dissertation, we must distinguish between Spanish society’s treatment of men and of women’s sexual and gender nonconformity, which impacts their literary representation. If fictional texts about male homosexuality are scarce, comparable works about female homosexuality in the pre-war period are even more so, in part due to historical lesbian invisibility and women’s longstanding ostracization from the public sphere. But we can still recover a degree of Spanish sapphic sexuality from women’s writings—some that were published during the first decades of the 1900s, and others that are only coming to light in the 21st century. Indeed, while men in different fields produced a wave of writings on homosexuality—primarily essays and manuals but, recalling some of Cernuda and García Lorca’s works, poetry and prose as well—women, too, were beginning to write about queer existence, as we will see in the following chapters of this dissertation.²⁶ The contributions to queer literature by both men and women writers serve “to elaborate a common

²⁶ Patricia Barrera Velasco traces the corpus of Spanish lesbian writings by women and identifies Vicente’s *Zezé* and Fortún’s *Oculto sendero* as two of the few examples before the 1970s (243).

culture for their respective communities and subcultures” (McCallum and Tuhkanen 3). Especially in the cases of Vicente and Fortún, who expressed same-sex attraction in their personal lives, it is critical to recover the voices of those whose works were erased from or never made it into the Spanish literary canon due to societal pressures and self-censorship.

Had the Second Republic or other democratic leadership continued to lead Spain through the 20th century, it is very likely that more LGBTQ+ texts could have existed in the Spanish literary tradition. But within less than a decade, right-wing insurgents prompted the destruction of the new elected government’s progress. Too many hopes lay on the Second Republic: first, the modernization and laicization of Spanish society, and second, a bold redistribution of social wealth (Álvarez Junco 81-82). These goals were met with a lot of opposition, and even within the republican faction, there were great divisions on how to achieve them. So, the governing bodies cultivated the country’s progressive stance until the Civil War and ensuing dictatorship interrupted social movements and replaced them with repressive *nacional-catolicismo*. Many republican supporters and intellectuals, if not killed or captured, were forced into exile. Those who left made their mark elsewhere—often, their work was banned in their native country—while those who stayed faced censorship, imprisonment, violence, and even death. García Lorca, himself a homosexual republican poet and playwright, is acknowledged as one of the first victims of Franco’s faction; he was executed in August 1936, a month after the start of the war.²⁷ And the progress women had made under democracy was destroyed as Francoism forced them back into

²⁷ After the discovery of García Lorca’s last epistolary correspondences, Amelia Castilla and Luis Magán recount, in an article published in *El País*, how at the time of his execution, Lorca and his lover Juan Ramírez de Lucas (1917-2010) had been discussing leaving for Mexico, but the latter’s age and strict father impeded this journey. Lucas is likely the muse behind Lorca’s *Sonetos del amor oscuro*; the author’s insistence on delaying his exile for this great love ultimately cost him his life (Castilla and Magán). Lorca’s works were banned in Spain for over nearly two decades, and none of his unpublished works were released in the nation until the mid-1950s.

traditional gender roles, criminalized homosexuality, and plunged the nation into decades of fear, hatred, and secret resistance.

1.2 Dissertation Objectives

This thesis focuses on a selection of works from the first half of the 20th century by three Spanish writers—Ángeles Vicente (1878-c. 1918-1932), Carmen de Burgos (1867-1932), and Elena Fortún (1886-1952)—who authored fiction and articles that pinpointed female experiences. They built on the work of their foremothers, even though there were few in comparison to the plethora of male authors. Indeed, celebrated male writers have, for centuries, made up the majority of what is recognized as “Spanish literature” and composed many of the common representations of women at the time.²⁸ Although Spanish women’s contributions during the first decades of the 20th century are slowly coming to light by way of documentaries (*Mujeres en la historia* [RTVE series], Dir. María Teresa Álvarez, 1995-2009; *Las maestras de la República*, Dir. Pilar Pérez Solano, 2013; *Las sinsombrero*, Dir. Tània Balló, 2015; *A las mujeres de España. María Lejárraga*, Dir. Laura Hojman, 2022), new editions of older texts (Vicente’s texts from the early 1900s republished in 2005-2007 and 2020; *Cartas a las mujeres de España*, 1916, republished in 2022), and previously unpublished manuscripts or letters (Fortún’s two novels, 2016 and 2020; *Victoria Kent – De Madrid a New York*, 2018; *Cartas de Maruja Mallo*, 2025), scholarship on this topic is still limited, as is also clear in the literature reviews for each author. To develop a well-

²⁸ García Lorca, for instance, a fellow member of the *Generación del 27*, focused on themes of honour, tradition, purity, and marriage in many of his plays (*Bodas de sangre*, 1932; *Yerma*, 1934; *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, 1936). A firm advocate of feminism—for what we would consider feminist thought in a 1920s Spanish man—, García Lorca represented women’s sexual and social frustrations in his theatrical pieces. Meanwhile, other writers such as poet Rafael Alberti often wrote about female bodies (“Amaranta”; “Nocturno”) from a markedly male perspective. However, *Doña Inés* (1925) by José Martínez Ruiz, pseudonym Azorín, is among the few novels with a female protagonist by a male author written between 1900 and 1936 (Johnson, “Narrative” 130). In this story, independent main character Inés must flee Spain after she is spotted kissing a man in a cathedral and is consequently shunned from society.

rounded, accurate picture of Spain's 20th-century cultural and intellectual history, we must expand on renewed efforts to bring *female* writers, intellectuals, and artists to the foreground, which is the first objective of this dissertation. By building on efforts to recover female writers, this project promotes the study of three women who dared to be intellectuals, emphasizes their crucial role in Spain's artistic and cultural panorama in the 1900s, and cements their inclusion in the literary canon. Furthermore, it contributes to the growing fields of queer and feminist studies and explores these authors' immediate, indirect, or even posthumous influence on their country.

More specifically, the study of fictional texts by Vicente, Burgos, and Fortún highlights their involvement in the construction of a modern society—though in the case of Fortún, fear of censorship left her lesbian works unpublished until the 2000s, meaning her contributions beyond her *Celia* children's series are only now coming to light. While the Spanish nation sought to match its neighbours' modernity, competing discourses—religious and scientific, but also cultural, medical, and pseudoscientific—explored vital social issues such as education reform, queerness and sexuality, and women's rights. While the Church largely encouraged a return to tradition, the other frameworks of knowledge were more nuanced, advocating for progress while also holding conservative views on certain matters such as sexual nonconformity. As such, this dissertation intends to demonstrate how three Spanish women authors engage with and criticize medical, religious, and social discourses in their stances on crucial women's issues related to intellectual pursuits, marriage and motherhood, and (dissident) sexuality—prostitution, adultery, and same-sex desire. Although they were undoubtedly shaped by the leading discourses of the early 20th century, Vicente, Burgos, and Fortún advocated for liberation from gender roles and the ecclesiastical and scientific influences maintaining them, paying particular attention to sexual orientation and conduct, but also tying into questions of class, education, violence, spatiality, and national discourse. Indeed, examining how these three writers and their works dialogue with each

other—a perspective not yet explored in scholarship—reveals how they share their commitment to women’s rights and also the fact that their texts are heavily defined by the systems that attempted to regulate gender and sexuality in Spanish society during a period of tentative sociopolitical growth and globalization.

Bearing in mind all of the above and situating Vicente, Burgos, and Fortún in the context of a growing international feminist movement and a network of women authors who depict the female experience—and more specifically, the queer female experience—, this study proposes an answer to several research questions, including: How do these authors internalize and/or challenge contemporary clinical theories and social morality? How do they represent same-sex desire and gender nonconformity through both physical appearance (i.e. clothing) and conducts? How do their characters uphold, endure, or reject sexist and homophobic assumptions and gendered double standards? What ambiguities and contradictions can be found in their depictions of dissident female sexualities and identities? How do these authors’ texts engage with Spain’s steps towards modernization? How do they represent the relationship between fluctuating notions of gender/sexuality and political modernity? How do they reflect the collective anxieties of the new century surrounding the unstable categories of gender and sexuality?

1.3 Theoretical Approach to Gender and Sexuality in Early 20th-Century Spain

Given the multifaceted nature of this dissertation’s subject, our research adopts a Cultural Studies approach, which relies on interdisciplinarity and draws from several fields: Queer Theory, Gender Studies, Psychoanalysis, and History. Moreover, since several narratives in our corpus foreground the impact of sexism alongside homophobia and/or class-based oppression, it is imperative to recognize how these overlapping forms of discrimination yield more complex issues. To address this, we turn to Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of *intersectionality*, first coined to refer to the unique challenges facing women of colour, especially regarding identity politics and

violence, though later expanded to include other intersections such as sexual orientation and class (1242). The difficulties experienced by individuals marginalized on more than one front—for instance, based on ethnicity and disability, or religion and gender identity—are distinctive in that they place the victim in an impossible position “within discourses that are shaped to respond to one [activist movement] or the other” (1244).

To begin, we must contextualize our authors within a period of great progress for Spain, including the emergence of the *mujer moderna*, who not only embodied political liberalism and professional engagement, but also adopted a new “masculine” style and sought an education, therein threatening the traditional nuclear family (Mangini, *Las modernas* 74-76) that the Church fiercely defended. Drawing on studies such as Mangini’s *Las modernas de Madrid: Las grandes intelectuales españolas de la vanguardia* (2001) and Gómez Blesa’s *Modernas y vanguardistas: Mujer y democracia en la II República* (2009), we highlight the history of Spanish women intellectuals and of the main institutions that encouraged modernity and female participation in public and academic life, for example the Lyceum Club. This institution was crucial in countering the Catholic narrative of female submission, and its members faced considerable disapproval, with many calling them criminals, “enemigas de la familia cristiana,” and deserters of the hearth (Gómez Blesa 209).

To establish the groundwork for our analysis of women’s—and at times working-class women’s—issues featured in the novels under study, we consult chapters in Johnson and Silvia Bermúdez’s *A New History of Iberian Feminisms*, which compiles the arguments of vital voices in the first wave of Spanish feminism such as Concepción Arenal (1820-1893), Campoamor, and Nelken. The latter “believed that feminism in Spain was inextricably intertwined with class affiliations” (Johnson and Castro 222), an idea that is especially evident in Vicente’s *Teresilla*. To build a portrait of what our authors understood as the modern woman and grasp the complexities

of early 20th-century Spain, we also consider panoramic studies on relevant literary canons such as *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Spanish Culture* (1999) and *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature* (2014), as well as other scholarly works (Acosta and Haidt; Charnon-Deutsch; R. Johnson; Gies; Graham and Labanyi; McCallum and Tuhkanen; Nash).

Looking to the matter of gender divisions in this blossoming society, we must first study the traditional expectations of domesticity imposed upon Spanish women before examining how our authors demonstrate the importance of overcoming these barriers (Aldaraca; Nieva de la Paz). According to Kathleen Gough, in the modern era, “the confinement of women in homes and small families ... artificially limits [the] human capacities” for progress and cooperation (770). In Spain, one of the primary arguments to justify women’s domestic ideals was the traditional notion of the *ángel del hogar*, which Bridget Aldaraca traces back to Fray Luis de León’s *La perfecta casada* of the 16th century (33) and the longstanding separation of the honourable family from public spaces (55). Spanish husbands and fathers demanded “subordination and affectionate obedience” (42). However, women’s emancipation thwarted these expectations of virtuous subservience: instead of embodying the perfect homemaker who cared for her dwelling, children, and spouse, the modern woman refused to be complicit in her continued exploitation and challenged double standards of sexual purity and intellectual possibilities (Ríos Lloret 181-82). We also draw from the British text “The Origin of the Family” (1971), in which Gough outlines the eight characteristics of male power: “to deny women sexuality or to force it upon them; to command or exploit their labor or to control their produce; to control or rob them of their children; to confine them physically and prevent their movement; to use them as objects in male transactions; to cramp their creativeness; or to withhold from them large areas of the society’s knowledge and cultural attainments” (768). This framework allows us to underscore how our authors—Fortún in

particular—incorporate many of these traits in their depictions of women’s struggles in Spanish society.

One of these challenges, reinforced by “generations of male scholars [who] have distorted or over-interpreted the evidence to bolster beliefs in the inferiority of women’s mental processes” (Gough 770), are the debates over female involvement in intellectual life. Indeed, celebrated British author Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) also indirectly addresses Gough’s latter two characteristics in one of her foundational texts. In 1928, the same year she published her groundbreaking *Orlando*, Woolf read two papers at the Newnham and Girton colleges that became *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), a publication Woolf knew would see backlash—in her private journals, she predicted she would be “attacked for a feminist & hinted at for a sapphist” (qtd. in Gordon vii). Woolf’s proposal is, simply put, that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (4). In essence, Woolf criticizes the gender roles that force women to prioritize bearing and raising children and blames these demands for their lack of financial resources. Without these resources, women cannot afford an independent space in which to develop their literary or artistic creativity, as we see in *Oculto sendero*. Without this room, they cannot contribute to the intellectual and artistic traditions of their nation, leaving men feeling superior and exerting their academic authority to exclude women from the cultural sphere. In fact, Woolf herself declared that if women are to write, they must first kill the “angel in the house” (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 17) that has historically hindered female liberation and literary creation.

While Woolf foregrounds the physical space and financial emancipation women need to produce art freely, Gilbert and Gubar’s *Madwoman* explains that female authors, due to their exclusion from the canon, lack foremothers and suffer the anxiety of authorship, the fear that they

do not belong in the literary sphere and cannot author a text at all.²⁹ This concept responds to American literary critic Harold Bloom's (1930-2019) 1973 proposal that male writers experience a certain anxiety of influence, fearing that their work lacks posterity compared to their literary "fathers." By contrast, women creatives are burdened not only by self-doubt, but also by criticism from other women—indeed, certain male theorists bolster their antifeminist arguments invoking the regressive stance of their female contemporaries. Italian psychiatrist Gina Lombroso (1872-1944), for example, alleged that "la mujer no podrá dar para la creación de las obras maestras más que aquella parte de su alma que no esté absorbida por las preocupaciones familiares," arguing that women lack the ambition and quest for glory needed to write a masterpiece since their ultimate glorious destiny is motherhood (qtd. in Marañón, *Tres ensayos* 216). Certain male scholars use Lombroso's and other women's arguments to lend credibility to their sexist beliefs among female readers. To better understand the challenges Vicente, Burgos, and Fortún faced, we need to acknowledge that, though these attitudes were beginning to shift in the 1920s—at least with regard to women's presence in public spaces—the strict moral codes set by the Catholic church and conservative governments continued to define how Spanish women should participate in society.³⁰

Considering that female "madness" is an essential subject in some of Vicente's supernatural short stories, we draw once again from Gilbert and Gubar's *Madwoman* alongside a slew of other scholars to address the representation of female insanity in society and its literature

²⁹ Even today, as Heather Savigny clearly outlines in her work on cultural sexism, women in academia face many barriers due to gender.

³⁰ Indeed, the expectations for women—purity, domesticity, obedience—are common across time and space, and women worldwide have highlighted the double standards. The concepts of feminine purity and honour, for example, appear in the literary canon of numerous eras and nations. These are key concepts in Spain's Early Modern literature, and their persistence is represented in García Lorca's aforementioned rural trilogy, but also in "Hombres necios" (1689) by Mexican Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695) and "Tú me quieres blanca" (1918) by Argentinian Alfonsina Storni (1892-1938).

(Barnes; García-Díaz and Jiménez-Lucena; Rudnick and Heru; Ussher). The framework to explore the historical construction of “madness” is shaped by Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud’s (1856-1939) psychoanalytic concepts of melancholy and hysteria, as well as by his development of Ernst Jentsch’s notion of the *unheimlich* (or uncanny) and its social, mental, and supernatural dimensions. Julia Kristeva further expands these ideas in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (1988) after developing her theory of the abject—the disturbance of a system or order—in *Pouvoirs de l’horreur* (1980); both concepts are crucial to our analysis of Vicente as well.

A century after the period this study examines, Gender Studies and Queer Theory have flourished, assigning terms like *transgender*, *bisexual*, and *nonbinary* to experiences that have long existed, but seen little societal acceptance and recognition and even less academic research until recent decades. The challenge, when starting from this perspective, lies in drawing conclusions about the queer community of a hundred years ago without anachronisms and without molding their experiences and writings to what they would signify in today’s climate of inclusive activism. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, for example, warn against “simplifying, miscategorizing, and thereby misreading literary and sexual expressions that vary widely across cultures and historical periods” (2). Accordingly, in our close readings, we always take into account the context in which our three authors lived, were educated, and penned the works we are examining, keeping in mind that the authors themselves, their activism, and their texts are not always in agreement, nor does their literature have to tell the truth. We are therefore attentive to where they reproduce and/or reject contemporary beliefs and to the contradictions that emerge within their modern stances.

Moreover, since one of our objectives is to examine how our authors’ works dialogue with contemporary studies on gender, it is fundamental to pay close attention to what historical scientific authorities believed and wrote about sexual difference as they pertain to bodies, desires,

sex characteristics, and clothing—a sexual trait rife with symbolism and closely tied to gender expectations.³¹ We thus consider the terminology proper to the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries, among which figures the umbrella term “inversion,” preferred by doctors such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902), Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), and Marañón to denote a wide range of gender identities and sexual preferences outside the norm. Jack Halberstam proposes that the medical field’s use of “inversion” served to categorize and rationalize any deviance to fit a binary conception of gender and sexuality that excludes many bodies and experiences (82, 161). This is evidenced in Marañón’s *La evolución de la sexualidad y los estados intersexuales* (1930) where he devotes several pages to what he defines as the two types of female inversion: “regressive towards puerility,” a more platonic affection towards women, and “progressive towards virility,” an observable physical inversion towards masculinization accompanied by libido directed to other women (199-201).³² Marañón’s often discriminatory views on women and LGBTQ+ people reinforce the hierarchical rapport of men and women in society and stigmatize anyone who does not conform to traditional molds, namely masculine women, feminine men, and sexual “deviants.”

As one of the leading medical authorities on the growing field of sexology in the 1920s and 1930s, Marañón’s theories on intersexuality and inversion, in particular, shape the contemporary rhetoric to which our authors were exposed. In fact, as we see in Chapter Two,

³¹ Marañón leaned into the controversy surrounding his beliefs, noting in *Tres ensayos* that “[ha] sido tachado de antifeminista, y a veces con modos violentos e imprecatorios. Pero no [le] importa, porque [tiene] razón” (215).

³² The “discovery that lesbianism was a neurological disease,” a condition Krafft-Ebing called degenerate and “flying in the face of nature,” was not only an insult to queer women but also made their acceptance in society that much harder to attain (Miles 304-305). Krafft-Ebing uses the same term as Marañón—sexual inversion—to describe the biological damage future lesbians underwent in the womb “through no fault of their own” (Miles 305). Marañón’s use of terms such as *perverse* and *disturbances of sex* suggests that his study of sexuality, as he confirms at the end of the chapter, opens a “possibility of an educational intervention” (*Evolución* 202) that could begin to remedy the problems he highlights. He frequently engages with the ideas of German psychoanalyst Iwan Bloch (1872-1922) and other leading voices in the field.

Burgos explicitly credits Marañón in one of her novels and reiterates many of his beliefs through a supporting character. In *La evolución*, Marañón analyses in detail sexual characteristics ranging from pubic hair to eyebrows before diving into his exploration of inversion, intersexuality, hermaphroditism, virilisation and feminisation, and homosexuality, using technical and scientific terms to make sense of evolving notions of sex and gender—many of which appear in Burgos and even Fortún’s novels.³³ Additionally, in *Tres ensayos*, he writes at length about motherhood, while also discussing feminine suffrage, sexual difference, women in the workforce, and homosexuality. He even notes the “absence of the maternal instinct” in lesbians (202), a trait Fortún and Burgos incorporate in their fiction.

While being cognisant of early 20th-century perspectives on gender and sexuality, we also engage with more recent theories on gender identity that can carefully be applied to—or at least brought into dialogue with—historical and literary examples of nonconformity. Queer theorist Judith Butler’s works on bodies, gender performance, heteronormativity, and gender identity, namely *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies That Matter* (1993), and *Undoing Gender* (2004), propose that gender is a social phenomenon and not a biological reality. Like Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Butler highlights the importance of the binary and, going further, its deconstruction. Moreover, Butler’s and other analyses of gender and sexuality drawn from lesbian, transgender, and women’s studies help us define terms such as cross-dressing and the mannish lesbian (Cruz-Cámara; Newton; Velasco; Vialette), underscoring the significance of clothing and behaviour—social and sexual—within the context of an uncertain Spanish modernity. According to Esther Newton, the mannish lesbian’s “behavior or dress (and usually both) manifest elements designated as

³³ Johnson notes that Marañón was not the only one publishing about such topics; José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), for example, published many articles on similar themes by scientists and philosophers in his journal *Revista de Occidente* that began in 1923 (*Gender* 185).

exclusively masculine” (560), prompting her association with homosexuality. A brief review of historical examples of cross-dressing reveal that this gender performance has occurred for a variety of reasons.³⁴

We also borrow the concept of the *chica rara* from Spanish author Carmen Martín Gaité (1925-2000), which she defined as “un tipo de mujer ajeno a los esquemas convencionales de orden y desorden que [presiden] la educación de la época” (111). Although Martín Gaité did not explicitly associate the *chica rara* with lesbianism, several literary weird girls in Spanish literature are attracted to other women and dress in a more masculine fashion. And as Ana I. Simón-Alegre highlights, well before Martín Gaité’s essay, Burgos in particular utilizes the double meaning of the adjective *raro*: “rare, but also ‘Having an extravagant temperament and prone to being singled out’ (RAE 655, 1869), in other words, queer” (61). Indeed, this concept remains relevant in current scholarship—for example, *Queer Women in Modern Spanish Literature Activism, Sexuality, and the Otherness of the ‘Chicas Raras’* edited by Simón-Alegre and Lou Charnon-Deutsch in 2021—and is primordial for Fortún’s chapter, where we emphasise how several characters, and the author herself, closely align with Martín Gaité’s definition.

Despite the beginnings of tolerance of dissident sexualities in certain spaces, heterosexuality remained the dominant discourse in the early 1900s. Understanding how women who love women have historically been excluded from written traditions and marginalized within unsympathetic societies allows us to place our analysis of 20th-century lesbian texts within a framework that recognizes the challenges, biases, and fears with which the authors contended (Gough; Gómez Blesa; Simonis). In this regard, Adrienne Rich’s seminal essay in *Lesbian Studies*,

³⁴ Several plays by William Shakespeare (1564-1616) include characters who cross-dress, for example *The Merchant of Venice* (c. 1596-1598) and *Twelfth Night* (c. 1601-1602), in which females in “male” clothing play an important role in the plot. The same occurs in Spanish Golden Age texts including in *Don Quixote* (1605) by Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616).

“Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1986), which develops the concepts of compulsory heterosexuality and the lesbian continuum, is central to our approach. Rich explores how lesbianism is characterized as deviant, thus concealing lesbian existence and experience from writings of all sorts, even feminist ones (178). Despite attempts to erase them, there are countless examples from across time and space of female same-sex desire. From the Ancient Greek Sappho of Lesbos (c. 630-c. 570 BCE)—whose name serves as the etymological antecedent for the words “lesbian” and “sapphic” due to the poet’s affections for women—to today, women have loved women regardless of what men, the church, or the state have determined was right or wrong, and one of the ways this tradition has persisted in writing is through lesbian literature.

However, the complexities of queer identity in the 20th century require that any attempt to classify lesbian literature begin by questioning the very definition of “lesbian” and other terms assigned to sexually dissident women at the time. As Halberstam explains in *Female Masculinity*, “lesbian” is not an accurate term to represent experiences and identities prior to the late 20th century (109), nor have sexual behaviours for any gender remained unchanged until today (Faderman, *Surpassing* 18). Similarly, McCallum and Tuhkanen advise that “it just makes scholarly sense to avoid ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ to discuss the depictions of sexuality ... to use these terms is to impose a modern view of sexuality on a much different cultural world” (5). Nevertheless, while acknowledging their limitations, we apply the terms sapphic, lesbian, same-sex, and queer interchangeably as working categories to reference the sexual identities that we know today’s language cannot wholly encapsulate.

Literature offers profound insight into human relationships and sexuality, both in a more general sense and in relation to the author’s own experiences. Barbara Johnson affirms this when she proposes that “from the moment literature begins to try to set things straight on that score [the truth of sexuality], literature itself becomes inextricable from the sexuality that it seeks to

comprehend” (13). McCallum and Tuhkanen capture this idea in the first lines of their *Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature* introduction when they reflect on the existence of queer literature. In the end, they determine that “there is no such thing as lesbian and gay literature, only many things that might compose and decompose that entity” (11). Similarly, in “When Is a Lesbian Narrative a Lesbian Narrative?” (1996) and “The Lesbian Narrative: The Pursuit of the Inedible by the Unspeakable” (1995), Marilyn R. Farwell asks readers what constitutes the disputed genre of lesbian literature, a concept with which several other scholars engage (Faderman; Mérida Jiménez). Who is the lesbian in a lesbian work? Must it be a positive representation? McCallum and Tuhkanen also ask how explicit erotic acts must be and how they compare to other (but equally meaningful) ambiguous or indirect forms of affection (4).³⁵ What about different forms of sexual nonconformity along the spectrum of sexuality? One of the difficulties in identifying the genre lies in the fact that, due to social discrimination, many sapphic texts remained unpublished, were destroyed, or were written so ambiguously that only a faint lesbian subtext remains, often in the hope of shielding the author from persecution or reprisals.

Within lesbian literary and film studies, some scholars have identified subgenres such as the boarding school lesbian plot, relevant to *Zezé* and especially to *El pensionado de Santa Casilda*, where we note how the characters’ identities, behaviours, and romantic friendships/relationships with other boarders set them apart. Martha Vicinus’s “Distance and Desire: English Boarding-School Friendships” (1984) frames much of the analysis of these works, demonstrating how the enclosed boarding school space encouraged the development of queer bonds. Rosalind Miles uses the term *romantic friendship* to identify the “quietly tolerated” and discreet “Boston marriages” of

³⁵ The scholars continue: “To what extent does representation of women’s desire – a challenge in patriarchal cultures in the best of times and a long-standing concern of feminist criticism – differ from that of men, which may be under other kinds of pressure – whether to explicitness in phallogophilic cultures, or indirection in homophobic ones?” (McCallum and Tuhkanen 4).

the U.S. in the late 19th century, soon impeded by sexology's newfound passion for psychoanalyzing and pathologizing women who preferred other women over men (304).³⁶ Vicinus and other scholars apply this term in European contexts, and we adopt it for Fortún's interpretations of sapphic partnerships. Parallel to our primary texts, we draw on Charnon-Deutsch's *Narratives of Desire: Nineteenth-Century Spanish Fiction by Women* (1994), McCallum and Tuhkanen's *Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, and related studies (Farwell; Pratt; Rich; Sanfeliu) to demonstrate how Vicente, Fortún, and even Burgos articulate alternative conceptions of sexual orientation within the dominant discourse of heterosexuality.

Furthermore, our authors' writings comprise several examples of prostitution in its many forms: marriages or "sugar daddy"-type arrangements born out of financial need (*Ellas*, *El pensionado*, *Zeze*); prostitutes with a female pimp (*Ellas*); young, pregnant prostitutes or unwed mothers turning to sex work (*Teresilla*, *El pensionado*); a proud woman with a secret past of sex work (*El pensionado*); and, of course, many unhappy bourgeois marriages. While studies on marriage (Aldaraca; Cabello Hutt; Fariña Busto; Johnson) demonstrate that a heterosexual union before God was the only state-sanctioned option for middle-class Spanish women in the 1920s and 1930s, chapters from Akiko Tsuchiya's *Marginal Subjects: Gender and Deviance in Nineteenth Century Spain* (2011) and articles by Vázquez García and Moreno Mengíbar, among others (Nash; Nelken), support our study of this alternate form of sexual deviance. Sex workers and *acompañantes*—arguably a category of prostitution in the form of companionship or sexual involvement for financial gain—are depicted in our literary corpus as victims of seduction and/or economic circumstance, reflecting one of numerous existing perspectives on sex work in early

³⁶ A Boston marriage referred to a longstanding union between two unmarried women, generally fiscally independent from men, who spent their lives dedicated to each other (Faderman, *Surpassing* 190).

1900s Spain. Indeed, already in the late 19th century, some blamed prostitution on “una degeneración integral de la personalidad, consecuencia de una herencia morbosa” (Vázquez García and Moreno Mengíbar 226), accusing the sex worker of spreading syphilis through what Tsuchiya would call deviant sexuality.³⁷ This belief carried into the 20th century, with Marañón even proposing that many prostitutes are homosexual as a reaction to the “selfish masculine aggression” of their male clients (*La evolución* 200), a sort of double deviance.

Finally, given the importance of spatiality in Fortún’s novels in particular, but also in the works of Vicente and Burgos, we extract from literary geography several essential notions, namely Arnold van Gennep’s liminality, developed further by Kevin Hetherington; Eva Moreno-Lago’s *geocódigos* or coded spaces/symbols; and Foucault’s concept of heterotopia. Building on the ideal, impossible concept of utopia, Foucault proposes in a 1967 lecture titled “Des espaces autres” the term *heterotopia* to refer to Othered spaces.³⁸ While utopias are perfect and therefore can only be imagined, heterotopias are concrete spaces where “alternative social ordering is performed” (Hetherington 40). Foucault differentiates between six types, including those defined by their transient nature (fairs and other temporary instalments—the second type) or by their timelessness (libraries, museums, cemeteries—the fourth type) (6-7). He identifies heterotopias into which nonconforming individuals are forced (the first type), the “hétérotopies qu’on pourrait appeler de déviation : celle dans laquelle on place les individus dont le comportement est *déviant* par rapport à la moyenne ou à la norme exigée” (4; emphasis added). Examples comprise old age homes,

³⁷ By the first few decades of the 20th century, however, a third perspective came into play: forgetting the dangerous realities of prostitution amidst the Roaring Twenties and the rise of the erotic novel, prostitutes were sometimes seen as “mujeres liberadas de las ataduras sociales que hacen del meretrício una forma de vida consciente y satisfactoria, que usan a los hombres en beneficio propio y reclaman para sí el derecho al placer y al dominio antaño reservado a los varones” (Vázquez García and Moreno Mengíbar 231).

³⁸ This term actually comes from anatomy and refers to “parts of the body that are either out of place, missing, extra, or, like tumours, alien” (Hetherington 42).

prisons, and psychiatric clinics—spaces of surveillance. Foucault also mentions American motels used for affairs, “où la sexualité illégale se trouve à la fois absolument abritée et absolument cachée, tenue à l’écart” (7). Both the physical spaces Foucault highlights and the metaphorical marginal spaces—the concept of the closet, for example—capture essential elements of women’s and queer people’s exclusion from mainstream society, even as the Spanish nation slowly worked toward a new social order.

1.4 Chapter Overview

After this introduction follow three chapters devoted to Vicente, Burgos, and Fortún, respectively. Each chapter begins with a review of existing scholarship that highlights the gaps in current research and then offers an in-depth analysis of some of their most notable works, comparing and contrasting their perspectives on women’s rights and queerness within the paradigms of cultural and scientific thought of a nascent modernity.

Chapter Two, “Regarding Bodies, Spirits, and Women’s Rights: Ángeles Vicente,” examines how the author merges the burgeoning field of psychiatry, her own version of spiritist doctrines, and fundamental turn-of-the-century feminist issues in *Teresilla* (1907), *Zeze* (1909), and five short stories published between 1908 and 1911. First, we examine Vicente’s depiction of (in)sanity and mental health through supernatural elements in “Sombras,” “Alma loca,” and “El huerto encantado,” focusing on the anticlerical rhetoric of the latter. Then, we explore how the author confronts outdated honour codes, primarily in *Teresilla*, and the obstacles barring women from education and employment opportunities in both novellas. Lastly, under the heading “Rogue Sexuality,” we examine how Vicente uses satire to engage with the dangerous promiscuous male archetype of Don Juan in “La última aventura de don Juan” and “La derrota de don Juan” before turning to prostitution and adultery in the novellas. The last subsection delves into queer identity/desire in *Zeze*, an important precursor to Fortún’s sapphic novels. Overall, this chapter

reveals how Vicente tackles significant women's rights concerns and their connections to medical, religious, and social discourses in the early years of a new century, setting the stage for the subsequent analyses of Burgos and Fortún.

Chapter Three, "Carmen de Burgos: Exploring Sexuality and Gender 'Scientifically,'" opens with an overview of contemporary medical doctrines on sexuality and gender, in particular those of Marañón. Then, we move to the novelette *Ellas y ellos o ellos y ellas* (1916) and the novel *Quiero vivir mi vida* (1931), reading them through these medical discourses to examine how Burgos addresses concerns about the (de)construction of Spain's national identity. In the next section, we reflect on how her social activism does not fully extend to queer Spaniards, showcasing her own uncertainties regarding their "deviant" identities—homosexuality and gender nonconformity—and behaviours such as prostitution, adultery, and violence. In these same works, we then analyze the rejection of marriage and motherhood, where Burgos's outrage at the limited paths available to women in her era becomes visible, even though it is tempered by her criticism of LGBTQ+ identities. Finally, we look to the creation of queer heterotopias, spaces that both marginalize and protect queer communities, in Burgos's works. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates the ambiguities in this author's texts and in her own preconceptions about her nonconforming peers, noting the shifts in her beliefs over time.

Chapter Four, "Living 'Al margen de la vida': Elena Fortún's Lesbian Literature," also commences by examining the medical and social categorizations of queer identity and desire that shaped Fortún's era, and are reflected in her two posthumously released novels, *Oculto sendero* (2016) and *El pensionado de Santa Casilda* (2022). Likely written in the 1940s during the author's exile in Argentina, they depict, however, the cultural and social landscape of pre-Civil War Spain. Then, we consider how the establishment of queer spaces and friendships are paramount for personal and communal growth and demonstrate how Fortún reveals her lesbian content through

coded language and symbols that only a specific audience would understand. Continuing on the topic of spatiality, we apply Woolf's concept of the *room of one's own* to Fortún's argument on how female creation is inhibited by male egos and insufficient space in which to produce art—a struggle both the author and *Oculto sendero*'s protagonist know all too well. *El pensionado* takes a different approach: with adequate space and no male impediments, its characters *are* ultimately able to express themselves through art. This chapter ends by contending that for women of Fortún's era, and for queer women especially, the violence they suffer can be physical and/or sexual, but also takes the shape of traditional marriage and forced maternity, which are equally dangerous to body and mind.

Chapter 2 – Regarding Bodies, Spirits, and Women’s Rights: Ángeles Vicente

Ángeles Vicente García was born in Murcia, Spain, in 1878, but moved with her family to Argentina at the age of 10, where she was exposed to works by writers such as Juana Manuela Gorriti (1818-1892) and Eduardo L. Holmberg (1852-1937), who both leaned into the psycho-scientific and the latter into science fiction as well (Ena Bordonada, “Ángeles”). As an adult in Argentina, Vicente began a career in journalism at a time when the country was flourishing with great literature and multicultural influences.³⁹ Vicente later spent about a year in Milan, Italy, but a conflict with her publisher fueled her journey back to Spain to publish *Teresilla* in 1907 (Trigo 73).⁴⁰ There she also published *Zeze* (1909) and two short story collections, *Los buitres* (1908) and *Sombras – Cuentos psíquicos* (1910 or 1911).⁴¹ A variety of Vicente’s writings—letters, chronicles from newspapers *El Imparcial* (1867-1933) and *Blanco y Negro* (1891-1939), and short stories—are compiled in the 2022 volume *Libre de espíritu*.⁴² In August 1911, according to Elena Bonmatí González and Kyle Cheesewright, the press exploded with the news that Vicente and the female poet Gloria de la Prada (1886-c. 1951) were romantically involved, to the dismay of the latter’s family (273). Until the end of the 1920s, the author’s presence in Spain can be confirmed either

³⁹ A magazine article and photo prove Vicente was involved with the Argentine freemasons and even introduced women’s masonic lodges (Ena Bordonada, Introduction, *Teresilla* 14).

⁴⁰ Vicente also collaborated with Manuel Linares Rivas (1866-1938) on *La desertora*, the translation of a French play by Eugène Brieux (1858-1932) called *La déserteuse*, with disastrous results (Ena Bordonada, “Ángeles”).

⁴¹ The potential sequel to her infamous novella, *Zeze y yo (diálogos)*, announced by Vicente in both *Zeze* and *Sombras*, was never published or located (Ena Bordonada, Introduction, *Zeze* XIII). *Sombras* also publicized *Buscando almas (novela)*, which never saw the light either (XIII).

⁴² A letter to Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío (1867-1916) confirms Vicente’s connection to the Spanish Álvaro Retana (1890-1970), pen name Claudina Regnier, a homosexual erotica writer and journalist who likely influenced the content of *Zeze* (Ena Bordonada, Introduction, *Zeze* XV). She requested he submit her short story to *Mundial*, but it was never published—the paper did not include pieces by women outside of the fashion section (XVI). Vicente’s texts in newspaper and magazines primarily date from 1907 to 1915, her name absent from many of the most popular publications save for *Blanco y negro* (Ena Bordonada, “Ángeles Vicente, narradora” 39).

through known addresses and activities or publications, with the short story “La sombra que llora” published in the magazine *Reflejos* in 1929 (Ena Bordonada, Introduction, *Zeze* XVII).⁴³ Records show the author returned to Argentina in October 1916, a widow at the age of 38, and continued to publish in Spanish papers until the end of the 1920s and even up until 1932, but her movements after that date, including her death, are largely unconfirmed (Ena Bordonada, “Ángeles” 35; Introduction, *Sombras* XVII).⁴⁴ Another paper, however, contends that Vicente’s death was reported by two newspapers in 1918, placing her demise in June 1918 in Argentina (Bonmatí González and Cheesewright 282)—evidence that this woman writer’s life remains shrouded in mystery.

That is not to say Vicente was unknown in her own era; in fact, her work was the subject of many reviews and promotions, while her dedications to other authors suggest a close working relationship with them (Ena Bordonada, “Ángeles Vicente, narradora” 42).⁴⁵ But with so little confirmed biographical data today, we must instead draw from her literature to gain insight into this enigmatic author. According to Ángela Ena Bordonada, the breadth of Vicente’s literary references throughout her works proves her to be a particularly well-read woman, an unusual feat

⁴³ Vicente published many short stories in the press, but very few opinion or news pieces, though she could have been signing with a different name. Regardless, there are many more tales than the ones in *Los buitres* and *Sombras* stored in the Hemeroteca Digital of the Biblioteca Nacional de España, for example (Ena Bordonada, “Ángeles Vicente, narradora” 38).

⁴⁴ Her husband was Cándido Elormendi (1860-?), though Vicente never used her married name in her writing. A 1911 review of *Sombras* in the newspaper *Mundial* refers to her as “la señora de Elormendi,” which Trigo also uses in his prologue (Ena Bordonada, Introduction, *Sombras* XXXV). Nevertheless, in city archives, Vicente was listed as head of the household, which suggests she made a living off her writing and did not reside with Cándido (XVII).

⁴⁵ “A Emilio Fernández Vaamonde, mi mejor amigo” (Spanish poet and journalist, 1867-1913) is the dedication of “Una extraña aventura” in *Los buitres*, while Luis de Terán (Spanish writer and teacher, 1864-1935) is the recipient of the one for “La trenza.” The longest story in *Sombras*, “Spirto y Caro,” is written in collaboration with Rafael López de Haro (Spanish author and screenwriter, 1876-1967). Vicente also corresponded with Spanish writer and philosopher Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) starting in 1906 (Toro Ballesteros, *Viaje* 49).

for her era (Introduction, *Zeze* XVIII). She is also musically inclined, a fact that takes shape in *Zeze*'s own skill at the piano (XIX). Meanwhile, in his prologue to *Teresilla*, Spanish writer and doctor Felipe Trigo (1864-1916), known for his erotic literature, highlights the influence of various intellectuals on Vicente's work. On one hand, one of the most important currents that characterizes her texts is spiritism, a combination of spiritual and scientific perspectives that we will explore in depth in section 2.1. The French educator Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail (1804-1969), pen name Allan Kardec, largely contributed to the diffusion of spiritist writings across Europe and the Americas, including to Vicente in Argentina in the 1870s.⁴⁶ Ena Bordonada explains that as of 1870, spiritism—also known as Kardecism—spread across Argentina, prompting the creation of various societies and confederations (Introduction, *Zeze* XXII).⁴⁷ This current appears in most of Vicente's stories and to a lesser extent in her novellas, though with a sort of distance established through humour and occasional parody that make her works more attractive to the general reader (XXIV).

On the other hand, in addition to her obvious spiritist leanings, Vicente belongs to the *librepensadoras* movement, its beliefs clearly reflected in her social criticism; like many of her era, she focuses on disparaging the clergy, the bourgeoisie, and urban Spain's cultural and material delays compared to the countryside, which she idealized (Ena Bordonada, Introduction, *Zeze* XXI).

Vicente also defends women's rights and brings to light issues that are not yet at the forefront of

⁴⁶ Other influences likely included Argentine writers Eduarda Mansilla (1834-1892) and Juana Manuela Gorriti (1818-1892) (Ena Bordonada, "Espiritismo, hypnosis" 227-228). The topic of hypnotism appears in Gorriti's "Quien escucha su mal oye," for example, as well as in Vicente's "Alma loca" (228). Famous American gothic writer Edgar Allan Poe also influenced the creation of short stories in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with translations to Spanish appearing in the second half of the 1800s (226-227).

⁴⁷ According to Simón-Alegre and Charnon-Deutsch, women writers used their works "to express their ideas regarding both their sensual and sexual emotional world ... For example, women put their personal mark on Spiritist writings by exalting rather than deprecating women's deep sentiments and love for others" (6).

the social conscience, such as working conditions in the mines (“El diablo”), incarcerated women’s suffering (“La sorpresa”), and sexual assault (“La última aventura de Don Juan”).⁴⁸ Bringing these and other women’s issues into her narrative fiction helps spread the image of the modern woman toward which Vicente hopes Spain will evolve. Like Pardo Bazán and Arenal before her, Vicente laments women’s limited education and the lack of work prospects it offers them, leaving them dependent on men for financial security or even turning to prostitution, especially if abandoned by a lover. She critically explores *donjuanismo* and offers a modern perspective on marriage and motherhood that serves as an apt precursor to Fortún’s. Similarly, Vicente, pioneer in the employment of themes such as female sexuality in her writings, approaches eroticism differently than her (male) peers do in their erotic novels.⁴⁹

Sara Toro Ballesteros places Vicente among the Spanish vanguard next to Carmen de Burgos and Sofía Casanova (1861-1958), crediting leading Vicente scholar Ena Bordonada with the recovery of this forgotten author (Introduction 14). Indeed, Ena Bordonada stumbled upon Vicente’s work in the 1990s, finding titles listed in the catalogues of important editorial firms and reviews in newspapers (Introduction, *Sombras* XIII). After much archival research that began to pull Vicente back into the limelight, Ediciones Lengua de Trapo brought forth a new edition of *Zezé* in 2005 and *Sombras* in 2007, while *Teresilla* was republished by Editorial Renacimiento in 2020.⁵⁰ Scholarship on publications by Vicente is limited to a few articles and book chapters, two

⁴⁸ Although in “La sorpresa,” the characters’ crimes are not specified, Vicente alludes to their mistreatment before a guard’s nocturnal hallucination allows them to escape and pursue their “planes revolucionarios” (91).

⁴⁹ Litvak explains that the women in these erotic texts by male authors are most often young, almost androgynous, and that there are frequent allusions or explicit mentions of transsexuality and lesbianism (67). See for example Artemio Precioso’s (1891-1945) *El triunfo de Carmela* (1925) and Juan de Balboa’s (?-?). *La glorieta* (c. 1931). However, Vicente’s work shares an important trait with many of these novels: anticlerical rhetoric (Litvak 70).

⁵⁰ An independent website called Mitos Eternos self-published an edition of *Los buitres* in late 2024 with an introduction by Roberto Salguera.

theses (Fernandez Gonzalez; Toro Ballesteros), and the introductions to newer editions of her works, the most recent article being Bonmatí González and Cheesewright's "Ángeles Vicente's 1911 Sapphic Scandals: Queer Intermedia and Transatlantic Gender History" (2024). Toro Ballesteros' 2013 doctoral thesis thoroughly investigates Vicente's life and all her known works; later, the scholar serves as editor for *Libre de espíritu*.⁵¹ Ena Bordonada authors the prologues to three of Vicente's books—while also including Trigo's original 1907 prologue to *Teresilla*—in addition to publishing a variety of articles on her journalism, as well as on her fascination with spiritualism and eroticism. A handful of analyses of *Zeze* (Arias Vegas; Barranco Sánchez; Cabello-García; Clavo; Holloway; Karageorgou-Bastea) and of Vicente's short stories (Casas; Ena Bordonada; Jiménez Madrid), some of which focus specifically on the *donjuán* figure (Becerra Suárez; Belmonte Serrano), make up most of the other investigations. Vicente is also mentioned in a few larger studies on Spanish women writers (Barrera Velasco; Charnon-Deutsch; Mackenzie) and appears in the occasional online news article.

Although few scholars have explored Vicente's sizeable collection of writings, her works are rife with the same themes female authors are celebrated for addressing decades later, as we will see in the summaries of each work, beginning with *Teresilla*. Dedicated to the author's husband, Vicente's first novella follows a young girl seduced by a *donjuán* figure who quickly abandons her once pregnant, prompting her downward spiral into prostitution.⁵² The novella is

⁵¹ She also published two articles on Vicente: "Don Juan de América" and "Esculpir la niebla. Ocho cartas inéditas de Ángeles Vicente a Unamuno."

⁵² Ena Bordonada identifies the "tono folletinesco" of *Teresilla* (Introduction, *Zeze* XI). The *folletín*, or serial novel, is a type of popular melodramatic novel that first appeared in the mid-19th century, at times even published in the newspaper. Some viewed this precursor to the modern Spanish novel as dangerous in its social influence over its readers (Mercer 3). According to Wadda C. Rios-Font, approaching women's 19th-century serial novels helps us understand the development of women authors who held intellectual property rights for the first time, leading to their integration into public spaces (38). The *folletín* sought "fictional public spaces" as grounds to explore questions of socioeconomic standing and movement—as lineage lost its influence on a

divided into five parts, each comprising one chapter. These segments are told by an absolute omniscient narrator who describes the circumstances around Teresilla's life as they relate to Teresilla's mother Sabina in the first two parts, then Teresilla herself in the third. The fourth is shared between mother and daughter, while the last centres on Juan, a family friend who comes across Teresilla in her final days. The story opens with doña Sabina and her husband Jaime running a puppet theatre in Málaga, Spain, with the help of their beautiful, naïve daughter and the local *donjuán*, Francisco, not realizing the two are seeing each other. Then, Teresilla and her lover run off together to spend the night at Francisco's, where he pressures her into intercourse and kicks her out the next morning. In the third part, Teresilla is confessing her shameful sexual encounter to a priest who is aroused by her story before she returns home to her mother, who forgives her and nurses her back to health after she succumbs to a lengthy illness. The two visit an aunt out of town where they meet a kind French poet named Luis with whom Teresilla falls in love. Unfortunately, once alone in Málaga again, Francisco charms Teresilla into a clandestine sexual relationship that results in her pregnancy and abandonment. She distances herself from Luis and her family, and part five opens with the news that she has been missing for years. She recounts her years of suffering to a family friend at a brothel in Almería and, the next morning, her drowned body is discovered.⁵³ Ena Bordonada points out both the naturalist elements of the story—emotional and physical challenges—and the melodramatic focus on honour and disgrace that seems at times forced, as well as the tragic ending (“Entre” 132). Often included alongside

person's status, their actions within a public social setting became essential to understand and monitor class (Mercer 7). As a result, now that Spanish literature had begun exploring the plights and ambitions of the middle class (3), it was all the more possible for writers like Vicente to denounce its social ills.

⁵³ The topic of suicide is also somewhat present in “Sombras” and “Alma loca,” while in *Zeze*, it is mentioned in passing as a remedy for melancholy (98), and when a minor character shoots himself to escape his debts (40).

naturalism are the notes of social determinism we see in *Teresilla*, whose protagonist almost seems doomed from the beginning due to her social class, family, and relationship. With heavy themes like prostitution, mental health, honour codes, and accidental pregnancy, this novella denounces the dire situation of women of both the bourgeoisie and the working class in Vicente's era.

Taking a narrative approach reminiscent of the picaresque novel, *Zeze* is the first Spanish work by a female author to include homoeroticism and sexual experiences between women.⁵⁴ The narrator and author of this piece share many traits, including their hometown of Murcia and their time in Argentina.⁵⁵ The story begins with a meeting between an unnamed woman and a *cupletista* nicknamed Bella Zeze—her real name is Emilia—in a train car headed for Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay. The narrator encourages the *cupletista* to recount her life story, which she plans to publish. The novella alternates between Zeze's and the writer's narrative voices, the former describing the past and the latter reacting in the present. Zeze had a turbulent childhood—her mother was unfaithful to her father, who soon thereafter passed away, and sent her first to live with a religious fanatic aunt and then to a boarding school in a convent. There, Zeze engages in an illicit affair with a female classmate, Leonor. Back at home, after some time, Zeze's family is ruined mentally and financially by her mother's lover Ferrario. Luckily, the protagonist reconnects with Leonor and her husband Luis and begins a hidden romance with both until a conflict sends the protagonist packing. Zeze, broke and alone, falls ill and is forced to depend on an older banker she despises for two years. She eventually returns to the life of a *cupletista*, travelling and performing

⁵⁴ The picaresque novel is often told through the protagonist's own summary of their life—often adventurous and even tumultuous—up to the present of the narrative. See Holloway for more on *Zeze* within the picaresque tradition.

⁵⁵ Murcia and Argentina both appear in many of Vicente's short stories as well. Argentina, for example, is the setting of "Algunos fenómenos psíquicos de mi vida" and "El hombre de los pies negros" in *Sombras*.

zarzuelas, at which point she meets the narrator on a train. After a few years, in a sort of epilogue, the two happily reconnect in Spain.

We will also draw from a selection of Vicente's short stories that highlight early feminist themes like religious oppression, societal barriers, and the dangers of men. First, the 14-page story "La derrota de Don Juan," appearing in *Los buitres*, is formatted as a one-scene play that presents a dialogue between the famous and beautiful artist Raquel and a *donjuán* figure in his forties named Adolfo Santori. The latter is attempting to declare his love for the former, who is witty in her responses and clearly does not share the same passion. In "La última aventura de Don Juan," appearing over five pages of the *Sombras* compilation, an aging and downtrodden Don Juan pressures a widow into accepting his company on her journey home only to find his manhood surgically removed at the behest of that same woman for reasons the reader can only imagine.⁵⁶ Then, he heads to Africa to fight in a war in search of a glorious death but is captured by a sultan and lives out his days in a harem—a punishment turned prize. From the same collected works, we will also be studying "Alma loca," the story of a ghost woman who torments her husband's new lover almost to insanity until she agrees to help hypnotize said husband into killing himself. The titular "Sombras" itself is a woman's reflection on her mental health, with depression personified as a terrifying spider, and alludes to the challenges faced by women of her era.⁵⁷ Finally, eight pages long, "El huerto encantado" is a strong anticlerical piece about a man taking advantage of a grieving young widow. When she moves to a haunted house in the hopes of reconnecting with her deceased spouse, she is instead harassed by the priest next door who leaves her "otherworldly" signs and watches her sleep.

⁵⁶ *Sombras* is dedicated to López de Haro.

⁵⁷ In fact, the original cover of *Sombras* is a naked woman, her face obscured, with a large spider in the background.

This chapter will use Vicente's two novellas and five of her short stories to examine how the author recreates the issues plaguing women in her era. In section 2.1, we will consider how both spiritist and psychiatric discourses impact her literary creation, using supernatural elements to criticize the institutions at fault for women's social plight. In section 2.2, we will examine Vicente's express condemnation of traditional honour codes and their attempt to control female bodies, while section 2.3 will present her vision for the beginnings of a modern woman free from the clutches of the clergy: educated, able to work a meaningful job, well-travelled, and unmarried. Section 2.4 will explore and deconstruct the deviant sexualities and behaviours of the *donjuán*—womanizing Spanish anti-hero—the prostitute, and the sapphic woman. This chapter will demonstrate how Vicente served as a (much forgotten) precursor to the more recognized Carmen de Burgos and Elena Fortún, subjects of chapters three and four, in spite of her similar feminist preoccupations and their shared context of early Spanish modernity, highlighting in particular how all three draw from contemporary medical discourses—psychiatry and/or sexology—and focus on similar women's issues.

2.1 Psychiatry, Spiritism, and the Early 1900s

With recent innovations in medicine such as the discoveries pertaining to tuberculosis and cholera in the late 1880s, paired with better infrastructure, health policies, and epidemic control through hygiene and vaccination, the turn of the century saw an increase in life expectancy for Spaniards, previously far below the European average, and with it a burgeoning interest in experimental science and medicine (Toro Ballesteros, *Viaje* 199). Later, the study of the brain—mental health, spiritual and emotional wellbeing—began to make waves in the medical community.⁵⁸ But as science turned toward the metaphysical, the clergy attempted to “establecer

⁵⁸ In fact, it was only in 1925 that the Real Academia Española's dictionary added the term psychiatry (“ciencia que trata las enfermedades mentales”) in addition to psychology (defined in

una división clásica de tradición platónica entre cuerpo y alma para que los doctores no puedan invadir el área reservada a la Iglesia” (Toro Ballesteros, *Viaje* 210).⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Emil Kraepelin (Germany, 1856-1926) and Freud, among others, greatly influenced how medical professionals approached the burgeoning field of psychiatry.⁶⁰ Today, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines psychiatry as the branch of medicine focusing on mental, behavioural, and emotional disorders. But years ago, as society was still shifting from seeing mental illness as demonic possession to a medical condition, the lines between the psychological and the supernatural were less definite.

Concurrently, the field of literature was evolving to include new categories with equally ambiguous boundaries. In 1818, English writer Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797-1851), daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, debuted the science-fiction genre with her famous *Frankenstein*, a prime example of social criticism supported by a blend of scientific and supernatural elements. Around the same time, with the worldwide distribution of their work, the American Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) and the German Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann (1776-1822) consolidated the fantastic genre; Hoffmann’s gothic literature was translated to Spanish in the 1830s, and Poe’s in the second half of the century—some of Poe’s works can also be loosely classified as science-fiction. Rather than facing an external threat like a vampire or monster, their “fantástico interior” focuses on an alteration of the character’s personality through means of sleep, delirium, insanity, maniacal obsession, doubles, and other forms of mental control (Casas 16, 20).⁶¹ In the later

1852 as the part of philosophy that explores the soul and its operations) (Toro Ballesteros, *Viaje* 202).

⁵⁹ In this regard, it is important to remember the crucial role the Catholic sacrament of confession has played historically as a means of control and power. See Foucault’s *La volonté de savoir* (77-85).

⁶⁰ The etymology of the word “psychiatry” is of note: the Greek words *psyche* (mind or soul) and *iatreia* (healing).

⁶¹ The first three, sleep, delirium, and insanity, coincide in the only scene in *Teresilla* with spiritist leanings: the protagonist, traumatized after an unwanted sexual encounter, falls asleep only to cry

decades of the 1800s in Argentina, where Vicente would eventually move, it was fashionable to be reading these two authors (Ena Bordonada, “Ángeles Vicente, narradora” 37).⁶²

One of the clearest representations of the porous nature of the scientific and the mystical is spiritism. Spiritism, which primarily spread across Europe and later Latin America through the works of Kardec, brings a scientific, religious, and philosophical perspective to the spiritual realm—spirits and additional otherworldly experiences. Spiritist literature, adds Ena Bordonada, addresses themes like hypnotism, hallucinations, depression, and madness, highlighting the renewed interest of the medical field in psychiatry and the brain (“Espiritismo, hipnosis” 226).⁶³ Catholic authorities considered spiritism “an inept parody of science and a failed and false philosophy” (Charnon-Deutsch, “Women Moved” 34). However, as Charnon-Deutsch explains, “the Church’s opposition only sparked the curiosity of the public and societies and journals for the promotion of Spiritism quickly sprang up in urban areas of Spain once translations of Kardec became widely available ... it offered an alternative to Catholic orthodoxy and religious practice [which] made it especially attractive to women” (“Women Moved” 34).

Indeed, the female spiritist movement in Spain has its roots in the coalition of various freethinking groups. Gómez Blesa explains that in 1889, women from three veins—republicans,

out sentence fragments the reader recognizes from her ordeal, but that her mother can only assume are delirium and give her “un aspecto de loca” (Vicente 144).

⁶² Argentina’s own fantastic literary tradition begins with Gorriti and Holmberg, then Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938), leading into some of the nation’s biggest names: Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) and Julio Cortázar (1914-1984). Gorriti even includes what Ena Bordonada calls “afecto-enamoramiento entre dos amigas” in her 1874 short story “Juez y verdugo” (Introduction, *Sombras XXX*). Vicente may also have been familiar with Antonio Ros de Olano (1808-1886), José Fernández Bremón (1839-1910), and Agustín María Acevedo Rodríguez (1806-1874), pen name Tirso Aguimana de Veca, who also published science-fiction/fantastic texts.

⁶³ Even Carmen de Burgos has a spiritist work: *El retorno* (1922). According to Charnon-Deutsch, Burgos’s “rambling fiction is crammed with dozens of examples of the paranormal: Instances of transmigration, doubling, fortunetelling, somnambulism, materializations, magnetism, hauntings, hypnotism, astral travel, bilocation, perispirits, black magic, and dozens of mediatic séances either witnessed or retold by the novel’s credulous characters” (“Women Moved” 46-47).

spiritists, and masons—were united within Barcelona’s *Sociedad Autónoma de Mujeres* (1891-1898); outliving the original organization, this movement lasted into the 1920s, when its notable figures passed away (50). Its members stemmed from different ideological backgrounds but shared the goal of freeing women’s education from religious and social pressures (Ena Bordonada, “Espiritismo, hipnosis” 224).

Concurrently, late 19th- and early 20th-century writers “se sentían fascinados por las ciencias ocultas como antídoto en contra de la anomia burguesa finisecular, y como un lugar estable en el que expresar su ideología” (Ferrer Gómez 91). And (urban) women in particular found a welcoming space in the spiritist movement, which had far fewer barriers to female participation and even encouraged equal education (Charnon-Deutsch, “Women Moved” 36). Writer Rosario de Acuña (1850-1923), playwright Ángeles Lopez de Ayala (1856-1926), politician Belén Sarraga (1874-1950), writer Amalia Domingo Soler (1835-1909), and sisters Amalia (1861-?) and Ana Carvia Bernal (1865-?) served as leaders of this “feminismo laico” with a spiritist twist, guiding their peers toward the establishment of the modern, independent, cultured woman using their best weapon: the pen (51-52).⁶⁴ Focusing on the broad themes of Progress, Science, and Reason, these feminists sought to revitalize the nation through education, encouraging literacy for men and especially women in the countryside (53). These voices, Domingo Soler in particular, profoundly influenced their successors. In fact, Charnon-Deutsch contends that

women Spiritists like Domingo Soler taught women to love women: By empowering them to participate in civil society, rejecting masculinist attitudes toward women’s capacity to change the world, promoting the notion of universal love and comradeship, praising rather than belittling women’s sentimentality and energetically questioning gender norms that

⁶⁴ Charnon-Deutsch suggests that Domingo Soler’s writings hint toward deeper affections for women beyond her feminist desire for female emancipation (“Women Moved” 45).

circumscribed women's education and participation in social activism. ("Women Moved" 35-36)

While Domingo Soler's work inevitably comprises many incongruities, like most feminists of the era, she nevertheless inspired both Vicente and Burgos alongside countless other women writers (36). Domingo Soler published over 2,000 pieces, many in spiritist papers such as *El criterio espiritista* (1868-1875?), Spain's first spiritist publication, and in *La luz del porvenir: Semanario espiritista* (1879-1899), the magazine for which she served as editor (Charnon-Deutsch, "Women Moved" 36).

Vicente, too, found great success in her press contributions, with many of her stories recompiled in *Sombras*, *Los buitres*, and *Libre de espíritu* especially having originally appeared in the papers. The rise in popularity of the short story genre coincides with the modernization of the newspaper; at the turn of the century, it began to include more sections pertaining to the needs of urban Spaniards, like theatre and sports, as well as a section dedicated to fiction (Ena Bordonada, "Ángeles Vicente, narradora" 39). This allowed authors to share their work and gain fame much faster than through traditional publishing (39). At the same time, "Spiritist publications provided a non-judgmental forum for women to explore not just unexplained psychic phenomena but also differing solutions to the Spanish question regarding gender relations" and lead by example (Charnon-Deutsch, "Women Moved" 45).

Vicente's novellas emphasize women's social struggles and have only wisps of spiritism in their conception. Conversely, she places spiritism at the forefront of most of her short stories, dotting them with references to feminist issues. But as some turned to spiritism for its supernatural dispositions, others scorned its lack of scientific basis; Vicente, meanwhile, was drawn to the parts of spiritism that are rooted in medicine, especially as it pertains to mental health and women's

health.⁶⁵ Her stories, especially those in the *Sombras* collection, are the perfect example of how, according to Marta Ferrer Gómez, spiritism served as a meeting point between medical pathology and a more otherworldly—and secular—perspective that was rapidly gaining ground at the time (87-88). Vicente's stories follow two main thematic lines: social criticism and the realm of the fantastic in its largest sense. The latter takes shapes as “la prospección en el yo, profundizando en las perturbaciones de la mente; y ... la investigación biológica que enlaza con la ficción científica o ciencia-ficción ... hacia la anticipación social y tecnológica y el viaje a través del tiempo y del espacio, en busca, en ocasiones, de un mundo mejor” (Ena Bordonada, Introduction, *Sombras* XXV). More specifically, hypnosis (like in “Alma Loca”), depression (“Sombras”), and hallucinations (“La sorpresa”) pepper the pages of Vicente's stories, though without pushing her readers to believe in spiritist doctrines. It is in fact the inclusion of these spiritist and horror themes that mark Vicente as a singular writer, influenced by her travels—few authors and even fewer female authors at the time wrote about such topics. But *Sombras. Cuentos psíquicos* also demands a glance at what Vicente considers a psychic phenomenon: anything relating to the brain, be it psychological, logical, physiological, or supernatural (Ena Bordonada, Introduction, *Sombras* XLIII). Vicente both defends spiritism as having a scientific component and criticizes the parts of the movement that she calls “ridículas sesiones de espiritismo a lo Allan Kardec” (qtd. in Ena Bordonada, Introduction, *Sombras* XLIV).

2.1.1 Supernatural Symbology in “Sombras”

In “Sombras,” a young woman alone in her room undergoes a terrifying ordeal: while reflecting on her emotional tribulations, her anxieties take the (meta)physical form of a decapitated

⁶⁵ One firm denier of spiritism was Argentine Canadian philosopher and physicist Mario Bunge (1919-2020), who considered it a pseudoscience. Others put forth allegations of fraud and religious concerns against the spiritist movement.

head, a spider, and shadowy ghosts. The latter engage her in a discussion on women in society, the fleetingness of human existence, and destiny. What Vicente calls “la depresión del alma” (3) in this text is undoubtedly an early exploration of mental health struggles, prompting Ramón Jiménez Madrid to note Vicente’s inclusion of psychoanalysis—still in its early stages—in her works, as well as their dreamlike or surreal quality (22). The protagonist’s self-reflection on her symptoms offers a glimpse into the author’s interest in the psychological: anxiety, depression, insomnia, purposeless, and drowning in these feelings. Beginning with the first paragraph, the female protagonist not only describes her mental state—“enferma y triste”—but also declares her intent to decipher the “enigma” of her thoughts (Vicente 3). She compares her anxiety to the spectre of a dream, the palpitations of an invisible world, and chimeras floating around her (3), offering an occult explanation to the mental health challenges contemporary medicine has yet to explain. As Ana Casas reminds us for texts similar to “Sombras,” often “no es posible discernir el grado de perturbación mental del personaje protagonista que, a su vez, suele ser el narrador del relato ... de modo que el lector difícilmente puede estar seguro de la veracidad de lo contado” (22). So, we must read the rest of the story with the narrator’s unreliability in mind. As the protagonist attempts to fall asleep, afraid, alone, anguished, her inexplicable and invisible assailant begins to transform into something more appropriate for a horror story: “una cabeza sanguínea ... que no tiene nada de humana” (Vicente 4). From there, the speaker’s insurmountable depression is manifested into the shape of a terrifying spider.

Throughout history, the spider has symbolized creation, patience, fertility, and destruction; it is a predator, a trickster, a storyteller, a weaver of destiny.⁶⁶ The latter is particularly interesting as a frame for “Sombras,” in which the protagonist questions her life’s purpose through an internal

⁶⁶ The spider is also connected to mythology around the world—the Ancient Egyptian Neth, the Greek Arachne, the West African Anansi, and the Native American Iktómi, among many others.

monologue: “¿Si no sirves para nada, por qué vives? ¡Cumple tu misión, que para algo has venido!”

(3). This is in response to the main character bemoaning what can be interpreted as woman’s plight—incessantly seeking something *more*, feeling unworthy and dissatisfied, having no purpose or identity. Considering Vicente’s criticism of the traditional path of marriage and domesticity, and especially her insistence on the importance of women’s education so they can participate independently in society, it seems her protagonist’s mental health crisis may have been induced by a much larger social inequity. Drawing from the posterior 1960s antipsychiatry movement that claimed madness is not an inherited weakness or imperfect development but a method of surviving an unlivable situation (Caminero-Santangelo 8), we can argue that the protagonist’s mental health crisis is at least partially attributable to the limited paths available to women in Spanish society.⁶⁷

Shortly after, the spider appears and, opening the great chasm of its mouth, releases human-like shadows, one of which announces to the protagonist “Soy tu destino” and might suggest that jumping in front of a moving vehicle would bring her the peace she lacks (4).⁶⁸ The apparitions even call themselves “Sombras de destinos” (5), confirming the connection between

⁶⁷ Antipsychiatry and its leading voice, Scottish psychiatrist R. D. Laing (1927-1989), understood madness within a social context, looking to the patient’s surroundings—namely, the family—before assuming an individual weakness or failing (Caminero-Santangelo 82). Conversely, this approach often assigned blame to a mother for a child’s insanity (83)—the environment *determines* the behavioural outcome, evoking 19th-century determinism.

⁶⁸ Around the same time Vicente published this story, the Swiss creator of analytical psychology, Carl Jung (1875-1961), was working on his theories regarding the self, among which figures the shadow. He defines the shadow as “the negative side of the personality” (Jung 10). He explains: “The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real ... Closer examination of the dark characteristics—that is, the inferiorities constituting the shadow—reveals that they have an emotional nature, a kind of autonomy, and accordingly an obsessive or, better, possessive quality” (8). Applying this to Vicente’s narrative, the shadows—and their source, the spider—can be understood as a part of the protagonist herself, one that has a measure of control over her and obsesses over the mission it assigns her.

the spider and fate.⁶⁹ After a brief discussion with the shadows, the protagonist begins to move toward the spider's open mouth into which her companions have disappeared. On the surface, these pages give the impression of depression personified enticing a mentally unstable character into giving up and giving into to the inescapable certainty of death. As Ferrer Gómez states, “la patología psicológica queda ligada a la teoría del psicoanálisis, basada en una conjunción de elementos de la destrucción, de la locura y del sujeto como elemento monstruoso, como extraño a su cuerpo y a la realidad en la que vive” (88). As such, the speaker faces off against the spider—embodiment of her darkest and self-destructive thoughts—and loses. However, if we maintain the frame of women's issues, an alternate reading becomes more possible: the only solution to a depression triggered by social ills is to rebel against the system despite the dangers.

There are three crucial moments that support this interpretation. First, when the shadows declare that the speaker must take on an important mission, she responds: “¿No sabéis que soy mujer, y que en esta sociedad, toda mujer moderna, con veleidades de reforma, rompe con la tradición del aforismo humano, ofende la susceptibilidad, y *es declarada loca sin más análisis?*” (Vicente 5; emphasis added). Upon rereading the story, the reader might realize they too assumed the protagonist is delusional—disregarding Vicente's redefinition of female insanity (see section 2.1.3). Second, the shadows claim that a human life is inconsequential; only when humanity abandons its puritan notions of honour above all will society be able to progress (5). Third, and most importantly, the shadows identify themselves as the feminine “nosotras” and declare that regardless of their struggles, the influence of the masculine “ellos” will eventually die out (5).⁷⁰ This partition continues as the shadows describe the world they envision, one in which they are as

⁶⁹ The *sombra* analogy is also used in *Teresilla*: when the protagonist is telling an old acquaintance about her grief after losing her 10-month-old son, she describes herself as “una sombra que anda” (Vicente 208).

⁷⁰ Jung also posits that the shadows of a person always match their gender (10).

powerful as God and future generations will be freed of current gender hierarchies (6). Finally, they invite the main character to be “un destino” alongside them, prompting her difficult journey into the mouth of the spider (6). In the first interpretation, this scene shows the mixture of feelings, especially fear, that a person might experience as they debate whether to end their life, illustrated as an insatiable beast intent on claiming its victim. Especially within a Catholic society, where suicide constitutes a taboo and a sin, this would be a disquieting choice to make. But from a feminist lens, the reader might instead see the protagonist’s lethargic movements toward the creature as a fear of change, a reluctance to be the one making the necessary sacrifices in order to ensure a better future for the next generation of women. Then, the speaker’s body surges forward—while her “pobre cabeza quiere deshacerse”—and she is paralyzed with fear without quite understanding why (6-7). The spider, drawing her in, insists that “Es inútil que te rebeles, ¡tienes que pasar!” (7).⁷¹ Finally, she enters the void. The story ends with the following: “Voy cada vez más adentro. Primero tinieblas... ¡Las ideas y los pensamientos parecen deshacerse!... Luego todo se transforma... ¡Ah!... ¡Oh!...” (7). What beliefs are being deconstructed if not the constrictive gender expectations and honour codes the protagonist lamented earlier? Her exclamation at the end would then be one of wonder or enlightenment, and not one of fear.

Focusing on the supernatural elements of the story, we can draw from German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch (1867-1919), who in 1906 proposes the concept of the *unheimlich* (something not quite at home or at ease), which translates to the “uncanny” or unhomely (7-8). He explains how, when confronted with uncertainty, man develops a sense of the uncanny—for example, when faced with a being/object that may or may not be living (12-13), or an inability to distinguish between

⁷¹ Inverting this analysis, the spider could also represent the speaker giving into tradition and letting herself disappear under the weight of the patriarchy, but with the shadows’ discussion, this seems less likely.

the imaginary and reality. He posits that “women, children and dreamers are also particularly subject to the stirrings of the uncanny and the danger of seeing spirits and ghosts” due to their lesser critical thinking and stronger psychical background (13). Thirteen years later, Freud explores the term, this fear of an (un)familiar thing or being, adding to it coincidences, recurrences, the “omnipotence of thoughts”—thinking something and then it comes true—, and potentially supernatural occurrences like witchcraft or haunted houses (“The ‘Uncanny’” 633-635).⁷² Most importantly, he highlights the uncanny effect “easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality” (636).

Building on Freud’s analysis, Kristeva focuses on how the uncanny primarily appears within the frame of something that was previously familiar (*Étrangers* 270). She adds that our fear of mortality fosters an ambivalent approach to the notion of afterlife, wherein ghosts represent our confrontation with the idea of death (273). And if the object of our uncanny feeling is a *thing*, Kristeva posits, it creates “une *destructuration du moi* qui peut soit perdurer comme *symptôme* psychotique, soit s’inscrire comme *ouverture* vers le nouveau” (*Étrangers* 278). In other words, confronting the *unheimlich* has a result on our sense of self. Kristeva concludes that Freud is not talking about the strangeness of others, but rather the uncanny inside ourselves, borders she presents as blurred: “L’étrange est en moi, donc nous sommes tous des étrangers. Si je suis étranger, il n’y a pas d’étrangers” (*Étrangers* 284).

Applying these notions to Vicente, the supernatural elements of “Sombras” fill the reader and protagonist with a sense of dread and uncertainty—are they real or in her head? The story is set in the protagonist’s bedroom, a location of familiarity and female domesticity/subservience

⁷² Ferrer Gómez suggests that Freud’s interest in spiritism influenced his later doctrines, although he maintained a strict division between the occult and the psychiatric (87).

that will soon be overrun with the *unheimlich*. First is the aforementioned “cabeza sanguínea,” uncanny in its departure from what the main character perceives as human. Soon it transforms into a spider, which opens its mouth wide enough for a slew of shadowy figures to emerge before disappearing—it will reappear near the end to swallow them again. The shadows, which the protagonist herself labels “fantasmas” (Vicente 4), elicit many emotions from the protagonist, including taking charge of her feelings and wanting to be herself (“¡Yo quiero ser yo!” [5]). She even sees her reflection in the clear green eyes of the spider (6). The emotional turmoil she felt at the beginning of the story has prompted a rumination on life and death—represented by ghosts/shadows—and left her with both psychotic symptoms and a new opening. Finally, the separation of self/other and real/imaginary are ambiguous: the head becomes the spider, which spits out and reabsorbs the shadows, and all of this may or may not be happening in the protagonist’s imagination. Vicente creates a sense of the uncanny with a combination of horror, spiritism, and psychological components that work together to ensnare the reader and thereby impart her pro-woman messaging on her audience.

2.1.2 Misguided Ghosts in “Alma loca” and “El huerto encantado”

One of the most recognizable components of the fantastic is ghosts—sometimes, we see their perspective surrounding their death and the Great Beyond, and other times, the ghosts are haunting the characters whose stories we are following. The spirit in Vicente’s “Alma loca” begins her afterlife simultaneously in her coffin and floating above her body, witnessing her family’s grief. Then she meets other souls who, for no discernible reason other than her bewilderment, ostracize her and call her “alma loca” (10), giving the story its title. But it is only after a solitary journey through an infinite empty space that the soul finds her way back to her family and, finding her husband Mario in another woman’s arms, is shocked into recognizing her own death. This prompts her murderous quest for vengeance—finding a way to provoke his death so he is with her

once more, ending both his “affair” and her solitude.⁷³ Her solution? Haunting the lover into near insanity until she agrees to hypnotize the husband into killing himself. Toro Ballesteros highlights similarities in the deaths in Poe’s “The Premature Burial” (1844), Pardo Bazán’s “La resucitada” (1908), and Vicente’s “Alma loca,” which the reader and sometimes even the character can foretell (*Viaje* 236); to this we would add “Sombras” as well for its protagonist’s reflection on depression and the ambiguous ending that may suggest her death.⁷⁴ The scholar proposes this type of demise is preferred by Vicente due to the versatility of the blurred lines between life and death, here and beyond (*Viaje* 236-237).

Indeed, in “Alma loca,” hypnosis is the interstice between the worlds of the living (reality) and the dead (fantasy). Referring to Thomas Willis, Toro Ballesteros highlights two types of spirits, melancholic and maniacal:

Los espíritus melancólicos ... se diferencian de los maníacos en que mientras que la pasión de aquellos va irremediabilmente unida a la tristeza, la de estos se acompaña de audacia y furor. Los maniáticos de Ángeles Vicente encajan a la perfección en este esquema, pues el impulso de sus respectivas manías las lleva a perpetuar extrañas costumbres o bien a acometer hazañas sobrehumanas. (Introduction 152-153)

⁷³ In “Alma loca” especially, the dead are able to influence the living. For example, the vengeful ghost speaks to the protagonist and even holds her in place—“unos brazos [la] oprimían cariñosamente” (9)—to ensure her story is heard.

⁷⁴ “The Premature Burial” is an expression of the main character’s paralyzing fear of being buried alive. In the end, in spite of all his preparations to thwart this occurrence, he finds himself in a dark, confined space—a boat. This shocks him out of his catalepsy and helps him overcome his fear. “The Cask of Amontillado” (1846) foreshadows death similarly, though the victim does not realize until escape is impossible; in this story, Poe’s protagonist encourages a friend-turned-enemy into intoxication, then seals him in a catacomb to die. A sort of opposite occurs in Pardo Bazán’s “La resucitada,” which begins with a dead woman waking up in her coffin and returning to her family—but they cannot accept this overly pale version of their mother and wife, whose perfume cannot mask the smell of the crypt.

The *alma loca* in question, after a bout of melancholy, leans into the second category with an unparalleled fury, but her attempts to influence her husband in the material world are in vain and his psychic strength surpasses hers. Luckily, Mario is interested in the supernatural and asks his new lover to hypnotize him one day, unwittingly facilitating his own near downfall—also the moment the soul elaborates her plan to kill her husband. This is an example of how Poe’s works influenced “la incorporación de ciertas prácticas científicas (en especial el magnetismo y la hipnosis) para justificar la irrupción de lo sobrenatural” in Spanish modernist stories by Vicente and others (Casas 17).

Moreover, the setting of “El huerto encantado” is the paranormal focal point of this spiritist story.⁷⁵ A house in which a young widow and her older maid live alone sits next to a haunted garden, one the townsfolk fear so much that even the nosiest neighbours and the bravest men do not approach the home, especially as the sun begins to set. They even wonder whether the women “tendrían ... algo que ver con las almas del huerto” (Vicente 19). The reader learns that the deceased husband addressed his potential death, promising his wife to return to her; thus, the grieving spiritist widow is happy to move onto a potentially haunted lot as it represents that interstice between the world of the living and the dead that now separates her from her beloved. Across the garden lives don Cipriano, the priest of the San Cirilo parish and the so-called interpreter of the garden’s “almas en pena,” who assuages the community’s worries about the newcomers and promises to watch over them (20). He encourages the townsfolk to maintain their

⁷⁵ Marginal spaces such as hospitals, hotels, and even morgues figure amongst the settings of Vicente’s works. In “La trenza,” from *Los buitres*, a student at a what we can suppose is a coroner’s office is haunted by a ghost named Elena, the spirit of a woman whose body he was examining, while he sleeps. Upon waking, he remembers that Elena was his first girlfriend and runs to the office, only to find her corpse gone and a letter from her addressed to him containing a braid of her hair. Like the cemetery Foucault labels a heterotopia, this coroner’s space is also home to dead people, an expression of Kristeva’s abject (see section 3.5).

distance, effectively contributing to the widow's isolation, and uses his spiritual authority to make financial demands of his churchgoers: "mientras la vecindad les pagara misas y echaran limosnas en el cepillo de las ánimas, estaban tranquilas y a nadie molestaban [las almas]. Estas razones del santo páter calmaban los ánimos y agitaban los bolsillos" (20). Of the selected works, "El huerto encantado" is the most obvious in its criticism of the Church. Vicente makes a caricature of this character with chubby cheeks and a reddish complexion. She even mocks the idea of souls through the young woman, who imagines them as birds in the garden rather than souls on another plane of existence. Like the doctor in "Alma loca" (see section 2.1.3), this priest is celebrated for his work—keeping the unhappy spirits at bay—in spite of his inaction, which satirizes him further.

Like Vicente herself, the unnamed widow in the story is a spiritist and welcomes the opportunity to move next to a haunted garden in the hopes that her recently diseased husband of less than a year will make good on his promise and reach out to her through the veil of the afterlife once in a location propitious to "fenómenos psíquicos" (Vicente 20). To induce these otherworldly events, she and the servant—who is more of a mother figure to her than an employee—limit their contact with the outside world. She chooses her bedroom for its view of the garden, though most of it is obscured by a lone palm tree which, at its base, is surrounded by unruly plants that contribute to the gothic atmosphere. This is also the location of coincidences, among which is the appearance of a cluster of dates hanging from a tree a year after the woman's husband brought home a bunch of dates and died a few days later—coincidences, of course, figuring amidst Freud's examples of the uncanny. But the lack of signs from beyond prompts the widow to reflect on the existence of such phenomena: "¿Serían ilusiones de mentes enfermas esas comunicaciones con el más allá?" (21). Is her husband's soul lost and confused—like the ghost in "Alma loca" was upon awakening in the afterlife? She insists on believing in spiritism, especially because her husband did, and is rewarded with an uncanny coincidence the next day: the dates have miraculously fallen into her

room in spite of the wall separating the palm tree from her window. To her great joy, for many days in a row, there are signs: flowers in her bed, dates on her chair, petals on the floor... Then, a bad omen—three crosses etched into the tree trunk, and another appearing overnight. Suddenly the signs instill a deep fear in the widow, and she feels the weight of an invisible presence. But unlike in “Sombras” and “Alma loca,” this time the inexplicable has a logical explanation: it is not ghosts, but a creepy priest who has been watching her sleep and leaving dates or flowers in her room.

Indeed, turning from the spiritist to the feminist, Vicente criticizes the clergy and the patriarchy in one fell swoop with don Cipriano, who not only extorts his congregation but also takes advantages of a widow’s beauty while asleep and blames her for his own lack of self-control: “desde que usted habita esta casa vengo todas las mañanas. Perdóneme, señora, no se enoje; pero usted tiene la culpa de los madrugones que me he dado para venir a echarle flores... ¡estaba usted tan hermosa... así dormidita!...” (25). Not only does he exhibit the behaviour of a stalker and voyeur, but also requests she abandon her anger because the fault is hers—victim-blaming decades before American psychologist William Ryan (1923-2002) introduced the term in 1971. Compared to the supernatural, this invasion of privacy is much worse: “Del horror ni hablar podía la pobre viuda” (25). Worse still, Toro Ballesteros insinuates, is the line of crosses he has etched into her window, signifying how many times the priest has sinned—masturbated—as a result of his inability to uphold his idealization of the widow (Introduction 210). He faults the curves of her body with his condemnation, reducing her from a person to a body for which he makes “sacrificios” (210).

Is this story Vicente’s warning to women about believing too readily in the occult in addition to the dangers of men? The widow could easily have suffered a much worse fate at the hands of a priest who does not believe in consent. Is it a cautionary tale about those who would abuse the supernatural for their own gains? Unlike many other spiritists, her stories never suggest

blindly following the doctrine. A critique of the Church, to be sure—she ends the tale with the voyeur priest misusing the symbol of the cross and worshipping this woman rather than his God, despite recognizing this as sin or blasphemy. This remits to *amor cortés*, a medieval European literary concept characterized by its nobility, chivalry, and prohibition.⁷⁶ The honourable knight places the recipient of his adoration on a pedestal, expressing his devotion through the dualities of erotic/spiritual, immoral/moral, and human/holy. Sometimes, explains Antonio Gracia, the *amada* is scornful and out of reach, thereby causing the lover to suffer, often turning this pain into poetry (16).⁷⁷ But Vicente instead satirizes courtly love, a degradation of an outdated model of love; by placing an unwilling and unaware recipient on his pedestal that should be reserved for God, the deplorable clergyman of “El huerto encantado” depicts many of the traits and actions that are wrong in the Catholic institution. Rather than worshipping this idealized woman, he devotes himself to the erotic feelings her body elicits in him. He—not a spirit—is the invisible presence the main character has felt looming over her, stark contrast to “Sombras” and “Alma loca” and their otherworldly antagonists.

2.1.3 Redefining Madness in “Alma loca”

The characterization of women as “crazy” ties into a stereotype that persists even today. Looking back a few centuries, a great many 18th- and 19th-century women were diagnosed with “hysteria,” with symptoms including everything from seizures to depression, eating disorders to anxiety. Hysteria, from the Greek root *hyster* (womb) that was believed to be the cause of the

⁷⁶ A more recent example of the genre is *Pepita Jiménez* (1874) by Juan Valera (1824-1905), in which a seminarian idolizes and falls in love with a young widow his own father hopes to marry. See more in Cornejo-Parriego’s “Ángel o fraude? Los discursos de la viudez en *Pepita Jiménez*.”

⁷⁷ The poet with whom the titular protagonist of *Teresilla* falls in love also expresses his passion in a form reminiscent of courtly love. Upon seeing Teresilla for the first time, he exclaims, “Merveilleuse!” and is reminded of a Greek statue (Vicente 153); later he refers to her as a daughter of the sun (155).

illness, was an exclusively female disease and included a wide range of symptoms (*Madwoman* 53). Jane M. Ussher adds that this condition was associated with a plethora of unwanted traits: hysterical women were difficult, narcissistic, impressionable, self-indulgent, desiring of privacy and independence, morally repulsive, and manipulative (63). By the late 1800s and early 1900s, proponents of what would soon become psychiatry developed arguments on women's supposed intellectual inferiority, thereby allowing for medical diagnoses that controlled women's roles in society (García-Díaz and Jiménez-Lucena 2). Hysteria—which David L. Eng calls “pathological female subjectivity” (1275)—served this purpose above all. Leighton Barnes proposes that—at least in the British context—inadequate medical research led to the widespread use of the label of “hysterical,” which not only invalidated women's health struggles but also limited their involvement outside the home, especially in politics and elections (2-3). Feminism and hysteria were intertwined in the social consciousness, with the diagnosis serving as a tool of suppression (Barnes 21). In fact, explain Gilbert and Gubar, patriarchal socialization is to blame for many of the conditions that were lumped under the “hysteria” label (*Madwoman* 54). A girl's education in docility and obedience would surely sicken her to some degree as it goes against primal human urges for survival, pleasure, and assertion: to be “trained in renunciation is almost necessarily to be trained to ill health” (*Madwoman* 54).

Already in Spain in 1882, Catalanian mental illness doctor Juan Giné y Partagás (1836-1903) affirms that women's predisposition to psychological conditions could be waylaid by engaging in her domestic role of mother and homemaker, for which she was equally predisposed (García-Díaz and Jiménez-Lucena 4). Freud, meanwhile, “‘gave early-twentieth-century psychiatrists license to further eroticize this female malady’ and to reinforce Victorian notions of ‘womanliness,’” both mandating female sexual freedom and raising more barriers (Rudnick and Heru 205). Even doctors such as the Spanish César Juarros (1879-1942), who worked toward

sexual reform and defended the right to divorce, helped establish female sexuality as the business of men (García-Díaz and Jiménez-Lucena 6). To summarize, then, the hysterical woman—unconventional and/or exhibiting a variety of mental or physical symptoms—was simultaneously sexualized, repressed, and removed from public life.

After exploring the ghost from “Alma loca” in the previous section, we must turn our attention to the character she is haunting: an unnamed young woman who is also the new lover of the ghost’s widowed husband. After constant interruptions to her days and nights by this troubled spirit, the protagonist is at her wit’s end.⁷⁸ But her biggest concern is not the apparition; rather, the fear of being called crazy and sent to a psychiatric facility is what truly drives her out of her mind (11).⁷⁹ The nightly haunting of the protagonist by this obsessed spirit produces a double “craziness”—while the former’s afterlife is reduced to a desire for vengeance, the protagonist is medically diagnosed as insane due to her insistence on the ghostly voice she hears. According to Ferrer Gómez, Vicente’s works contain “varios elementos implícitos, procedentes de trazos centrífugos del simbolismo oculto francés y de la psicología médica sobre las patologías del individuo, *destilada en la figura del loco* o el maldito, sujeto que ha entusiasmado a la historia de la medicina, la antropología, la literatura y la psicología” (86; emphasis added). Once again, Vicente combines the psychological with the metaphysical in her spiritist writings, this time through the figure of what doctors at the time would simply have called a hysterical woman.

⁷⁸ The soul wants the woman to hypnotize her husband and convince him to kill himself. The protagonist does not refuse this request out of love for Mario; in fact, when pleading with her to leave her alone, she suggests the ghost’s time would be better spend trying to influence Mario toward suicide herself (12). Rather, she is unwilling to participate in this supernatural crime. Hypnotism is also key in the titular “Los buitres” story.

⁷⁹ The asylum also appears in *Zeze* as a final destination for the protagonist’s mother after being abandoned by her lover, and her health declines until her death under the vigilance of the staff. The aunt’s idiosyncrasies, meanwhile, are ignored due to her “título y fortuna” (Vicente 13).

In her various stories, Vicente alludes to contemporary medical mental health practices, for example sending patients to France or moving them from the city to the countryside to combat melancholy (Toro Ballesteros, Introduction 145), a condition more often associated with educated or prestigious individuals. Although this is not the case in “Alma loca,” the protagonist does end up in an asylum, but because she is haunted rather than clinically unwell.⁸⁰ Unfortunately, she is tricked into staying at a “casa de salud” (12) by her family and friends, much to her dismay. She tells the doctor, a man in his forties “de aspecto vulgar y de trato amable” (12), about the haunting in order to convince him of her sanity. Ironically, she says, “tanto hablé yo para demostrarle mi perfecto equilibrio cerebral, que conseguí probarle que estaba loca de remate” (13). This reminds me of Marta Caminero-Santangelo’s belief that “Hysteria is the site of a battle for representation which, for the woman, can only be won by being lost; she can, for Freud, come into possession of her own story by ceasing to cling to her interpretation of events ... and accepting that of the therapist” (71). In maintaining her position, the protagonist worsens her doctor’s opinion of her—it is only once she makes a deal with the ghost and pretends to be sane that she is allowed to leave the asylum. The figure of the doctor, while not overly present, serves to emphasize the psychological and scientific nature of Vicente’s texts and give weight to the diagnosis of “loca,” which contrasts with the protagonist’s reflection on insanity while amidst the patients at the sanatorium.⁸¹ Ena

⁸⁰ Freud reminds us that according to Jentsch, “manifestations of insanity” prompt a feeling of the uncanny because they “excite in the spectator the impression of automatic, mechanical processes at work behind the ordinary appearance of mental activity” (“The ‘Uncanny’” 625). But the signs of women’s mental instability in Spain in the early 20th century were not necessarily clear-cut. As García-Díaz and Jiménez-Lucena explain, diagnoses often depended on “conductas consideradas ‘inadecuadas’ o ‘inapropiadas’ que las mujeres manifestaban en su entorno familiar y social, convirtiéndolas en síntomas y signos cuantificables, apelándose así a la intervención del discurso psiquiátrico” (7). In this story, the protagonist’s main symptom of “craziness” is simply a lack of sleep that influences her health and social functions.

⁸¹ According to García-Díaz and Jiménez-Lucena, “El manicomio” is an “espacio donde se genera un juego de subjetividades” (3). In Vicente’s story, we are encouraged to reflect on the perceptions

Bordonada underscores that Vicente's *locos* are never blamed for their condition, but rather looked upon with pity ("Espiritismo, hypnosis" 225). The reader effectively feels for the protagonist, garnering sympathy for the mind of a woman the world sees as insane, but the first-person storytelling proves she is cursed by a mystical enemy instead—mental health and spiritual activity combined to form Vicente's definition of "psíquico."

Interestingly, Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909) puts forth in *Los fenómenos de hipnotismo y espiritismo* (1909) that "la mujer, más predispuesta a la histeria, es más apta para la hipnosis" (qtd. in Toro Ballesteros, Introduction 202). Indeed, the protagonist of "Alma loca" is more in touch with the supernatural and can not only hear the soul's voice, but also see her when dreaming. She is almost successful in her hypnosis of Mario at the end of the story, but instead, after a painful mental battle with physical effects, Mario tells his lover that they are saved, which suggests he has beaten the soul of his deceased wife. The pain he endures to accomplish this is grotesque—his eyes bug out of his head, his teeth clench so hard they nearly shatter, and he convulses wildly for seconds or minutes or hours. This remits to Jentsch's example of epilepsy as a trigger for a feeling of the uncanny in witnesses to the seizures, a reminder of "hidden psychical processes, in that here the muscular disturbances follow a certain higher ordering principle" (14).⁸² In "Alma loca," rather than neurological disease, the principle is spiritual. But who is crazy in this story—the soul, the protagonist, both, or neither?

This text also begs another question: Why have readers identify with and even begin supporting the ghost's quest for vengeance, if only to have her lose in the end? We can find an

of different subjects—their language, their way of relating themselves to the world—rather than simply writing them off as "crazy."

⁸² Interestingly, Freud highlights Hoffmann's 1816 story "The Sandman," whose titular protagonist tears children's eyes from their heads, as an example of a story prompting uncanny feelings in its readers ("The 'Uncanny'" 625).

answer in Gilbert and Gubar, who highlight how mad or monstrous female characters are often punished over the course of their story; their rebellion and its subsequent quelling show the female authors' own fragmented desires to identify with or overcome the "self-definitions patriarchal culture has imposed on them" (*Madwoman* 78-79). Sometimes, the "mad character is created only to be destroyed" (78). At the end of "Alma loca," the ghost is defeated by Mario, whose psychological powers outmatch his deceased wife's. Though she began as a foil to the new lover, the audience finds itself feeling a certain degree of approval for the two women once they begin working together, and the ghost's supposed destruction leaves the reader unsettled. The story concludes with Mario assuring his new partner that they are now safe—but with such an abrupt end, the reader cannot know whether this is truly the case or whether Mario will discover his lover's part in the ploy against him and risk a similar end.

Moreover, Toro Ballesteros highlights the figure of the doctor as key for Vicente, connecting it to a larger doctrine that began in the 1860s (Introduction 115). Yvan Lissorgues describes this tendency to "definir para la literatura un método de aproximación a la realidad parecido al de las ciencias experimentales -observación, experimentación, impasibilidad ante los hechos ... hacer entrar en el campo literario los nuevos datos proporcionados por las ciencias: ciencias naturales, biología, fisiología, psicología, sociología, etc." (qtd. in Toro Ballesteros, Introduction 115). This observation takes shape in "Alma loca" when the protagonist, once in the women's psych ward, passes time analyzing the "clase de locura" her fellow inpatients exhibit (13). She reflects on the possibility that she is not the only one rendered crazy by supernatural influences, criticizing men for their egotistical inability to accept that there are things beyond their understanding. She posits that one of the inmates is not necessarily deluded in thinking she is a famous singer—her insanity coincides with a singer's untimely death and could be the result of the latter's unfinished business. Like a scientist, and not unlike the naturalist writer we will explore

in section 3.3, she begins with observation during the day; then at night, she evaluates her data and comes to the conclusion that the only “crazy” person is the doctor himself. This contradicts the narrative of her doctor and real medical practitioners at the time. Celia García-Díaz and Isabel Jiménez-Lucena explain that “La historia clínica nos muestra una encrucijada discursiva donde la voz autorizada era la del experto, y se apreciaba una cierta pérdida del discurso de las pacientes, sustituido, en parte, por el discurso de otros (familia, personal de cuidados, o discurso institucional)” (7-8). In spite of the protagonist’s efforts to rationalize her behaviour—she is being haunted, after all!—neither her relatives nor her doctor give any weight to her words, effectively silencing her in an attempt to heal her from this mental illness. But while the doctor and the protagonist’s family act as the voice of authority, since the story is from the “crazy” person’s perspective, readers are also exposed to her discourse that disproves the label of insanity she has been assigned.

Within feminist thought, some critics consider 19th-century hysteria a protest against traditional feminine roles, while others counter that this protest was ineffective and caused more harm than good (Caminero-Santangelo 3). Leaning into this dichotomy, Caminero-Santangelo proposes that “Perhaps the reason the madwoman continues to be such an enticing figure is that she offers the illusion of power, although she in fact provides a symbolic resolution whose only outcome must be greater powerlessness ... the madwoman as an alternative to patriarchy ultimately traps the woman in silence” (3-4). Conversely, in “Alma loca,” as we have seen, Vicente plays with the binary of sane/insane, even showing female insanity as a source of (temporary) power and agency—the crazed soul uses her passion to exact vengeance on her husband (Toro

Ballesteros, *Viaje* 260).⁸³ This apparition has been silenced by her untimely death, but finds her voice through another female character—her husband’s new lover. The lover also finds power in embracing her condition and facing the voice in her head: the ghost. Having realized that the doctor considers her a lost cause, she changes course; instead of resisting, she resolves to work with the ghost to find freedom for them both. After promising to do her part with Mario, the protagonist receives instructions from the spirit on how to escape the madhouse and, after a peaceful night’s sleep at last, easily tricks the doctor—“Hice tan bien mi papel, o bien era tonto” (15)—into releasing her. She is able to manipulate him based on his “scientifically objective” perception of sanity and facilitate her return to society. Ironically, the doctor is lauded with congratulations for his marvelous scientific cures in spite of his inaction during her stay in his facility. Indeed, Vicente does not employ “los discursos médico-científicos al servicio de valores morales burgueses” (Toro Ballesteros, Introduction 226), nor does she present them as all-knowing or above reproach. Instead, this figure embodies the perceived incompatibility of scientific men and spiritism or, seen another way, their inability to support women’s psychological health and take them seriously.

2.2 Challenging Traditional Honour Codes

Nearing the turn of the century, Spain was rapidly changing in many areas of society: class divisions, gender roles, and even sexual mores. Among the “dangerous slippages that plague the Spanish middle class in the late nineteenth century” are the “chaotic mixing of masculinity and femininity” and the “elision of any boundaries between the public and private spheres” (Mercer 113). The distinctions that once defined Spanish identity were shifting, with many blaming unconventional (often queer) expressions of gender—mainly nonconforming women—for what

⁸³ Similarly, the *donjuán* figure of “La derrota de Don Juan” highlights the slightly crazy contradictions the woman he wants to seduce is making, suggesting she has spiritist leanings, to which she responds that “yo no soy espiritista... ni dejo de serlo” (Vicente 134).

they considered the downfall of the nation.⁸⁴ As such, the traditional role of the wife and mother in the home gained support from those who feared how society was changing as a new century approached. On one side of the debate regarding female education, the figure of the “ángel del hogar”—the perfect homemaker, the immaculate daughter/wife/mother—seemed an adequate objective for women’s schooling.⁸⁵ This idealized image appears for example in an 1854 poem by English writer Coventry Patmore (1823-1896), “The Angel in the Home,” in honour of his first wife and fellow author, Emily Augusta Patmore (1824-1862). Already in existence since the 16th century, this trope again gained ground in Spain, where literature in which “se exalta la vida doméstica, el hogar como espacio utópico claramente diferenciado del espacio público y la figura de la mujer virtuosa de clase media” (Blanco 110) shaped social perceptions of gender roles. Many of the texts that promoted this feminine ideal were in fact written by women who, in their personal lives, embodied modernity—culture, education, travel, journalism, even tumultuous marriages—but were unable to reproduce these traits in their female characters (Ena Bordonada, “Jaque” 91).

Like several of her peers, Spanish poet Isabel Poggi de Llorente (1840-1917), for example, shared in the press her belief that women were responsible for society’s morality. Magazines, manuals, and even novels emphasized the importance of female virtue for the good of the nation, using model protagonists to inspire female readers to conform to domestic ideals (Blanco 107-108).⁸⁶ Another example is Spanish writer and journalist Faustina Sáez de Melgar (1834-1895), who expounds in the prologue to her *Las mujeres españolas, americanas, y lusitanas, pintadas por sí mismas* (1885) that “queremos buenas esposas que sean el consuelo, la esperanza, el ángel de paz del hogar conyugal; queremos buenas madres” (XII). Alda Blanco highlights how such

⁸⁴ This concept will be evaluated in relation to Marañón in section 3.2.

⁸⁵ We will explore the angel of the hearth further in regard to Fortún’s writings in section 4.3.1.

⁸⁶ Manuals included Joaquim Rubió i Ors’s (1818-1899) *El libro de las niñas* from 1868.

texts “ofrecen un verdadero catálogo de cuantos aspectos comprendían los atributos físicos, morales, espirituales y psicológicos de la buena mujer” while also accentuating the distance between the private and public domains (108). This was particularly the case in the *novela sentimental* and the melodrama, which explored the unambiguous conflicts between Good and Evil (111-112).⁸⁷ Conversely, Vicente’s writings—some of them, like *Teresilla*, sharing many traits with the *novela sentimental* and the melodrama—explore the issues women face in a society straddling both tradition and modernity and argue in favour of women’s escape from domesticity.

In Spain, the 1889 Civil Code did not allow for divorce as we know it today—though permitting separation in cases of any female adultery, or male adultery causing public scandal—until the brief secularization of marriage and legalization of divorce by the Second Republic in the 1930s (Nash, *Mujer* 27).⁸⁸ Already in the first years of the 20th century, Vicente is addressing the hypocrisy surrounding women’s sexual behaviour that Carmen de Burgos will explore a decade later. One of these is the question of separation in cases of infidelity, but more prominent in Vicente’s works is the perceived morality of a sexually active woman versus man. In the late 19th and early 20th century, (female) sexuality “became the locus of middle-class attempts to create, strengthen, protect, and defend bourgeois political and social power” (Mercer 26). Longstanding honour codes focusing especially on women’s bodies and behaviours served to define not only how a woman should act, but also how to react to any deviation from the norm. Leigh Mercer reminds us that it is *male* engagement with society that serves to produce modern notions of honour

⁸⁷ The *novela sentimental* appeared as a subgenre in the late 1800s, though its roots date back to a similar genre by the same name in the 15th century.

⁸⁸ In “El reloj” in the *Sombras* collection, Vicente criticizes the bourgeois woman and her unfortunate destiny of marriage and suffering the ensuing infidelities and cruelties of her husband. *Libre de espíritu*’s “Divorcio por no calzarse,” meanwhile, is the author’s fictitious reflection on a town in Paraguay where nobody wears shoes; when a local girl marries a Spanish man who eventually attempts to mandate footwear, she instead opts for divorce.

and reputation (8)—though this moral doctrine is also passed down from mother to daughter, like in *Teresilla*.

Knowledge surrounding sexuality is also controlled by men, though some are more encouraging of women's sexual education than others.⁸⁹ A few even publish manuals with detailed information pertaining to bodies, sexuality, relationships, and more, such as Pedro Felipe Monlau (1808-1871), the Spanish doctor who fathered the concept of natural hygiene in the nation. His book *Higiene del matrimonio, ó, El libro de los casados en el cual se dan las reglas é instrucciones necesarias para conservar la salud de los esposos, asegurar la paz conyugal y educar bien á la familia* (1853) explores marriage, divorce, hygiene, anatomy, virginity, reproduction in all its stages, menstruation, pregnancy and abortion, childbirth, and children's education. Monlau's book—the first hygiene manual to target the average reader—was republished over a dozen times between 1853 and 1929, translated, and diffused across Europe and Latin America. In spite of its Catholic and gender biases, by reading this or similar works, men and women especially could be more prepared for adult relationships; but instead, many women were shielded from anything sexual in nature and had to depend only on what their parents were willing to share—all for the sake of the family's honour. As Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist explains, “the reputation of women has been contingent on them conducting themselves in such a way that they do not risk bringing shame on male relatives” and the family name (139).

As we saw in section 2.1.1, in “Sombras,” Vicente defends culture and progress while also devaluing traditional notions of honour—she places honour and love/life on opposite ends of a binary wherein only the latter leads to a change in the order of the world (5). Vicente offers “una

⁸⁹ Foucault notes in *La volonté de savoir* that there are those who have power within the order of sexuality (men, adults, doctors, parents) and those who are kept from it (women, teenagers and children, sick people), those who have the right to sexual knowledge and those who are kept ignorant (130-131).

dura crítica contra la hipocresía de la mujer en sus relaciones amorosas, defendiendo, por el contrario, la actitud sincera y abierta de la mujer que, sin trabas morales ni sociales, se entrega al hombre amado” (Ena Bordonada, “Entre” 124). Her criticism of outdated honour codes and family structures is even more evident in *Teresilla*, where the protagonist’s mother is caught between her Christian beliefs and her love for a daughter who is heading down a dangerous, immoral path. In the first pages, doña Sabina reflects on her own domestic bliss, when her daughter was young and innocent and life was simple; she wishes her daughter would marry and find the happiness she once had (Vicente 87). Once Teresilla meets what Sabina considers an appropriate potential husband, “el marido que ella había soñado para su Teresilla” (159), she is overjoyed—but this fairytale resolution is not in the cards for the protagonist. Vicente also demonstrates how Sabina’s beliefs influence her daughter: after Teresilla spends the night with the *donjuán*-esque Francisco, she is convinced he will marry her because the sexual activity in which they have engaged is, in her mind, synonymous with matrimony (135). Unfortunately, Francisco has no intention of settling down, and Teresilla’s inexperience with sexuality and relationships leaves her open to exploitation and heartbreak. Her mother’s unspecific warnings against men did not protect her from this sexual misadventure.

The concepts of honour and virtue carry significant weight in *Teresilla* and are constructed through characters’ personal reflection and gossip, and especially the titular protagonist’s parents’ rules for their daughter’s behaviour. It is in fact Teresilla’s learned honour code that drives the plot forward, transforming her from an innocent girl into a victim of a *donjuán*, then into a pregnant runaway, and finally a suicidal prostitute. Her decisions are time and time again influenced by what she believes her parents will think of her after being seduced by Francisco on several occasions, prompting her flight from Málaga. Over the course of the story, Vicente builds Sabina’s honour code through her comments about her daughter and others. This mother considers her

daughter's interest in Francisco a conspiracy against her (91). She also reflects on all the "pecados" of two hypocritical neighbourhood women (89) and, upon hearing that Teresilla and Francisco have been spotted kissing, she threatens to kick Teresilla out of the home, where they are all "gente honrada" (95). Margaret L. King proposes that "the guarding of chastity was the primary business of the daughters of the Renaissance. Their honor consisted in the maintenance of their chastity; their fathers' honor consisted in their supervision of the chastity of their daughters and wives" (qtd. in Ljungqvist 140). Although centuries separate the Renaissance and Teresilla's sad story, Spanish notions of morality largely remain the same. But unlike traditional male figures, Teresilla's father is useless, leaving his wife to protect the family's reputation; instead, Vicente presents him as a caricature of male authority in the home. While Teresilla and Sabina loudly argue about the former's flirtations with Francisco, Jaime awakens, yells at them to go fight outside, and "refunfuñando, se volvió a dormir como un perro viejo. Al poco tiempo roncaba como antes" (Vicente 95). There is only one moment in which he finally takes responsibility for his daughter's virtue, when she reappears after more than a day away from home. Once his worries for her safety dissipate, "se rebelaba en él el sentimiento moral, de esa moral que se complace en colocar la honestidad o la honradez de la mujer..." (140). Then, he threatens her briefly: "Sabes que me dan ganas de ahogarte y decirte que eres una..." (140). But Sabina stops him and waves away his concerns, so he defaults to asking about that night's dinner (141). Though at this moment the mother's fears outweigh her moral rigor, the reader cannot help but notice how both parents are effectively pushing their daughter away—and into the arms of her *donjuán*—in their attempts to mitigate scandal and protect Teresilla.

Through a passing character, Vicente offers a reflection on the existence of social expectations surrounding morality: "Después de todo, ¿quién tiene la culpa? ¿La sociedad por tener leyes en contra de la Naturaleza, o la Naturaleza por tener leyes en contra de la sociedad?"

¿Es la educación? ¿Es la ignorancia? ¿Somos los padres unos imbéciles? ¿Son los hijos unos ingratos?” (120). This father lost his 18-year-old daughter to suicide after an “amor contrariado” (172).⁹⁰ His thoughts on honour remit to a larger discourse on free love, an argument primarily put forth by anarchists but dating back to Wollestonecraft, who criticized the institution of marriage and State control of unions and births. Like Vicente in the aforementioned passage, Puerto Rican anarchofeminist Luisa Capetillo (1879-1922) also laments the imposition of laws invented by egotistical men on the natural laws: “Emancipemos á la mujer del rutinismo enervante llamado religioso, que las hace ver en una ley natural, un acto deshonesto y bochornoso. Si es agradable pasear, oír una deliciosa música, comer un manjar exquisito, ¿por qué negarlo, y avergonzarse en demostrarlo?” (32). She adds that “El matrimonio es una conveniencia social; el amor es una ley natural. ... El matrimonio es la prostitución del amor” (39), drawing together marriage and prostitution as an antithesis to love. Though the free love movement gained ground in the 1930s in Spain, Vicente and her contemporaries already recognize the irony of considering Christian morality more important than the laws of nature decades earlier.

Moreover, Vicente demonstrates how honour codes transform pregnancy and maternity from social victory into a shameful secret. For Teresilla, this begins with her second courtship with Francisco, while her respectable prospective husband Luis is in France. With the coming of spring, the protagonist finds herself nauseous and eventually realizes what her symptoms mean (179). Francisco refuses to take responsibility and vanishes, so Teresilla is left with the shame by herself:

⁹⁰ The topic of suicide comes up frequently in *Teresilla*, primarily as the solution to a young woman’s dishonour. After her first sexual encounter with Francisco, she roams unfamiliar streets, hungry and tired, and nearly throws herself under an approaching tram (138), then again wishes for death once back at home (142). But as her mental health declines even further, she rambles to herself: “¡Quiero morir!... ¡Qué importa que sea joven... mis padres no me llorarán... Francisco menos, porque no me quiere!...” (146). Every time suicide comes up, it is accompanied by Teresilla’s struggles around sexuality and morality, establishing a clear connection between mental wellbeing and impossible sexual standards for women.

“Un día se sabrá mi vergüenza. No podré negarlo. Me echarán de casa. ¿Y entonces?” (180). She also laments that her child will not be recognized by a father, reminding the reader of the importance of paternity in Spanish society.

In addition to taking a toll on her virtue, Teresilla's pregnancy impacts her body and mind: “la gestación le producía una extraordinaria debilidad; los mareos eran más insistentes; caminaba apoyándose en las paredes para no caer; cerraba los ojos, y el fantasma del futuro la hacía estremecerse” (Vicente 181).⁹¹ Her condition encourages her suicidal ideation, especially after visiting Francisco at a brothel only to be rejected again (186). But Teresilla soon realizes that at this time, she lacks “el valor de suicidar[se]” (180), a sentence she repeats often (206, 207). Months later, Teresilla's baby dies before his first birthday—after all, there is no space for an illegitimate child in this honour-obsessed society—, and her mental health deteriorates alarmingly. While Vicente does not lay any blame for this tragedy on the mother or her situation, the narrative voice of the novella's final section accuses Teresilla of killing her child (Vicente 203). Juan suspects her without knowing why, but the reader can guess at his reasoning: to avoid the shame of an unwanted, “bastard” child, Teresilla—already associated in his mind with deviance from both her seduction by Francisco and her current office—might have resorted to infanticide. Offended, Teresilla recounts how she fled Málaga with Luis who, unbothered with her pregnancy by another man, offered her freedom from the shame she felt she would bring upon her family; and with the birth of her son, “empezaron para [ella] los días felices” (207).⁹² Since his death, her grief has only served to drive her toward her eventual suicide.

⁹¹ Vicente also includes the dangers of maternity in a small detail in “Alma loca”—the ghost died in childbirth (9).

⁹² Luis is surprised when Teresilla announces her pregnancy, thinking she will no longer be able to have a relationship with him. But Luis, “Ante esta dolorosa revelación,” decides it does not matter to him (189).

In *Zezé*, questions of honour are not central; rather, they help build the picture Vicente is presenting of a society intent on controlling women's bodies. The first example is the convent boarding school, the setting of the first several chapters. While the protagonist is there because her mother wants her out of the way, her classmate and lover Leonor, the daughter of noble parents, is sent to this space as punishment for “cuestiones amorosas” (Vicente 23)—in fact the author uses the verb *encerrar* to denote Leonor's condition. Conversely, Zezé finds freedom through (heteronormative) notions of honour: since she has had no known male suitors, society considers her “*demi-vierge*” (44).⁹³ While Anne Holloway contends that Zezé in fact flaunts this status and that both her and Leonor enjoy the male gaze (216), Zezé's use of her perceived honour for social advancement can also be interpreted as her manipulating the system to her benefit. But as an adult, Zezé loses this protection; her financial circumstances force her to turn to lovers for support, and she abandons any pretext of being honourable. Indeed, her relationship with Leonor is ultimately ruined by Zezé's sexual exploits with Leonor's husband Luis. When the protagonist first notices his interest, she knows she will not be able to resist him and wonders whether she will feel guilt for robbing Leonor of her husband's love (45). Soon thereafter, she and Luis kiss at a party and begin their affair (47), which ends with Leonor discovering their infidelity and casting Zezé out of their home. Hypocritical Leonor soon finds another female lover to maintain while also being committed to Luis, and Zezé is alone. These relationships combine two sexual deviances: infidelity and homosexuality. It is interesting to note that although Vicente presents queerness as natural in this novella, both characters are also adulterous, a common preconception about the LGBTQ+ community that will be evidenced again in our study of Carmen de Burgos's unfaithful characters (section 3.3.2.2.).

⁹³ A footnote explains that the term means “‘virgen en apariencia’, pues no ha « conocido varón »” (44).

Moreover, the most important comment on honour and purity is the story of Zezé's neighbour Elisa, seduced, impregnated, and abandoned by a *donjuán*. The protagonist, hearing her tale, vows to protect her, and reflects on the injustice:

Otra víctima más de ese cariño efectista, regulado por los prejuicios sociales, prejuicios inhumanos a quienes tantas víctimas se inmolan. ¿Cuándo necesitamos más del cariño de los nuestros que en los trances difíciles? ¿Por qué no nos aceptan cómo somos? ¿Por qué ese afán de reformar a su capricho y amoldar a las convenciones nuestro carácter, anulando nuestra personalidad e imponiéndonos el agradecimiento y la esclavitud...? (64)

Although Elisa's misadventure has a much happier ending than Teresilla's, the message is the same: society blames the female victims of men, and their loved ones shun them when they are most needed. Even Elisa's mother, who sneaks her daughter some money and recommends she go to Madrid, maintains the status quo of "¡La moral ante todo!" (65). But while Teresilla was left to deal with the aftermath of her seduction more or less alone, Zezé finds a solution for Elisa that will satisfy the appearance of honour. One night, she realizes that within such a ridiculous honour code, what is easily lost can also be easily regained through marriage (65).

So, she begins volunteering at a hospital and finds a terminally ill man of a similar stature as her—Manuel Bruno, dying of tuberculosis.⁹⁴ Zezé's plan is to steal his identity and marry an eight-month-pregnant Elisa to save her from ruin, with the help of their landlord, doña Pasito, and their neighbour, a male student.⁹⁵ But Elisa gives birth to a little girl before Manuel passes away;

⁹⁴ Within the Romanticism movement of the 19th century, tuberculosis was often associated with beauty standards—pale skin and flushed cheeks—and literary creation with the "tubercular writer" trope. At the same time, notes Susan Sontag, tuberculosis also carried a certain taboo—many feared the mysterious disease, which was identified as a bacterial infection in 1882, and refused to discuss it even with the afflicted patient (6-7, 11).

⁹⁵ The first lesbian marriage recognized in Spain was that of Marcela Gracia Ibeas and Elisa Sanchez Loriga in 1901, for which Elisa pretended to be a man. This historic event is brought to the big screen in *Elisa y Marcela* (Dir. Isabel Coixet, 2019).

finally, after his death, the student arranges the necessary documentation and writes a letter to Elisa's parents from the now-deceased "husband" to ensure her future and baby Emilia's—within the façade of this "marriage," the child is no longer proof of Elisa's extramarital sexual activity. Meanwhile, Zezé disguises herself as Bruno and weds Elisa in a dim church. Indeed, referencing Butler, Ainoa Iñigo Clavo explains that "Al no poder cambiar las reglas de respetabilidad de la sociedad en la que viven, las dos jóvenes se ven obligadas a subvertirlas a través de esta parodia. La *performance* de género, por lo tanto, sirve para liberarlas" (80). And as Zezé had predicted, "*con la vuelta de honor*" (67) of the daughter, "conforme recibió su padre la carta, le entró el ataque de cariño, y presto salió en busca de su hija. ¡Ya no podía la muchacha viajar sola! ¡Ya tenía honra! ¡Ya era un ser humano...!" (68). The protagonist is left reflecting once again on her society, "más convencida que nunca, *del valor real de la honra...*" (68). Elisa's tale, nearly identical to Teresilla's until the end and similar to what many of Vicente's contemporaries experienced—hence her constant criticism of the *donjuán* (see section 2.4.1)—showcase the toxic applications of what an important sector of the public considers appropriate, decent, and traditional. Vicente does not hesitate to label this failed moral code ridiculous, herself italicizing the points she seeks to highlight: honour is something too easily lost and gained, and its inflated value only harms women and society.

2.3 The Beginnings of the Modern, Educated Woman

Amidst the nationwide preoccupations with the condition of education in Spain in the second half of the 19th century, the bourgeois, anticlerical, liberal, and progressive prevailed. These focal points were also vital in the *Institución libre de enseñanza*, created by Spanish philosopher and educator Francisco Giner de los Ríos (1839-1915) and a team of (male) university professors in 1878. Its goal of remodeling Spanish pedagogy in the 1800s impacted women in the 20th century, primarily by reducing illiteracy rates (especially in urban areas) and encouraging

women's appearance in university settings. At the same time, many initiatives and activists focused on women's education specifically. During the 1892 *Congreso Pedagógico Hispano-Portugués-Americano* in Madrid, for example, Pardo Bazán presented a powerful argument on the difference between women's and men's education: "No puede, en rigor, la educación actual de la mujer llamarse tal *educación*, sino *doma*, pues se propone por fin la obediencia, la pasividad y la sumisión" ("La educación" 131). These real-life politics strongly influenced the fictional women that dotted the pages of contemporary literature, creating a new model of female character in novels and theatre especially (Ena Bordonada, "Jaque" 89). As these new female models—in both books and Spanish society—appeared in the first years of the 20th century, encouraged by various women's education movements, so too did male-authored texts romanticizing traditional gender roles (Johnson, *Gender* 19). Women were associated with the *pueblo* and symbolized Spain's "eternal national tradition" in the country's quest for identity (20); many rejected the idea of usurping tradition to educate women and men equally.

However, feminists like Acuña and López de Ayala sought education reform with the clear objective of instructing women and girls the same way as men in order to ensure autonomy and emancipation from the father or husband (Gómez Blesa 53). As they believed the cause of this "esclavitud femenina" was primarily religious ideology, it is unsurprising to see a strong anticlerical argument in the writings of Spanish women such as Belén de Sárraga Hernández (1874-1951): "En vano vosotros los republicanos contra la monarquía; el clericalismo que de ella se alimenta, gobernando a nuestras mujeres en el confesionario ... la hacen fuerte" (qtd. in Gómez Blesa 54).⁹⁶ As such, in both politics and literature, equal access to education and dismantling the monopoly of the Church over public instruction and daily life went hand in hand.

⁹⁶ Domingo Soler and López de Ayala also held strong anticlerical views (Charnon-Deutsch, "Women Moved" 44). These activists also called out the double standards of their *librepensadores*

At this crossroads of modernity, authors like Vicente used fiction to put forth their arguments on the debate surrounding social progress, class divides, and women's integration into public life. Women's fiction from this period "gave birth to a position for women in the public sphere long before it was a lived reality" for Spanish women as feminism had yet to develop in the nation, in large part due to the inexistence of a well-defined middle class until the late 1800s (Mercer 23). But with the turn of the century, the changing place of women in society prompted newspapers and magazines to publish sections destined to female readers—and not only about children and the home (Ena Bordonada, "La invención" 35). So too began in earnest women's contributions to these publications, addressing "women's" themes but also general topics from a feminine perspective (35). For Vicente, it was the time to promote social advancement and identify its main impediments for women: the Church, traditional marriage, insufficient education, and limited career choices. As Mercedes Barranco Sánchez notes, Vicente imparts on her readers that only "la educación puede proporcionar y liberar al hombre de la opresión" while family, school, and the Church impose "la opresión del individuo en general y de la mujer en particular" (9). This author's quest for women's liberation can be summarized with a line from the final page of *Zezé*: "Si no hubiera protesta, no habría lucha, y si no hubiera lucha, no habría progreso" (99).

Vicente's social criticism focuses on three aspects: the situation of women in her era, the Church, and the bourgeoisie (Clavo 71-72). We will first examine the unambiguous anticlerical arguments put forth by Vicente in her novellas, remitting to the analysis of the priest pretending to be a ghost in section 2.1.2. Due to the interconnected nature of social problems and the Church in early 20th-century Spain, we will then highlight how Vicente addresses three women's issues in

peers who advocated for equality in public but expected a traditional wife in the privacy of their home (Gómez Blesa 54).

Zeze: the poor state of education, the lack of available career options for women, and marriage as an (un)necessary evil (with nods to “La derrota de don Juan” and “El huerto encantado”).

As we saw with “El huerto encantado,” Vicente is expressly critical of the clergy, satirizing its members through their social and sexual misconduct. Lily Litvak notes that this is common in the erotic novel at the time, though often in the figure of a priest offering absolution and a (sexual) exorcism of the evil plaguing the woman confessing (70). Though not an erotic novel itself, in *Teresilla*, a similar incident occurs when the protagonist, lost and confused after her first misadventure with Francisco, finds herself on the steps of a church, and a priest invites her into his confessional booth to admit to her sins. At first, he represents her hope for salvation (130); she does not notice “las risitas maliciosas del cura que parecía gozar con su narración” as she recounts all her thoughts, feelings, and passions (131). This religious authority demands more and more almost pornographic details surrounding Teresilla’s shame—“¡Cuenta!... ¡Cuenta!” (133)—enjoying her story with voyeuristic excitement. Vicente describes his arousal: “El cura se frotaba las manos. ... Por momentos sentía un ímpetu irresistible de besar a la chica como lo había hecho Francisco. Parecía que de pronto aquella naturaleza reprimida en la juventud con violencia brutal, adormecida o entorpecida en la vejez, se despertase con una extraña e irresistible sensualidad” (133). He even asks about the specifics of the sexual intercourse, what he considers “lo más importante... El modo... ¿Cómo [le] hizo? [Quiere] saber cómo [le] hizo...” (135). This is what incites Teresilla to notice the priest’s inappropriate attitude, his bloodshot eyes, and her repugnance at his reaction (136). Unlike in many male erotic novels, Vicente interrupts the priest’s scheming by allowing her protagonist to leave the church, albeit in tears and wondering if this is true religion and why she had tasked it with her regeneration (136).⁹⁷ A few pages later, once she is back with

⁹⁷ The figure of the priest appears frequently in 19th-century novels. Like in *Zeze*, Pardo Bazán’s 1886 *Los pazos de Ulloa*, for example, presents a priest as a false friend to a weakened woman.

her family, the peal of distant church bells triggers a deep unease in Teresilla—“¿Y no es bastante penitencia la que sufro?... ¿Quieres ponerme otra, viejo feo?” (146)—and a bout of suicidal ideation. Though the scenes pertaining to religion are brief, Vicente is able to demonstrate to readers not only the church’s monopoly over morality, but also the potential exploitation and sexual corruption made possible by placing morality in the hands of the clergy. Her denigration of this priest and the one in “El huerto encantado” are similar in that the characters find sexual gratification in vulnerable women while hypocritically helping society maintain its codes of conduct surrounding female virtue.

Vicente maintains her anticlerical argument even in *Zeze*, blaming religion for the protagonist’s widowed aunt’s obsession with hell and the devil, and for her change in personality: “nunca he podido comprender cómo esta mujer que no fue tonta, que había viajado mucho y que se había criado libre hubiera caído en tanta imbecilidad ... Sólo puede explicármelo la sugestión. Sabido es que por medio de la sugestión auricular vienen los curas imperando” (14). According to Cristina Arias Vegas, “La tía encama, perfectamente, el tipo de la beata que interpreta la religión como mortificación y sufrimiento” (76). The aunt stops attending the theatre and hosting parties and *salones* (Vicente 13). Here, the author not only highlights the negative influence of religious authority figures, but also opposes Christianity and the modern woman—raised free, travelling the world, and building an intellectual community, yet reduced by a predatory priest. In contrast, one of the nuns at Zezé’s boarding school, Angélica, who “era contraria a las ceremonias religiosas; decía que Dios es el universo” and suffered under her fellow Sisters’ hypocrisy (35), is one of Zezé’s most important allies.⁹⁸ Arias Vegas notes that Zezé fondly remembers this nun, looking to

Similarly, in *La regenta* (c. 1884-1885) by Leopoldo Alas (1852-1901), pen name Clarín, a religious figure takes advantage of the vulnerable Ana Ozores, which also happens to Teresilla.

⁹⁸ One instance of this hypocrisy is another nun’s clandestine relationship with a man from the community—the protagonist and Leonor observe this nun sneaking the man into the convent on

her as a great influence on her youth (76). Christina Karageorgou-Bastea describes her as a liberal woman who “exemplifies solidarity among women, free thinking and disobedience, love for knowledge and adaptability. Sister Angélica does not believe in God but in the laws of the universe” (254). Ana Cabello-García, meanwhile, focuses on the fact that “Además de desvelar las relaciones sexuales que mantienen las monjas a escondidas, Zezé nos cuenta la opresión y la hipocresía en la que viven, que si bien pareciera que gozan de libertad, no es tal, ya que no debiendo obediencia a ningún hombre se la deben a Dios, dando como resultado una vida más sumisa si cabe” (104). Both the inclusion of this character and the distance the author establishes between Angélica and traditional religious subordination suggest that Vicente does not condemn religion itself, but rather the men and the systems who exploit the power it awards them. As an adult, Zezé affirms her disbelief in a higher power: “Además, yo no puedo creer en Dios, si he de creer en su paraíso y en su infierno, porque el paraíso y el infierno están en mí como el día y la noche están en la Tierra” (Vicente 35). This leads Clavo to propose that

En la novela se plasma la disolución nietzscheana de las verdades absolutas en la postura que manifiesta la protagonista hacia la existencia de Dios ... los hombres han asesinado a Dios, han terminado con las verdades absolutas y ahora lo que nos queda, tal y como afirma el filósofo, es un horizonte borrado. Por lo tanto, no hay dirección hacia donde moverse, sino puras interpretaciones, puro perspectivismo. Es la misma visión que comparte Zezé en su testimonio y en su actitud ante la vida. (69-70)

Not only is the protagonist questioning the legitimacy of the Church and its disciples, but also the existence of God himself, largely due to the suffering she has already endured here on Earth. As

multiple occasions (Vicente 27). While the Sisters are critical of Zezé’s relationships, at least one of them is also (secretly) usurping sexual norms.

such, she can justify her manner of living for herself without caring how she will be judged by others, neither in life nor in the afterlife, should one happen to exist.

Turning to the topic of education, in the early 1900s, there was little opportunity for girls and women to access the same sort of schooling as their male counterparts, especially in rural areas. Reminiscent of Gough's eighth characteristic of male power—withholding society's knowledge and cultural attainments from women, including professional discrimination (768)—Vicente alludes to this issue in her larger criticism on the lack of career choices for women due to their incomplete education in *Zezé*. Ena Bordonada summarizes this social critique: “alude al retraso social, material y cultural de un pequeño pueblo levantino en el último capítulo de *Zezé*, haciendo hincapié en las murmuraciones de la clase media, frente a la naturalidad de trato de la clase campesina y, sobre todo, denuncia la mediocridad e inutilidad de la enseñanza que imparte la maestra, Doña Angustias, en la escuela del pueblo” (“Entre” 119). Indeed, the brief description of the rural education system suggests that these schools leave a lot to be desired: “Doña Angustias ... era la profesora más aristocrática del pueblo. Casi no sabía leer ni escribir, pero ¿qué falta hacía?; en cambio, era muy primorosa. Sus alumnas aprendían a bordar, a hacer flores, y, especialmente, unas muy cucas canastitas de pepitas de melón. Con esto, y sabiendo el catecismo, estaba admirablemente terminada la educación de las señoritas del pueblo” (Vicente 94). Ironically, the teacher can barely read and write, but she imparts domestic and religious knowledge to her female students, thus “completing” their education or their *doma*, as Pardo Bazán would frame it. Although this comes at the end of the novel, it highlights the argument Vicente has been presenting over the previous chapters—women lack opportunities for advancement in society, starting with an education that focuses on preparing them for traditional gender roles rather than active participation in the public sphere. Compared to these students, *Zezé* is cultured; she likes to travel, read, and play the piano, drawing from international composers like Frédéric Chopin

(Poland, 1810-1849), Franz Liszt (Hungary, 1811-1886), and Richard Wagner (Germany, 1813-1883). Recognizing the nation's educational inequalities is crucial in understanding why Zezé's career path led her to being a *cupletista*, a singer of short songs called *cuplés* most often performed in theatres.

Cabello-García explains that “En los inicios del s. XX surge un nuevo y emblemático modelo de mujer: la cupletista, vinculada de manera inequívoca a la esfera pública, configurada en el imaginario social colectivo como la encarnación del deseo, la lujuria y el erotismo, y representante de una de las figuras femeninas que goza de mayor libertad e independencia en la España de esta época” (95). It is unsurprising that a woman exercising her freedom would face social reprimands, especially attacks on her virtue, at a time where traditional notions of honour still impacted public perceptions. One of the many ways *cupletistas* were denigrated was through male literature; indeed, “estas mujeres fatales inspiran en muchas ocasiones el tema -central o marginal- de la novela galante o erótica” (Cabello-García 96). But Vicente takes a different approach to the literary *cupletista*, centering her narrative around a protagonist who proudly identifies as such in spite of the challenges. According to Cabello-García, the author “le atribuye a la profesión de tiple una carga positiva, pues teniendo en cuenta la escasa o nula educación de la mujer en España y su absoluta dependencia del varón (legal, social, económica, emocional e intelectual), esta es una de las pocas salidas para iniciar el camino de la independencia” (106). Clavo expounds that as a *cupletista*, “la protagonista estaría por debajo de los homosexuales que tienen relaciones estables, casi al fondo, con los promiscuos, en la frontera de la base de la pirámide [de la respetabilidad]” (76). This is the social hierarchy with which Vicente opens her novella. But the narrative never depicts Zezé performing, so “the expectations of a body that is only an object of desire are demystified, for the reader never converts into a spectator” (Karageorgou-Bastea

256). Instead, Zezé is allowed to defend her career path to both the narrator and the audience, then retires when her financial situation no longer requires her to work.

Right from the first pages of the novella, Zezé's job scandalizes the other passengers on the train, beginning with a woman and her daughter. The protagonista explains to the narrator: "Me ha tocado un camarote donde va una señora con su hija, la que, apenas se ha enterado de que soy cupletista, ha puesto el grito en el cielo, quejándose al comisario. —Le parece a usted —ha dicho la buena señora, —que voy a consentir que mi niña duerma al lado de una... cupletista?" (5). We learn that the protagonist is a *cupletista* because her landlord, the kind and supportive doña Pasita, was one in her youth (59); Pasita warns her about agents and contracts that should be signed only as a last resort (71) and encourages her to develop as a performer. Impressed with her voice, Zezé's teacher encourages her to turn to the *zarzuela*, earning her a small contract fairly quickly (91). So begins her career, which takes her around Europe and even to Latin America. The profession of *cupletista* effectively awards Zezé the opportunity to see the world, which directly translates to freedom. It is during one of these business trips that the narrator and the protagonist meet aboard a train travelling along the Río de la Plata.

Trains were especially important in this era, offering women a new form of travel: "Aquellas mujeres salen, viajan, se benefician de la facilidad que les ofrecen los nuevos medios de transporte — principalmente, el tren — y narran las novedades vividas en crónicas periodísticas, recogidas con frecuencia en libros de viajes" (Ena Bordonada, "La invención" 40).⁹⁹ Right away, readers are offered three signs of Zezé's modernity and freedom: the train trip, which she is taking unaccompanied; her career, along with her assurances that she is an honourable person

⁹⁹ The train also remits to the transient heterotopia Foucault describes in "Des espaces autres" due to its temporary nature—the characters in this setting are constantly in movement (as the train advances) and will ultimately go their separate ways at the end of its journey.

nonetheless; and her clothing choices that also contribute to her liberation. Zezé enters the train wearing “un traje corte sastre” (Vicente 4), which remits to Ena Bordonada’s point on how “las mujeres van eliminando prendas que deformaban su cuerpo y limitaban sus movimientos” (“La invención” 37)—clothing is integral in both queer and modern identity, as we will see in sections 3.3.1.1 and 4.1.2. The chapter concludes with Zezé justifying her path—“En España, la mujer que se ve obligada a resolver por sí misma el problema de la vida, difícilmente puede hacerlo en forma decorosa, y, de lo malo, lo mejor es hacerse cupletista” (7)—and her cabinmate, a writer reminiscent of Vicente herself, agrees to listen to and write down Zezé’s story, thereby justifying her arguments to a larger Spanish audience. She is also unmarried, and the way Vicente presents marriage throughout *Zezé* and her short stories leave no room for doubt that the author also believes marriage is an antithesis to female liberation.

Marriage, as one of the few respectable options for middle- and upper-class women in Spanish society in the first decades of the 20th century, was often promoted as the catchall solution to everything—from accidental pregnancies (as we saw in section 2.2) to financial woes to deviant female behaviour. But the idealized domestic wife and mother was beginning to undergo a strict deconstruction at the hands of activists and writers alike. Certainly, female authors “rechazan el tipo de mujer perfecta o casi perfecta, convertida en objeto sensual y erótico creado y deseado por el hombre. Por el contrario, construyen un personaje femenino próximo a la normalidad, en el que caben las imperfecciones estéticas, sin que por ello el personaje pierda atractivo e interés narrativo” (Ena Bordonada, “Jaque” 100). Ena Bordonada highlights Vicente’s use of phrases such as “No era fea” and “No podía considerarse hermosa” before signalling virtues such as intelligence and character instead, thereby rejecting the sexually gratifying image of the woman built for male readers (Introduction, *Sombras* XLI). Often, she begins by introducing the reader to the female character’s merits other than her beauty; for example, the woman in “La derrota de don Juan” is

described as “artista célebre por su talento y su belleza” (Vicente 9)—her talent comes first. Favouring intellect over beauty challenges traditional expectations for women in order to be good candidates for marriage; rather than a pretty homemaker, she is talented, educated, freethinking, and worldly. This contributes to Vicente’s argument against traditional marriage, which she primarily frames as a financial opportunity for women, not a loving relationship.¹⁰⁰ For example, “El huerto encantado” begins by setting the scene with a young woman, having purchased a home near the haunted garden in question, and her older maid. Toro Ballesteros proposes that “No corrían mejor suerte las viudas en buena posición económica que no permanecían junto a un familiar varón ni volvían a casarse”—and these two women, nicknamed by the townsfolk “Las misteriosas,” are a perfect example of women operating outside the control of men (*Viaje* 329).

An even clearer example occurs in *Zeze*, when the banker tries once again to convince the protagonist that marriage would benefit them both. He says, “Y ¿por qué no? ¿Qué podría faltarle? Tendría usted cuanto quisiera, coches, trajes, alhajas... Tengo un nido que parece un paraíso...” to which the protagonista responds, “¿Con serpiente y todo?” (49). With this, Vicente proposes that what men picture as paradise is, for women, only an illusion—something sinister lurks beneath the surface, like the snake from the Bible story of Adam and Eve. Indeed, the longer Zeze is around the banker, the more his desire increases and the more repulsed she becomes by what she finds; living together during her convalescence leads her to discover his erotomania and be the victim of his passions (86). And yet, Zeze’s landlord believes that “querer a un hombre sin dinero era cosa

¹⁰⁰ Even when a character marries for love, she is quickly disillusioned. For example, in “Alma loca,” Vicente laments the predetermined path of the bourgeois woman toward an advantageous marriage. The ghost summarizes her life story: first, the “frívola educación” of Spanish girls, then falling in love at 17 and marrying two years later, then children (Vicente, “Alma” 9). In the same sentence, she admits she *could* have been happy—but, having nowhere to direct her energy and passions, she occupied herself by making both herself and her husband miserable with her extreme jealousy (9).

de tontas” (61) and feels no pity for Zezé’s misery, which seem to her “tonterías ... fáciles de soportar” since she has housing security and all the material goods she could want (87). The landlord subscribes to the belief that a fair exchange is taking place—sexual gratification and domesticity for financial stability—which remits to the argument that marriage is another form of prostitution. But Zezé denounces this hypocrisy when she is finally ready to escape the banker by selling jewellery he had gifted her, referring to herself as an “instrumento de placer” for this rich man and asking: “¿Quién es un ser para hacer de un otro una propiedad contra su gusto?” (88). It is only once Zezé inherits her aunt’s fortune that she is completely free to enjoy her life as she pleases; she no longer needs to tether herself to a man for fiscal reasons. And in spite of the numerous challenges Zezé has faced over the course of her life—inadequate education, poor family life, career limitations, and the threat of marriage, all connected directly or indirectly to religious interference in Spanish society—Vicente allows the protagonist a happy, hopeful ending rife with implicit messaging regarding the true nature of women’s freedom.

2.4 Rogue Sexuality

2.4.1 Donjuanismo in “La última aventura de Don Juan,” “La derrota de Don Juan,” and the Novellas

According to Sara Wright, Don Juan lives to this day in the popular imagination as “the legendary seducer of women, charismatic rogue, ... A potent icon of uncontained male sexual energy” whose only constancy is his infidelity (5-6). A great many studies and books have been written on the *donjuán*, an archetype sourced from Spanish playwright Tirso de Molina’s (1579-1648) *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (c. 1630). Even more often has this character been reproduced in works stemming from the 17th century to the present, in Spain and abroad,

especially by men.¹⁰¹ In the original, Don Juan “scorns marriage and social convention and meets his end in hell” as punishment for his sinful life (Wright 9). Taking a different approach, José Zorilla (1817-1893) revitalizes the character in his 1844 *Don Juan Tenorio*, romanticizing the protagonist and launching Don Juan as a representative of Spanish national values; he also adds a redemption arc to emphasize the victory of Catholic morality (Johnson, *Gender* 111). Interestingly, Don Juan meets his match in a femme fatale character in *Doña Juana Tenorio* (1874) by playwright Rafael María Liern (1832-1897). This character returns in “La última aventura”—according to Carmen Becerra Suárez, the grieving widow, a “joven manipuladora, que cubre su rostro con un tupido velo, nos recuerda al prototipo de mujer fatal” (91). Wright summarizes how the *donjuán* has changed over time, making it impossible to reduce him to a single type or significance—individualism, religious transgression, consumerism, national Catholicism, colonization of the sexual sphere, a man of the aristocracy and of the people, a trickster, a parody, and more (14-19, 49).

Pardo Bazán’s “La última ilusión de Don Juan” (1898), Valle-Inclán’s four-part *Sonata* collection dating from 1902 to 1905, *Las hijas de Don Juan* (1907) by Blanca de los Ríos (1859-1956), and Alberto Insúa’s (1883-1963) *El alma y el cuerpo de Don Juan* (1912) are among the distinct representations of the mythical figure dating from Vicente’s writing epoch.¹⁰² Becerra Suárez’s analysis of what she names “donjuanismo desnaturalizado” highlights the impact of the short story genre in its diffusion (85-86).¹⁰³ She adds: “En la mayoría de las versiones, sobre todo

¹⁰¹ For example, one of the greats of French literature, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (1622-1673), stage name Molière, produced a play called *Don Juan* in 1665. In 1924, Argentina’s Lugones published a *donjuán* story of his own: “El secreto de Don Juan.”

¹⁰² While Pardo Bazán subverts the original Tirso narrative to make Don Juan a hero, Ríos highlights his duality as myth/reality and supernatural/human while presenting him as an alcoholic womanizer (Wright 27). Carmen de Burgos also tried her hand at a novel featuring this archetype: *La entrometida* (1921).

¹⁰³ Indeed, Pardo Bazán and Vicente’s works are short stories, and even Ríos’s is a novella.

las escritas en las postrimerías del siglo XIX, se modifica totalmente el carácter del héroe, se altera el papel de la mujer, se impide el enfrentamiento con la Muerte, dejándole envejecer, en suma, se despoja al mito de su trascendencia” (84). Johnson contends that while male modernist authors looked to Don Juan for inspiration and national identity—eliminating Molina’s and Zorilla’s condemnation of the character—, women wrote him as a parody, a symbol of “moral depravity” and “social irresponsibility” (*Gender* 22, 112).¹⁰⁴ As we will see in our analysis of Vicente’s texts, both the female and male archetypes of the traditional Don Juan myth are largely subverted.

Not long after Vicente writes her Don Juan short stories, Marañón proposes that the *donjuán* type is not the epitome of virility, but rather the erroneous sexuality of a man incapable of productive social conduct (*Tres ensayos* 48). In fact, since virility should be measured qualitatively rather than quantitatively, the perfect man should resolve his sexual instincts in very few or—better yet—just one love that is rich in both passion and sentiment (*Tres ensayos* 211). The most important masculine virtue, explains Marañón, is “austeridad”—not only severity but also exhibiting self-discipline over one’s senses and passions—, which is profoundly lacking in Don Juan (214). But the *donjuán* evokes the “canon de la belleza correcta y armónica de la mujer [más] que al enérgico de la masculinidad” which causes him to jump from woman to woman without ever finding the right one, a veritable “turista del amor” (212-213). It is interesting to note that Marañón relegates what he considers “wrong” sexuality to the realm of the feminine even while describing it as a perversion of male behaviour and identity. At the same time, he laments how the woman who, by choice or otherwise, involves herself in the *donjuán*’s games will only attain sexual and social abjection (213)—in other words, regardless of her willingness to entertain the *donjuán*’s sexual whims, she will be ostracized for her rapport with such a figure. By the mid-

¹⁰⁴ For more on Don Juan in the Spanish national identity, see chapter two of Johnson’s *Gender and Nation* and section 3.2 of this thesis.

thirties, Marañón had established that Don Juan was in fact homosexual as he did not conform to the doctor's standards of virility in many of his iterations—a womanizer or an effeminate man who in either case is seldom shown to have children or has only degenerate children (Wright 75).¹⁰⁵

Although she does not present homosexuality as perverse, like Burgos and Marañón, Vicente shares Marañón's later opinion that *donjuanismo* is a scourge on Spanish society—Don Juan is not a national hero of old, but an embarrassing and outdated male archetype. José Belmonte Serrano proposes that, while “Ángeles Vicente no pretende adoctrinar a nadie; ... tampoco oculta sus intenciones a la hora de denunciar la marginación de la mujer en una sociedad por entero machista en la que abunda, y de qué manera, el donjuanismo estúpido y, sobre todo, la insolidaridad hacia el género femenino” (192). More specifically, Vicente's “ataque habitual contra el donjuanismo [contribuye] así al proceso de desvirtuación que el mito de don Juan sufre en las últimas décadas del siglo XIX y las primeras del XX, visible en la obra de numerosos escritores, filósofos e, incluso, científicos” (Ena Bordonada, Introduction, *Sombras* XL). Indeed, in both of Vicente's Don Juan short stories, the archetype is humiliated, and his legacy is challenged through the deconstruction of stereotypes and a shift in power.

“La última aventura de Don Juan,” although brief, is divided into three scenes that take place in different settings. In the first page, the reader is introduced to a *donjuán* whose days of womanizing are at an end—he is depressed, bored, old, and worn out (Vicente 59). His boredom stems from his lack of “conquistas amorosas, único objeto de su vida” (59); as such, he is surprised and excited when a young widow stops him on a busy street and asks for help just as he was reflecting on his decline as a man. While she is only requesting money for the train to get home, Don Juan insists on accompanying her via carriage—deflecting her concern of improper

¹⁰⁵ Ríos's daughters of Don Juan, for example, turn to prostitution or mysticism, the latter also contracting tuberculosis.

appearances—and pressures her into eating at a restaurant together, promising to be a perfect gentleman. While they eat, he feels rejuvenated and validated in his quest of seduction. Nevertheless, the widow has a trick up her sleeve, hinted at by the last sentence of page two: “¡Sarcasmo de la vida, que hacía que aquella infeliz viviera engañando con la más triste, aunque disfrazada verdad!” (60). The reader soon realizes the woman is pretending to be seduced by Don Juan in order to mock him, a leitmotif Toro Ballesteros notes is common in Spanish *autoras*’ work at the time (“Don Juan” 364). The sob story the widow tells Don Juan is in fact a manipulation that leads to the second scene of the tale, which opens with the protagonist under anesthesia surrounded by close friends discussing the fate worse than death that destiny had in store for him (Vicente 61). They rehash what happened to Don Juan at the hands of the woman they call “hetaira”—a term for an Ancient Greek courtesan serving as a high-class prostitute or “companion”—whose deception resulted in his current condition (61).¹⁰⁶ Vicente summarizes their criticism of women: “Todos dentro de sí anatematizaban al mundo femenino, y cada cual formaba un proyecto para defenderse de la mujer, como si fuera el monstruo más raro y peligroso” (62). The author indirectly mocks this group of friends through their dramatic lamentations over Don Juan’s condition—worse than previous injuries during sex escapades, worse than getting shot in a duel—as they grieve around his bedside. But the protagonist is not dead; rather, his genitals have been amputated, so what his friends are mourning is his masculinity, directly intertwined with Don Juan’s identity. Vicente is effectively reducing the archetype to his (missing) body part.

Historically, involuntary penis removal has been used as a penalty for rogue sexual behaviour; in Ancient China, for example, immoral sexual activity carried this risk (Sommer 33). Later, in China and the Middle East during antiquity, castrated men served as guards or servants

¹⁰⁶ While this is the only mention of prostitution in this story, Vicente explores the theme in depth in *Teresilla*, which we will analyze in section 2.4.2.

to concubines and in harems (“Eunuch”). They functioned as a sort of third gender between man—defined by his genitals—and woman. This reduction of gender to the absence or presence of a penis also remits to Freud’s psychoanalysis. In 1908, he proposes the term “penis envy” to encapsulate what he believes women feel upon realizing they lack this key organ, opposing it to “castration anxiety” in boys and men that stems from their fear of becoming a sort of woman if they were to lose their manhood. Similarly, since Don Juan’s sense of self largely depends on his perceived virility, his shame and “decaimiento moral” (Vicente 63) are worsened by his newfound condition of eunuch. He feels homesick for his genitals and entertains thoughts of dying to escape this infernal punishment (63). According to Becerra Suárez, “El castigo adquiere ... un carácter simbólico: por un lado supone la muerte del mito y por otro, ya libre de obstáculos, la definitiva liberación de la mujer” (91). Don Juan’s emasculation in “La última aventura” is a punishment for his—and all other *donjuanes*’—immorality. And yet, in the last scene of the story, his luck begins to change.

Upon discovering a battalion is leaving Spain to fight in “la guerra con África,” Don Juan decides to make his nation the woman for whom he quests and embarks on a perilous journey he assumes will end in his glorious death (Vicente 63). But death, which Vicente personifies as feminine and flirty yet out of reach, eludes him still (63). Both of these new targets for his womanizing ways—death and Spain itself—are used to mock the *donjuán* archetype. With the latter, Vicente suggests the protagonist only develops a sense of patriotism when his personal goals prove unattainable, effectively connecting and satirizing the notions of gender and nation, so critical in early 20th-century Spanish society. With death as his maiden, Vicente ridicules Don Juan further: even in the midst of a war, he is unable to seduce his final *conquista amorosa*. With his military exploits growing more and more daring, Don Juan finds himself captive; the sultan who requested the protagonist’s detention has heard tales of this womanizing war hero and intends

to punish him by hanging him by what he assumes is an impressive penis (63).¹⁰⁷ Instead, he is disappointed both in Don Juan's degenerate appearance and in his surgical emasculation (63). But in the end, Don Juan does not have to change his ways; now in a harem at his captor the Sultan's order, he finds other ways to seduce the concubines who are supposed to be his punishment. He manages to "incitar a las mujeres a infidelidades psíquicas" (Toro Ballesteros, *Viaje* 226)—a nod to Vicente's spiritist interest in the brain. The story ends with the following: "¡Pobre sultán! Nunca podrá saber las infidelidades de sus mujeres, porque no conoce los fenómenos psíquicos, y no puede sospechar cómo don Juan, al descubrir que le quedaba un órgano fluídico, supo librarse del martirio..." (Vicente 63). In contrast to scene two, in which a friend lamented, "¡Pobre amigo mío!" (62), here it is the sultan who is unlucky as he, like many in the early 20th century and before, could not imagine sexual activity occurring without a penis. But Vicente's allusion can be interpreted in few ways: infidelity on a mental and emotional level, fitting the author's definition of "psíquico," but also activities that might cater to women's pleasure or even Don Juan's through other means. Through the lens of traditional heterosexuality and propriety, the possibilities for intercourse are limited, but as Vicente shows us in *Zeze*, sexual gratification is in fact achievable without a penis or a man at all.

In the early 20th century, Johnson highlights how the "male seducer represented a serious threat to women's precarious position in a bourgeois milieu, at a time when the 'angel of the house' archetype was the preferred model for female behavior" (*Gender* 122). As such, affirms Jordi Luengo López, "la estampa del clásico donjuán, bajo ninguna forma podía sostenerse en el contexto histórico-cultural definido por la modernidad, por eso [las mujeres] intentaron moldearlo

¹⁰⁷ This remits to another version of the Don Juan story, an unfinished satirical epic poem written between 1818 and 1824 by English author Lord Byron (1788-1824). In one of the 17 cantos—the last being incomplete at the time of Byron's death—Don Juan is sold into slavery in Istanbul and finds himself attending to one of the sultan's wives.

a su gusto a través del insulto y el descrédito” (qtd. in Toro Ballesteros, “Don Juan” 367). This explains the approach Vicente takes with “La derrota de Don Juan” in order to humiliate the protagonist, placing him in a more modern setting. His name is Adolfo Santori, and he approaches famous and beautiful artist Raquel as she sits by the fireplace of a luxury bed and breakfast, immediately offering her dramatic compliments: “¡Es usted una mujer extraordinaria! A su lado me siento insignificante, pequeño, tan pequeño... que quisiera que usted me dominase” (Vicente 129). Raquel takes an ironic tone with Adolfo as she expresses her surprise at his willingness to be dominated by her, referring to his reputation. As he attempts to convince her the rumours are exaggerated and declares his love, Raquel can only laugh as she points out the inconsistencies in his speech, thus highlighting the absurdity of his confession and even telling him this outright—she is “haciéndole ver lo ridículo del procedimiento” (132). His exclamations over her beauty are even more dramatic than the priest’s in “El huerto encantado,” once again reminding the reader of courtly love and its histrionic pronouncements of devotion.¹⁰⁸ But Raquel will not be swayed, referring to the women he seduces as his victims and offending Adolfo with not only her refusal to be charmed, but also calling his attempt “ridículo,” “vulgar,” and “tonto” (131-132).

Though focusing more on the 1920s, Johnson summarizes that the infamous Don Juan figure’s representation reveals male and female authors’ attitudes toward many domestic questions (*Gender* 143). While one of these issues is the womanizing ways of the *donjuán*, Vicente also underscores the topic of class. Indeed, Raquel also criticizes Adolfo for attempting to seduce her the way he would a *modista* and even mocks his methods: compliments, promises, sacrifices,

¹⁰⁸ Like Gracia describes for the male lover in *amor cortés* (16), Adolfo’s reason for existing and for his continued survival is, so he claims, his passion for Raquel, without which he would be destroyed.

begging, and finally tears.¹⁰⁹ She distances herself from the working class, explaining that like her, “Una mujer de talento, consciente de sus actos, se entrega á un hombre ... porque así le place... en un momento de... aburrimiento, de... curiosidad... Por cualquier razón, menos por haber sido conquistada” (Vicente 133). She goes on to confirm that “El conquistado es él, el hombre,” which Adolfo admits are disconcerting opinions (133).¹¹⁰ She claims that Adolfo’s offer of doing anything she wants, sacrificing anything, “Suele dar resultado con las burguesas poco ilustradas” (135), once again establishing the importance of class and education on a woman’s ability to see through a *donjuán*. Then she mocks his suggestion of soulmates as something only romantic schoolgirls would believe (136). She supposes she is the only intelligent woman who has ever crossed paths with Adolfo (137). Finally, she tells Adolfo his tears would only work on a *jamona*, a term for a plump, older, single woman (137). Rather than criticizing only the *donjuán*, Vicente also belittles other women who could not challenge the womanizer due to their class, age, or educational shortcomings. However, she does not explicitly blame these women for this powerlessness.

Meanwhile, Vicente also uses Raquel to comment on the very notion of beauty—beauty is simply a convention, Raquel has already been called beautiful by many, and regardless she also has a mirror and can form her own opinions. Raquel also proves her intelligence not only through her witty banter, but also in her references to classic literature and her use of Latin.¹¹¹ While Adolfo

¹⁰⁹ While “modista” translates to “seamstress,” the connotation suggests a more stereotypical, working-class, simple profession. This is not a tailor with a certain status, but rather an innocent woman who sews and makes small repairs to clothes all within the domestic confines of the house.

¹¹⁰ Vicente also references German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) in this section, agreeing through Raquel with only one of his contentions: that humans are an instrument of nature. His 1818 *The World as Will and Representation* proposes, among many theories, that man’s instincts, actions, and desires are driven by the will of reality or the natural world.

¹¹¹ From the resistance to intellectual women comes the Spanish saying, “Mujer que sabe latín ni tiene marido ni tiene buen fin.” Mexican author Rosario Castellanos’s collection of essays *Mujer que sabe latín* (1973) ironically references this biased saying.

acts like a traditional *donjuán*—what Johnson calls “extreme male egotism and a disregard for a morality that takes women’s needs into account” referring to “Valle-Inclán’s ugly, sentimental, Catholic” *donjuán* figure (*Gender* 143)—he is thwarted at every turn by both the author and Raquel. This is an example of how “Women writers strove to neutralize Valle-Inclán’s morally slippery Don Juan through modified realist strategies the reveal of feminine and feminist consciousness” (Johnson, *Gender* 143). Interestingly, Vicente once again alludes the historical punishment of castration in a *donjuán* story, though through a reference to another piece of literature, the 1717 epistolary poem “Eloisa to Abelard”.¹¹² But this time Adolfo’s punishment will not be physical; rather, he is emotionally and verbally humiliated while serving as entertainment for Raquel (and the reader).

One example of this humorous and ironic dialogue takes place as Adolfo seems almost ready to abandon his quest in the last pages of the story:

SANTORI (*desesperado*)—Entonces... entonces... ¿Qué hacer para ser interesante á los ojos de usted?...

RAQUEL—¿No cae usted en ello? Una cosa muy sencilla.

SANTORI (*con afán*)—¿Cuál?

RAQUEL—¿Cuál?... Ser interesante. (136)

As Adolfo’s desperation increases and he gets more offended, Raquel tells him the only interesting thing about him is how he encapsulates all the “vulgaridades amorosas” she has come across (137). The *donjuán* doubles his efforts, claiming he will introduce Raquel to a modern relationship better than her inept past suitors, to which the woman responds that she will only see him again if he

¹¹² Alexander Pope (1688-1744) wrote this poem based on the medieval story of Héloïse d’Argenteuil and her teacher Peter Abelard’s affair, and Peter’s subsequent castration by Héloïse’s family as punishment.

takes on the role of “súbdito” (139) and obeys her. He eventually agrees to Raquel’s (sarcastic) demands for a modern and more equal relationship, which denies the *donjuán* his traditional masculine role. How Vicente situates her characters is meaningful—the protagonist, the one in control, is the modern Raquel, “la que, conocedora de las anacrónicas técnicas del conquistador, expresa su desdén e indiferencia hacia él, incluso su desprecio, con un discurso irónico y sarcástico que dibuja a un fatuo, anticuado, ridículo y absurdo mujeriego” (Becerra Suárez 89). Similarly, Toro Ballesteros explains that in deconstructing the Don Juan myth, so too must his counterpart Doña Inés emerge in a new form (“Don Juan” 365). Becerra Suárez adds that the final line—“¡Pobre humanidad! ¡El feminismo se impone!”—confirms that Vicente is not searching for women’s dominion over men in a reversal of roles, but rather a new system away from antiquated norms (89). As such, the destruction of the Don Juan figure serves as a form of social criticism; no longer the great myth of old but rather a vulgar, common, laughable man, the *donjuán* exemplifies the need for liberation from traditional sexual expectations and even from female domesticity (89).

In *Teresilla*, there are multiple men who play this role, identified explicitly by the author as *donjuanes*, and some of them follow her mold of a foolish, older womanizer who has lost touch with reality. For example, doña Sabina is harassed by an aging dance instructor with rotten teeth who compliments her and grabs her hand, broadcasting his love, to which Sabina responds, “¡Déjeme en paz, viejo imbécil!” (113). However, Francisco’s version of the *donjuán* is characterized differently. Instead of a foolhardy old man, this *donjuán* is in his prime and signifies danger for the victims of his “conquista” (116). He forces Teresilla to drink wine to release her inhibitions (133), takes advantage of her innocence and inebriation, then allows his landlady—an older woman, Luisa, who is hinted to be his benefactor and lover—to kick Teresilla out in the

morning, referring to her as Francisco's latest "capricho" (134).¹¹³ Then, in spite of his mistreatment of the protagonist, she is once again seduced later in the book, convinced by his incessant pursuit of her that he truly loves her (173). He even invites her to run away with him, making grand promises of marriage that nearly inspire Teresilla to "creer con fe ciega en un porvenir de dicha" that of course never comes to fruition (175). And although he convinces her to spend the night with him again, resulting in her pregnancy, he soon teaches her that "ciertas cosas se prometen solamente; no se hacen" (183)—he will not and had never planned to marry her. While the *donjuanes* of Vicente's short stories and even Sabina's incidence serve to ridicule and reshape the narrative of the Spanish womanizer, with Francisco, Vicente takes a more serious approach, showcasing the society that does not forewarn its girls in the name of propriety, sets impossible standards of female virtue, and offers them no comfort or viable opportunities when they are "ruined" by dangerous men. Similarly, as we saw in section 2.2, in *Zezé*, the protagonist meets a pregnant woman named Elisa who has been seduced and abandoned by her *donjuán*, then expelled from her family home and travelled to Madrid in desperation. While this anecdote serves to make a point on honour while representing gender as a performance, it also exemplifies yet again the danger of allowing these seducers to wreak havoc on vulnerable women. Thus, Vicente imparts on

¹¹³ Francisco's benefactor, an older woman who supports him financially in exchange for sexual favours, is referred to as a "mala mujer" (106) and "vieja fea" (132). This sort of arrangement can be considered a sort of prostitution, though in this case Francisco is the one selling his body. The older woman treats the protagonist poorly—after Francisco and Teresilla spend the night at the apartment she provides, she exclaims that Francisco must now be tired of the girl and got his revenge (134). She also mentions she will not provide for Teresilla financially (134). While the reader is encouraged to dislike this character, in the end she is killed by Francisco, yet another of his victims who shows that in spite of the financial/sexual arrangement, Francisco did not relinquish his male seat of power.

the reader the necessity of deconstructing the myth of Don Juan and, with it, the tolerance for real *donjuanes* in Spanish society.¹¹⁴

2.4.2 Prostitution in the Novellas

As we saw in section 2.3, at the beginning of the 20th century, much of society looked toward the possibility of a modern, educated woman who participated in more academic and economic sectors than ever before. Though the debate regarding women's schooling raged on—many believed her only education should pertain to home and child—others fought “no sólo [por] su derecho a una instrucción, sino a una instrucción útil para conseguir un trabajo que le permita liberarse de la obligada protección y dependencia de un hombre de su familia” (Ena Bordonada, “Jaqué” 90). Without this education and its ensuing employment opportunities, women have limited means of financial profit—and prostitution requires no formal education. Spanish feminist author Margarita Nelken suggests that prostitutes from a bourgeois background turn to sex work upon finding themselves alone and with no education or job prospects; a larger percentage, however, are working-class and are seduced, abandoned, and forced to adopt prostitution as a means of financing their and their children's lives (Nash, *Mujer* 32-33). Nash highlights the

¹¹⁴ In *Zeze* there is only a passing mention of the *donjuán* in the summary of a character's fall from grace as “un juguete caprichoso para *mayor gloria* del estúpido donjuán” (Vicente 64). However, one could argue that *Zeze*'s mother's lover is an unofficial *donjuán* although he moves into her house for a while. Arias Vegas flags the mother as a “víctima prototípica de un donjuán, puesto que pierde totalmente su orgullo como mujer al malvender todos sus bienes para salvarle de la miseria, y su frágil mente enloquece cuando su amante egoísta decide pegarse un tiro” (75). Indeed, Vicente describes the mother as Ferrario's victim (15); he is morally corrupt, attractive yet so obsessed with his own image that he becomes repulsive, and intent on enjoying the material perks of life (15). Eventually, *Zeze* seduces Ferrario to exact vengeance on Ferrario and on her mother for her infidelity. It turns out to be easier than *Zeze* anticipated, this “perversa idea de enamorarlo para hacerles sufrir” (38), and she figures he was already interested. Until Ferrario bankrupts the family and vanishes, the protagonist feels she has triumphed: “Ferrario se convirtió en [su] esclavo, y [su] madre en una sombra que día a día se hacía más transparente” (39). This dynamic remits to Santori in “La derrota de don Juan,” who must also take on a submissive role if he is to win over his target, Raquel—in both cases, the women are playing games with the Don Juan figure.

widespread belief—across the political spectrum—in the connection between prostitution and the lack of economic means (*Mujer* 32).¹¹⁵ Many critics even show a degree of understanding toward these women due to their social and financial plight; others, however, blame the prostitute’s “inmoralidad, perversidad e insaciable apetencia sexual” for her occupation (33-34). This ties into the dichotomous perception of women: on the one hand, corrupt and sexually perverted, versus the asexual and spiritual mother (34).¹¹⁶

Domingo Soler, in writing to her friend and fellow writer Consuelo Álvarez Pool (1867-1959), lamented the “trata de blancas” which “existed in all social spheres, from the woman forced to prostitute herself in order to survive, to the single woman whose worth is measured by the size of her dowry ... she also pitied money-obsessed women and prostitutes for what they had become in order to cope in a world in which women were overwhelmingly dependent on men” (Charnon-Deutsch, “Women Moved” 42). Similarly, explains Toro Ballesteros, “la preocupación de Vicente por la oleada de prostitución no se circunscribió a una cuestión moral sino a una problemática de índole social que frenaba el avance de la mujer” (Introduction 209). Indeed, Vicente criticizes “la indefensión y destrucción de la mujer por la seducción del hombre que, tras abandonarla, a veces embarazada, y bajo la incompreensión hipócrita y moralista de la familia y de la sociedad toda, no le queda otra salida que la prostitución” in *Teresilla* especially, but also in *Zeze* and, subtly, in the short story “La trenza” (Ena Bordonada, “Entre el espíritu” 122). *Teresilla* follows this exact pattern of seduction, pregnancy, abandonment, and sex work. Her first introduction to this job is the café-brothel where she finds Francisco surrounded by “mujeres de mala vida” (Vicente 183)—

¹¹⁵ Rich, however, considers prostitution an example of Gough’s second characteristic of male power, “to force [male sexuality] upon [women]” (Gough 768; Rich, “Compulsory” 182). Prostitution also ties into the third characteristic, “to use [women] as objects in male transactions” (Gough 768).

¹¹⁶ We will examine in depth the figure of the Good and Bad Mothers as presented by Burgos in section 3.3.2.1.

a moral judgment she pronounces on a career path she will ironically take a few pages later. Soon after she arrives at the café, Francisco violently rejects her, and one of the sex workers—humanized by the author—helps her up, finds her a private room in which to drink some water, and gently escorts her out with the advice to never return (186).¹¹⁷ While Doreen Massey confirms that “brothels, were for men – the women who did go there were for male consumption” (234), Vicente offers a glimpse into the female solidarity that can develop in this space.

A dozen pages after, though years have passed in the narrative, a family friend named Juan comes across Teresilla in a tavern-brothel at a port. They talk for a while, and Teresilla admits to having suffered enormously (202); her mental health is poor, her tears lost in the “amargura y desesperación de sus terribles días” (205). After asking Juan if she disgusts him (205), Teresilla describes her journey from seduction to a brief stint of motherhood, then the grief and societal challenges that led to her current office. Teresilla does not fit the narrow definition of family values of the early 1900s as either a daughter or a parent—prompting her descent into sex work. Her distance from family values and class standards as a prostitute earn her the label of “public woman” (Mercer 75). Teresilla is used to make a statement about women’s work opportunities: “Probé todos los oficios. Me dijeron que era incapaz, pero que era bonita... ¿Entonces?... Si quería trabajo... permanecer en una casa, aunque fuese como sirvienta... ¿Comprendes?... Entonces... entonces... servir... trabajar... y...” (208). Then, she laughs bitterly, continuing: “Luego, empujada, empiezas a bajar, nadie te detiene, nadie te compadece, y es inevitable, hay que llegar

¹¹⁷ Francisco is described as “brutal” (181) and a “bruto” (185) and proves himself such through his actions. For example, after Teresilla begs him for help with her pregnancy, he threatens her and pushes her to the ground (186). The next time we hear about him, years have passed and he is incarcerated for killing his older mistress, the same one who was so cruel to Teresilla (210). In contrast, the French poet Luis seems an even better match for the protagonist—however, he too uses force against her in one scene, when he grabs her arm painfully and demands answers about her baby’s father, frightening Teresilla immensely (190). Brutal and corrupt are also the descriptors Vicente uses for Zezé’s mother’s lover, Ferrario, though we never see him act violently.

hasta el fin” (208). Vicente alludes to the proximity of domestic servants and prostitutes, both of whom sell their labour—“servir” and “trabajar” can be used to describe either job—with sex work as the ultimate result of female suffering and social oppression. After recounting her life story to Juan, she tells him she would have been better off killing herself (206). Of course, Juan attempts to change her mind, but the next morning he recognizes her drowned corpse (212). The novella ends with the dehumanizing exclamation of one of the brothel’s patrons: “¡Es la muchacha nueva de don Carillo!...” (212). In death, Teresilla is reduced to the property of the brothel’s owner, her identity as a prostitute eclipsing her name, her family, and her suffering.

In *Zezé*, Vicente describes a brothel as one of the “antros de corrupción donde ... los vicios y rencores ... aparecen en su brutal crudeza” (73). She notes the “olor a carne sudosa” and the “palabras más soeces” in these establishments, stating that when a human loses what distinguishes them from irrational beings, they become the most repugnant beast (73). Even after such a condemnation, she blames society for hiding its vices until it is too late for the victims of ignorance (73). *Zezé* reflects briefly on the “pobres mujeres que sirven hasta de escarnio” who have reached this point in their lives for various reasons, giving an example of an older, unattractive prostitute who begged her for money and admitted that she was simply trying to survive until death took her (74). Though Vicente does not seem to support the existence of prostitution in Spain, her argument is not the moral failings of the women, but rather the many levels of societal failings that see women forced into a job Vicente characterizes as suffering under male consumerism. This is evidence right from the first chapter, when *Zezé*’s passionate rant about the conditions of Spanish women recalls Pardo Bazán’s speech on women’s education as domestication:

La mujer ... tiene el cerebro atrofiado por la continua sugestión de obediencia que se le hace en la casa, en el colegio y en el confesionario. Vive convencida de su inutilidad, para otra cosa que no sea la esclavitud a que se somete pasivamente, y, cuando tiene que luchar,

como la instrucción que ha recibido es inútil, no le queda otro remedio que sucumbir... y sucumbe al único medio de que dispone, a la prostitución, donde, después de explotada en vil comercio, es despreciada, concluyendo así la sociedad de cometer su crimen como cualquier homicida vulgar. (Vicente 7)

There are three stages in the oppression of Spanish women, according to the protagonist. First, they are brainwashed into subservience by their families, schools, and churches. Then, when they face difficult times, they have neither the knowledge nor the experience to find a solution. As such, they turn to prostitution, where they are reduced to serving as merchandise. In this same dialogue, Vicente plays devil's advocate for a moment, using the narrator to voice an argument from the opposing faction on the morality of sex workers. But Zezé's response is unambiguous:

— ... El deseo del lujo y el vicio son efecto de la caída: en casos raros podrán ser la causa.

—Entonces, según su opinión, la sola culpable es la sociedad.

—Así lo creo. Estoy convencida de que si he descendido, no ha sido por mi culpa. (7)

We can safely conclude that regardless of whether Vicente feels prostitution is immoral, her focus lies on how women are victimized and forced onto this career path or others, like the *cupletista*, only to be ruthlessly denigrated by a society so intent on preserving ancient honour codes that it is unable to recognize the necessity of progress.¹¹⁸

2.4.3 Queerness and Eroticism in *Zezé*

At the turn of the century, Spain was caught between tradition and modernity, with many fighting to maintain familiar identities and social structures. The bourgeoisie realized that class distinctions could only be preserved through “cultivating and policing a strict gender

¹¹⁸ Prostitution will again be addressed in conjunction with marriage, adultery, and homosexuality in sections 3.3.2.1 and 4.3.3, first as a form of sexual deviance and then as an example of violence toward women.

differentiation that would foster productive marriages and improve their lineage in future generations” (Mercer 9). As such, the idea of lesbian relationships—which would not result in progeny—would seem even more detrimental to the Spanish national image. Yet these partnerships and experiences existed, and not only in the sort of literature intending to shock readers.¹¹⁹ Indeed, in this era, “sexual orientation serves as a springboard from which gender claims are spelled out at the crossroads where modernity confronts tradition in the heart of *casticismo*, and the liminal zones where performance of the body meets spectacle, entertainment, social class, and the nation” (Karageorgou-Bastea 262). Nevertheless, explains Cabello-García, Vicente’s inclusion of erotic lesbian experiences is surprising for a *female* author during a period when only male writers depicted sapphism in their erotic novels (105). *Zeze* drew much attention and criticism at the time of its publication and can now serve as one of the earliest—if not *the* earliest—example of sapphic Spanish fiction by a woman.¹²⁰

When addressing her newly published short stories, certain critics focused more on Vicente’s appearance than on her literary talents, or complimented her “manly” writing abilities.¹²¹ But *Zeze* was more contentious. One review in *El País* in 1910 declares: “Si un autor erótico de esos que está dando con prodigalidad la última hornada nos hubiera presentado *Zeze*, acaso estuviéramos en la obligación de indignarnos. Pero en nuestro caso no porque las vacilaciones de la carne desfilan en páginas aromadas por la delicadeza de la mano femenina” (qtd. in Ena

¹¹⁹ In section 4.1.3, we will discuss how some texts used sapphic desire for shock value.

¹²⁰ Heavily influenced by the Ancient Greek Sappho, Spanish Romantic poet Carolina Coronado (1820-1911) wrote poetry with clear sapphic undertones in the mid-1800s (Acosta and Haidt 159). Angela Acosta and Rebecca Haidt also refer to Coronado’s 1846 poem “Los cantos de Safo” in which the writer justifies the subject’s suicide as honourable (159).

¹²¹ Ena Bordonada notes that in the early 20th century, women writers would receive “críticas condescendientemente paternalistas, otras que rezuman un misoginismo implacable, y otras muchas que, al elogiarlas, les atribuyen valores masculinos” (“La invención” 27).

Bordonada, “Ángeles Vicente, narradora” 45).¹²² Another the same year in *Heraldo de Madrid* proclaims that Vicente writes “con una intrepidez muy poco femenina asuntos demasiado escabrosos” (qtd. in Ena Bordonada, “Ángeles Vicente, narradora” 45). We must again note the critic’s difficulty admitting women into traditionally male pursuits like writing; there is also the term *escabroso*—lurid—used to describe the eroticism between women in the novella. Others considered it pornography, bemoaning what they considered repulsive scenes of “sensualismo enfermizo y lésbico” (qtd. in Ena Bordonada, “Ángeles Vicente, narradora” 46). Indeed, censors and supporters gossiped and responded emphatically to *Zeze*’s publication, especially since the novel emboldened women to address their sexuality, and critics worried *Zeze* would fundamentally alter Spanish society (Bonmatí Gonzálvez and Cheesewright 274-275).¹²³

Contemporary scholars, however, have received this novella differently. Jiménez Madrid describes Vicente’s tone as direct, open, and without euphemisms in its consideration of lesbianism, even during erotic scenes (22). Barranco Sánchez celebrates how *Zeze* normalizes female homoeroticism (9). And, interestingly, Ena Bordonada does not identify *Zeze* as a lesbian book, or even an erotic one. Rather, it is for her the first Spanish piece by a woman—and among the first by Western women—to explore “la intimidad y la sexualidad de la mujer de modo directo, incluidos episodios de contenido lésbico” (Introduction, *Sombras* XIV).¹²⁴ But what is a lesbian

¹²² Not to be confused with the contemporary *El País* founded in 1976; another *El País* newspaper, a republican publication, existed in Madrid from 1887 to 1921.

¹²³ Even “El huerto encantado” combines a degree of eroticism with spirituality (Toro Ballesteros, Introduction 209-210).

¹²⁴ Ena Bordonada explains in depth why she is unwilling to consider *Zeze* a lesbian novel: “No hay duda de que lo más llamativo de esta novela es el contenido erótico, pero debo insistir en que no puede quedar reducida por eso a una vulgar novela erótica ni, mucho menos, se puede calificar de relato lésbico. El erotismo aparece como una nota más en el devenir de la protagonista que ira madurando a través de las distintas experiencias que vive hasta alcanzar su independencia gracias a su trabajo -ya la fortuna de una herencia- que le permite retirarse a vivir en serenidad. Si sorprende la habilidad que muestra la aurora en el campo erótico, sobre todo cuando en el resto de su obra conocida apenas hay huella de este tema” (“Entre” 145).

novel if not a story in which a woman develops a queer identity through experiences with other women, self-reflection and personal growth, and building herself a life independent of men?¹²⁵ This novella, written in 1909, paved the way for future additions to the Spanish corpus of lesbian literature—though lost to the ages at first, it is now a prime example of sexual fluidity from over a century ago.

Bella Zezé recounts her life story to her travel companion, including her sexual adventures with both men and women. Zezé's years in the convent can be ascribed to the “novela de internados” we will explore in depth in section 4.2.1 with Elena Fortún's boarding school novel *El pensionado de Santa Casilda*. This genre favours relationships between female students or between a female teacher and student, most often conceived for the benefit of the male gaze (Arias Vegas 77). Indeed, Zezé's protagonist has both of these connections while in the boarding school—first, an implicit relationship with the nun Angélica, then an explicit romance with her classmate Leonor.¹²⁶ But the clear sapphic eroticism in this novella takes place between Zezé and Leonor when they are boarding school classmates and later as adults.¹²⁷ One of Vicente's strategies is therefore to plant Zezé's queer awakening as natural and uncensored, a part of their identity that develops organically over the course of their lives. Looking at this sapphic development, we first see a friendship of great emotional intensity—“¿Me quieres?” asks Leonor, to which the protagonist replies, “Mucho” (26)—blooming into a sexual relationship. Vicente constructs the

¹²⁵ Building on our theoretical framework, we will continue to explore what constitutes a lesbian narrative in section 4.1.3.

¹²⁶ Compared to the unambiguous sexual activity between Leonor and Zezé, with the nun one must instead read between the lines: “me hacía ir a su cama. Allí le contaba mis penas, y ella me acariciaba dándome consejos” (20). The relationship also inspires “disaparatados comentarios” from classmates (Vicente 20). While the relationship between Leonor and the protagonist is safe and equal, the one between Zezé and an adult nun would today be considered pedophilia.

¹²⁷ Arias Vegas proposes that “a partir de la entrada de Emilia en el convento se observa una fuerte influencia de la literatura pornográfica, puesto que se sabe que Ángeles Vicente mantuvo relaciones de amistad con ... importantes autores de novela erótica del momento” (77).

bond between 14-year-old Zezé and Leonor, three years her senior, through a budding passion that grows from nervous kisses (23) to caresses growing in intensity (24), and finally to sexual release:

Nos abrazamos embriagadas en el perfume de nuestros cuerpos, y el fuego interior que nos abrasaba, degeneró en un espasmo voluptuoso. ... sus labios ardientes, como una llama, me quemaban al resbalar en una lluvia de besos. Mis miembros se estiraban en suprema convulsión. Perdí las fuerzas... me sentía morir... ¡Oh! ¡Qué momento de olvido y de locura!

Nos separamos avergonzadas. (29)

Looking at this passage, Ena Bordonada asks: “¿Estamos ante la descripción del primer orgasmo femenino descrito por una escritora española?” (“Entre” 145). Of the works that were not lost or destroyed, the answer is likely yes.

As an adolescent, Zezé responds to Leonor’s advances, but is sometimes plagued with guilt—for abandoning Sor Angélica—or anxiety about her life in the convent school. According to Holloway, “the language Zezé employs regarding her attraction to Leonor (‘la depravación’/‘locura’) is evocative of shame; furthermore, she hails the benefits of Leonor’s removal from school as having a ‘normalizing’ effect on her” (216). Ena Bordonada, too, proposes that Zezé discovers feelings of pleasure and culpability together (“Entre” 146). Conversely, Clavo contends that at no point in time during her youth does the protagonist feel guilty or strange due to her sexual leanings, considering them completely natural (81). Indeed, Zezé’s anxieties are more about the monotonies of her daily life than her sexual awakening. It is primarily the authorities at the boarding school who do not approve of queerness, except for Sister Angélica, who is unbothered by the homosexual nature of Leonor and Zezé’s closeness—though she is perhaps a bit jealous of losing Zezé’s attentions. This nun’s reaction to the clandestine relationship between her boarders reflects a reality of the time: “todo se lo había sospechado, y que nada le extrañaba, porque no era la primera vez que ocurría, antes al contrario, eran casos muy frecuentes en el

colegio” (Vicente 32). Nevertheless, eventually the girls are sent to separate dormitories and watched carefully at all hours until Leonor is removed from the school to get married (31-32).

As adults, the relationship between Leonor and Zezé begins anew, and the author’s description of their sexual passion reaches new depths. But this does not serve to gratify the (male) reader; rather, “el elemento erótico en esta novela parece estar en función exclusivamente del conocimiento y rechazo de unas formas de vida, que la preparan para alcanzar su arcadia particular” (Ena Bordonada, “Entre” 148). Even so, this text was shocking to its contemporary readers and even today is a surprising find within a predominantly male-oriented literary tradition, especially in the erotic genre. Moreover, male models of power endorse the notion that eroticism indicates female inferiority and should be devalued as a result (Clavo 80). As such, Vicente’s reclamation of female sexuality is even more striking; her characters unapologetically give in to their primal urges, caring little for appearances: “Todas las mañanas nos bañábamos juntas en una gran pila de mármol rosa, y el agua caliente y perfumada nos daba tal vértigo, que procedíamos como bestias, sin tener conciencia ni del tiempo que duraba nuestra locura” (Vicente 43). Ironically, both Leonor and Zezé are lauded in public—“En sociedad nos admiraban, y un ejército de pretendientes nos perseguía, asediando nuestra *virtud*” (43)—another criticism of traditional notions of honour.

The most explicit moment of the novella is the last sexual experience between Leonor and the protagonist. Vicente writes:

Nos abrazamos como dos luchadores del tiempo griego en la palestra ... vimos nuestros cuerpos reflejarse en los espejos, y con mayor furia nos precipitamos la una en los brazos de la otra. ... Los cabellos sueltos en la lucha lujuriosa nos envolvían; los senos erectos daban esa sensación de saciedad, como si quisieran derramar el néctar que no poseían, y en frenética convulsión, las bocas buscaron ávidamente el fruto del placer. (54)

Ena Bordonada comments on this passage, “con acumulación de léxico erótico, única vez en que la autora se refiere directamente a miembros corporales –‘los senos erectos’– y al sexo femenino directamente bajo la poética forma de ‘el fruto del placer’” (“Entre” 146). This explicit scene leaves no room for ambiguity—these are two women taking express pleasure in each other’s bodies. Interestingly, though, this encounter is immediately succeeded by a knock at the door that brings the lovers back to reality: “nos miramos avergonzadas, rendidas, abatidas, sin valor ni aliento para contestar” (Vicente 54). Oscillating between pleasure and shame, Vicente’s characters depict the complexities of navigating queer identity in a society intent on smothering any deviation from sexual norms—not only homosexuality but female sexuality in any degree—, years before Carmen de Burgos and Elena Fortún explore the same themes from a distinct sociocultural context.

As we will see in depth in chapter four (section 4.1), gender is a construct that shifts according to social norms, geographical and historical perspectives, and personal experiences. For Clavo, social systems of gender and sexuality vindicate “la persecución y represión sin tregua de aquellos que no se ajustan a la norma heterosexual y además ha servido para perpetuar la opresión de las mujeres” (75). While many today might claim that sexualities other than heterosexuality are a recent phenomenon, sexual fluidity dates back millennia—though terms and traits used to define these experiences have dramatically changed over the years. A 21st-century reader might consider Zezé a lesbian or even bisexual, but the character rejects any modern or traditional label, simply living her desires freely outside heteronormative barriers. Similarly, Clavo proposes that the protagonist belongs to Rich’s lesbian continuum (see section 1.3 and 4.1.3) because in spite of her attraction to women, she never identifies as lesbian; rather, she “huye de las denominaciones binaristas, de las etiquetas, tal y como defiende la teoría queer” (78). The reader cannot ignore Zezé’s consensual and joyful romantic involvement with two male characters, the student who lives in her building—“Sin estar enamorada del estudiante, estaba feliz a su lado” (72)—and

Leonor's husband Luis. Holloway notes that "Zezé's erotic encounters with Luis, Leonor's husband or the 'estudiante' are certainly never relayed with the level of detail lavished upon those with Leonor" (217); nevertheless, the protagonist actively seeks out these relationships and maintains them willingly, without labelling herself their partner. This is the case with Leonor as well. Zezé knows people in their circles consider her Leonor's lover, but she does not feel this is an appropriate label (49). Nor is she satisfied with her situation: "El tiempo pasaba, y continuaban sin interrupción los ratos de locura con Leonor. Cada vez, después de nuestras orgías, era mayor mi desencanto, mi cansancio de aquella novela vivida, donde se destacaba mi imagen más impura de lo que era, y más culpable que desgraciada" (45). Is this because the protagonist is lacking a true emotional connection with Leonor, who is still committed to her husband as well? Perhaps Vicente intends to present a relationship between women as less fulfilling or is influenced by contemporary sexology that frames homosexuality as deviant. A more likely interpretation is that Zezé seeks complete freedom; with this character, Vicente "revela el valor que en potencia adquiere la libertad de no depender de *nadie*" (Cabello-García 107; emphasis added). And in the end, Zezé finds financial and social liberation, unfettered by any romantic relationship or dependency.

The novella concludes with the writer finding Zezé in this blissful freedom, and for a moment the reader might wonder if the two could develop a romantic relationship. But the narrator has already confirmed her heterosexuality in her words to Zezé: "Yo le brindo con mi amistad, sin las aficiones de Leonor, se entiende" (84). And yet, as Karageorgou-Bastea explains, the "mutual sympathy developed between them may also be thought of as a way to bypass censorship and make palatable the narration of passion between two teenage girls in a religious boarding school, or the nonchalant attraction of a flirty socialite for other women," highlighting the "homosocial complicity" between the *cupletista* and the narrator (257-258). But Angie Simonis proposes an

alternate interpretation, explaining that a) the protagonist's free, independent lifestyle, and b) Zezé sharing her life with a woman, with or without a sexual relationship, do not exclude her from Rich's lesbian continuum ("Retrators" 30-31). Indeed, physical love between women is not a prerequisite for Rich, as social pressures and practices as well as literature have made lesbianism invisible and even impossible ("Compulsory" 182). The ending of *Zezé* is also left open, perhaps because the author intended to continue the characters' journey in a sequel that was never published. Regardless of the nature of the relationship between the protagonist and the writer, Vicente successfully presents sexuality as fluid and substantiates the existence of female passion, sapphic or otherwise.

2.5 Conclusions on Ángeles Vicente

To conclude, the selected works by Vicente focus on several common themes pertaining to women's rights, namely sexual liberation, education and career opportunities, and oppressive constructs of morality, intertwining these with her spiritist beliefs and her nation's burgeoning interest in psychiatry. Her definition of the psychological—anything pertaining to the brain including the supernatural—is accentuated by the way her short stories blend ghosts with mental health, questioning the very notion of sanity and tying into feminist themes. The major argument in *Teresilla*, one also presented with *Zezé*'s character Elisa, is the destructive concept of female honour, a subjective quest for "purity" that ruins families and ends lives. Vicente yearns to free Spanish women from these antiquated beliefs and double standards, placing the blame on society rather than its victims. She also faults the religious institution, satirizing its main players and opposing progress and the Catholic Church; a lack of access to education for girls and women is an important factor in their oppression as well. In her most successful work, Vicente depicts her idea of the modern woman: Zezé, whose clothes, career, travel, and beliefs confirm her

nonconformity to traditional expectations for identity and behaviour, highlighting Vicente's disregard for the institution of marriage.

In section 2.4, we explored three forms of rogue sexuality, beginning with the *donjuán* figure Vicente is so intent on deconstructing and denigrating. Through two short stories, Vicente presents the *donjuán* as a target for vengeance—including manipulation and castration—and emotional and verbal devastation at the hands of the women he attempted to seduce. As such, the author flips the gendered power dynamics and calls into question the myth of the great Spanish state at a time of important shifts in national identity. But Vicente also explores other deviant sexual behaviours, briefly touching on adultery before moving into queerness and eroticism. At the time, according to Charnon-Deutsch, “women Spiritists were also becoming more daring in their exploration of intimate relationships ... Vicente did not indulge in homilies extolling family life” (“Women Moved” 46). This tendency is evident in Vicente's work—not only does she include erotic themes in *Zeze* and even “El huerto encantado,” but she also avoids focusing on any traditional relationships or family structures. Instead, she presents sapphic relationships with explicit sexual passion as natural, without judgment, and contrasts them to the sorts of heterosexual engagements the protagonist has. Ultimately, though, Vicente proposes that a woman can only be truly free if she is independent, both financially and romantically. While much of Vicente's history remains an enigma, her writings leave no room for doubt that she sought to emancipate Spanish woman from the archaic gender norms and morality that impeded nationwide progress. This early feminist laid important groundwork for many who would follow in her footsteps, some finding fame and others disappearing from the public eye and the Spanish literary canon, much like Vicente herself did until recent scholarship and new editions of her work have recognized her value to the Spanish literary canon.

Chapter 3 – Carmen de Burgos: Exploring Sexuality and Gender “Scientifically”

Born in the Spanish province of Andalucía, Carmen de Burgos y Seguí (1867-1932), pen name Colombine, was a teacher, writer, activist, and journalist who, after marrying at 16 and leaving her abusive and unfaithful husband nearly two decades later, defended with renewed ardor women’s rights to vote and get divorced, earning herself the nickname *La Divorciadora*.¹²⁸ Even the controversial Spanish medical doctor and intellectual Marañón, though not always in agreement with her views, writes that her *La mujer moderna y sus derechos* (1927) is the most important feminist document published in Spain (*Tres ensayos* 240). Burgos was also president of the *Cruzada de las Mujeres Españolas* (1920-late 1920s), an organization that put forth petitions demanding civil and political rights for women (“El primer acto”).¹²⁹ Though born in the 1800s, her writing career began in 1900 and was interrupted by her unexpected demise in 1932. She mostly centres her work around female protagonists, the majority of whom “son simplemente encarnaciones literarias de casos reales, la mayor parte de las veces patéticos, que enfrentan al lector a la precaria situación de la mujer española en la época” (Establier Pérez 21-22).

Her texts can be divided into four categories: news articles, which she wrote for papers including *El Globo* (1875-1932), *El Diario Universal* (1903-1930s), and *La Correspondencia de España* (1859-1925), even becoming the first female war correspondent of the *Guerra de Melilla* in 1909; novels such as the celebrated *La rampa* (1917) and *Puñal de claveles* (1931); novelettes,

¹²⁸ According to Establier Pérez, the author “fue infatigable defensora del divorcio, no sólo a través de sus novelas sino incluso en su actividad periodística” (95), a quest that began around the turn of the century and followed Burgos to conferences, clubs, news outlets, and publishers for the next few decades. In fact, in 1903, she became the first female editor of a Spanish paper using the pseudonym *Colombine* (Senabre Sempere 107).

¹²⁹ Burgos was also a member of many press and human rights organizations, for example the *Alianza Hispano-Israelita*, which she founded in 1908. She even founded the *Revista Crítica* the year after as a space of self-expression for the young artists who attended her *tertulias* (Minesso 175).

many appearing in the publication *El cuento semanal*, which ran from 1907 to 1912; and essays on women's rights ("Carmen de Burgos. Biografía").¹³⁰ Our analysis will focus on her novelette *Ellas y ellos o ellos y ellas* (1916) and her novel *Quiero vivir mi vida* (1931), which address themes of gender identity, sexual desire, conventional marriage, and other women's rights issues that can easily dialogue with Fortún's and Vicente's musings on the same.

Recent scholarship on Colombine is not nearly as extensive as her collection of writings. There are several studies on the author that explore her passionate defense of women's rights and her representations of women's issues (Arranz; Cruz-Cámara; Establier Pérez; Garibo Peyró; R. Johnson; Louis and Sharp; Louis; Paino Ambrosio et al.; Starcevic), her involvement with other cultures (Galiano; Hernández González; Pujante Segura), and her different stories, novelettes, and novels (Martino; Louis and Sharp; Palomo and Núñez Rey). Others examine her work as a translator (Palmer). Due to the sheer quantity of texts authored by Burgos, however, there is not much scholarship on each of her works. While her more popular *Quiero vivir mi vida* (hereafter *Quiero*) has been studied in a handful of articles and chapters (Bell; Delrue; Establier-Pérez; Estrada-López; R. Johnson; Lindholm Narváez; Mangini), *Ellas y ellos o ellos y ellas* (hereafter *Ellas*) is the topic of only one dissertation and one article by Amy Bell—whose doctoral research investigates *El veneno del arte*, *Ellas y ellos o ellos y ellas*, and *Quiero*—of a book chapter in Anja Louis and Michelle M. Sharp's *Multiple Modernities*, appearing once again alongside *Quiero*, and

¹³⁰ Helena Establier Pérez explains that the novelette, a short form of literature, was soon eclipsed by more significant literary currents such as modernism and *noventayocho*, meaning that many who found fame by contributing to these magazines were forgotten by critics (15). Litvak adds that these short story collections reached a largely working-class audience, especially due to their low cost (51). Among Burgos's *Cuento Semanal* publications was the 1909 "En la guerra (Episodios de Melilla)" about the armed conflict between Morocco and Spain. Yasmina Romero Morales notes that Burgos harshly criticizes Moroccan mothers (528), proving that Colombine's feminism is not intersectional. According to the biographical Cervantes Virtual entry on Burgos, examples of feminist essays include *Arte de saber vivir* (1918) and *El arte de ser mujer* (1922).

of a few pages in Johnson's *Gender and Nation*. Building on the limited scholarship on these works, our analysis of sexual dissidence in many of its forms will be among the first to focus on queer feminism and the rejection of heteropatriarchal social structures in *Ellas* and *Quiero*.

The novelette *Ellas y ellos o ellos y ellas*, published in an issue of the short novel magazine *Los Contemporáneos* (1909-1926) on June 2, 1916, and as a book in 1917 alongside four other short narratives, is a tale of social conventions, cross-dressing, jealousy, and same-sex relationships built around a group of “protagonistas corales” (Palomo and Núñez Rey 56).¹³¹ The story is divided in four parts, each in a different setting and with an overlapping cast of characters, though as María del Pilar Palomo and Concepción Núñez Rey point out, *Ellas* has less of a plot and more “meras situaciones planteadas entre los personajes” that give the narrative a sort of discontinuity (78). The first situation takes place at a *tertulia* in the Hotel *Magestic* and introduces, through the gossip of the more traditional “dama” Loreto and the progressive “caballero” Aumada, most of the key players in *Ellas*—including Luisita, a young woman who strikes the fancy of many in attendance. The second part begins as Luisita leaves the hotel with her young son and meets up with Manuel, a gay man who married a woman named Mercedes. The two return to Luisita's, where we get to know her lover Juana. The third part delves into the relationships between the different characters and the fourth part, a masquerade ball, brings the novelette to a close with a terrible crime: Manuel kills Luisita after discovering her kissing his wife (though the marriage is annulled at this point). While the story takes place over just 19 newspaper pages, it is rife with the same themes Burgos explores in her much longer *Quiero vivir mi vida*.

¹³¹ Concepción Núñez Rey adds that some of Colombine's works, including *Ellas*, comprise “un protagonista colectivo construido sobre poderosas individualidades a las que nos acercamos en primerísimo plano” (56). This is especially the case, she explains, in *El último contrabandista* (1922).

In the 1931 novel, “intersexuality” takes centre stage, indicating a sometimes physical but more often psychological and/or spiritual condition that defies the categorizations of sexually (non)compliant bodies.¹³² *Quiero* tells the story of a young woman’s downward spiral amidst a flurry of adultery and disappointing marriages. Isabel, newly wedded and strangely dissatisfied with her destiny of domesticity and parenthood, falls more and more out of line with tradition as the years go by—a case of what her husband Julio’s friend, a doctor, calls intersexuality. Both Isabel and Julio, like many of their friends, are unfaithful to each other and have an increasingly complex relationship that builds up to Isabel’s violent crime: stabbing her husband to death. From considering her marriage as something that “venía a interrumpir la continuidad de sus días” (Burgos 18) to cries of “quiero ser hombre también” (248), Isabel communicates her detachment from womanhood more and more anxiously, a process described by Marañón in his prologue to the novel as “la trayectoria del alma de una mujer, desde su fase de feminidad intacta, hasta que esta feminidad es resquebrajada por el crecimiento oculto de sordas raíces de virilidad” (“Prólogo” 10). Together, this novelette and novel allow the reader to understand how Colombine and many of her peers might have felt about shifting notions of gender and social structures in early 20th century Spain.

Our analysis will study how *Ellas* and *Quiero* address several important themes pertaining to deviation from sexual and gender norms. Often taking an ironic tone, Carmen de Burgos criticizes expectations for women, double standards, and social mores using different characters’ experiences. We will first dive into the medical discourse around sexual deviance and intersexuality spearheaded by the contentious doctor Marañón that Colombine incorporates in her

¹³² Intersexuality is, to Marañón, a condition with many iterations: a masculine-looking woman, a “hermaphrodite,” a man with a woman’s voice... He goes into great detail about each of the terms he assigns to different conditions and the many types of inversions and “pseudohermaphroditism” he has noted in society, which we will explore in depth in the coming pages.

literature. This will serve to illustrate how gender and sexuality impact the construction of a national Spanish image, especially in times of great transformation. Then, taking into consideration the author's naturalist and realist tendencies, we will highlight how she engages with her era's discourse on women and sex and explore the problematic ways in which she renders characters outside binary norms, more specifically gay men, lesbians, and characters who do not quite fit any contemporary labels. After exploring these deviant identities, we will turn to the behaviours—prostitution, adultery, and queer violence—that accentuate the author's representation of her morally chaotic society. Next, Burgos's portrayal of the inescapability of heterosexual marriage and motherhood will offer a glimpse into the reasons why women, regardless of sexual orientation, might reject their predetermined path. Finally, we will employ Foucault's concept of heterotopias to understand the spaces to which sexual nonconformity is relegated and how these clandestine circles create a new space of order and resistance.

Studying LGBTQ+ themes tackled by Burgos—who, as far as anyone knows, was heterosexual—allows for an external perspective on queer identity and a glimpse into what (straight) feminists thought of their sexually dissident contemporaries. Marañón and other scholars studied and wrote about sexual differences and characteristics, heavily influencing both the writings on queer people and the community's self-perception, even as the Second Republic worked towards forging a nation more accepting of people's differences. Basing herself on “las aportaciones de la ciencia médica más reciente ... así como de las teorías psicológicas en que se fundamentaban muchas de sus conclusiones” (Establier Pérez 122), Burgos offers a portrayal of what contemporary sexologists called inversion of the spirit and what many thought of as dissident sexuality. The connection she establishes between LGBTQ+ characters and violence, while potentially an argument against the dangers (heterosexual) women faced in her era or a game of literary irony, may nevertheless tarnish her feminist record. Despite this contention, many of the

issues Burgos addresses are similar in theme and perspective to what the sapphic Fortún expresses in her works: a) a general disregard for the “sanctity” of traditional marriage and the conventions surrounding the roles of husband and wife, and b) the joys and the challenges—though especially the latter—of the queer experience(s). In chapter four, we will compare the themes of unconventional gender expression and same-sex desire with Fortún’s representations of sapphic relationships and self-expression, as well as queer/women’s spaces and the violence they face.

3.1 Medical Discourse on Queerness

We know today that sex, gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation are distinct and fluctuating categories. A century ago, however, leading theorists proposed a much narrower—and discriminatory—view of these vast concepts. Marañón and his peers used their beliefs on women and LGBTQ+ people to reinforce the hierarchical rapport of men and women in society; at the same time, they pathologized anyone who attempted to reject the limits imposed on them by the patriarchy or did not fit traditional molds, namely masculine women, feminine men, and homosexuals of either gender. While many of these same issues are still present today, the language we use to discuss and debate them has changed. We must consequently lead with a definition of three 19th-20th century terms: inversion, hermaphroditism, and intersexuality.

Inversion, also called the third sex, is based on homosexual attraction, a perversion of the instinct. Melanie Taylor explains that the “term ‘invert’ reflects the belief that same-sex desire is in fact an inversion of the sexual instincts, since the *natural* direction of sexual attraction within a heterosexual paradigm can only ever be towards a person of the ‘opposite sex’” (288). Hermaphroditism is a biological combination of male and female organs—what is known as being intersex today. What, then, did *intersexuality* mean in the 1920s and 1930s? In *La evolución*, Marañón uses intersexuality as an umbrella term for all “sexual confusion” including hermaphroditism, inversion, homosexuality, and other physical or mental deviations from the

norm. He begins his work with a reminder that the masculine and the feminine are not binary oppositions, but rather two stages in the development of one singular function, sexuality (1). Similarly, he considers the aging process as another determining factor in the evolution of a person's psychology and, more specifically, masculinity/femininity ("Prólogo" 8). Roberto Nóvoa Santos (1885-1933), another famous Spanish physician, explores many of the same topics—sexual functions, pregnancy, menopause, and more—citing Marañón and other professionals in the field (Friedrich Schauta, Julius Tandler, Havelock Ellis).¹³³ He considers the different stages of sexual discovery: first, self-discovery; then, projecting desire onto a family member and later onto someone outside the family, at which point there may be a phase of hetero or homosexual indecision; and finally, (hetero)sexual maturity (*Manual* 784). He also proposes that with age, the feminine type becomes more masculine or an asexual, intermediary type (760). Menopausal women suffer from "alteraciones nerviosas" that can cause psychosis, namely mania, hysteria, and melancholy (*Manual* 760). Sexual inversion, meanwhile, occurs mainly in degenerate individuals and, in the case of a woman, can be described as living and loving "like a man" (788). Note the categorization of a female invert within the gender binary: if she breaches the template of traditional womanhood, then she belongs to the realm of the masculine.

The classification of sexuality and gender has been a preoccupation of many theorists since the late 19th century. In 1895, Ellis attempted to condense sexuality into a binary system and simplify the "taxonomy" of inversion (Halberstam 76) put forth nine years prior by Krafft-Ebing, who believed homosexuality was a congenital disease (Drescher 568). Ellis's studies, however, fail to find a foolproof way to identify inverts, though he claims they often exhibit masculine traits,

¹³³ A third colleague, Enrique Fernández Sanz (1872-1950), also studied psychoanalysis, mental illness, and intersexuality, insisting the modern woman and the lesbian were regressing in their human evolution (Vázquez García and Moreno Mengíbar 223).

excessive body hair, and underdeveloped sexual characteristics (Halberstam 78-79). He turns instead from anatomy to personality, highlighting cases of “early childhood boy identification, adolescent dysphoria, and adult adaptation with some successful relationships” as signs of female inversion (79). In 1921, Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (1875-1961) puts forth the concept of anima—the subliminal feminine side of a man—and animus—a woman’s unconscious masculine traits (14), focusing on the psychological components of gender. In the 1930s, “medical and scientific specialists were eager to lay claim to the study of homosexuality as a means of furthering their expertise and legitimacy as agents of social control” and reinforce power relations (Minton 437). Freud’s psychoanalysis depends entirely on binary gender and sexual identity (Halberstam 77), a system that can only be maintained if society insists “every individual be assigned to the category of either man or woman at birth and that individuals conform to the category to which they have been assigned thereafter” (Drescher 567). Leaning into Freud’s view of homosexuality and other sexual “aberrations” as “enfermedades del desarrollo psicosexual” (790), Nóvoa Santos contributes to the negative perception of queer Spaniards in his era. Doctors like him, Marañón, and many more across the world used their scientific “objectivity” and knowledge to justify their pathologization of a marginalized group.

Jack Drescher posits that as the Church began losing its influence on society and a secular authority took charge, “religious categories like *demonic possession*, *drunkenness*, and *sodomy* were transformed into the scientific categories of *insanity*, *alcoholism*, and *homosexuality*” (568). In fact, until 1973, the American Psychological Association (APA) considered homosexuality a mental illness and only removed it entirely from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) in 1987 (Burton). Drescher explains that the DSM included homosexuality because of the belief in the “presence of atypical gender behavior or feelings [as] symptoms of the disease or disorder to which mental health professionals [needed] to attend,” a condition caused by some “internal defect

or external pathogenic agent” (566). Even today, many consider nonconforming gender or sexual orientation a malady—one need only look to the United States in early 2025 to see a regression toward a binary system as a means of social control.¹³⁴

3.2 Sexuality, Gender, and the Nation: The Fear of Contamination

Within a country’s identity, notions of culture, sexuality, and gender are intimately intertwined. According to Drescher, “Rigid gender beliefs usually flourish in fundamentalist, religious communities where any information or alternative explanations that might challenge implicit and explicit assumptions are unwelcome” (567). These principles are especially in line with the roles of women and with compulsory heterosexuality. According to Rich, the female body has long been considered “impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination” (*Of Woman Born* 34). Maternity and sexuality both serve male interests—in other words, the interests of the nation—and anything that threatens patriarchal institutions is relegated to the realm of deviance or criminality (42). Butler, too, muses on the relationship between a nation’s culture and its sexuality: “Although we may be tempted to say that heterosexuality secures the reproduction of culture and that patrilineality secures the reproduction of culture in the form of a whole that is reproducible in its identity through time, it is equally true that the conceit of a culture as a self-sustaining and self-replicating totality supports the naturalization of heterosexuality” (*Undoing* 124). In other words, a nation would

¹³⁴ Gary R. Hicks reports that over 70 nations still criminalize homosexuality, according to a 2017 study (4). In recent years, we have seen many regressive policies passed and an uptick in violence toward the queer community—in the United States, for example, book bans and backlash at drag events have marked the right-wing attempt to “protect the children.” Looking back several decades, “when lesbians and gay men first became publicly active in seeking civil rights and societal recognition, a moral panic, defined as the ‘overreaction to forms of deviance or wrongdoing believed to be threats to the moral order (Drislane and Parkinson, 2016),’ began to set in the public consciousness against the homosexual” (Hicks 6).

likely endorse heterosexuality regardless of religions in order to safeguard the future of its identity through reproduction.

After centuries of conquest and religious indoctrination, Spain's sense of self largely depended on its colonies in Latin America and the Philippines and its moral "superiority" as a Catholic stronghold. But two important factors changed the face of the Spanish nation in the 1800s, prompting an "end-of-the-century identity crisis" (Johnson, *Gender* 31) and intensifying the quest for a national essence. On one hand, shortly after the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in South America (1492), in 1898, Spain lost the last of its colonies (Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam, and the Philippines). On the other hand, over the course of the century, the Church had gradually been losing some of its influence over Spanish thought and signs of this decline—the Inquisition's abolition, a partial secularization of education, and the Krausist movement—appeared amidst calls for the separation of Church and State (Bertz 3).¹³⁵ Other European countries, Johnson explains, sped ahead with technological, political, and social advances, while the ultra-religious Spain found solace in its idealism, a virtue that set it apart from the rest of the continent (*Gender* 69). As such, certain sectors of society began to reflect in earnest on what they perceived as Spain's backwardness compared to neighbouring nations, while others were content with moral fortitude as the country's driving force.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ In 1888, Spanish writer and journalist Rosario de Acuña compares the family to the nation, explaining that "esa pequeña sociedad ... toma su vida, es decir, sus costumbres, en la gran raíz del Estado y de la raza, nutrida por las leyes y la religión" (93). She eloquently disparages the Church for its role in the repression of women: any female passion only encounters barriers in the form of "unos ideales religiosos caducos, fantásticos, huecos, momificados en ataúd de leyendas, que se desmoronan como polvo estéril al reflejo más tenue de la investigación científica" (96).

¹³⁶ In truth, Spain's lack of scientific enlightenment was already a preoccupation even centuries earlier. Benito Jerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro (1676-1764), monk and scholar of the Age of Enlightenment, worked for educational reform and worried about Spain's minimal advances.

This debate is illustrated within Spanish author and professor Miguel de Unamuno's (1864-1936) own contradictory beliefs. Though he criticized movements that lauded science as the solution to the world's problems (Villar Ezcurra 1502), his writings generally concur that Spain should strive for the highest knowledge in any field (1501). According to Unamuno, there was no "Spanish" science, though there were Spanish men of science; the rest of Europe had the advantage in that field (1502-1503). But, he also asks, what of their values and idealism (1503)? He often reflects on the intersection of science and religion, finding himself at odds with the broad concepts of truth, reality, faith, and progress (1505). As a *krausista* and *europaista*, Unamuno was critical of cultural narratives that justified or expressed nostalgia for the Spanish empire. In addition, he rejects *casticismo*—the Castilian essence of Spain and its values—while also encouraging a spiritual revitalization of the nation.¹³⁷ This search for what José Antonio Maravall names "españolidad" (qtd. in Johnson, *Gender* 31) considers the past, present, and future of the nation, blurring temporal and geographical differences to favour that which best represents the "eternal essence" of the nation (*Gender* 34-36)—though opinions on what constitutes its soul are divided.

Furthermore, Spanish identity post-1898 largely depended on beliefs surrounding gender, with many drawing from literature for models remitting to Spain's days of supremacy.¹³⁸ Male authors invoked the manly but chaste "heroic idealist" Don Quixote de la Mancha, titular protagonist of Miguel de Cervantes' magnum opus, whose idealization of women and chivalry set

¹³⁷ One of the writers of the *Generación del '98*, Unamuno famously said, "¡Que inventen ellos!" about Spain's role within European scientific advancement. But Alicia Villar Ezcurra proposes Unamuno's opinions on technology evolved over the years. He explores many of these ideas in *En torno al casticismo* (1902).

¹³⁸ Nash declares that in the 1930s, "El peso de la religión y de la doctrina católica en torno al matrimonio y la familia serían determinantes en el mantenimiento de la institución familiar como célula básica de la sociedad" (*Mujer* 22). By upholding the structure and morals of the family, a microcosm of the nation, the Church attempts to ensure Spain itself remains under its rule despite a widespread social departure from strict religious beliefs and behaviours.

women back centuries, according to Carmen de Burgos (Johnson, *Gender* 70). Similarly, the virile figure of Don Juan triggered antithetical interpretations of the national image (Johnson, *Gender* 111). Don Juan served for some “as an emblem of national energy, whereas for others he was a decadent degenerate who reflected Spain’s contemporary diminished state” (111). Among the latter camp was Marañón, who identifies Don Juan’s sexuality not as a prototype for Spanish men, but as an example for “sexualidad equívoca y ambigua” (*Tres ensayos* 47).¹³⁹ By the turn of the century, fluctuating gender roles—especially virile women and effeminate men—were seen as one of the signs of decline for the Spanish nation (Estrada López 147), prompting many to write about the perils of sexual undifferentiation. According to Cleminson and Vázquez García, “Marañón’s multiplication of sexual types had the objective of protecting the difference between the sexes by consigning any transgression (feminism, homosexuality, new woman) not to the field of perversion, sin or vice, but to the anomalous and varied field of intersexuality” (qtd. in Estrada López 150). Almudena Cabezas González and David Berná Serna explain that, as questions of gender and sexuality begin to shift the social order, homosexuality is relegated to the realm of the feminine, “un espacio amplio y variable que, con grandes matices y variaciones, acoge a todo aquello que no es un hombre, es decir, a los exteriores constitutivos de las identidades sexogenéricas” (785). The fear of a sexually vulnerable Spain remits to Sara Ahmed’s concept of the soft nation, one that is feminized and penetrated by others—in other words, demeaned and invaded, rather than one that displays (male) strength (Chang 168).

In the early 20th century, anything beyond the traditional masculine man versus feminine woman was cause for alarm because it upset the delicate hierarchy of men over women and the

¹³⁹ According to Marañón, the myth of Don Juan was not only a lie but also a glorification of “poligamia estéril y con detrimento del trabajo creador” and social/sexual abjection for women (213).

Church's authority over the common citizen. Daphne Spain proposes that, from a Marxist-Feminist point of view, "Patriarchy is institutionalized in the nuclear family and becomes the model for men's power in other realms" (25). If the family is a microcosm representing a Catholic Spain, then the patriarch must ensure the preservation of the gender hierarchy in which women are "subordinate workers in privately 'male-owned' families" by controlling female labour and sexuality and segregating spaces by gender (25-26). Rich adds that the family actually means the mother, "who carries the major share of child-rearing, and who also absorbs the frustrations and rage her husband may bring home from work ... Her own anger becomes illegitimate," as she works to provide a good home for husband and progeny (*Of Woman Born* 54). Without the division of labour and the man's positioning as chief of the privatized family unit (54), the nation risks further decline because it is losing its virtue and its self-appointed role as the Occident's moral and spiritual reserve. If the nation's identity depends on Catholicism, which in turn is contingent on the nuclear family, then those who deviate from set gender roles, genders, sexual orientations, and sexual behaviours are thereby a threat to society at large. Fearing contamination from both external and internal sources—neighbouring countries, but especially Spaniards whose gender and/or sexuality are outside the norm—medical, religious, and intellectual authorities would therefore attempt to quell any transgressions for the sake of a moral and impenetrable Spain.

3.3 Colombine: Clinical Discourse Meets Fiction

Scholars have debated whether to categorize Carmen de Burgos as a realist or naturalist writer, especially as these two currents share many commonalities. The author herself identifies with the latter: "Siempre he procurado que mi novela fuese naturalista, aunque lleve escondida, como un alma indispensable, la poesía" (qtd. in Establier Pérez 19). Comparing the late 19th-century movement to melodrama, Keith Newlin explains that naturalism generally focuses on the universal, a broad category rather than an individual (6). The movement was heavily influenced

by the theories of French author Émile Zola (1840-1902) and is traditionally recognized as belonging principally to the period of 1890-1915 (Newlin 3). Zola claims both the naturalist writer and the doctor seek to understand the cause and offer a remedy to the human conditions they unearth (Bretz 53). This literary current embraces determinism, social commentary, and brutalist elements, using sociology and the scientific method to guide its investigations (Establier Pérez 19; Bretz 53). Essentially, it is “didactic literature with a thesis to prove” (Bretz 6).

If Colombine is a naturalist writer—and we would affirm she is in many of her texts—then her inclusion of Marañón’s medical theories is unsurprising. He even wrote the prologue to *Quiero*: “Breve ensayo sobre el sentido de los celos, por Gregorio Marañón.” In these pages, the doctor highlights the influence contemporary psychology has on Burgos’s narrative (10). In return, Colombine dedicates *Quiero* to Marañón, of whom she was a fervent admirer (Establier Pérez 125), praising how he has studied intersexuality so rigorously to illuminate “este problema con luces de ciencia y de piedad” (Burgos; emphasis added). Marañón, too, proposes that in examples like that of Burgos, “cuando el artista lo es de verdad, tiene mucho de aquellas dos cosas, de naturalista y de psiquiatra” (“Prólogo” 10). Drawing from Marañón, Burgos combines scientific knowledge with her observations of society. As Helena Establier Pérez highlights in her chapter “Las degeneradas,” Colombine’s naturalist tendencies push her to explore all sorts of illnesses, pathologies, and deformities, including various sexual dysfunctions (119). With an “inclinación al feísmo” (119), the author gathers all sorts of unconventional individuals—or “gentes excéntricas” (Burgos, *Ellas* 1)—in the scenes of her works to demonstrate the different expressions of intersexuality she has noticed around her. As Palomo and Núñez Rey note, many, if not practically all, Colombine’s characters are based on her examinations of reality, including herself and her direct entourage, and sometimes undergo a sort of alteration or literary interpretation that is common in naturalist writing (44), while Johnson adds that mass protagonism—as is the case in

Ellas with its numerous main characters—is also frequent (*Gender* 205). Recalling Newlin’s definition of naturalism as generalizing, Burgos observes various queer identities but reduces them to unkind stereotypes and often blames the environment for sexual misdeeds. She employs “gender amalgams and cross-dressing to question traditional marriage,” all the while “daringly [deploying] homosexuality, lesbianism, and travestism to probe Spain’s reaction to the moral confusion of the modern world” (Johnson, *Gender* 205).

Marañón, Nóvoa Santos, and their peers led the discourse on human sexuality and influenced society’s opinions—and, by extension, how contemporary authors engaged with these views in their works. As a naturalist author with a penchant for the diseased, deformed, and pathologized, Burgos could easily find inspiration in her surroundings: the medical discourse of sexology and the specific pathology of intersexuality. If naturalism begets a thesis, then we can consider hers in these two texts to be that sexual deviants—namely prostitutes, adulterers, and especially queer people—present a serious risk of contaminating a vulnerable Spanish society. Colombine expresses a certain distress around fluctuating notions of gender and sex in both *Ellas* and *Quiero*. Using extreme mental, physical, and social cases—many drawn from real life—the author presents an argument on the queer community and the threat it poses to the nation. In fact, Burgos often focuses on the domestic in her novels, pitting Spain against nearby countries, France especially, where men and women have achieved greater equality (Johnson, *Gender* 233). Johnson argues that by “highlighting the institution of marriage, however, she suggests that sociopolitical rather than biological factors define the nation” and offers solutions through “moral behavior or civil and legal structures that can be changed or reformulated” (*Gender* 233-234). But *La Divorciadora*’s quest for justice does not extend to sexually nonconforming Spaniards, whose identities and actions make up the core of her naturalist considerations.

3.3.1 Deviant Identities

In 1864, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895), a German gay rights advocate, put forth a theory describing “*urnings*”: a third sex in which a woman’s spirit is born in a man’s body (Drescher 568). Similarly, he offered the term “*urningin*” to refer to a man’s soul captive in a woman’s form, his understanding of what today we call a lesbian (568). Likewise, according to Newton’s research on renown sexologists Krafft-Ebing and Ellis, the “true invert was a being between categories, neither man nor woman, a ‘third sex’ or ‘trapped soul’” (568). While a 21st-century reader might wonder if this character is transgender or nonbinary, we must remember that these terms and even today’s idea of “lesbian” do not strictly fit the experience Burgos is recreating in her characters. In fact, as Halberstam highlights in *Female Masculinity*, even the term “inversion” encompassed many types of masculine women (83), negating the diverse queer identities of the early 1900s. Indeed, posits the scholar, “Inversion as a theory of homosexuality folded gender variance and sexual preference into one economical package and attempted to explain all deviant behavior in terms of a firm and almost intuitive belief in a binary system of sexual stratification ...” (82). This makes it challenging to establish with any certainty what a person’s—or a character’s—sexuality or gender identity might have been.

As we saw earlier, Spain’s identity crisis cultivated a panic regarding sexual undifferentiation and fluctuating presentations of male and female bodies. Nóvoa Santos, for example, highlights how as of puberty there are changes, “de un lado, a la esfera corporal, y de otro, al plano del espíritu” (*Manual* 782). He explains how inversion generally occurs in “individuos degenerados,” but also in “personas completamente sanas de cuerpo y de espíritu que no presentan signo degenerativo alguno,” noting that since in most cases the “órganos genitales están perfectamente conformados desde el punto de vista anatómico, y fisiológico,” it stands to reason that inversion is a psychological disorder (788)—an inversion of the spirit. Here, physical

and spiritual health converge. Concurrently, Marañón proposes there are two forms of psychological inversion; those who are sexually attracted to women and those who lack any sexual attraction (*La evolución* 172). Either one may or may not be accompanied by a certain virilization, he affirms, effectively categorizing every possible iteration of “woman” he can imagine compared to the “normal” feminine woman that is the basis of his scientific undertaking (*La evolución* 116-117). In a later chapter, Marañón clarifies that female inverts may be “regressive towards puerility,” exhibiting more of a platonic affection towards women, or “progressive towards virility,” which takes the form of an observable physical inversion towards the masculine and libido directed to other women (*La evolución* 199-201).

However, in *Undoing Gender*, Butler explains that alternative forms of masculinity and femininity assumed by the queer community are not copies of heterosexual masculinity/femininity, but rather originals; homosexual and heterosexual gender identities are all established performatively (209). In a similar vein, Halberstam theorizes that “female masculinity is a specific gender with its own cultural history rather than simply a derivative of male masculinity” (77). He adds that studies by Ellis and his peers could not accurately depict these identities because, as external observers, they did “not have access to the structures of social, sexual, and causal interaction that organize any sexual subculture” (77). Many of these analyses assume that everyone would “at least symbolically want to be a man” and that masculinity constitutes superiority (78). Although sexologists, psychologists, and academics studied in great detail sexual/gender dissidence, “The history of inversion ... still represents a tangle of cross-identification and sexual preference” that does not fit today’s labels and there are “many histories of bodies that escape and elude medical taxonomies, of bodies that never present themselves to the physician’s gaze, of subjects who identify within categories and not in relation to medical or psychosexual research” (Halberstam 161). Nevertheless, Burgos attempts to “dissect the ills of Spanish society” (Johnson,

Gender 232), drawing “inconclusive” conclusions about gender that reflect contemporary scientific theories and her own uncertainties around gender, sexuality, and Spanish tradition.

3.3.1.1 *Ellas y ellos o ellos y ellas*

Colombine’s preoccupations with the unstable categories pertaining to sexuality and gender are, of course, the inspiration behind the title of her 1916 novelette. Accordingly, the cast of *Ellas*, one of Colombine’s best “descripciones satíricas de colectivos humanos” (Palomo and Núñez Rey 43), is full of characters who do not fit within the gender binary. Lourdes Estrada López carefully analyses the significance of the title:

Ellas y ellos o ellos y ellas (1917), makes reference to a double concern of the time: on the one hand, the anxiety about the virilization of women and the feminization of men (the “viriloid” and “feminoid” intersexual states mentioned by Marañón), which is expressed by the disjunctive “ellas o ellos”/ “ellos o ellas.” ... On the other hand, the title *Ellas o ellos* refers to the impossibility of distinguishing between heterosexual and homosexual individuals. (151)

This concern is shared by several supporting characters, beginning with the gossipy Loreto: “— Qué asco, qué asco—dijo. — Ya no se sabe á quién tratar; no se puede adivinar las que son ellos ni los que son ellas” (Burgos 7).¹⁴⁰ Later, at the masquerade ball, a police officer who attempts to deny two men in drag entry into the event ends up more confused than anything, saying that in the end, “[él no sabe] todavía si son ellas ó ellos” (16)—one of several instances in which minor characters’ comments offer judgement on the nonconforming protagonists. Even the sapphic Juana

¹⁴⁰ A connection between queer men and pedophiles is even made by Loreto’s husband, who blames society’s acceptance of “inmoralidad” for these crimes and fondly remembers a time when such deviants would simply have been killed by members of the community (Burgos 4-5). Interestingly, Loreto’s name ends with an o, which most often indicates a grammatical masculine, while her co-conspirator at the hotel, Aumada, has a traditionally feminine vowel to end his name.

refers to herself and her queer friends as “*estos seres indecisos que no se sabe si son Ellas ó Ellos...*” (11). The impacts of this gender confusion on the general (gender conforming) population is summarized by an older couple that, upon realizing that the feminine Luisita is attracted to women, wishes that “abnormal” men and women were “*amarillos, verdes, naranja, de un color cualquiera, pero distinto del color de los demás para que se les reconociera como de una especie diferente*” (Burgos 11). While Colombine advocates for women’s rights and freedom from traditional gender roles, her position is ambiguous on whether her nation should strive for freedom from the construct of gender in its entirety. The two transgressive categories to which the author pays particular attention in this novelette are the effeminate man and the virile woman, which we will explore below.

If gender is a construct (Butler, *Gender* 8), then what is masculinity? What makes a body “manly” enough to fall under the category of male? In other words, who decides what constitutes each gender? Cabezas González and Berná Serna offer the following denotation of masculinity in their study on Europe in the 18th to 20th centuries: “*Tal y como concluye Badinter ‘un hombre alcanza la masculinidad mediante tres negaciones básicas que debe probar constantemente: que no es mujer, que no es bebé y que no es homosexual’*” (785). But French philosopher Élisabeth Batinder’s (1944-) characterization is problematic in that a) it defines the term by describing what it is not (woman/baby) and b) negates the masculinity of gay men, reducing them to a subset of stereotypical femininity instead. In *Ellas*, a few gay men, most notably Adolfo and Manuel, flaunt their feminine side over the course of the story. Adolfo is a friend of the sapphic couple Adela and Rosa, so he is often described by the narrator in comparison to them: “*jovencito, más débil y delicado que [Adela y Rosa]*” (Burgos 2) and “[*el cuerpo*] más *femenil* que el [*de Rosa*]” (3). In both these examples and several others, the keyword is *femenil*, antonym for *varonil* or *viril*—the

terms most used by Burgos to depict intersexual women. He is also partial to ballet, falling under the stereotype of homosexual men who appreciate the arts.

Meanwhile, Manuel, the most prominent of the queer male characters, is described fastidiously by a narrator who seems to pity him:

Era uno de esos tipos dolorosos, débiles, enfermos, *físicamente degenerados*, de hombros estrechos, pecho carnososo y caderas de ánfora, como *una mujer vestida de hombre*; uno de esos tipos de los que todos se burlan sin compasión, á favor de la impunidad que les asegura su debilidad y su cobardía, y que, al mismo tiempo, no tienen amigos porque no los hallan aún bastante sometidos y se les moteja de *agrios, atrabiliarios y peligrosos*. (Burgos 9; emphasis added)

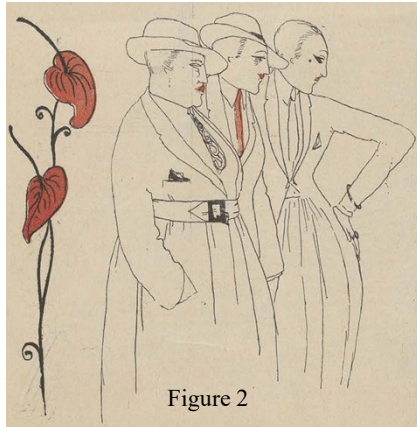
There are a few essential elements in this passage that merit our attention. First, the corporal degeneration—like the intersexuals described by Marañón and his peers, inversion has a physical manifestation, an effect on the body that is easily recognized by the public, at least in most cases.



Figure 1

Burgos also uses the term *enfermos*, which remits to the idea of homosexuality as a threatening congenital condition that could influence Spain, trading virtue and strength for feminine vulnerability. Next, the reference to a man in women's clothes sets the stage for the later instances of cross-dressing in parts III and IV, punctuated by the illustration of men in dramatic makeup and high heels on page 15 (see Figure 1).¹⁴¹ While the text presents these three figures as cross-dressing men, the illustrations are purposely ambiguous—especially when analysed in conjunction with the other images that portray men

¹⁴¹ The illustrations for this novelette are by José Zamora (1892-1971), Spanish vanguard/modernist painter.



or women in nontraditional clothing (see Figure 2)—adding to the concern over sexual undifferentiation.¹⁴² Then, one must wonder why Burgos considers these characters “like *women* dressed as *men*” rather than the reverse. It is evident that the author conflates sexual orientation and sex/gender, assuming that a gay man cannot truly be masculine or even a man at all.

Burgos projects the nation’s fear of contamination with intersexuality, which scientific texts by Marañón and his peers consider a medical condition, highlighting both the visible and indistinguishable sexual Others that traverse both the pages of the novelette and the streets of Spain.

Finally, Manuel’s description remits to the danger of sexual inverters that we will analyse in section 3.3.2.3—although they are weak and cowardly, they are, according to this story, intemperate and a serious threat. Nevertheless, Burgos explores the self-expression of LGBTQ+ identity through the gay men who fill their closets with feminine clothes and lean into the label of artist (17) that almost serves as a third category in addition to the binary man and woman. These men are shown in various states of cross-dress, some even owning “*Ropa interior de mujer que hacía suponer visitas de mujeres imaginarias*” (Burgos 15). Colombine also suggests they “*quisieran apagar el olor á hombre*” with perfume (15). In Part IV, their feminine costumes at the masquerade ball cause them trouble with an authority figure, reminding readers of the potentially severe consequences of dressing or acting outside of gender norms. These costumes are a

¹⁴² In Figure 1, the reader assumes the three characters are men dressed in drag, in spite of the more feminine traits some exhibit, since the page exclusively talks about Adolfo and his companions engaging in such behaviours. Figure 2, meanwhile, is even more ambiguous as the page refers to queer men and women including Adolfo and Rosa, suggesting that the illustration could be of any of them.

performance on two fronts—they are dressed as a *cupletista* and a ballerina, but also as a gender that is, to others' eyes, incongruous with the sex they were assigned at birth. Butler explains that in the context of drag, there are three concepts in play: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance (*Gender* 187). In a later book, the scholar demonstrates the importance of not only tracing the institutions of gender but also considering the moments where “gender is disputed and challenged ... and where the very social life of gender turns out to be malleable” (*Undoing* 216). Burgos's era is clearly one of gender transformation, and in her prose, she proves—although perhaps intending to caution rather than celebrate—how easy it is to conflate sex, gender, and arbitrary traits such as clothing deemed “masculine” or “feminine,” a concept we will explore in depth in the following chapter.

Within a binary conception of gender, if gay men are presented as having an excess of femininity, the opposite is true for lesbians. There is, however, an important contrast between male sexologists' perspectives and Colombine's presentation of masculine women. Although many scholars point toward arrested female development (Freud, for example) or excessive masculinity (Marañón) as the cause of inversion, they are focusing on the positive or neutral traits that straight men and queer women share: a love of women, for example, or boyish upbringings and hobbies. But Burgos adds another layer to this comparison. Through her characters, she attempts to highlight that, like straight men, intersexual women can be controlling, manipulative, and even abusive. The author is characterizing masculinity negatively, not only because it causes sexual confusion and thereby challenges national identity, but also because she associates maleness with violence, especially toward women. In her novelette, Burgos describes certain female characters using words and traits associated with masculinity to hint toward their intersexuality, as well as a few mentions of their self-expression through “la sobriedad del traje masculino” (18). The first queer woman to whom the reader is introduced is the baroness Adela, “una mujer flexible, de

mediana estatura, morena, con dientes de loba, muy blancos, en una boca firme y voluntariosa. Ofrecía una agradable impresión de fuerza, de salud, con *un aire varonil*; de mirada burlona, audaz, dominadora, algo irónica, como llena de confianza en sí misma” (2; emphasis added). Note that the only term that, by definition, relates to men is *varonil*; the other attributes (strength, audacity, dominance, confidence...) are not exclusively male, though they are generally used to describe only (straight) men. There is also Luisita, “reina de la seducción” (Burgos 4), whom Colombine created to be “la perversa experta en el arte de disfrazar magistralmente su degeneración” (Establier Pérez 138). The author also calls her a siren, the dangerous hybrid ocean creature that lures sailors to their deaths. The fact that Luisita is sapphic but does not look masculine or “inverted” in any way is terrifying for both the characters in the novelette and perhaps even to the author who gave them life—she is a threat to society and to those she ensnares financially, like the father of her child.

Burgos’s use of language to describe the cast of *Ellas*, not only their appearance but also what she thinks of their sexual or gender nonconformity, feeds into the pathological argument made by doctors against this community. Colombine begins her novelette with terms like eccentric and abnormal, but eventually turns to more medical vocabulary, culminating with a condemnation of intersexuality as “aquella enfermedad, aquella fiebre, aquella viruela, aquel tifus, aquel cáncer, que aparecía tan arteramente; se imponía aislar, vacunar, curar á los enfermos” (20) in the last page. This pathologizing language leaves little room for doubt that to a degree, Burgos feared the corruption of her modern society by sexual anomalies—homosexuals and adulterers, especially—and wrote out warnings in literary form. Her queer characters also draw these negative conclusions about their peers. Juana, for example, says of Luisita: “Era una desdichada criatura que si no moría de tisis ó meningitis, consumida por los vicios de revelaciones precoces, sería uno de esos viciosos, degenerados, carne de presidio ó de hospital” (Burgos 18). This quote about a homosexual (and an

unfaithful one, at that) remits to Foucault's heterotopias "de déviation," like prisons and medical clinics.

Indeed, if one believes in the risk of physical or social contamination due to intersexuals, then one must force them away from society rather than accept or even endure them, since "No podía consentirse la tolerancia si no se quería que la *enfermedad* se ramificase para corroer y comerse toda la belleza del ser moral: sus ojos, su boca, su corazón; llegando á convertirlo en algo descarnado y trágico" (Burgos 20; emphasis added). Fearing for Spanish society, Burgos's text pathologizes the LGBTQ+ community, contributing—intentionally or not—to their marginalization. Establier Pérez proposes that *Ellas* is a confrontation between old-fashioned (false) morality and liberal values on sexuality; or between "las dos Españas -la España de Carmen de Burgos, progresista e ideológicamente fresca, por un lado, y la tradicionalista, que arrastra lastres morales de otros tiempos, por otro-" (141). But while Burgos does call out two double standards of Spanish morality—how gay men are more accepted than sapphic women, and how (heterosexual) adulterers ironically criticize LGBTQ+ people for their nonconforming sexuality (Establier Pérez 142)—, we would hesitate to label Colombine as an icon of liberalism due to her overall negative portrayal of queer characters.

3.3.1.2 *Quiero vivir mi vida*

In *Quiero vivir mi vida*, the convergence of literary and scientific discourse—specifically, the medical rhetoric of men such as Marañón, Ellis, and Nóvoa Santos—that blames the ills of society on intersexuality is even more explicit. Returning to the idea of national identity, we see how Burgos worries for her country, its very soul (and its burgeoning social progress) at risk of contamination by the LGBTQ+ community, whose "sickness" must not be allowed to spread. Largely basing herself on Marañón's research, Burgos describes queerness in her novel using current medical terminology, especially through her character Dr. Alfredo—a "thinly disguised

representation of Marañón” (Johnson, *Gender* 208) and a friend of Julio’s. Julio, worried about his wife, tells Alfredo: “hay en ella, realmente, algo que depende más de influencias de su espíritu que de enfermedad de su cuerpo” (Burgos 79). The doctor links this physical illness—affecting first her real body and then her “órganos espirituales,” or vice-versa (80)—to her psychic inversion. Through Alfredo’s character, Burgos muses on the *third sex*—and though Isabel does not herself identify as an invert, when asked by Alfredo what she would like to be in the duality of man and woman, she replies, “Preferiría no ser... o ser hombre” (Burgos 89), firmly cementing herself in a category beyond the gender binary. This perspective is echoed in Alfredo’s diagnosis of Isabel’s “espíritu de contradicción” (Burgos 89), which he later admits to Julio is “una marcada inversión de sexos, o, mejor dicho, un predominio del masculino en la mezcla de ambos” (226), and again in the protagonist’s own thoughts: “Me parece que tengo dos cerebros superpuestos” (176) and “No soy mujer en absoluto” (245).¹⁴³

Both Alfredo and the reader recognize Isabel as a clear example of progressive sexual “degeneration” that fits Marañón’s categorization of “intersexualidad por hipertiroidismo” (Establier Pérez 127), an increase in a woman’s virile secondary characteristics that were until that point normal, affecting the skin and hair as well as the skeleton and jaw (Marañón, *La evolución* 115). Psychically, adds Marañón, these women are more prone to manic and depressive episodes (166), as we see in Isabel. The deviations in her character are also subtly linked to menopause, a time during which female reproductive functions cease: “Ahora se inician nuevas influencias con su climaterio, vuelve a sufrir su crisis [de virilidad]” (Burgos 222). Marañón makes this same case, explaining that “intersexualidad viriloide climatérica” is quite common, especially in “mujeres afectas de una *constitución intersexual* anterior” (*La evolución* 190). While Marañón laments the

¹⁴³ This perspective is echoed by other medical and social nonconformists, for example in Fortún’s two novels studied in the following chapter.

mounting lack of distinction between male and female in the scientific field, Alfredo examines on several occasions his patient Isabel, trapped by the “lucha de los instintos femeninos y viriloides unidos en su naturaleza” (Burgos 25), and reports back to her husband about his findings. He identifies her as intersexual (223) before launching into an explanation of inversion, androgyny, “desequilibrio sexual” (224), and hermaphroditism (225). He even presents another (fictional) case of a woman with a tumour on the cortical part of her suprarenal gland—which produces estrogen and testosterone—that made her grow a beard and have a deeper voice, physical markers of increased masculinity, until it was excised by Alfredo himself (224).¹⁴⁴

Although not a medical category, Martín Gaité’s concept of *chica rara* is, in a way, related to the medical discourse of intersexuality. It points to many traits masculine women share, namely an untraditional upbringing, a virile character, and a distaste for marriage and motherhood. This is the case for *Quiero*’s troubled protagonist, whose journey begins with her father raising and educating her almost as though she were a boy after he loses three infant sons (Burgos 23). Isabel’s recollections of childhood portray her as a sort of pseudo-son to her parents, a fact the novel blames for her queerness—an environmental and social factor. She has been, since she was a girl, “descontentadiza” (75), always feeling like something is missing. And like many unconventional girls, her interests lie beyond traditional female pursuits: “no había tenido muñecas ni cajas de costura, sino soldados de plomo, sables y balones” (32). This is the first hint towards Isabel’s purported manhood. Nevertheless, as the narrator confirms, although “Isabel tuvo una educación varonil ... en la pubertad triunfó una feminidad bien definida” (Burgos 222), at which point our protagonist marries her boyfriend, Julio. This union briefly introduces another predominant trait of the *chica rara*, her difficult connection with other women, which often takes the form of a

¹⁴⁴ This case remits to what Ellis considered indicators of possible inversion in women at the end of the 19th century: hairiness and maleness.

mother directing her daughter into a marriage she does not want (Martín Gaité 100).¹⁴⁵ In fact, Isabel's mother does exactly this: "Doña Milagros, temerosa del carácter de su hija, se dió maña para apresurar la boda y toda la familia conspiró en favor del matrimonio" (Burgos 26). So opens the novel, with Julio trying to take care of his new wife and Isabel disconcerted at her new relationship status.

While Isabel never voices or acts on any sort of same-sex desire, her sexual dissidence can be divined not through her attraction to women but her distaste for men, especially her husband. Her *horror al macho* takes form in Burgos's descriptions: "Sintió repugnancia a los galanteos" (24), "especie de repulsión que existe, paradójicamente, entre naturalezas afines" (24), "una adversión, una frialdad, una repugnancia, que le hacían intolerable la relación con su marido" (199). Isabel must even dissociate, pretending she and Julio are two different people when they are in bed, so she can tolerate the sexual experience (203). Put plainly, Isabel "No experimentaba atracción hacia ningún hombre" (212) and feels for Julio *amor fraternal*—that is, until the climax of the novel. Nearing this point, the reader catches glimpses of Isabel's identity crisis, which increases as she faces off against heterosexual relationships—"El trato con los hombres agudizaba su estado nervioso" (25)—, the possibility of motherhood—"Sentía angustia de verse expuesta a una forzosa maternidad" (34)—, and adultery—"No podría [perdonarle a Julio] una infidelidad. [Ella era] demasiado hombre para eso" (235). Pulled out of context, these three examples could easily be understood as a woman rejecting a predetermined path and the betrayal of a spouse.

However, Burgos proposes an alternative conclusion through the voices of her narrator and other (male) characters: intersexuality. From her childhood interests to the friendships she establishes with other *chicas raras* that Julio quickly forbids, *Quiero*'s protagonist is not unlike

¹⁴⁵ Martín Gaité highlights the *chica rara*'s peculiar relationship with "espacios interiores" and the family members who defend such spaces (100).

other sexual inverts in comparable literature, for example those of Elena Fortún's *Oculto Sendero* and *El pensionado de Santa Casilda*.¹⁴⁶ Does this mean Isabel is a lesbian, like the characters in those books clearly are? Not necessarily—as the medical theories Burgos intertwines in her story contend, the intersexual condition results from hormones, tumours, or other physiological components, meaning that in some cases it can be cured and a woman (though perhaps not Isabel) could technically return to a conformist femininity and a happy heterosexual marriage. Equally important to consider is the complexity of defining lesbianism in an early 20th century context, meaning that assigning Isabel the same label as another intersexual character erases the breadth of nonconforming gender identities and sexualities.

3.3.2 Deviant Behaviours

Dissident identities lead to behaviours that are perceived to compromise the stability of the nation. In her study of late 19th-century Spanish fiction, *Marginal Subjects*, Tsuchiya establishes that the “perceived threat of the deviant woman lies not only in her resistance to circumscription within social norms, but also in her potential to seduce and *contaminate* the entire social body with her desire” (57; emphasis added). Among the female figures that posed a threat to the social body through abnormal sexuality were the lesbian, the prostitute, and the adulteress. According to Halberstam, in the 1800s, women were generally categorized in relation to marriageability (51). He explains that by the late-1800s, both the masculine woman (a subset of which later emerges as the lesbian, or what Marañón would call intersexual woman) and the prostitute are branded together as they have “extramarital desires” and “aggressive sexual tendencies” that separate them

¹⁴⁶ One of these is Lina, whose friendship with Isabel prompts Julio to explain that “la sociedad es exigente, Isabel ... y si te ven acompañada de gentes dudosas se alejarían de ti” (59). He believes something in her is “raro” (60) even though she is married (to a much older man who apparently lets her do as she pleases). Having a husband control a woman's friendships is a concept we will explore in depth in Fortún's chapter.

from traditional morals (51). In both cases, the woman in question is not bound to a man by marriage (52). To this, we would add the adulteress, another figure whose sexual behaviour extends beyond the limits of holy matrimony and engages in taboo activities for the sake of pleasure rather than reproduction. In her works, Burgos engages with the deviant behaviours of prostitution, infidelity, and violence, the latter specifically perpetrated by queer Spaniards.

3.3.2.1 Prostitution

By the late nineteenth century, women are permitted to take on just one of two opposing roles, mother or prostitute, thereby solidifying the modern myth of romantic love and its ensuing violence toward women (Cabezas Gonzalez and Berná Serna 785). Rich also explores this binary of good and evil, explaining that in order to maintain the illusion that female bodies can only be either pure or corrupt, women are forced to see themselves in one of two categories: good/fertile/pure, or evil/barren/impure (*Of Woman Born* 34). She continues, “The asexual Victorian angel-wife and the Victorian prostitute were institutions created by this double thinking ... which had everything to do with the male’s subjective experience of women” (34).¹⁴⁷ Labelled by Freud as the Madonna-Whore complex, this dichotomy of female sexuality not only holds women to impossible sexual standards, but also reduces their multifaceted identities to their function in sexual gratification and/or reproduction. Marañón, who believed women’s primordial role was to raise children—a reasonable number of good kids, to avoid becoming exhausted shells of their former selves (see section 3.3.2.2)—wants to turn the focus on the “impure” side of the

¹⁴⁷ Pura Fernández divides this even further, differentiating between the prostitute “de ocasión” who accidentally had to turn to sex work, and the “prostituta nata” who did so, according to foregone male moralists, due to their hysteria and/or nymphomania (193). In several chapters, Fernández addresses the connection between prostitution and venereal disease, syphilis specifically, which illustrates a literal rather than metaphorical way that sexual miscreants contaminate society. Note that the men visiting the prostitutes are not blamed for spreading disease.

binary. He wishes that sociologists and moralists would focus their efforts on countering prostitution and adultery (*Tres ensayos* 96-97). This same preoccupation is evident in the era's literature; indeed, Tsuchiya asserts that the adulteress and the prostitute served as "the two most popular prototypes of female sexual deviance" at the time and appeared in many realist novels (14).¹⁴⁸ Colombine combines the sometimes-overlapping figures of prostitute, adulteress, and lesbian/intersexual in an effort to illustrate the moral panic of Spanish society, while also criticizing the lack of options for respectable women in her era.

The idea of prostitution brings to mind certain stereotypes—most often negative ones—about the women who engage in this business.¹⁴⁹ However, as Nash explains in *Mujer, familia y trabajo* (1875-1936), prostitution and marriage become two sides of the same coin, particularly when a marriage is based on economic need and can be considered a form of prostitution (30). Surprisingly, *Quiero* does not engage with the topic, though many other novels by the same author do.¹⁵⁰ In *Ellas*, however, there are several examples of the latter. Many of these transactions have the bonus of being same-sex relationships: a younger woman is the *entretenida* of an older woman, or a younger man with an older man, an agreement that provides financial aid to the younger and sexual gratification and/or companionship to the older partner. Adela and the viscount are both the older member of such unions, while one Italian woman is the younger and explains her choice thusly: "Después de todo ... esto me compromete menos que acompañar á un hombre, quizás viejo

¹⁴⁸ Fernández adds that the prostitute's body, stereotypical carrier of venereal disease and political tool for regulating the profession, was instrumental in moving social hygiene from the private to the public sphere (21).

¹⁴⁹ While "'respectable' women simply could not wander around the streets and parks alone," even the non-respectable prostitute, whose business depended on the public space of the streets, "would still be effectively restricted by the threat of male violence" (Massey 234).

¹⁵⁰ Colombine's fixation on the sexual identity of her characters and their impact on social hygiene is palpable in her novel *La rampa* in the form of "sugar daddy"-type arrangements, a concept explored in depth in *La mujer fantástica* (1923).

y repugnante, y en caso necesario soy yo quien pega” (11). Again, the author manages to criticize patriarchy and socioeconomic struggles—fiscal instability is the driving factor behind the *entretendida*’s relationship, and of course Burgos includes a remark about beating a partner, flipping the narrative of male violence to shock readers into realizing women’s reality. In this story, what we could consider a form of prostitution serves only to highlight yet another sexual offense by the Hotel *Magestic*’s irregular clientele within the confines of their heterotopia.

3.3.2.2 Adultery

Turning next to adultery, the sexual double standard of the late 19th and early 20th centuries can be summed up in Paloma Castañeda’s words: “en la mujer el adulterio es un delito y en el hombre sólo una falta menor” (106).¹⁵¹ A woman could face two to six years in prison for adultery—then one to three as of 1928—, while a man committing the same acts would only be punished if he caused public scandal (Vázquez García and Moreno Mengíbar 212).¹⁵² In other words, “it is female, rather than male, adultery that is perceived generally to threaten the social order with the dissolution of boundaries” (Tsuchiya 72).¹⁵³ By extension, female sexual desire—in any form—is condemned, while the same behaviours (and worse) in men are accepted as inherently masculine, remitting to the toxic “boys will be boys” excuse used to this day. The

¹⁵¹ This concept comes into play in several 19th century novels, for example Clarín’s *La regenta* and *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1887) by Benito Pérez Galdós (1843-1920). In the former, a young woman marries an older man for reasons of convenience, then has an affair with the local Don Juan figure that results in her social ostracization and overwhelming guilt. Galdós, meanwhile, presents a complex web of illicit relationships between characters including Fortunata, a working-class woman, and a philanderer, who also marries his cousin Jacinta.

¹⁵² Rich includes this hypocritical punishment in her reflection on how men “deny women [their own] sexuality” (Gough 768). For her, punishment for female adultery or lesbian sexuality is a clear expression of male power.

¹⁵³ Foucault quotes Roman philosopher Seneca (c. 4 BCE-65 CE) on this double standard: “il est malhonnête, celui qui exige de sa femme la chasteté quand il séduit lui-même celle des autres; tu sais que, comme il est interdit à elle d’avoir un amant, il t’est pareillement interdit d’avoir une maîtresse” (qtd. in Foucault, *Le souci* 229).

adulteress is yet another transgressive body, alongside the invert and the prostitute, one associated with consumerism in Spain: “Es como si este impulso de consumir llevara a la mujer a traicionar sus deberes de esposa y madre, propiciando ... la invasión del lecho conyugal y del hogar por potencias externas” (Vázquez García and Moreno Mengíbar 210). Marañón, meanwhile, has an interesting take on the cause of adultery, positing that prohibiting women (and their husbands) from willingly limiting how many children they have opens the door to adultery—if a wife has many children and thereby becomes “envejecida prematuramente, malhumorada,” her spouse is far more likely to be unfaithful (*Tres ensayos* 95-96). He does not, however, blame the wife for having so many children in the first place. Tsuchiya, engaging with Tony Tanner’s analysis, explains that “while the realist novel, like the family itself, might appear to uphold bourgeois norms at its ‘centre,’ it is driven ... [by an] impulse toward the disruption of (and deviation from) these norms ... In this light (female) adultery, as a specific type of deviant sexual act, as well as a metaphor for societal anxieties about gender deviance in general, came to be a central concern in the nineteenth-century novel” (71); of course, this tendency carried into the 1900s and into Colombine’s naturalist literature (with realist traits).¹⁵⁴

Establier-Pérez proposes that beyond representing homosexual pathology and degeneration, *Quiero* prioritizes its author’s need to question current ethical models on human sexuality (119, 122). This would include infidelity among both heterosexual and homosexual

¹⁵⁴ Questions of gender, honour, and medical rhetoric are rooted in the 19th-century novel; see for example Jo Labanyi’s *Gender and Modernization in the Spanish Realist Novel* (2000) and Labanyi and Charnon-Deutsch’s *Culture and Gender in Nineteenth-Century Spain* (1996). There is, however, a striking difference between novels such as *La regenta* or *Los pazos de Ulloa*, and Burgos’s works: in the latter, there is no ecclesiastical figure but rather a social and/or a medical authority making pronouncements on gender, sexuality, and women’s roles in society. This remits to the modernization of the country with the turn of the century. Though delayed compared to its European neighbours, Spain too saw advances in science and a reduction in the Church’s control over its citizens.

couples, the latter serving as a double infraction. We begin our analysis with a classic example of adultery: a married man has an affair with a younger female colleague. In this plot point, it is clear that “el adulterio del varón [es] una escuela de masculinidad” (Vázquez García and Moreno Mengibar 214), a sin, yes, but not sexual deviance, as demonstrated by the mild reactions to Julio’s infidelity. This is revealed when Isabel’s husband finds himself entranced by Matilde, the daughter of a family friend, and soon offers her a job as a typist at his office to spend more time together. From the beginning, Julio “Tuvo que confesarse que en su interés por Matilde había algo de *pecado* para con Isabel” (Burgos 142; emphasis added), yet he still pursues a relationship and even sets her up in an apartment once she has his child.¹⁵⁵ When Isabel finds out from her friend Lina that her husband has a mistress and a son, she is in disbelief, especially upon hearing that the coworker from whom Lina heard the rumour believes Matilde has more rights to Julio than his own wife, because “tiene más derecho una amante con hijos que una esposa sin ellos,” to which Isabel responds, “¡Siempre la maternidad!” (231).¹⁵⁶

This double standard also takes place in the brief sexual escapades of Isabel’s friend Berta with their other friend’s husband. Bell explains Berta’s plight and its significance in the novel:

Luis, exercising his masculine prerogative, is able to use Berta for little more than “one night of love” and return to his wife without the slightest remorse, while Berta, feeling ridiculous and shamed, struggles to “submerge” and conceal her pain ... Burgos shows that a woman, whether she is a middle-aged widow searching for romantic fulfillment, like Berta, or a newlywed bride fretting over her lost virginity and consequent loss of power, like Isabel,

¹⁵⁵ See more on the child’s role in the plot in section 3.4.

¹⁵⁶ The unnamed son has no significant role in the novel—he and his mother are secondary to Julio’s real wife, and Julio even admits to himself that he would love his son much more if he were Isabel’s (Burgos 196-197). Instead, the boy serves as a plot device to contrast male and female infidelity (see section 3.4).

finds herself in an impossible situation ... women of every age must carefully monitor their sexuality or risk losing their respectability or even their lives. (“Carmen” 143)

Again, the man in a heterosexual extramarital liaison is able to walk away unscathed, while the woman risks punishment—imprisonment, ostracization, even death—for engaging in the very same activity.

In stark contrast to these examples is Isabel, unfaithful to her husband (although Julio is never explicitly made aware of this fact). First, the protagonist flirts with her doctor, her interest disguised as a need for medical attention: “Se descubrió el pecho y lo obligó a reclinar la cabeza sobre él, en esa actitud de amante que toma el médico cuando ausculta sin auriculares. Le hacía rozar la piel sedéña, aspirar el perfume de su carne y sentir la caricia de sus cabellos. —Púlseme— insistió” (Burgos 105). This dialogue shows their dynamic—Isabel, seductive and intense, and the doctor, cold and detached. Later, Isabel has a meaningless affair with Enrique, who falls in love with her. According to Mangini, the protagonist’s seduction of the young man serves to denounce “the way women have been groomed to utilize their bodies for social and economic commerce” (The Female” 29). She has learned to manipulate men using her female body, though at the same time, Isabel takes on a more masculine role in this dynamic, subverting the traditional “older man seduces and abandons younger woman” trope (133-134). Is Isabel trying to fill a void, the discontent that has plagued her since childhood? Is she playing a game of identity politics at the same time as she plays with Enrique’s heart? Or is this plot point setting the tone for her eventual crime of passion? According to Vázquez García and Moreno Mengíbar, in the early 20th century, the sexual desire of the adulteress not only betrayed the ideal of female purity, but was also believed to undermine her husband’s virility (214); and Julio’s virility is, in fact, questioned in the novel. Seen in this light, it could be argued that Isabel is purely a woman exploring her sexual needs and refusing to conform to traditional gender roles. But *Quiero*’s narrative voice depreciates

intersexuals and condemns their sexually transgressive behaviour, highlighting a concern for the moral wellbeing of the Spanish nation.

Many of the adulteresses in *Quiero* have masculine traits or express their womanhood in unconventional ways. Isabel's intersexuality, of course, is the unifying thread throughout the novel; yet another iteration of her nonconforming character is her adultery. Joaquina, a friend of Isabel's, is also an example. As she describes her passionate (heterosexual) affair to Berta, the narrator passes judgment on the "naturaleza ingenuamente perversa de Joaquina" (108), which remits to Vázquez García and Moreno Mengíbar's description of the adulteress's dishonour and "desnaturalización" (214). Thinking of the feminine Joaquina and the masculine Isabel, Berta claims: "La falta de feminilidad y el exceso de ella producían el mismo resultado" (Burgos 76). Both characters are sexually degenerate, according to Burgos, and may remind the reader of Luisita and Juana in *Ellas*—the former, a beautiful temptress, and the latter, lacking any femininity whatsoever, but both sexual deviants. In the case of either text, the inclusion of queer women who are not noticeably masculine speaks to the preoccupation with being unable to recognize some of the members of the LGBTQ+ community.

In *Ellas*, the connection between intersexuality and infidelity is even more striking. The social circles of the queer community are fraught with jealousy and tension, another sign that Burgos may not think highly of this group. It is due to jealousy that Manuel commits a murder; and again, jealousy is to blame for Juana's controlling behaviour. The narrator describes Juana as "la más escandalosa, ... con sus bruscos accesos de celos que le hacían maltratar á Luisa en plena calle; llevársela del teatro en medio de la función y otras mil impertinencias por el estilo" (Burgos 14). But even between minor characters, we see this theme come into play. When the baroness Adela begins flirting with Luisita, the former's girlfriend looks on in despair: "Rosa lloraba sin atreverse á decir una palabra, con esa sumisión y hasta admiración con quedas mujeres burguesas

reciben las infidelidades de sus esposos” (Burgos 6). This example not only portrays Adela as unfaithful, but also criticizes men for doing the same to their wives, thereby linking the sapphic woman and the straight man with a moral deficiency. In addition, this is not the first time Adela is disloyal to her partner, though, in truth, Burgos does not paint the relationship as exclusive. Ironically, however, Adela has her own lovers followed in case they would dare cheat on her with other women—she is not concerned about their potential dealings with men (11). It appears every LGBTQ+ character is unfaithful, and a few of the straight ones as well, including Loreto’s husband and an American diplomat’s wife (3). Colombine’s comment on the social and moral decline of the Spanish nation is evident in how she highlights the chaos unleashed by corrupt sexuality—in any of its forms.

Another important message in *Ellas*, a double standard the author brings to light, is how hypocritical heterosexual adulterers are in their ostracization of those whose “crime” is their homosexuality. Manuel affirms this ironic point when reflecting on the people who decry him for being a gay man: “Eran todos aquellos hombres adúlteros, todas aquellas mujeres viciosas, todos los que tenían esposas infieles, á las que ellos eran infieles también” (Burgos 10).¹⁵⁷ This is one of the moments during which the author makes the reader pity intersexuals, what Bell describes as “[the author’s] undeniable sympathy—whether consciously or unconsciously rendered—toward many of her homosexual characters, and an equally incontestable contempt for those who reject them on the basis of their behavior or sexual preferences” (“Carmen” 87). This could be explained by Burgos’s scientific theory: like Marañón, she believes that intersexuality is an ailment, not a personal moral failing of an individual (unlike in the case of infidelity, in which sexual

¹⁵⁷ Manuel quickly realizes he lives in “una sociedad corrupta, hipócrita, falsa en su moralidad y en sus costumbres ... [que] se [halla] legitimada para juzgar y condenar arbitrariamente todo aquello que no comprende,” namely the “sexualidades alternativas” of Manuel, Luisita, and their community (Establier Pérez 142).

“perversion” is a personal choice). Nevertheless, by the end of the novelette, the narrator returns to their usual depreciation of envious, violent, queer characters, with a terrible crime of passion marring the final pages.

3.3.2.3 Queer Violence

Like many sexologists, Ellis highlights the threat of violence in his characterization of lesbians, claiming that inverted women’s a) feminine emotionality, b) infantile impulsiveness, and c) masculine energy often foster a criminal path (Farwell, “The Lesbian Narrative” 160). On the contrary, as Marañón argues, a feminine woman would never kill a husband’s lover; she would either wait in distress for him to return to her side or realize that it is too late and there is nothing to be done (“Prólogo” 11). The wife who does kill is most often older and therefore further astray from her femininity or, in other words, intersexual (10-11). Marañón explains in *Quiero*’s prologue: “Cuando una mujer mata a su amante, ... se trata, en efecto, casi siempre de una mujer intersexual; y no es ella, sino su componente viril el que lucha con el otro varón, para defender a su propia feminidad disminuida de la feminidad triunfante de «la otra», de la amante” (11). These doctors lay the groundwork for naturalist writers to explore the more violent aspects of transgressive sexuality in both men and women.

Burgos, firm defender of women’s equality under the law, penned in 1921 the 60-page novella *El artículo 438* to explore intimate partner violence and the legal discriminations of the 1870 Penal Code that would protect men at the expense of women—one of many works of fiction and nonfiction to address such topics. As early as 1904, she wrote, “El Código Civil limita la capacidad de obrar de la mujer que carece, por lo tanto, de capacidad civil” (qtd. in Castañeda 112), calling article 438 “vergonzoso” again in 1927 (Castañeda 106). Like Pardo Bazán before her—for example, in “El indulto”—, Colombine protests legal double standards and the lack of protection for women from intimate partner violence, crucial feminist issues that impacted the

author directly. Nevertheless, her activism lacks intersectionality when it comes to intersexual men and women and the danger she suggests they may pose to Spanish society. Her fascination with the “diseased, deranged” members of her community, brought to life in her naturalist writings, is intertwined with her criticisms of male violence toward Spanish women.

In *Ellas*, the themes of both queer violence and male brutality take shape in the character of Manuel—a gay man consistently described as weak of mind and body—who commits the most heinous crime. Near the end of the novelette, Juana hints that his ex-wife Mercedes may be looking for something beyond friendship with Luisita at the masquerade ball. Manuel says, “pensaba siempre con terror en que otro hombre hiciese hablar los sentidos de Mercedes, pero no pensé en que me la arrebatará *otro amor como el mío*... Esta idea me enloquece...” (18; emphasis added). Then, he dashes over and, in a fit of jealousy, stabs Luisita to death, much to Mercedes’ dismay: “unos besos frescos, libres, sueltos habían llegado á sus oídos... el rencor y los celos se habían ido agravando en él rápidamente... ni vió el sexo de su rival... ni las condiciones... ni nada. Hombre ó mujer, ¿qué más daba? Buscó su puñalito en el bolsillo y lo clavó de un golpe en el seno blanco de aquella mujer que le robaba su felicidad” (Burgos 20). While Mercedes and Manuel are separated (due to Manuel’s inconvenient inability to consummate the marriage), he still feels possessive of her, even if it was Manuel who, pages earlier, criticized men who see their wives or girlfriends as no more than sex objects. In fact, he develops with Mercedes what the author calls “un amistoso interés” (12), a term reminiscent of the *amor fraternal* established between the queer protagonist of Fortún’s *Oculto Sendero* and her husband. Although it is far from a conventional union—considering husband and wife are separated and both exhibit same-sex desire—Manuel still cares for Mercedes, which is one of the reasons why the crime of passion at the end of the story is so striking. How could he kill someone who brings Mercedes such joy?

Colombine proposes a partial answer, that “Manuel ... había matado por celos de su mujer, á Luisa, á aquella otra mujer que le había robado su cariño” (20), albeit perhaps more a question of platonic affection rather than commitment that constitutes the betrayal Manuel feels. But it is Marañón’s prologue to *Quiero* that offers the reader a more complete response. The men in the novel do not frequently demonstrate violent tendencies, but Marañón still includes a paragraph on why they might murder their wives that we can apply to the final scene of *Ellas*:

en casi todos los casos, cuando un hombre mata a una mujer, no es por arrebatarla de los brazos de un hombre determinado y fijo: en este caso, a quien odia y hiere es al hombre mismo. Sino por vengar la veleidad, el pasar incesante de unas manos a otras; que es obra del varón escondido en la mujer y no de ésta. Es indudable que este tipo de mujeres apasionadas y sensuales, son, por ello, no los prototipos muy femeninos, sino las de tipo intersexual. (11-12)

Manuel might not kill his own ex-wife, but he does stab the object of her attention, Luisita. Both women are intersexual—though Luisita is duplicitously feminine—and therefore have that *veleidad*, the passion for women that belongs to the masculine part inside them, which Manuel seeks to destroy. In the context of a patriarchal society, Manuel, who has a slew of same-sex lovers, and whose manliness is constantly questioned, is humiliated due to his failure to satisfy his ex-wife, while a woman can. Furthermore, it could be argued that this gay man’s extreme reaction that leads to his “madness” (“Esta idea me enloquece”) and crime is a reaction of internalized homophobia as he witnesses a same-sex pairing on plain display, “otro amor como el [suyo]” (Burgos 18). This situation reflects a profound irony: Manuel, Mercedes, and Luisita are all intersexuals, but instead of empathizing with those who experience Otherness, the effeminate man finally finds some semblance of virility and uses it to kill his ex-wife’s sapphic lover.

Once again focusing on the context of a patriarchal, national identity-seeking Spain, the reader can interpret the novelette's conclusion differently based on the final paragraph: "no se concebía cómo aquel hombre débil y sin voluntad había podido matar por celos, unos celos ridículos, de otra mujer. Parecía como si la pasión de los celos fuese sólo un egoísmo carnal de posesión ... Se comprendía al hombre vengando su honor no su amor" (20). This scene clearly alludes to the *drama de honor* of Spanish literature's Golden Age, which Bell proposes is both a reference to and an attack on the tropes of the genre ("Carmen" 100).¹⁵⁸ Manuel, however, fails where other male characters succeed: "Había matado como un héroe de la España antigua, y sin embargo no tenía en favor suyo la simpatía que hay siempre para el hombre que venga su honor" (Burgos 20).¹⁵⁹ Bell continues,

Burgos takes considerable pains to cast the witnesses to Luisa's murder as members of an audience watching an honor play. The crowd's confusion and rejection of the climax of this "play" result from the fact that the action does not adhere to dramatic conventions for productions dealing with the theme of *pundonor*. ... Because he had not been officially dishonored, the crowd regards Manuel's actions as pointless and unnecessary. ("Carmen" 102)

Burgos uses the hotel patrons' reaction to the crime—utter bafflement and trivialization—to show the Spanish audience as desensitized to (real and literary) femicide (102). In truth, beyond a bit of horrified gossip, the aftermath of this murder is not addressed—not even Luisita's poor motherless son or any legal action. The focus is the impact such degenerates may have on the "innocent"

¹⁵⁸ An example of the *drama de honor* is Pedro Calderón de la Barca's (1600-1681) *El médico de su honra* (1637) in which a man is justified in killing a woman in the name of honour.

¹⁵⁹ While men avenging their honour are usually seen as righteous, this is not the only example of a different response to said crime. Bronfen uses Robert Browning's narrative poem *The Ring and the Book* (1869) to illustrate the duality of both the husband—"vindictive jealousy" or 'justified revenge'"—and the murdered wife—martyr or adulteress (292).

heterosexuals around them. Elisabeth Bronfen analyses a dual sort of violence around representations of women's bodies: violence that creates conflict, and the sacrifice of the feminine body to end the disruption and return to stability (193). In this sense, Luisita's corpse marks the end of the sexual disturbances—infidelity and sapphic desire—in both the novelette and society.

Similarly, in *Quiero*, a passionate stabbing takes place, serving to reiterate the warnings about the dangers of intersexuality and the increase of both jealousy and criminality in the lesbian or otherwise sexually confused body. As the novel progresses, Isabel's emotional turmoil takes a physical toll on her health and her mental stability. In a final battle between feminine and masculine, her dormant virility finally erupts as she admits the truth in a rage against her husband: “¡No te puedo aguantar... pase lo que pase!... ¡Aborrezco a los hombres... los desprecio... y quiero ser hombre también!... ... ¡No soy Isabel! ¡Isabel se murió!... ¡Se ha condenado! ¡La castigó Dios... por sus pecados y por los de su marido!... ¡Porque era la mujer!... Es un asco ser mujer...” (248). Then, she stabs Julio in the neck with kitchen scissors—a nod to the domestic sphere to which women are relegated. The narrator represents Isabel as both dangerous and deranged in this scene.¹⁶⁰ As the main character looks down at her husband's corpse, “En sus ojos, extraviados por la *locura*, brillaba la mezcla de amor y de odio” (249; emphasis added). Then, she does something even stranger: “aproximó sus labios a los labios del moribundo y le sorbió el último aliento en un beso largo, largo... aspirado, profundo. *Quería apoderarse de su espíritu... beberse... hacerlo suyo, lograr su aspiración suprema...*” (249; emphasis added). Anyone can kill with a sharp pair of scissors, but it takes a special kind of murderer—an intersexual, according to this novel—to bring about a death with spiritual repercussions on the victim. Mangini labels Isabel a “female Dracula of sorts ... a gothic anti-heroine” intent on destroying the representative of her feminine oppression

¹⁶⁰ Johnson notes that unlike in *Ellas*, which follows the traditional plot, Burgos “reverses the classic Calderonian honor play” in *Quiero* by having the wife kill her husband (*Gender* 209).

(“The Female 29-30). *Quiero* ends on Isabel’s joyous affirmation, “¡Al fin le he robado su alma de hombre!” Johnson proposes that Isabel is attempting to take on a social rather than biological male identity so her affair, her expressions of jealousy, and her vengeance are permitted like they would be if she were a man (*Gender* 210).¹⁶¹

But this interpretation suggests one of two points: either Isabel is simply a cisgender woman dissatisfied with patriarchal constraints, or we must return to Butler’s theory that gender itself is a social construct rather than a biological reality.¹⁶² Remembering the prologue, we can infer that Isabel’s crime is intended to quell the opposing feminine triumph presented by Julio’s lover, a woman who could not only satisfy him sexually, but also gave him a child, thereby fulfilling her feminine duties. Comparatively, Isabel cannot measure up as a woman and, ultimately, murders her husband in a way her twisted mind understands as adopting his male identity. In fact, according to Establier Pérez, Isabel’s depiction throughout the novel—for example, being prone to violence and jealousy, committing adultery, or simply being temperamental and unpredictable—serves to criticize the “masculine” traits and actions that society tolerates and even celebrates in men, while in a woman they are seen as scandalous and even monstrous (133). Essentially, while other Colombine works underscore a woman’s economic, occupational, social, and legal inferiority, this novel reflects on a woman’s moral inferiority in Spanish society (Establier Pérez 136). Its dramatic final scene subverts the typical male-on-female intimate partner violence and undoubtedly reflects the belief that pathological intersexuality and any “abnormal sexual activity leads to other excesses such as criminal activity, especially crimes

¹⁶¹ After separating from her first husband, Burgos found happiness with famous writer Ramón Gómez de la Serna (1881-1963), until he had an affair with her own daughter in 1929. Johnson proposes that in this passage, she may be playing out her own fantasy (*Gender* 210).

¹⁶² See also Judith Lorber and Susan A. Farrell’s *The Social Construction of Gender*.

of passion” (Farwell, “The Lesbian Narrative” 160).¹⁶³ In ending her novel this way, Colombine proposes that queer individuals strive to contaminate not only the social body but also Spain’s national identity. This story does provide visibility to different identities and condemns at length the narrow expectations for Spanish women, yet it does not overcome stereotypes and medical misconceptions related to homosexuality and gender diversity.

While Burgos depicts how jealousy (combined with intersexuality) lead to passionate crimes, in *Ellas* she also presents an example of a more consistent form of violence with the masculine lesbian Juana. In line with the “mujer hombruna” or “virago” detectible by her masculine role, her jealousy in relationships, and her aggressive behaviour (Vázquez García and Moreno Mengíbar 219), Juana is defined more by her character than her “fealdad hombruna” (Burgos 8). Like a man, she is controlling, manipulative, and sometimes violent with Luisita, her lover. When the latter goes out without Juana, this abusive woman expresses her displeasure by yelling and hitting Luisita in front of Manuel: “la mujer ruda y grosera le estampó un bofetón en el rostro que le arrancó un alarido de dolor ... [Luisita] Se debatía y pataleaba como una niña, bajo la lluvia de golpes que la otra le descargaba” (8). Manuel, effeminate and feeble compared to Juana’s virile strength, is unable to intervene. Later, Juana even encourages Manuel to be more brutal with his ex-wife in order to win her back and explains her philosophy on relationships:

por su falta de espiritualidad nos hacen caer en este deseo bastardo que usurpa el lugar del amor... ¡con tal de que no ame á otra! Yo no tendría jamás celos de un hombre, de una traición de su naturaleza; pero cuando pienso que otra mujer se puede poner en mi camino... no sé... no sé... Me robaría todo lo que tengo de ella... la traición con otra no podría

¹⁶³ Isabel is, in a few brief scenes, the victim of her lover Enrique’s anger; for example, when Isabel suggests breaking off the affair, Enrique grabs her arm aggressively (Burgos, *Quiero* 156). A few pages later, Isabel is worried about leaving town and thereby inciting Enrique further (163).

achacarse más que á cariño... á cariño... Esa idea me vuelve loca... *Por eso le pego, la maltrato en vez de acariciarla. Así, brutal, la retengo; le doy una sensación de hombre* (11; emphasis added).

Juana wants to “prohibírselo [a Luisita] todo, dominarla en todo” and demonstrates a savage passion that scares Luisa (8). The connection Colombine draws between violence and maleness is clear: “Así, brutal, la retengo; le doy una sensación de hombre.” By being violent (like a man), Juana hopes to maintain the power dynamic of superior man/inferior woman and keep Luisita from leaving her, not out of love (Juana clearly states that Luisita does not love her), but out of fear and/or obligation. Estrada López explains that “as a masculine lesbian, not only does [Juana] repudiate her own sex/gender, but also in her emulation of men, she can only imitate their most despicable characteristics” (152). As such, Juana is both a representation of violence against women and of the intersexual threat to society.

While Manuel is objectively the perpetrator of the most severe crime, *Ellas* does not absolve queer women of blame. First, Mercedes “betrays” Manuel, though the audience determines his subsequent actions were unwarranted. Then, Juana is the reason Manuel discovers his ex-wife’s “indiscretion” with Luisita, prompting the latter’s murder. And Luisita herself—whose function as a queer/bad mother we will explore in section 3.4—is at fault for the way she treats her child and his father, and deceives society with her feminine lesbianism.¹⁶⁴ Estrada López thereby interprets the novelette’s tragic conclusion “as a punishment of Luisa, a sexually dissident woman, instead of a repudiation of Manuel’s lack of virility, and as a confirmation that feminine homosexual women are regarded as a menace for the whole group of women” (153). While Burgos

¹⁶⁴ Luisita’s death is in fact a punishment for Mercedes and Juana as well, since they were both her lovers.

calls out the double standard of different sexual dissidents, she also leans into her own double standard: gay men—*ellos*—are less of a threat than lesbians—*ellas*.

While Estrada López contends that the queer men in *Ellas* are portrayed in a positive light, especially compared to the negative image Burgos draws of intersexual women (152), we would argue that Manuel's crime demonstrates the author's bias against *all* queer people, regardless of gender. It is true, however, that "Women's virilism is considered a social threat for the patriarchal society, since characteristics traditionally considered manly can be possessed by both sexes, which would eventually justify women's access to power. On the other hand, 'feminoid' men are considered a regressive state in Marañón's theories, and as such, they are not regarded as a threat of the hegemonic order" (Estrada López 152). In *Ellas* specifically, gay men represent a more individual threat, while sapphic women usurp the heteronormative narrative. In a similar vein, Establier Pérez highlights one of Spain's contradictory standards that Burgos exposes in this narrative: male homosexuality, as a relatively frequent occurrence, especially among intellectuals, is regarded as more palatable than "la inclinación lésbica [que] era objeto de la más contundente repulsa social" (140). Even the conservative Loreto justifies inversion in the case of artists, namely the Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), claiming, "parece que necesitan esa mezcla de dos sensibilidades, para ser más exquisitos, más perfectos" (Burgos 7). But if women are barred from the intellectual and creative sphere, a subject we will explore in depth with Fortún's chapter, then so too are they excluded from this tolerance of queer artists. Instead, they are represented as promiscuous, brutal, and/or biologically degenerate.

Although it would be simpler to conclude that Burgos fears and despises the LGBTQ+ community, there are indications of the author's more complex moral dilemma regarding such individuals. Since authors and their narrators are not obliged to share an opinion, although the narrators of both *Ellas* and *Quiero* do little to hide their distaste for queer people, there is a

possibility that Colombine is seeking to underscore her society's hypocrisy rather than contribute to it. Indeed, she travelled the same circles as many queer artists and intellectuals, especially in Madrid; she was, for example, among the *autoras* who accompanied Antonio de Hoyos y Vinent (1884-1940), Spanish writer, journalist, and homosexual (Vázquez García and Moreno Mengíbar 217). Establier Pérez contends in *Mujer y feminismo en la obra de Carmen de Burgos* that Colombine is making an implicit social critique in favour of intersexuals; in addition to rebuking the hypocrisy underscored in section 3.3.2.2, Colombine has only sympathy and respect for “‘ellos’ y especialmente ‘ellas’” (145). This is an argument seldom seen in the work of other scholars, however, and it seems unlikely that such brutal, pathologizing depictions of LGBTQ+ Spaniards—based on Marañón's scientific rhetoric and celebrated by the doctor himself—are in fact “uno más de esos ejercicios de sutil ironía a los que Carmen de Burgos tiene sobradamente acostumbrada a sus lectores” (Establier Pérez 144).¹⁶⁵ Instead, we would propose there is a certain ambiguity to Colombine's beliefs, a paradox comprising a fear of the unknown and a quest for women's social advancement. Going further, Simón-Alegre bluntly highlights real-life examples of Burgos's hypocrisy: “she defended her ideals, while at the same time she outed people who frequented certain ... literary gatherings by placing a filter of suspicion upon them, hinting at their queerness, and in the case of women, she implied that they rejected the model of the ‘ángel del hogar’” (53). Indeed, in spite of her sympathy for the plight of intersexuals like Manuel—note that the character who receives the most pity is a gay man—and her recognition of Spain's sexual double standards, the chaotic actions of Burgos's queer characters primarily serve to accentuate the threat they pose

¹⁶⁵ Engaging with Establier Pérez, Mangini notes, however, that perhaps “by purporting to be a disseminator of *Marañonian* theory, and then asking him to write the prologue, she veils her feminist agenda and secures a wider audience” (“The Female” 30).

to many aspects of society, namely the power dynamics and family structures on which the nation depends.

3.4 Firmly Rejecting Marriage and Motherhood

For many women across time and space, marriage has served as a prison, an inevitable fate. Passing from the father's rule to the husband's, young wives have abandoned their dreams, needs, and wants in favour of their spouse's and children's. And through all this, matrimony has been framed as a sacred honour and a rite of passage bestowed only on the worthy. For Marañón, “el matrimonio es la tabla de salvación para la mujer que se ve hundir en el abismo de la soltería” (*Tres Ensayos* 84). Although historically the men of the Church and State have regulated the institution of marriage and promoted it as the most honourable option for women—with the convent providing a suitable alternative—marriage is often falsely perceived as a fate desired principally *by* women. As 20th-century *españolas* gradually began leaving the home to pursue their academic, artistic, or even political aspirations, some scholars expressed concerns about the danger of raising girls to believe they have a choice in whether to get married at all (Nash, *Mujer* 24), while others wrote in defense of Fray Luis de León's manual *La perfecta casada*. Spanish historian Antonio Pareja Serrada (1842-1924) laments in 1880 the wife's suffering as she must “renunciar a su autonomía e iniciativa propia para someterse totalmente a su marido” and enters a “relación de dominio-subordinación” (Nash, *Mujer* 19). From a legal standpoint, the 1889 Spanish Civil Code still demanded husbands protect their wives and, in return, the latter should obey their husbands (*Mujer* 20).

Until the 1930s, there was no equality of the sexes, and Paloma Castañeda adds that the question of divorce offended traditional Spain due to the threat of the “otra España ... rebelde y desintegradora, encarnación de todos los males del país” (117-118). This period of modernization placed a heavy burden on Spanish women: ensuring the nation's progress did not eliminate the

traditional family values upon which it was initially built. Referring to *La perfecta casada*, Marañón proposes that only two chapters must be read by every young wife: chapter 11, about managing the home's "sirvientes y criadas," and chapter 18, on the perfect wife's role in "hacer bueno al marido" and raising his children well (*Tres ensayos* 107). Marañón agrees with the friar's insistence that a woman's job does not end at childbirth, but rather that "hacer bueno al hijo" is "puro oficio" de la madre (107), thereby placing the responsibility of conveying (male) morality on the woman who is most affected by such standards.

Though marriage and divorce are not prominent themes in *Ellas* and *Quiero*, through the 1931 novel's background characters, Colombine offers the reader a feminist perspective on the confines of marriage. In the latter novel, Isabel's mother, for example, must await her husband's death to move to the city—"Era un deseo que había tenido siempre y que sólo con la *libertad*, alcanzada por la viudez, lograba satisfacer" (24; emphasis added). Freedom, for a woman, is widowhood, while "astucia femenil" is her only form of defense (49) within the narrative supported by the patriarchy. Dr. Alfredo, for example, remarks that "Se la educa [a la mujer] diciéndole que su misión en la tierra es sólo la de casarse y tener hijos" (99), while an older woman whose job it is to arrange marriages warns mothers that in order to attract a man, "No se las debe dejar leer [a las chicas]" (165). But analyzing Isabel's rejection of holy matrimony is more complex: is her distaste for marriage due to her intersexuality, or to her unwillingness to conform to unjust patriarchal ideals of marriage, motherhood, and domesticity? She often repeats the refrain "Yo no debía haberme casado" (Burgos 34), while her husband Julio claims that Isabel has no maternal instincts and would divorce him rather than have children, his tone changing from patient to frustrated (56). As a matter of fact, both aspects fit into the mold of the *chica rara*, flagging once again the difficulty in differentiating what Isabel's sexuality and/or gender identity might signify, as we saw in section 3.2. Is her lamentation of "Yo quisiera no ser mujer" (276) meant to

show the protagonist's intersexuality or her condemnation of the limited paths available to Spanish women? Or is her criticism of these restrictions in fact a manifestation of her intersexuality? Regardless of the cause, one of its effects is Isabel's rejection of marriage and especially parenthood as her primeval mission.

"The physical and psychic weight of responsibility on the woman with children is by far the heaviest of social burdens," asserts Rich in *Of Woman Born* (52). The mother is held accountable for everything pertaining to said progeny and her very "status as a woman [is] in question if she has 'failed' her children" (52-53). Recalling the allegory of the family explored in section 3.2, we could argue that a woman who does not follow a traditional path or raises her children in compliance with societal standards contributes to the fracture of the Spanish national image. The early 20th century saw many changes to the domestic ideals of womanhood that prompted serious reflection by academics, among them, Marañón, whose stance on motherhood and *La perfecta casada* we might label paradoxical. While he is conservative in many of his beliefs, he also bemoans how women "desaparecen en la tristeza del hogar" (*Tres ensayos* 87). As referenced in section 3.3.2.2, the doctor proposes a wife forced to bear a child each year into her mid-thirties will be so depleted that her husband will turn to adultery. Marañón laments the miserable female trajectory from mother to exhausted old woman whose children have moved on to start their own sad lives, warning readers that they must address motherhood consciously, with "el maximum de garantías," to avoid mothers becoming the *victims* of maternity (76-77). A wife should not, he claims, "entregarse al marido ... sin ninguna garantía para su salud y la de sus hijos futuros" (94). Marañón sees Spanish women called to "sacrificar su juventud al bien de la sociedad" by having many kids (89), specifying that it is "La Moral, la Sociedad y el Estado" who encourage—demand—reproduction (104). Nevertheless, he continues, a quantitative approach

should not be taken; it is not the number of children that matters, but the quality (104).¹⁶⁶ Parents should consider not simply how many children they can raise, but how many they can raise to be sane, intelligent, and good (105). Marañón even suggests women have something more in their lives than motherhood, beginning with girls' education alongside boys their age (*Tres ensayos* 78). Educated women can therefore earn an *honest* living—this is perhaps an allusion to prostitution as an *immoral* source of income—and be less passive and dependent on a spouse (79-80). This will also decrease the tendency toward marriage for financial security (84).

That said, Marañón still fears society will forget that the primordial and essential purpose of marriage is procreation (100). He also recognizes the clear gender divisions in the home: “la ley de Dios se cumple: él, el hombre, trabaja o lo disimula con sus diversiones y deportes; ella, la esposa, concibe y pare cada año un niño” (75). This opposition of maternity (femininity) and work (masculinity) are, to him, biological realities that women can only partially overcome—by engaging in certain masculine work activities—without children or once their children are grown (*La evolución* 59). While motherhood impedes a woman's intellectual journey, having children is necessary for social progress and the continuation of humankind (61). But this time, Colombine, a mother herself, diverges from the doctor in her beliefs, trusting that women's rights and dreams “no se oponen al amor, al hogar y a la maternidad” (qtd. in Castañeda 109)—the fight for equality is compatible with parenting, even for single mothers (Castañeda 110).

Motherhood, or more specifically, its rejection, is addressed only indirectly in *Ellas* through the characters' deviation from the traditional path of parenthood. However, the text makes

¹⁶⁶ Child mortality rates among women bearing upwards of eight babies are high; Marañón laments the mothers' sacrifice for children who will not survive long enough to become productive adults and contribute to Spanish culture (*Tres ensayos* 92). He even laments the lack of sexual education among both men and women that often leads to venereal disease, again likely due to infidelity (94).

a cruel argument on queer motherhood that seems at odds with Colombine's pro-woman rhetoric. If this naturalist novelette's thesis is the danger of intersexuals, then one of its main arguments is that LGBTQ+ mothers are a threat to children and families, the very fabric of the future Spanish nation. This point is made through Luisita, who brings her young son to the Hotel *Magestic*—an inappropriate location for a child on all counts. There, Adela briefly attempts to use him to win his mother's favour by giving him candies and kissing his hair. An Italian woman, seeing the sapphic flirtations happening above the boy's head, tears him away from Adela and disparages her in broken Spanish (6). Right away, the reader is presented a negative impact of queer adults on nearby children, a concern many conservatives raise to this day. But the fact that this feminine—and therefore deceitful—lesbian has a child in the first place only serves to accentuate her heteronormative disguise.

Then, midway through the story, Juana criticizes Luisita for having “la coquetería de ostentar su maternidad, como si fuese una prueba de que los hombres pueden amarla” (10). Juana seems to resent Luisita's motherhood, the mark of a woman following the “proper” path—though unmarried and queer, at least Luisita has fulfilled her womanly duties by having a child. This can also be read as a complaint about a lesbian who can “pass” for heterosexual, uttered by a visibly intersexual woman whose resentment encourages several rants. Nearer the end of the tale, Juana tells Manuel about Luisita's “true” character:

Sostenía relaciones con el padre de su hijo para explotarlo, y lo engañaba continuamente con todos y con todas, haciendo del niño el instrumento de su insinuación, *sin idea de lo augusto de su maternidad* ... Aquel pobre niño rubio era como un prendido, un adorno de su traje ... Lo llevaba con ella para hacerse más interesante; enviaba á favor de él sus miradas y sus besos procaces (18; emphasis added)

As an “instrumento” of Luisita’s deviant sexuality, the child is reduced to an anonymous body whose only purpose is to advance his mother’s relationships. Neither the narrator nor his mother refer to this child by name despite his silent appearances throughout *Ellas*. By portraying a lesbian mother who cares little for her son beyond his usefulness in delivering letters to her lovers (18), the novelette equates queer motherhood with bad—even abusive—parenting. In other words, LGBTQ+ mothers are exploiters, even adulterers, who use their children to support their sexually “perverse” habits. In the end, Luisita is punished by the author for being not only a bad mother but also a sexual dissident, as we saw in the previous section. And by focusing purely on the mother, not the father, *Ellas* also contributes to the assignment of child-rearing to the realm of the feminine.

Conversely, in *Quiero*, Burgos uses motherhood to legitimize a character one would suspect of being queer, a friend of Isabel’s named doña Berenice who has only a small role in the novel. Like with Luisita in *Ellas*, motherhood camouflages Berenice’s possible intersexuality because of the widespread belief in the incompatibility of queerness and parenting. Like Isabel, Berenice mentions wishing she were a man, but in contrast to the childless protagonist, “a pesar de su aspecto machuno, nadie sospechaba de su feminidad” because she has had a dozen kids (131). Berenice is described by the author as a “señora fuerte, vellosa, huesuda, que montaba a caballo, fumaba y no sabía hablar más que de la belleza de las artistas famosas” (131)—these traits suggest a butch lesbian identity reminiscent of *The Well of Loneliness*’s Stephen Gordon.¹⁶⁷ While Berenice benefits from the mask of motherhood, neither Stephen nor Isabel have children, leaving their LGBTQ+ identities open for debate by their peers.

¹⁶⁷ Berenice’s excuse for her interest in female artists is growing up with several brothers with whom she learned to appreciate female beauty. Would this suffice to deflect scepticism when combined with her other characteristics? Perhaps, but mainly because she has had so many children, which indicates she has consummated a heterosexual relationship.

The figure of the mother is also represented by Matilde, Julio's lover, though she is rarely present in the novel. Neither does the unnamed son have a significant role—he and his mother are secondary to Julio's real wife, and Julio even admits to himself that he would love his son much more if he were Isabel's (Burgos 196-197). While Matilde represents the sexual double standard explored in section 3.3.2.2, the boy serves as a plot device to contrast the repercussions of male and female infidelity. When reflecting on his feelings for his lover and child, Julio begins to understand “cómo los hombres prescinden con tanta facilidad de los hijos como de una cosa que se desprende de su ser con tan poca importancia” (196). This serves to criticize men's ability to abandon a child they fathered regardless of the consequences, in many cases leaving behind no family name, honour, or financial stability. Since the burden of reproduction is distributed unevenly between men and women, so too is the outcome of an unprotected affair—a baby. When Isabel confronts her husband about his infidelity, she says, “¿No es lo mismo que la mujer traiga un hijo ajeno al hogar o que el hombre deposite un hijo suyo en el hogar de otro?” (245). This is her response to Julio's supplications for forgiveness and insistence that if Isabel had cheated, it would be more severe than his own dalliances. Nevertheless, after Julio claims he no longer desires Matilde and visits only for the sake of his son, Isabel generously offers for the boy to come live with them so she can be his mother instead (Burgos 246). While Julio's first reaction is elation and a new love for his wife, he quickly realizes he cannot tear apart Matilde and her son (247). Just two pages later, Isabel stabs her husband—the possibility of motherhood seeming to have exacerbated her identity crisis.

In fact, from the beginning, the anxious protagonist insists she does not want kids—this establishes a foundation for the argument that intersexuality and motherhood are incompatible. Then, in chapter five, Isabel's sister Rosa has a challenging pregnancy that only convinces Isabel even more that maternity is the wrong choice for her:

La veía deformada, enferma, sufriente; tan cambiada, que no le parecía la misma. Ella hallaba tan antiestético el período prematernal que no comprendía cómo, no sólo Rosita, sino hasta las mujeres más elegantes y coquetas, hacían *ostentación* de su fecundidad de un modo que le parecía impúdico, y fundamentaban su personalidad en la importancia que les daba la gestación y el alumbramiento. (33; emphasis added)

Isabel compares maternity to a life-changing illness, using the same term—*ostentación*—that Juana does in *Ellas*—*ostentar*—to draw attention to society’s celebration of motherhood. The contrast is stark against Colombine’s graphic description of Rosa’s childbirth experience, during which Isabel “La había oído gritar, quejarse, aullar de dolor, dos días seguidos. La veía allí, en el lecho, con la cabeza caída sobre los almohadones, pálida, macerada. No se atrevía a decirle nada y hubiera querido que le hablara para saber que no estaba desangrada y muerta” (31). When Isabel discusses this traumatic sight with their mother, doña Milagros simply says that she too suffered horribly, but such is life (36). This casual acceptance emphasizes how society has conditioned women into thinking their value depends on their willingness to submit to maternity, painful as it may be. But even Marañón is critical of this “gustoso sacrificio” (*Tres ensayos* 73) and recognizes that a minute of pleasure for a man is, for a woman, the beginnings of a series of complex and painful process, namely pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding, in addition to decades of menstruation (*La evolución* 56).

In his *Tres ensayos sobre la vida sexual*, Marañón contends that “la mujer oye con recelo que todavía, al cabo de los siglos, se la siga ofreciendo como único porvenir la maternidad; pues sabe, a costa de un dolor milenario, que nunca se encerraron tantos engaños en unas palabras tan nobles” (74). Similarly, Rich puts in words the internalized idea that “as a mother the woman is beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing; and the potential for motherhood ... is her single destiny and justification in life” (*Of Woman Born* 34). In spite of social pressures, Isabel is

undeterred, asserting feminist ideas in a conversation with her husband, her brother-in-law, and her mother, the latter of whom is appalled by her daughter's conviction:

—Pues yo no deseo tener hijos—declaró [Isabel] con violencia—. Fisiológicamente la maternidad me parece una porquería. Se engaña a las pobres mujeres cantando alabanzas a la madre, para que no se nieguen a dar a luz y no falten ángeles para el cielo y soldados para la guerra.

— ¡No repitas eso donde te oigan!—exclamó tan escandalizada doña Milagros, que se le cayó de la mano la cucharada de crema—. Dirán que estás loca. (37)

The mention of war in parallel to childbirth is of note in the passage above. While they may seem like opposites—death and life—childbirth can also be both for the mother. It can be a battle, a trauma, and even a death sentence, though luckily Rosa survives. Of course, Isabel's main argument is that the role of mothers is to produce angels and soldiers, remitting to religious and political doctrines.¹⁶⁸

Regarding the latter, Marañón, taking a surprisingly progressive stance, proposes that “En general, los que se quejan de la limitación concepcional son gentes interesadas en una mano de obra más barata ... y ... hombres de Estado que se alarman ante la posibilidad de que, en un caso de guerra, el ejército nacional no esté lo suficientemente nutrido de gentes dispuestas a dejarse matar” (*Tres ensayos* 98). He mourns the German, French, and English soldiers who were conceived at the beginning of the century for the Great War and underscores the futile “esfuerzo de las pobres madres [que] solo sirvió para aumentar los blancos ante las filas de cañones” (99).¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ This same concept appears in wartime over the course of history. Rich, for example, who had three sons at the time of the Vietnam War (1955-1975), was asked by a French woman if she was working for the army—in other words, procreating in order to supply her country with soldiers (*Of Woman Born* 30).

¹⁶⁹ An article in *El País* by David Trueba demonstrates that “hacer llamamientos a la maternidad” to provide bodies for the armed forces is still a current issue; in this case, he refers to Russian

But doña Milagros's final response in the dialogue between Isabel and her mother—*they'll say you're crazy*—is also interesting in that it holds a certain irony. To a contemporary reader, it seems reasonable to not want children after watching your sister nearly die to give life to her son, and to reject the idea that a woman's sole purpose is to produce heirs. It is not in fact crazy for a woman to forge her own path and refuse to let Church and State regulate her body.¹⁷⁰ While Burgos generally supports this feminist discourse, when it comes to an intersexual woman, the same desire for freedom from oppression is instead deemed a consequence of an alarming medical condition.

3.5 (Queer) Heterotopias and the Politics of Space

Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957), a French anthropologist, develops the concept of liminality within his work on rights of passage, a process with three stages: preliminal, liminal, and postliminal ("Arnold"). Hetherington adds that "Liminality is associated with a transgressive middle stage of a rite: it is often marked out spatially as a threshold, or margin, at which activities and conditions are most uncertain and in which the normative structure of society is temporarily suspended or overturned" (32). This undefined stage, neither here nor there, exists in the interstice of set locations or points of progression and remits to another critical concept in spatial studies, the heterotopia. Building on Foucault's work on Othered spaces as laid out in our introduction, Hetherington simplifies the definition of the heterotopia—also known as third space or paradoxical space—as a socially transgressive, incongruous place with an alternate social structure (41). Heterotopias emphasize both order *and* resistance, are defined relationally to other spaces, and have various shifting meanings (51). If the default or "universal subject" is the heterosexual

President Vladimir Putin's need for "carne de cañón." This same expression is used prior to 1926, when Marañón quotes R. Michels: "confesamos sentir poca simpatía por esas propagandas que, al estimular la procreación de los hombres, estimulan el aumento de la carne de cañón" (qtd. in *Tres ensayos* 99).

¹⁷⁰ This debate has begun anew in the United States with the overturning of the 1973 Supreme Court ruling on the right to abortion (*Roe v. Wade*) in 2022.

Western white man, then any divergence in gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, or beliefs relegates the person to the field of Otherness (Massey 223) and its Othered spaces—heterotopias.¹⁷¹

On a distinct yet related note, Kristeva offers the term *abject* to reflect the human reaction of unease or disgust with something that creates a rupture within our sense of self versus other. That is to say, abjection is “ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les régies. L’entre-deux, l’ambigu, le mixte” (Kristeva, *Pouvoirs* 12). Within a religious context, the abject becomes a transgression, a taboo, or an exclusion (24). Similarly, heterotopias “mark not only the boundaries of a society but its values and beliefs as well” (Hetherington 49), while crossing these borders—in other words, upsetting the social order—“is to become a form of moral pollution—dirt, filth, scum” (49). While Kristeva’s primary example of abjection is a corpse, which forces the subject to gaze upon this object and recognize their own inevitable future, we could also apply this dynamic to heterosexual and homosexual bodies. Returning to the idea that queer Spaniards disrupt the national narrative (section 3.2), and the fear of being unable to identify LGBTQ+ members of society (section 3.3.1.1), we argue that Burgos’s narrators look upon the queer characters with a sense of abjection. In turn, the characters are pushed into Othered spaces—heterotopias—so the rest of the country can circumvent these uncomfortable feelings.

Basing herself on Foucault’s research, Angela Jones contends that although a queer *utopia* is unachievable, “queer heterotopias are places where individuals can challenge the heteronormative regime and are ‘free’ to perform their gender and sexuality without fear of being qualified, marginalized, or punished” (1). They “exist in opposition to heteronormative spaces”

¹⁷¹ What Massey is proposing is that even a modernist celebration of these traits that make one the “Other” serves to reinforce the straight white man as the universal identity, the starting point from which Others depart (223).

and are created by “multiple subversive performances of sex, gender, and sexuality vis-a-vis transmogrification of bodies” (2, 4). The scholar frames these spaces in a more positive light than Foucault, reasoning that queer heterotopias are established by their members, rather than by the conventional society that wishes to conceal deviance. Jones explains that “By creating queer heterotopias, individuals are creating spaces where they force the larger heteronormative society to recognize queer bodies as viable on their own terms” (6). We would argue that in Carmen de Burgos’s era at least, queer heterotopias were fashioned by the community *at the same time* as mainstream society forced LGBTQ+ individuals into these paradoxical spaces.

Occupied by women, homosexuals, transexuals, and “toda una gama de seres con sexualidades o prácticas desviadas de la norma” (Cabezas González and Berná Serna 785), queer heterotopias serve not only as a place of marginalization but also of safety. In regard to secret societies, Georg Simmel explains that “secrecy is its own sociological purpose: certain insights must not penetrate into the masses; those who know form a community in order to guarantee mutual secrecy to one another” (qtd. in Spain 18). We could then consider the LGBTQ+ community its own sort of secret society—both a physical and a metaphorical space—dependent on its members’ discretion and operating within a queer heterotopia of its own (partial) creation. One common trait is indeed in their secrecy, which Moreno-Lago flags as one of three coded signifiers—alongside cafés and Paris—of a queer haven (217).¹⁷² In addition, these “spaces of resistance ... have their own codes, rules and symbols and they generate their own relations of power” (Hetherington 24) that often draw from the hierarchies of society at large, namely those based on class, sex, or race. In Colombine’s writings, different settings advance a resignification of spaces that do indeed favour both order and resistance.

¹⁷² We will explore this notion in depth section 4.2.

Divided into four parts that take place in unique locations, *Ellas* alternates between safe and unsafe spaces for the queer community. First is the tolerant *salón de fiestas* of the Hotel *Magestic*, “el único sitio donde se mezclaban sin escándalo algunas aristócratas y pretensiosas [sic] burguesas de la clase media, que, á su vez, consentían la aproximación de una sociedad decadente de artistas y mujeres de moda, en las que el éxito disculpa los atrevimientos” (Burgos 1). Although the *caballero* Aumada notes there is an “aroma de pecado” (Burgos 3), this hotel is generally a safe space away from discrimination and outdated expectations regarding relationships and identities—or, as Johnson labels it, “a little island of freedom and modernity within traditional Spain” (*Gender* 205). Building on Foucault’s theory, we would propose that the Hotel *Magestic* is a heterotopia, bringing together sexual transgressors (in terms of homosexuality and/or adultery) and creating a space for illicit sexual activity. It is also a queer heterotopia in that the members of the community have participated in the construction of this relatively welcoming space.

Next is Luisita’s house, where a jealous Juana awaits. Although this is a private space, it is unsafe—not because of society’s homophobia, but because Juana’s virility makes her an abuser. Even the effeminate Manuel does not feel secure enough to stand up to the brutal woman. This space is used to draw a portrait of Manuel and Juana’s opposing identities; as Daphne Spain reminds us, “definitions of femininity and masculinity are constructed in particular spaces—most notably the home, workplace, and community” (7). Then we are briefly back in the Hotel *Magestic*, learning more about the characters and their mainly artistic pursuits. Here, Burgos suggests that those who figure among the *third sex* are often artists, a point Fortún clearly makes in both her posthumous novels. In *Ellas*, it is an older woman commenting on a young man’s quest to become a ballerina that makes this subtle connection: “Aquí la gente no comprende las almas de artista, y en cuanto un hombre es delicado lo creen femenino” (13). The association of queerness and artistic ability is especially salient in Fortún’s works, as the following chapter will demonstrate.

The second half of Part III takes place at a viscount's house, where the gay men dress in drag and refer to each other using feminine names: "Ellos, en cambio, eran amigos todos, se reunían y celebraban sus fiestas, con frecuencia en casa del vizconde Julio, donde podían dar rienda suelta á su fantasía vistiéndose trajes femeninos y sombreros empenachados, pintándose y perfumándose, para usar coquetería de mujer" (14). This, too, is a safe space for self-expression. Finally, a masquerade ball serves as a backdrop for the conclusion of the novelette, one of many "espacios de encuentro social" in Colombine's writings that are "útiles para el estudio de grupo y la sátira" (Palomo and Núñez Rey 65). During this part, the men in drag are nearly denied entry—Rosa and Adela come to their rescue—the attendees' jealousy reaches new heights, and Manuel kills Luisita. While the masks should offer anonymity, and the ball itself, an opportunity to party freely, discrimination by different members of society turn the event into a troubling experience for all those involved.

Ricardo Gullón classifies the spaces in *Ellas* as "verdadero espacio literario, el que es portador de algún significado que hemos de interpretar" (Palomo and Núñez Rey 65). Indeed, the ones highlighted above leave room for various interpretations and significations. Focusing on the hotel, a reader may first identify it as a space of defiance—the characters are creating their own community where they can express their feelings and identities. Heterotopias are often "associated with identity formation in relation to acts of resistance" (Hetherington 42). Simultaneously, the hotel is not without a certain order: gay men benefit from a higher status than their lesbian counterparts, while the heterosexual characters (namely, Aumada and Loreto) situate themselves above the queer hotel patrons. With Manuel's murder of Luisita, Colombine also showcases the gender-based violence stemming from the standard patriarchal order that affirms men's power of women. Returning to Kristeva, *Ellas*'s narrative voice, the reader, and the supporting characters react with a sort of abject shock to the stabbing. Kristeva affirms that "Le traître, le menteur, le

criminel à bonne conscience, le voleur sans vergogne, le tueur qui prétend sauver... Tout crime, parce qu'il signale la fragilité de la loi, est abject, mais le crime prémédité, le meurtre sournois, *la vengeance hypocrite* le sont plus encore parce qu'ils redoublent cette exhibition de la fragilité légale" (*Pouvoirs* 12; emphasis added). Now a criminal—and one whose crime is unjustified, at that—Manuel becomes a symbol of the abject, rejected even from the already marginal heterotopia in which he had once found solace.

Finally, the hotel is also a space of isolation, as is the setting for the fourth part of the novelette: the masquerade ball. As the police officer at the door demonstrates, one can only enter certain heterotopias with permission (Foucault, "Des espaces autres" 7). Other heterotopias, meanwhile, "cachent de curieuses exclusions; tout le monde peut entrer dans ces emplacements hétérotopiques, mais, à vrai dire, ce n'est qu'une illusion : on croit pénétrer et on est, par le fait même qu'on entre, exclu" (7). The fact that any character attends this ball or spends time at the *Magestic* suggests they are in some way an outsider. This is of course especially true for the queer cast of *Ellas* who can be recognised as "other" in part due to their presence in these spaces, but may also blend in with the unidentifiable *ellas y ellos* that traditional society fears. As they are rejected by conventional circles, they must find and/or create their own spaces in which to exist uninhibited—an impossible quest for a queer utopia—but discover that danger can still find its way into their midst, especially if their narrator holds them in contempt.

Compared to *Ellas*, *Quiero* takes place in many more locations: private spaces such as people's houses, and public spaces like different areas of the city, restaurants, and outdoors. Little remits to Moreno-Lago's *geocódigos*, though there is a mention of a *tertulia* with a group of women (67). And while secrecy, the first of the scholar's three spaces, plays a role in *Quiero*, it is not exclusive to women or queer characters; any of the pairs having affairs depend on the cover of darkness or privacy to maintain their clandestine relationships. Berta, for example, takes a late-

night walk with her lover after a nice dinner, and in the gloom and isolation, the Plaza Mayor feels like another world (149-150). The spaces that allow for extramarital entanglements are more in line with Foucault's classic heterotopias. The scholar asserts that since we do not live in a void, the spaces we inhabit can be defined by the relationships established in and around them (3). He gives two examples: "emplacements de passage" like roads and trains, and "ces emplacements de halte provisoire que sont les cafés, les cinémas, les plages" (3). In other words, transient spaces depend on the relationship of those journeying along or through them, and whom they might meet along the way. Heterotopias "are not sites that exist in themselves, they are relational" (Hetherington 48)—they are defined in connection to other sites, processes, and inhabitants (51). Like Berta, Isabel's affair takes place in one of these transient spaces; while the former enjoys walking along a dark road, the latter chooses a deserted beach to meet with her young lover. She enjoys watching the ocean, with "todos los matices intermedios entre la tempestad y la placidez" (Burgos 130). A nuanced creature herself, Isabel is much like the ocean, capable of peace, but also called to anger, immorality, and violence. If not for her husband, Isabel claims, she would hardly worry about keeping her affair a secret, because she enjoys the feeling of doing something scandalous. Perhaps this is due to her intersexuality, for which she is disparaged already—like one of Fortún's characters, Trudi, Isabel is associated with more than one form of immoral sexuality. As such, she and her deviant actions are consigned to Othered spaces where they cannot upset the traditional social order.

3.6 Conclusions on Carmen de Burgos

Beginning with an exploration of the medical rhetoric to which Colombine was exposed as she wrote *Ellas* and *Quiero*, this chapter highlighted the key messages the author likely wishes to impart on her readers. For this, we first had to understand her sociohistorical context: with the decline of Christianity and the uncertain modernization of the nation with the turn of the century,

debates on the essence of Spain flourished. Most importantly, the connection between sexuality and/or gender and national identity sparked debates that Burgos recounts in her narratives. As a naturalist author whose writings put forth a thesis—the impact of queer identities on Spain—Colombine investigates social preoccupations with the risks of sexual undifferentiation and immoral sexuality, namely intersexuality, prostitution, adultery, and (queer) violence. Then, like in many of her works, she criticizes traditional marriage and maternity, while also addressing the newfound concern around queer motherhood. While she presents maternity as a threat to a woman's health, education, and personal fulfilment, we also noted how she underscores the potential damage a queer mother might do to her child and society at large. Finally, by applying concepts like Foucault's heterotopia, Kristeva's abjection, and Simmel's secret societies, we can surmise that Colombine's unconventional characters are relegated to an Othered space with its own social structure. This space is twofold: while it serves to marginalize what society considers an undesirable Other, the construction of a queer heterotopia and its community is fundamental in the development of LGBTQ+ identities.

To conclude this chapter, we'd like to draw attention to two points. On one hand, although Colombine was a champion of women—a fact even Marañón happily recognized—her prose leaves a lot to be desired in terms of progressive LGBTQ+ representation, even considering the era in which it was written. While she advocates for female liberation, education, and social equality, especially as a divorced intellectual woman herself, her perspective on intersexuals is largely influenced by the contemporary sexology that instills pre-war Spain with a sense of fear rather than understanding. While some scholars, like Establier Pérez, argue that this is a narrative ploy, it is hard to image that *La Divorciadora*'s vehement pathologization of queerness is ironic rather than an honest representation of her uncertainty regarding shifting concepts of gender and sexuality. Indeed, as we saw in *Ellas*, Colombine is not without compassion for the degenerates

she brings to life in her writings, “perhaps reflecting an ambivalence about nonheterosexual identities and her own mixed experiences as a nontraditional woman (Johnson, *Gender* 207). While Burgos’s activism attempts to usher women into a progressive modernity, her apparent biases regarding unconventional sexual behaviour limit her impact to only certain women who comply with her own construction of womanhood.

On the other hand, there is significant overlap between gender and sexual orientation in their early 1900s’ iteration that makes them impossible to address from the present without the risk of being anachronistic. As we saw with Halberstam, calling Isabel or Luisita lesbians cannot be accurate, but nor can the terms intersexuals or inverts—rooted in discriminatory medical philosophies—define identities that have always existed but struggled to take form in the face of a critical society. While we can theorize and propose likely conclusions, the very nature of the matter—broad, shifting notions of the self during a period of confusion between tradition and modernity—makes it difficult to define with any certainty what the true queer experience was like in 1920s and 1930s Spain. Queer female existence is in itself a rebellion, a threat, and a rift in “las categorías binarias masculinidad/feminidad sobre las que se construye el orden social” (Sanfeliu 34). Examining medical and political musings on sexuality and identity is essential in understanding why and how literary fiction engages with topics like sexual deviance, gender roles, and geopolitical spaces. After exploring Colombine’s outsider perspective on the LGBTQ+ community of her era, in the next chapter we will turn to Elena Fortún, an author similar to Burgos in terms of class, intellectual activity, and journalism, but distinct in that she herself clearly belongs to the category Marañón and his peers called intersexuality.

Chapter 4 – Living “Al margen de la vida”: Elena Fortún’s Lesbian Literature

María de la Encarnación Gertrudis Jacoba Aragoneses y de Urquijo, better known as Elena Fortún (1886-1952), quickly gained recognition in Spain as a children’s story writer.¹⁷³ An intimate member of the Lyceum Club Femenino inaugurated in 1926, Fortún wrote several articles about the importance of this intellectual community, describing it as a unique space unlike men’s academic circles: “es hogar y es ateneo; hay calor de casa de familia y ambiente de estudio y de trabajo” (qtd. in Fraga Fernández-Cuevas 98). The Lyceum Club provided female intellectuals the space they needed to exchange ideas and establish connections with other middle and upper-class women (96). Fortún’s participation in its cultural events and her collaboration in magazines such as *Royal*, *La Moda Práctica*, and *La Prensa* sparked her career as a journalist in 1926 (Fraga Fernández-Cuevas 33-34). In 1931, Fortún began publishing in the journal *Crónica*, and in 1935, she signed an exclusive contract with the children’s magazine *Gente Menuda* to publish her *Celia* stories and their spinoffs (37, 43). Stories about this spunky protagonist, a girl who challenges traditional gender roles in her musings on politics and education, were first published in newspapers and magazines (*Blanco y Negro*, *Gente Menuda*) and later in books.¹⁷⁴ *Celia en la revolución* (written in exile in the 1940s), however, only reached the public in 1987, more than a decade after Franco’s death.¹⁷⁵ For 40 years, the author saw great success and posterity in her

¹⁷³ This pen name stems from her husband’s project, *Los mil años de Elena Fortún*, the first issue of which was published as *Margerit* in 1922, the only one to be published. The piece was dedicated to the couple’s deceased son. As Fraga Fernández-Cuevas explains, Fortún’s use of the pseudonym may have been a way of honouring her husband’s literary importance above her own, of hiding behind his creation (68).

¹⁷⁴ *Blanco y Negro* was consistently published between 1891 and 1939, then appeared briefly at different time periods between 1957 and 2000 in conjunction with *ABC*. *Gente Menuda*, meanwhile, served as a supplemental and an independent paper between 1906 and 1910 and again between 1976 and 1999. *Crónica* operated between 1929 and 1938.

¹⁷⁵ While *Celia en la revolución*, unpublished due to self-censorship, presents an honest and critical account of the Spanish Civil War period, all of Fortún’s books offer a degree of commentary on women’s rights and roles in society. When the protagonist is young (*Celia lo que dice*, 1929, to

contributions to children's literature, with *Celia* even becoming a six-episode televised series in 1993—with a script adapted by Martín Gaité.¹⁷⁶ Fortún's portrait was added to the Ateneo de Madrid in 2023.¹⁷⁷

However, her published works and public appearances never revealed her sexual orientation.¹⁷⁸ Fortún only explored her lesbian identity in manuscripts: *Oculto Sendero*, an autobiographical novel written during her exile in Argentina in the 1940s that remained unpublished until 2016, and a second lesbian *Bildungsroman* (coming of age novel) released by Editorial Renacimiento in 2022 about pre-war Spain penned by Fortún during exile as well, *El pensionado de Santa Casilda*.¹⁷⁹ These two novels will be the focal point of this chapter.¹⁸⁰ Moreno-Lago explains that one of the “impedimentos con los que se ha topado el feminismo para

Celia y sus amigos, 1935), she unapologetically shares her big ideas and engages with the figure of the modern woman. *Celia, madrecita* (1939), in which Celia becomes the “mother” of the household after her mother's passing, combines tradition with modernity; similarly, *Celia institutriz* (1944) explores female independence and a return to the home. Finally, in novels such as *Celia se casa* (c. 1950, published 2018), although Celia turns to a more traditional role, the narrator—Celia's little sister Mila—still questions the domestic path as women's primary option. Interestingly, *El cuaderno de Celia* (c. 1947, published 2017) incorporates Inés Field, with whom Fortún had a romantic and spiritual connection, as a nun named Sor Inés.

¹⁷⁶ The TV series, released between January 5 and February 9, 1993, primarily reflects *Celia lo que dice* (1292) and *Celia en el colegio* (1934). Before the series' cancellation, Celia (Cristina Cruz Mínguez) runs wild, both in her imagination and in her real upper-middle class life.

¹⁷⁷ Carmen de Burgos was added a year earlier.

¹⁷⁸ Fortún is not the only lesbian author whose queer texts were posthumously published; author and athlete Ana María Martínez Sagi's (1907-2000) *Donde viven las almas* explores time spent with her partner, poet Elizabeth Mulder (1904-1987), a selection of which was only published in 2022 by Fundación Banco Santander. Editorial Renacimiento republished Mulder's 1934 *Una sombra entre los dos* in 2018.

¹⁷⁹ *Oculto sendero* was translated to English by Jeffrey Zamostny in 2021 as *Hidden Path* and published by Swan Isle Press with a foreword by Capdevila-Argüelles.

¹⁸⁰ Although *El pensionado de Santa Casilda* is by Elena Fortún, Matilde Ras (1881-1969) also participated in its creation, leaving what the back cover of the novel calls “los trazos de la pluma de Matilde Ras” and the influence of fellow lesbian creator Victorina Durán in its pages. See Antonella Russo on the influence of Paris in narratives by Ras including *El pensionado* (311-12). However, Romero López et al. contend that both *Oculto sendero* and *El pensionado* were signed under the pseudonym “Rosa María Castaños” (133) and seek to uncover, through a strict and technical methodology, who the latter novel's true author is (157).

construir la historia de las mujeres han sido las fuentes, ignoradas, desechadas y/o minusvaloradas por la mirada androcéntrica” (213).¹⁸¹ Having grown up in a society that did not encourage women’s creative output or feature many positive queer stories, Fortún feared the repercussions of publishing lesbian literature, and the *Oculto sendero* manuscript was nearly destroyed at the author’s request (Moreno-Lago 213-214). This is likely the principal reason *Oculto sendero* hit the shelves 64 years after its conception, and *El pensionado* even later.¹⁸² Now, with more and more queer stories coming to light by way of documentaries, books, exhibits, and articles, Fortún’s musings on gender and sexuality, kept private due to fear and shame, can finally be recognized within a Spanish and global LGBTQ+ context.

Studies on the impact of the subversive *Celia* series on Spanish culture and society are plentiful and include Ana Puchau de Lecea’s article on the “alternative models of femininity [Fortún proposes] ... through the character Celia and the social context of the series” (“Girl, Interrupted” 137), Ana María Moix’s article “Érase una vez... La literatura infantil a partir de los años 40,” Kathleen M. Vernon’s study of the *Celia* television series, and more (Caamaño Alegre; Nieva de la Paz). María Elena Bravo Guerreira and Fiona Maharg-Bravo, like many, highlight Fortún’s grassroots attempt at feminism (“De niñas a mujeres”) while María Jesús Fraga

¹⁸¹ Woolf asks: “Married against their will, kept in one room, and to one occupation, how could a dramatist give a full or interesting or truthful account of [women]?” (83-84). For this reason, women in literature are represented in relation to men and rarely as independent characters. Woolf flips the narrative, asking what would be left of Shakespeare’s work should men be only “represented in literature as the lovers of women, and were never the friends of men, soldiers, thinkers, dreamers,” and concludes that there would be very little remaining of his plays (83). Gilbert and Gubar build on this notion in *Shakespeare’s Sisters*, highlighting in particular the challenges facing women poets (xvii).

¹⁸² Although this dissertation does not focus on the subject of exile, it is nevertheless important to note that Fortún wrote these two works during her exile in Argentina, due to the Franco dictatorship. The psychological toll of being a queer woman author under the regime would have been devastating, and, without a doubt, Fortún still felt its effects abroad after her departure from Spain in 1939. Nevertheless, her texts reflect on the pre-war period of modernization and growth, offering their protagonists even greater freedom outside of Spain.

Fernández-Cuevas compares the young protagonist to don Quijote (“Don Quixote and Celia”). Fraga Fernández-Cuevas’s book *Elena Fortún, periodista* is the most complete investigation of the author’s presence in the press. Nuria Capdevila-Argüelles’ introductions to the epistolary collections and Marisol Dorao’s biography *Los mil sueños de Elena Fortún* connect Fortún’s personal life as outlined in her letters to her published writings. Mangini’s book on the Lyceum Club as well as research on the modern European woman, and specifically the contemporary Spanish *autora*, will allow us to develop a portrait of the intellectual, free woman Fortún wished she and her peers could be—someone Fortún could only become in the pages of her books.

Outside of Capdevila-Argüelles’s introduction to *El pensionado*, there is at present virtually no scholarship on this 2022 publication. We will, however, draw from the few papers on Fortún’s other lesbian *Bildungsroman*, and from articles that explore lesbian identity in different contexts. Josefa Álvarez Valdés studies *Oculto sendero* as a *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman* (novel of the artist) in which protagonist María Luisa confronts expectations of marriage and motherhood and accepts her lesbian identity.¹⁸³ Antonella Russo examines the novel as part of her study on Matilde Ras in 2023; most recently, Dolores Romero López et al. examine authorship and gender identity in its pages. Finally, Moreno-Lago’s 2021 article “Signs and Literary Spaces for the Reconstruction of the Sapphic Circle of Madrid in the Works of Elena Fortún, Rosa Chacel and Victorina Durán” is one of the few other scholarly sources that examines *Oculto sendero* beyond a brief mention of title and author, excluding Capdevila-Argüelles’s introduction to the

¹⁸³ Consider Irish author James Joyce’s 1916 debut novel *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, a *Künstlerroman* about the formation of a young, male artist. While both protagonists struggle in their journeys, *Oculto sendero*’s María Luisa faces obstacles unique to her gender—not having a room of her own in which to dedicate herself to her art.

novel, and even ties into *El pensionado*, which the scholar was able to access a year before its publication.¹⁸⁴

While Carmen de Burgos may disparage intersexuals, other authors use their writings to uplift (or, at least, humanize) the growing queer community. Elena Fortún takes the latter approach in describing LGBTQ+ characters in her unpublished novels, which centre on the rich inner lives of (upper middle class) female characters. *Oculto sendero* follows María Luisa Arroyo from childhood to her late thirties, with chapters divided amongst four sections that correspond with the protagonist's age (*Primavera, Verano, Otoño, Fin del otoño*—this last section has only three chapters and 14 pages in total). From the first scenes of the novel, María Luisa rejects traditionally feminine clothing, hobbies, and expectations, which creates tension in the relationship with her conservative mother. When an incident in school forces the family to turn to private tutoring for their daughter, our protagonist discovers her artistic talents that eventually lead her to Jorge Medina. Once her supportive art teacher and later her controlling husband, Jorge, like any Spanish man at the time, insists on regular sexual intercourse with his wife and demands unending menial labour, never allowing her the space she needs for art, as he feels her success undermines his fruitless painting career. The couple has and loses a daughter, her death driving them further apart. It is not until later in life that a doctor informs María Luisa that her “inversion” is not uncommon in the intellectual/artistic community. In this social stratum, after her separation, María Luisa finds a string of female lovers—though never one to wholeheartedly commit to her. The novel ends with María Luisa heartbroken and untethered, but free to be her authentic self.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ There are also two brief analyses of Fortún's autobiographical fiction by Estrella Díaz Fernández and Rafael M. Mérida Jiménez, and by Raquel Arias Careaga.

¹⁸⁵ The ending leaves the reader with a sense of melancholy, which Freud considers a form of unfinished grief. In these cases, the grief is not for the dead, but has been lost as the object of love; the melancholic subject may also know “qui il a perdu mais non ce qu'il a perdu en cette personne” (Freud, “Deuil” 9). This loss is often accompanied by “un immense appauvrissement du moi” (9).

After Editorial Renacimiento published Fortún's first autobiographical fiction, it began preparing the author's next posthumous work, *El pensionado de Santa Casilda*.¹⁸⁶ A story about the transition of a group of boarding school students into womanhood, *El pensionado* is built around the desire its protagonists feel for each other and for other women in their lives, away from the male gaze. The narrative follows several teenage girls at a school run by nuns through their youth and into their thirties. The novel is divided into three parts: first, *Pubertad*, the teen years, during which the girls navigate friendships and crushes; second, *Floración*, their twenties, when many of them get married, have kids, or establish a clandestine homosexual relationship; and third, *Plenitud*, their thirties, in which Fortún describes the new beginnings her protagonists are finally able to explore in 1930s Spain. The core group comprises Ofelia and her romantic interests (the French Manón and the Filipino Totó), as well as the beautiful Adela and her eventual partner, the masculine Trudi.¹⁸⁷ As they discover and grow into their queer identity, Fortún's protagonists reject traditional models of femininity and heterosexuality—navigating invisibility, desire, and ostracization—, ultimately joining a discreet community of modern, sapphic women that opens them to a journey of self-understanding and acceptance.

This chapter will compare Fortún's posthumous novels in order to highlight how the author recreates (queer) women's experiences within an uncertain modernity. We will begin section 4.1 by exploring the development of various queer identities, navigating the same pathologizing

¹⁸⁶ Among Fortún's autobiographical notes is a short text called "Nací de pie," also unpublished, that tries to explain homosexuality with the birth of a baby whose biological sex is unclear (Capdevila-Argüelles, Introduction, *Oculto Sendero* 21).

¹⁸⁷ Other characters of note are Jacinta, the beauty queen, and Castita, a younger boarder who joins the circle of friends during adulthood. Jacinta has her own fall from grace after being abandoned by a lover, but eventually finds happiness as Trudi's brother's lover. Castita, meanwhile, gets divorced, entertains a brief relationship with Trudi, and then returns to heterosexual courtship. The remaining girls of the group (Tomasa, Riet, Montserrat, Rosa María) make occasional appearances, first at the boarding school and later at the *Pensionado* meetups—but they follow the traditional paths of femininity, marriage, and motherhood.

medical discourse we studied in the previous chapter. We will investigate the significance of clothing and cross-dressing and connect it to Martín Gaité's essay on the *chica rara*—a young woman branded weird because of her clothing, interests, and tense relationships with other women. We will also consider what makes a lesbian narrative, if Fortún's works count as such, and how she represents sapphic desire in her work. An in-depth study of Fortún's contributions to lesbian literature will allow us to address the erasure and (in)visibility of lesbian desire and the fluctuating concepts of womanhood and women's liberation. In section 4.2 on LGBTQ+ and/or women's spaces, we will examine the boarding school lesbian genre (into which the first part of *El pensionado* neatly fits) and the queer spaces and sense of community developed by the LGBTQ+ characters themselves. Then, we will explore an issue all bourgeois women, regardless of sexual orientation, faced in Fortún's era: a lack of access to intellectual and artistic spaces, a concept we will support with Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. The final part of this chapter before the conclusions, section 4.3, will emphasize the author's social commentary, namely how she challenges the patriarchal institution of compulsory (heterosexual) marriage and criticizes the traditional family, the very foundation of social and moral order in Spanish society, leaving room instead for her version of queer motherhood. We will consider compulsory heterosexuality, marriage, and motherhood a form of violence toward (queer) women and study this in parallel with the other, more physical forms of gendered violence they face—a stark contrast to Colombine's violent queer characters.

4.1 Queer Identity and Desire

4.1.1 Further Unpacking Contemporary Medical Discourse

The gender binary of the 1900s still inhabits the minds of many in 2026, even as terms like nonbinary, genderfluid, and transgender enter common usage. But already in 1990, Butler and other scholars questioned the relation between biological sex and the social construct of gender.

Butler proposes that “gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex” because it is a cultural construction (*Gender* 8); in essence, gender is an interpretation of sex by a given culture and cannot be associated to any one biological body (8-9), especially where biology itself can be ambiguous (10). For those whose identities do not conform to expectations, there is a choice to make—live outside the binary, or on an *oculto sendero*.

As mainstream society attempts to regulate gender and sexuality, creating a false image of cohesion, it “conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts in which ... sexuality ... does not seem to follow from gender” (185). And though Butler does not reflect on the third sex, she does point out that “there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two” (9). She proposes in *Gender Trouble* that

The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one ... (9)

In *Undoing Gender*, she explains that the social construct of gender is a performance done for a (real or imaginary) audience, meaning that people’s gender depends not on them, but on how they present themselves to others (1). This rhetoric does not belong exclusively to the 21st century; in fact, Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) said in 1949 that “one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one” because of a cultural compulsion and not a biological antecedent (qtd. in Butler, *Gender* 11). The division of man and woman—and women’s realization of the significance of this partition—dates back even further. In the late 19th century, Krafft-Ebing and Ellis conflate gender expression and sexual orientation: “As gender role and behavior was deemed to be the natural

consequence of sex, if an individual's sexual desire belongs to the opposite sex then, it was reasoned, so must his or her gender attributes" (qtd. in Taylor 288).

Even 1920s Spain saw a destabilization of the once-distinct categories of gender and sexuality. The latter was embraced by some and violently rejected by others, who built on the theories and publications of their peers across Europe. Marañón, for example, refers to German sexologist Iwan Bloch, who claims: "todo intento de la naturaleza o de la cultura para borrar la diferencia entre lo específicamente masculino y lo específicamente femenino, tiene que considerarse como un atentado al progreso biológico de la Humanidad" (qtd. in Marañón, *Tres ensayos* 188). Similarly, Marañón believed that men should extinguish any inner female traits, while women should vanquish any hints of masculinity, because while neither masculinity nor femininity is inherently superior, their excellence depends on their differentiation, as does the species' reproduction (*Tres ensayos* 187). In fact, he claims homosexuality is a direct result of sexual undifferentiation (191).¹⁸⁸ The homosexual falls under the terms *invert* and *third sex*, synonyms we defined in the previous chapter as a person between the categories of man and woman—limited though these categories may be in the early 20th century. This medical rhetoric heavily impacted social and literary customs, which is clear in both Fortún's writings and her community. Even queer set designer Victorina Durán publicly defended and lived this *tercer sexo*, a third option beyond the binary of man and woman (Capdevila-Argüelles, Introduction, *El pensionado* 53). The reader is thereby left with an important question: if Elena Fortún had had the

¹⁸⁸ Marañón considers hermaphroditism—intersex, in today's terms—present in primitive animal evolution as the precursor of intersexuality, since animals (and humans) have yet to evolve into a perfectly defined binary of male and female (*Tres ensayos* 190). This provokes homosexuality in both animal and human bodies, most often appearing in the most primitive creatures (191)—this paints a negative picture of human homosexuality as both perverted and primitive.

terminology that stems from today's queer studies and medical discourse—transgender, genderfluid, nonbinary...—would her characters identify with a different label? Would she?

Fortún's novels do not engage directly with contemporary medical discourse in the same way Burgos does, though both incorporate the figure of the doctor, a character used to reiterate leading medical beliefs on inversion and intersexuality in Spanish society and beyond. In Colombine's *Quiero*, Isabel's doctor gives self-aggrandizing speeches on the pathologies that have infected his patient; in *Oculto sendero*, meanwhile, María Luisa's has a much smaller role. Over the course of a few pages, he listens to our protagonist recount the horror, the violation she feels when having intercourse with her husband—from whom she has now been separated for two months—and responds with a series of “¡Ya!” Then, he asks if she has been sexually active with any women and immediately thereafter if she is an artist, proceeding to list traits of the *chica rara* that María Luisa affirms are also the case for her: “Jugaba como un chico... . Sentía disgusto por los adornos femeninos...” (433). He insists that artists are seldom complete without a certain inversion of the spirit (433) and immediately associates female homosexual encounters with being an artist (432). Finally, he asks more medically relevant questions about “feminidad y ... violento masculinismo,” “Desarreglos ováricos,” and strong back muscles (433). After this discussion filled with hesitations and pauses in the form of ellipses, the doctor concludes that María Luisa's is a “caso típico de inversión del instinto en persona honrada” (433) and refers her to a psychiatrist, even suggesting she should try to “complacer a su marido” (433)—once again pathologizing inversion and enforcing heterosexuality. This *complacer* can be understood either as a) satisfying Jorge's need for heteropatriarchal normalcy or b) satisfying Jorge sexually, as a good wife should. This doctor, though he shares his beliefs with Isabel's pseudo-Marañón, is more functional in regard to the plot than his counterpart in *Quiero*, who simply regurgitates the discriminatory musings of a real-life doctor. This difference likely stems from the authors' own sexualities—the

lesbian Fortún contemplates the medical advice and theories, drawing her own conclusions, while the heterosexual Burgos leans into them.

Taking a more indirect approach, *Oculto sendero* questions the male-female binary through María Luisa and her queer friend Julieta's reflection on the third sex. Fortún writes: "[Julieta] Estaba de acuerdo conmigo en que no debía haberme casado. Los artistas no deben casarse pero eso se aprende tarde, cuando ya no tiene remedio" (*Oculto sendero* 444). María Luisa adds, partly in jest, "El artista es tal vez el *tercer sexo* ... Creo que entre los humanos son los artistas que no deben reproducirse," even using ants as an analogy, since worker ants are sterile and those that reproduce do not work (444; emphasis added). This same "third sex" is associated by Freud, Ellis, and Krafft-Ebing with "female lust and with feminist revolt against traditional roles" (Farwell, "The Lesbian Narrative" 160). Indeed, nobody is more transgressive in the novel than María Luisa and her fellow lesbian artists, who reject gender roles and gendered clothing. It is no surprise, then, that Julieta takes her friend's comment in stride, explaining that "el artista lleva en su cerebro y en su alma comprendidos los dos sexos" (Fortún, *Oculto sendero* 445). Combining Julieta's logic with the doctor's rhetoric, it is clear that Fortún's writing was marked by the leading research on the queer community that did not treat homosexuality and gender nonconformity as natural phenomena, but rather as deviance that could be suppressed or even cured.¹⁸⁹ To remedy its inversion, the "sexually independent lesbian body" (Farwell, "The Lesbian Narrative" 162) must conform to heteronormative boundaries by making simple adjustments. For María Luisa, this means leaving behind her masculine clothes, painting less, and taking care of the house, according to the doctor (Fortún, *Oculto sendero* 433). Were she to follow this path, she would be a failed

¹⁸⁹ Freud and Krafft-Ebing believed the lesbian was not necessarily more inclined to criminal activity, but rather that her existence was a crime in itself as she challenged traditional boundaries (Farwell, "The Lesbian Narrative" 161).

Künstler, an artist whose growth was inhibited by the restrictions society imposes on women. Although María Luisa will never visit the psychiatrist her doctor recommends, in this moment she is determined to please Jorge and be the perfect heterosexual wife. This delusion can only last so long—eventually, María Luisa must make the difficult decisions associated with living an authentic lesbian life if she is to survive in her early 20th-century Spain.

4.1.2 Identifying the *Chica Rara* through Clothing

Clothing carries a significant cultural and social significance; it hints to a person's economic status, religious beliefs, ethnicity, and personality. Most importantly for this dissertation, clothing is typically divided by gender; thus, wearing clothes within certain parameters speaks to a person's gender identity and, by extension, their roles and opportunities in society. Cross-dressing therefore becomes particularly relevant in this context. As Halberstam affirms, the female-to-male cross-dresser has existed for centuries, using clothing as a form of mobility; many women have donned men's clothing and concealed their gender to set off on adventures, become pirates, join armies, get "male" jobs, and even take female lovers (168).¹⁹⁰ In Spanish Golden Age theatre, Melveena McKendrick explains, the *mujer varonil* actress who dressed like a man on the stage represented "vicarious freedom and adventure" for female patrons, while also allowing herself to indulge in the (potentially lesbian) desire to dress in masculine fashion (320-321). For Aurélie Vialette, cross-dressing can be a political stance, a rejection of the State's control of women's bodies and roles in society (19-20). During the 19th century, some European women wore masculine attire to enter male spaces, like the Swiss surgeon Henriette Faver Caven (1791-1856), the French writer George Sand, and Spain's own poet and journalist Concepción Arenal;

¹⁹⁰ We might recall the famous transgender Catalina de Erauso (1592-1650), who cross-dressed and adopted a masculine persona to join the army, serving for 18 years before being discovered (McKendrick 40). For more on the figure known as the Lieutenant Nun, see Sherry Velasco.

others dressed in this fashion to adopt a temporary or permanent male identity or to challenge gender divisions (Vialeto 20-21). In her study of cross-dressing in the Spanish press, Nuria Cruz-Cámara explains that during the sociopolitical disorder of the early 1900s, “sexual ambiguity was often the focus of public discussions on the upheaval of the traditional gender order” (295) and cross-dressing frequently figured in magazines and the daily paper (296), something Fortún would surely have noted as she too preferred a more masculine fashion. While this clothing style later became associated with female homosexuality, the 1920s androgynous look was, according to Laura Doan, more in line with the modern woman than the lesbian (122). The former was identified as such not only because she had a cultural education, a professional vocation, and a liberal (sometimes feminist) political consciousness, but also because she applauded technological advances and “reflejaba la modernidad en su aspecto físico y su modo de vestir” (Mangini, *Las modernas* 75).¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, the medical field already associated cross-dressing to sexual inversion in the early 20th century (Newton 558). We can also establish a link between nontraditional clothing choices and the *chica rara* trope, whose traits include a penchant for masculine fashion. Characters who reject the gender binary in their clothing preferences also tend to do so in other areas—namely, their pastimes and their relationships.¹⁹²

In *Oculto sendero*, María Luisa’s fashion sense echoes her journey of homosexual self-discovery as she ages. As a child, she is often at odds with her mother over her love of masculine or genderless clothing, which gives her a sense of euphoria she simply cannot find in feminine attire. The first chapter, “El vestido,” introduces the protagonist as she rejects the new dress her

¹⁹¹ The figure of the modern woman appears in many works by women intellectuals of the 1920s—for instance, Rosa Chacel’s (1898-1994) short story “Chinina Migone” in which Chinina’s husband forces her to abandon her singing career while her daughter, once grown, dives into the world of silent cinema, embodying the modern woman in her activities and short hair.

¹⁹² This was also the case in Carmen de Burgos’s works, for example Manuel and his gay friends dressing in drag.

family has purchased for her. Through a dialogue between mother and child, the first-person narrator describes this disappointing garment as being met with anguish and tears (73). Later, when asked what she will do as an adult, the protagonist responds: “Vestirme de hombre y montar a caballo” (115). María Luisa has many conflicts with her mother about her manner of dress, and only her aunt Manuelita supports her gender nonconforming clothing choices. In fact, Manuelita brings the protagonist a Dutch boy costume for Carnaval, which María Luisa dons with great joy. Because of her masculine outfit, “¡Todos creían que [ella] era un niño! Esto [la] entusiasmaba” (169). A few pages later, María Luisa is again thrilled to be wearing mourning clothes, which give her a slightly androgynous air (189). Over the course of the *Bildungsroman*, María Luisa’s love of genderless clothing only grows as she leaves the home her mother controls. This tendency contributes to her isolation, but also to the picture Fortún is building of a character who rejects social norms and builds a life she can live authentically, which the author was never fully able to do for herself.

Once she is an adult, María Luisa has her clothes custom-made by the same tailor as her husband (378). Now, she can dress like a modern woman—comfortable and stylish, but also androgynous. She reflects on this gender ambiguity in the novel’s final section: “¡Qué delgada estoy! Hasta ahora he sonreído a la imagen ambigua que el espejo me devolvía... un algo de chico, otro algo de mujer... creo que dentro de poco pareceré un hombre definitivamente, un hombre flaco y feo...” (482). This rumination occurs while on her way to see Rosarito, her divorce lawyer—a clear parallel between clothing and modernity. At the same time, her attire fits the “distinctive marks of a lesbian sub-culture” (Doan 122); this 1920s modern aesthetic allows members of the queer community to identify each other, if only subconsciously. For example, Fermina, a lesbian acquaintance, immediately recognizes María Luisa’s clothing as a mark of

homosexuality and identifies her as “una amiga más” when they first meet (378). The protagonist, however, as Capdevila-Argüelles contends:

tardará en asociar su rechazo a la ropa femenina y la inseguridad que le produce con otras facetas de su identidad que debiera haber considerado síntomas de esa patología que según la medicina es su inversión: el temperamento artístico, el desvarío y tentaciones de suicidio que le causa el coito, la poca destreza en la administración del hogar ... De su primera juventud rescata la narradora el recuerdo de la extrañeza que siempre produjo en los hombres, debido a su poca feminidad. (51-52)

That said, some of the more stereotypical characteristics of “butch” or androgynous lesbian stereotypes prove accurate when it comes to María Luisa’s appearance. Her clothing choices demonstrate to readers that the cut and colour of a piece of fabric has, according to her peers, a gender, and the ones she chooses are typically more masculine. If gender is performative, “that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be” (Butler, *Gender* 34), then clothing is an integral part of that performance.¹⁹³ And if lesbian protagonists are disruptive and non-feminine (Farwell, “When Is” 16), then María Luisa’s sense of style and same-sex attraction do undoubtedly disrupt the “fiction of heterosexual coherence” (Butler, *Gender* 185) in that her gender expression and her sexual desire transcend the norms of her era.

In fact, many aspects of her identity indicate transgression, from the clothes she wears to her belief systems and moral code. María Luisa is a great example of the *chica rara* trope that Martín Gaité identifies in *Desde la ventana* (1987). While not a medical category, it does serve to classify a certain kind of girl/woman who rebelled against traditional expectations of femininity.

¹⁹³ This leads the reader to a sort of conundrum: Butler proposes that gender is the action of conforming to the identity with which it is associated, and at the same time, that gender stems from a person’s identity (*Gender* 34).

She generally dresses in a masculine or androgynous style and has masculine traits that appear as early as childhood. Like the *mujer esquiva* of the Spanish Golden Age drama (McKendrick 142), she is repelled by men, marriage, and motherhood. These traits are typically the reason she struggles to connect her mother and other women—unless they are *chicas raras*. In a time of women’s social progress, Isabel Murcia Estrada argues that “any woman who either remained outside of [the] vital markers of birth, marriage, reproduction, and death, and thus did not fit within normative logics is considered ‘queer,’” or *rara* (85). While *Quiero*’s Isabel was raised like a boy by her father, María Luisa leans into the traditionally masculine domain of her own accord and is ostracized for being boyish and a bad seamstress, and for enjoying running games. Her childhood is full of conflict—with her family, with other girls at school, and especially with society’s expectations for women. The protagonist often laments finding herself alone because she is an unusual girl (Fortún 211, 206). Her clothing preferences are a visual representation of her dissident sexuality and her rejection of tradition, both in her youth and as an adult. Seen alongside her other rebellious traits, her fashion choices depict her as not only a modern woman, but a lesbian one at that. Though Fortún seems to identify more with *Oculto sendero*’s María Luisa, there are aspects of her character present throughout *El pensionado* as well: her masculine clothing, her sapphic desire, and even her literary inclinations.¹⁹⁴

For instance, many of *El pensionado*’s characters lean into a modern/masculine clothing aesthetic once they are free from the confines of the boarding school. Manón, in her “trajes masculinos” (Fortún, *El pensionado* 397), Totó, wearing her “traje sastre azul marino de irreproachable corte, camisa de hombre y chalina de seda azul” (401), and even the feminine Ofelia, who enjoys “trajes sastres” and is “poco aficionada a los adornos” (237), have the opportunity to

¹⁹⁴ According to Martín Gaité, many Spanish post-war authors created weird girl protagonists to reflect their own experiences in the margins (111).

reflect their identities in their clothing near the end of the *Plenitud* and the start of the *Floración* sections of the novel. But Trudi, whose young adult days are marred by her sexual assault and subsequent detention in a reformatory, is not able to express herself and her nonconformist identity until later chapters; even then, she dresses more ambiguously. Near the end of the book, Ofelia finds her wearing “una blusa cruda que casi le llega a los pies y una pipia humeante en la boca” (449), an androgynous style. Trudi’s character is partially based on Swiss translator Trudy Graa (?-1942) in both looks and personality (Capdevila-Argüelles, Introduction, *El pensionado* 57), but also reminiscent of Victorina Durán, the costume designer who often went by Víctor or Vic, a good friend of Fortún’s. Artist and scholar Vicente Carretón Cano describes Durán as masculine, “de sólida estructura y aspecto recio; pausada en el hablar, gesto adusto, pelo cano, casi siempre vestida con trajes sastre de faldas y de una sobriedad ascética,” and undoubtedly sapphic (4). Through conversation with the costume designer, he also notes Durán’s frequent use of the word *hombre* to express frustration, much like Trudi.¹⁹⁵ Looking at her photos, one can see the same genderless clothing style Fortún uses to depict Trudi: suit jackets and ties paired with skirts and the occasional frilly shirt. In Durán, like in Trudi, the modern woman and the lesbian’s styles converge in the androgynous 1920s look, carrying with it a plethora of social and personal implications.

Once again, we can associate Trudi’s style to the other traits that cement her in the *chica rara* category. Throughout the novel, the narrator refers to her with terms such as *chicazo*, *varonil*, *caballero andante*, *andrógino adolescente*, and even *esbelta amazona antigua* (Fortún, *El pensionado* 76, 108, 72, 82). The teenager also prefers running games and tennis to traditionally

¹⁹⁵ Trudi is not the only character drawn from real life. Another is an actress who appears at the very end of *Floración* and whom Capdevila-Argüelles likens to Margarita Xirgu, actress and producer who worked closely with García Lorca (Introduction, *El pensionado* 52).

feminine pastimes. When she is forced to watch the children or do domestic tasks during her boarding school days, she does a lamentable job and is chastised more than once. Mending socks, for example, is “la tarea que más mortifica a Trudi” and sometimes even leads to tears (154). She makes for an awful *ángel del hogar*—the modest, submissive homemaker wife and mother who values propriety and lacks sexual desire (Aldaraca 30). Trudi speaks, acts, and looks unlike conventional models of femininity, and once into her thirties, she is free: economically independent and away from her family. On the last page of the *Floración* section, an actress, watching Trudi draw, says, “¡Pareces un muchacho!” to which Trudi responds, “¡Y lo soy!” (*Fortún*, *El pensionado* 358). Compared to María Luisa, who is undoubtedly a lesbian but never outright considers herself a boy, Trudi’s exclamation suggests something beyond sapphism, more in line with the *tercer sexo* mentioned by *Oculto sendero*’s supporting characters.¹⁹⁶ While today’s terminology offers the language to describe experiences that have existed for centuries, both Trudi and Fortún are limited by the pervasive medical rhetoric that defines sex, sexuality, and women’s bodies according to the theories of heterosexual men of “science.”

4.1.3 Repressing and Expressing Sapphic Desire

Society’s misogyny and homophobia have often forced writers to codify their language and use subtexts (Suárez Briones 271). Similarly, Lillian Faderman blames social stigma for keeping many lesbians from writing about their experiences at all—they did not want to be associated with the topic or risk their writing careers (“What Is” 49). But with contemporary sexology putting lesbianism on the forefront in the early 20th century, sapphic literature by male authors began to grow (50). Most of these works were voyeuristic, even pornographic, and had

¹⁹⁶ Within the realm of queer theory, posits Luisa Posada Kubissa, identity is both contingent and unstable (149), while Gracia Trujillo Barbadillo adds that “lo queer no supone tanto una identidad como una interrogación crítica de las identidades” (qtd. in Posada Kubissa 153).

little artistic value (Ena Bordonada xxxix).¹⁹⁷ They catered to the pleasures of the voyeur, whether that was the narrator, reader, or even the “detached medical observer” (Chang 159). This current was also influenced by French male authors who wrote about sexual activity between women in order to shock their bourgeois readers, thereby creating the second aspect of the lesbian’s dichotomous image: “medical anomaly ... [or] carnivorous flower” (Faderman, “What Is” 50). Neither one would encourage acceptance of lesbians in society. In this environment, few authentic and explicitly queer stories, especially by lesbian writers, could be put to paper. Consequently, explains Rafael M. Mérida Jiménez, literary critics are confronted with the frequent ambiguity of lesbian literature (11), particularly in its initial stages.

So, what is a lesbian narrative? Marilyn R. Farwell follows this question with several more: Who is the lesbian in the lesbian narrative—the character, the creator, or both? Must it be a positive depiction? How explicit must the text be? (“When Is” 6) Faderman adds to Farwell’s queries: What about novels with romantic friendships, but not physical sexual activity? What about the ones where the protagonist never acknowledges her lesbianism or even understands the possibility of homosexuality, but clearly does not fit traditional heterosexual molds (“What Is” 52-53)? These potential criteria are already challenging enough before we remember Halberstam’s insistence that the very term “lesbian” is not historically specific enough to denote the range of social and sexual experiences predating the late 20th century (109). Similarly, remarks Faderman, the degree to which “lesbian” denotes a sexual relationship is difficult to establish (*Surpassing* 18). Not only

¹⁹⁷ Spanish examples highlighted by Ena Bordonada include *Alas y pezuñas* by Emiliano Ramírez Ángel (1883-1928), the anonymous four-part series *El placer sin hombres* (c. 1930)—which included a short story called “El internado sáfico”—, Joaquín Belda’s (1883-1935) *La coquito* (1915), and Precioso’s boarding school lesbian story *El Triunfo de Carmela*, among others (xxxix). These fit into the larger erotic novel current that flourished in the first three decades of the 20th century, according to Litvak, with Spanish-Cuban writer Eduardo Zamacois (1873-1971) and Spanish writer and poet Pedro Mata (1875-1946) leading the charge (52-53).

was eroticism between women seldom put to paper, but sexual patterns in general—namely, what constitutes erotic activity and how often people engage in such behaviour—also changed drastically over time (18). As a result, Farwell posits that a lesbian narrative is not a specific genre, but rather a disputed form that depends on its interpretations (“When Is” 4). The scholar concludes that a lesbian narrative is “not necessarily a story by a lesbian about lesbians but rather a ... narrative space where both lesbian characters and other female characters can be active, desiring agents. This subjectivity is a way to describe the disruption that happens in the Western narrative ... when female rather than male desire dominates the plot” (“The Lesbian Narrative” 157). Farwell contrasts this plot to the traditionally male-dominated sphere that controls the passive female form (158) and proves that the patriarchy fears lesbians will become active subjects rather than submissive objects (161). This disruption of the preconceived social order is not without controversy, but does take shape in certain codified or unpublished lesbian texts, like the ones that are the focal point of this chapter.

That said, we know that Fortún was a lesbian, insofar as we understand the term today; by the same criteria, we can safely establish that her protagonists are as well. With a “plot that affirms a place for lesbian subjectivity” based on female desire, both *Oculto sendero* and *El pensionado* exemplify Farwell’s definition of a lesbian novel (“The Lesbian Narrative” 157). Each text includes scenes of sexual activity between women, while their desire for each other has significant impacts on the storyline. The characters are unique yet share similar experiences and take on an active role in their lives. By virtually any definition, and in answer to nearly all the questions posed above, one can confidently state that Fortún is a writer of lesbian literature. Consequently, we can explore what Bonnie Zimmerman considers a crucial trait of the lesbian novel—centering the

narrative around sexual passion between women (qtd. in Faderman 53).¹⁹⁸ In *Oculto sendero*, we can trace the growth of María Luisa's sapphic desire from childhood to her adult years, beginning with her development of feelings, however fleeting, for some of the older girls in her life. From her crush on her cousin Dulce Nombre ("mis ojos bebían su belleza perfecta" [128]) to her admiration for women she sees in passing ("¡Qué guapísimas me parecieron!" [145]), María Luisa's love of women shines through her repressed childhood. While nobody explicitly flags her homoerotic sentiment at this stage in her life, Dulce Nombre tells María Luisa: "Tu [sic] eres una niña muy rara..." (135). While her cousin likely cannot pinpoint what about María Luisa is so weird, she identifies her as a distinct Other.

As María Luisa ages, the reader realizes that the protagonist of *Oculto sendero*, like Martín Gaité's weird girl, "pone en cuestión la «normalidad» de la conducta amorosa y doméstica que la sociedad mandaba acatar" (Martín Gaité 111). Who or what is normal? Who decides what will fall under that category? What happens to those who digress from the norm? Because homosexuality—or inversion or intersexuality—is taboo, it is all the more difficult for the protagonist to realize what she is feeling. In the early years of her marriage, María Luisa remains sheltered; she does not know that homosexuality exists, nor that she is allowed to experience it. According to Rich, "the enforcement of heterosexuality for women" constitutes "a means of assuring male right of physical, economical, and emotional access"—and this is in part achieved by "the rendering invisible of the lesbian possibility" ("Compulsory" 191). This enforcement of heterosexuality—what Rich considers a form of propaganda—explains María Luisa's initial rejection of the homoerotic feelings she does not understand. For example, she sees a young woman at the park

¹⁹⁸ Unlike Zimmerman, Faderman contends that lesbian desire is not the only marker of sapphic literature; it is but one aspect of the (queer) human experience that *can* appear in works that "show the lesbian as a person coping with a panoply of life's problems" ("What Is" 56).

when her daughter is still little and thinks: “Los labios de Mary eran como dos bombones... Así debían de ser de dulces y gustosos” (Fortún, *Oculto* 344). Then, she is startled by her own desire: “qué idiotez se me había ocurrido” (344). It is not until she leaves the confines of the home and its mandated heterosexuality that she is free to explore the alternatives. Unlike in Carmen de Burgos’s works, it is only through the characters’ dialogue and never the narrator that the novel showcases criticism of queer identity or desire—this allows to reader to recognize any bias or medical discourse as personal opinions or internalized homophobia rather than objective facts.

Moreover, although María Luisa has always been branded as queer (“rara”), it is not until the *Otoño* section that she begins to understand what she feels towards women, starting when Consuelo, her sister-in-law, explains that Fermina loves and dates women (384). Until this point, María Luisa had not realized same-sex relationships were even an option. Then, she meets Rosita, her friend Lolín’s *querida*, and “Algo luminoso y dulce, esperado instintivamente toda la vida, inundaba [su] pensamiento...” (400). Another moment of revelation strikes María Luisa: women can be in love with other women, and this fact fills a void that has plagued her since her youth. Capdevila-Argüelles considers the influence of female friendships on María Luisa’s emancipation, and how different women participate in the broadening of the protagonist’s worldview: Julieta, who first mentions the *oculto sendero* on which they both travel; the vivacious spinster aunts who serve as motherly figures (Introduction, *Oculto* 37); the women who, like Fermina, noticed María Luisa’s lesbianism before she even came to terms with it; and her two careerwoman friends, Carmenchu (a doctor) and Rosarito (a lawyer), who offer a glimpse into the rise of the modern woman (59).¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ Fortún’s inclusion of many female friendships with no romantic undertones also challenges the perspective of certain freethinkers like psychologist Urbano González Serrano (1848-1904), who declared in 1892 “that a woman was incapable of great friendship since she was sacrificed to maternity” (Charnon-Deutsch, “Women Moved” 34).

In addition, the women to whom the protagonist is attracted also impact the construction of her lesbian identity as she matures:

Dulce Nombre, la prima mayor que ella de la que se enamora; Consuelo, la cuñada hermosa por la que se siente atraída y cuyo estropeado físico tras alumbrar muchos hijos y vivir relegada a la casa no puede dejar de notar; ... la atractiva y racial Florinda, su primera amante; Lolín, Rosita y Fermina, reflejo de ella misma y sus apetitos (Capdevila-Argüelles 37)

In spite of a lifetime of feeling like the weird girl, María Luisa learns more about herself and the world with every woman she meets. These relationships, however transient, help her by establishing shared understandings and practices between women, or more specifically those on the lesbian continuum as defined by Rich: “a range—through each woman’s life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman” (“Compulsory” 192). In other words, they face uniquely female circumstances such as “the bonding against male tyranny” and the rejection of marriage and male sexual demands or standards (192). And though Rich ties this continuum into the experiences of women around the world—of any race or socioeconomic status—with Fortún we are focusing on a financially privileged group of characters whose source of Otherness is primarily their sexuality.²⁰⁰

As a lesbian *Bildungsroman*, the novel traces María Luisa’s (homo)sexual awakening not only as self-reflection but as actual homoerotic activity. In a chapter aptly titled “Revelación,” Rosita becomes María Luisa’s first kiss with a woman: “echándome los brazos al cuello apretó su

²⁰⁰ Only one of Fortún’s protagonists belongs to the working class, and only after the character’s father dies does the family begin to experience financial challenges. Otherwise, the author focuses on the socioeconomic status with which she, too, was associated. Also in *El pensionado* is the only racialized character, a Filipino girl, but questions of race are seldom addressed.

boca contra la mía... sentí la pulpa húmeda de sus labios carnosos en los que se hundieron los míos... y el mundo dejó de existir” (404-405).²⁰¹ This is also the first kiss María Luisa actively enjoys, and the first moment of physical intimacy between women Fortún describes in her novel. In the next chapter, María Luisa meets Florinda and is almost dizzy because of the woman’s beauty (417). They engage in a conversation heavy with sexual tension (417) that culminates in the protagonist’s declaration of love for Florinda. Fortún implies that the two have sexual relations through a series of “.....” that spans one line (418). The tone of this scene is both hopeful and cautious, rife with exclamations and pauses. Moreno-Lago reminds us that anything embarrassing or shameful “no [podía] salir a la luz” (214) but can instead be recreated by reading between the lines or, in this case, the dots. According to Simonis, “las lesbianas no suelen dejar documentos acerca de sus vidas que incluyan detalles sobre sus prácticas sexuales o sus deseos eróticos” (qtd. in Moreno-Lago 213), which may translate into the ellipses or silences we encounter in fictional texts such as *Oculto sendero*. Although Fortún wrote about lesbian desire, she never intended for this transgressive manuscript to reach the public; like many of her lesbian contemporaries, she self-censored “sus sentimientos, condenándolos a estar encerrados y escondidos” (Moreno-Lago 214) in her unpublished writings. The page of ellipses, with only a few sentences that indicate love between women, is therefore an important clue in the reconstruction of Fortún’s own sexual identity and of Spain’s lesbian literary tradition. Like Fortún, Florinda and María Luisa know that their love must remain in private spaces. Sadly, their relationship only lasts a few months—Florinda eventually leaves for London because “La gente comienza a ver[las] siempre juntas ... Si

²⁰¹ After dating for five years, Lolín and Rosita break up when Lolín gets married to a man to save face (Fortún 402), like so many others who “married ... in order to remain respectable” (Rich, “Compulsory” 196). Rosita’s stance on heterosexual marriage involving lesbians can be summarized in her claim that María Luisa is only married to Jorge “nominalmente” (Fortún, *Oculto sendero* 402).

ahora no [se] fuera, como siempre lo [ha] hecho, habría comentarios...” (421). When she reappears, she is engaged to a man, much to María Luisa’s chagrin (425). Again and again, the protagonist’s heart is broken by her family, her lovers, and her society’s desperation for the repression of women.

Oculto sendero fits into the conflict between dominant heterosexuality and homosexual subculture; in other words, where tradition meets revolutionary ways of understanding medicine, sexuality, arts, and politics (Capdevila-Argüelles, Introduction, *Oculto* 43). Capdevila-Argüelles argues that Fortún’s writing gives insight into many of these themes as she experienced them despite doubting herself for leaving her own role of wife and mother and taking on the one of modern woman (Introduction, *Oculto* 43). Regardless of the author’s personal hesitations, the novel makes it clear that living authentically as an emancipated, modern woman and lesbian is the only path that will allow María Luisa to find freedom, success, and happiness. Capdevila-Argüelles describes this liberation as “la eventual vivencia de un lesbianismo discreto amparado por la libertad económica que le procuró dedicarse al arte” (Introduction, *Oculto* 31). By the end of the novel, our protagonist has developed an identity she can embrace with little reluctance: she is a lesbian, a painter, and an independent woman, leaving her past behind in order to be the person her family tried so hard to keep her from becoming. And with a lesbian author and protagonist, a plot that strays from traditional heterosexual structures and desire, and a continuum of sapphic experiences, it is clear that *Oculto sendero* would fit any definition of lesbian literature.

El pensionado, too, fits the criteria, though it is very different from Fortún’s first queer *Bildungsroman*. As the novel jumps from one perspective to the next, the omniscient narrator offers insight into each boarder’s understanding of friendship and/or desire towards the others, never condemning their queerness. It is the nuns who rigorously watch over their wards, often reminding them to behave like proper Catholic girls (“¿Qué manera de escandalizar es esa?” asks

Sister Salcedo after one of Trudi's outbursts [Fortún, *El pensionado* 76]) and limiting their one-on-one interactions. Nevertheless, amongst the boarders themselves, Fortún shows only acceptance or ignorance of the burgeoning passions between the main characters. Of course, the girls know they cannot publicly show their affection—they sneak kisses amidst bushes or behind closed doors and write letters in secret—but this is as much to do with homosexuality as with honour and modesty in general. Rosa E. Ríos Lloret explains that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, both the clergy and educational institutions promoted the values of purity and chastity (192), framing female sexuality only for reproduction and thereby experiencing motherly love (181). Similarly, Don Heliodoro, the school's medical authority, tells Trudi: “Lo más cómodo para las mujeres es dejarse querer *honradamente*, tener hijos, cuidar de la casa” (Fortún, *El pensionado* 80; emphasis added). For this reason, any expression of desire was firmly suppressed, be it between a girl and a boy or two girls. Even the fact that Adela and Guillermo, Trudi's brother, are corresponding by mail is viewed as a scandal, and the nuns are thankful they intercepted the letters before anything more could happen (194). In the same breath, Mother Superior expels Trudi for maintaining an *amitié particulière*, a term used in reference to a romantic friendship, and blames her for the impropriety between her friend and her sibling (194-195).²⁰²

Fortún's boarders are restricted by the nuns' rules about forming pairs, *les amities particulières* that the masculine nun Merriver implies would encourage homoeroticism. Still, surprisingly little is said against same-sex desire, likely because most of those who know about the relationships are lesbians themselves, and those who do not simply avoid such taboo topics.²⁰³

²⁰² Many terms served to represent the various iterations of love between women, such as “amigas sentimentales” or “amistades románticas” in Spanish and their French equivalents. For more, see Rosalía Cornejo-Parriego, *Entre mujeres* 21-29.

²⁰³ Adela's only vocal response to Trudi's love letter is to ask her to stop writing to her because it's “pecado decir esas cosas” (Fortún, *El pensionado* 92). Still, she is physically affectionate with Trudi and ultimately runs away to Paris with her at the end of the book. Is she reiterating her

The exception is Merrivier, whom the narrator implies is herself a closeted, cloistered lesbian who is jealous of the queer boarders.²⁰⁴ Capdevila-Argüelles asserts that since this character is unable to fully hide her own inversion, “La animadversión entre ella y Trudi tendría así que ver con un miedo profundo al reconocerse a sí misma en la joven” (Introduction, *El pensionado* 49). Although the boarders seldom face outright homophobia, they clearly do still live in a strict society that mandates heterosexuality and female purity. Fortún’s inclusion of resistance and resilience toward sapphism is not accidental (49), but rather a part of her experience being at war with herself over an identity her society did not want her to understand.

Nevertheless, *El pensionado* focuses on its protagonists’ lesbian desire, with male pleasure noticeably absent from this novel. As early as their teen years, the girls experience attraction and immense devotion to their lesbian crushes, writing declarations of love and stealing passionate moments when the nuns are not watching. Even “trivial acts of homage” (Vicus 607), like when Adela mends the socks Trudi is struggling to repair for the younger girls, add meaning to these boarding school romances. Manón, for example, comments on the newcomer Adela’s curves (Fortún, *El pensionado* 75) and notices the spark between Trudi and Adela, warning the former that Adela would give her “muchos disgustos” (85). Manón’s first love is Ofelia, however, and the two have a moment in the infirmary that marks them for decades to come. Ofelia’s breasts are tender due to her menstruation, and she puts Manón’s cool hands on her chest—“¿Inocencia?

conservative mother’s beliefs? Has she internalized society’s bias against homosexual desire? Or is putting lesbian love onto paper simply too dangerous?

²⁰⁴ There is in fact a longstanding tradition of lesbians in convents, a literary and cinematic genre often based on real-life examples, most famously the 17th-century nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, whose story comes to the big screen in *Yo, la peor de todas* (Dir. Maria Luisa Bemberg, 1990). Sor Juana’s writings on women’s rights to education and intellectual pursuits are not unlike the social criticisms of Fortún in her children’s book series and unpublished novels centuries later. Sor Juana’s “Respuesta a Sor Filotea” (1691) defends women’s education. Other Sor Juana poems, dedicated to “Phyllis,” express same-sex love.

¿Coquetería? ¡Quién sabe!” says the narrator (150)—which quickly turns into an overtly sexual encounter. Manón rips Ofelia’s clothes and “cubre de besos delirantes el terso seno y, finalmente, muere el tentador capullo...” (150-151). Ofelia tries to defend herself, begging the French girl to stop, all the while undergoing a range of emotions: “ruborosa y alterada, feliz al mismo tiempo, maravillada” and discovering a new attraction for her friend (151). Then they share an electric kiss before Manón leaves for the summer, telling Ofelia, “*Tu es à moi*” (152). This is the most intense and explicit moment of *Pubertad*, though this section also quietly sets the stage for adult relationships between the boarders with a simple kiss between Trudi and Ofelia, and another between Trudi and her future partner Adela.

In “Distance and Desire,” Vicinus explains that in the boarding school setting, a “loved one became the object of a desire that found its expression through symbolic acts rather than actual physical closeness or even friendship in an ordinary sense of daily contact and conversation. Distance was a means of deepening a pleasure” (605). This is the case for Totó, who loves Ofelia from afar in their youth until she is able to offer a grand gesture—helping Ofelia’s newly poor family after the death of the father. The relationship between Trudi and Adela, meanwhile, is more in line with what Vicinus describes as “friendships of great emotional intensity” (602)—not unlike what Merrivier labels particular friendships. Not long after Trudi first spots Adela, the “guapa” and “preciosa” new student (Fortún 72), she begins writing lines such as “no puedo vivir sin tí” and “si dices que no [me quieres], yo creo que me moriré” (89), to which Adela responds with seductive words or brief contact that leaves Trudi, “su víctima,” longing for more (104). Vicinus proposes that these relationships were particularly intense due to (English) society’s emphasis on propriety through distance and self-control (604); in the Spanish context, Catholic notions of female purity would only exacerbate the situation. When the boarders are older, they enter relationships with explicit sapphic desire: Ofelia and Natividad, a controlling older woman; Ofelia

and Manón, who leaves Ofelia for a ballerina; and Ofelia and Totó, who live happily ever after in Paris alongside Trudi and Adela. All these partnerships are as intense as the crushes of childhood, though now with overt—but not voyeuristic—sexual experiences uninhibited by the rules of a religious or social authority. Again, Fortún produces a novel that is unambiguously lesbian, although she never expected it to be read, let alone published or studied alongside other sapphic works. By putting pen to paper in spite of her fears, and by refusing to deny her characters their sexual desire, the author proves herself instrumental in the reconstruction of queer literature from a time of taboos, bans, and self-censorship.

4.2 Queer/Women's Spaces

4.2.1 Building Safe Spaces and Community

The relationship between women and space is intimately intertwined with gender roles and the conception of femaleness. If women's roles pertain to the household and the family, then they are also relegated to the domestic spaces in which the duties of wife and mother prevail over any individual desire for intellectual advancement.²⁰⁵ According to Massey, in the West, the “attempt to confine women to the domestic sphere was both a specifically spatial control and, through that, a social control on identity” (179). In other words, limiting both women's mobility and identity through the strict division of public and private spaces fosters their subordination (179). The scholar also highlights the cyclical nature of gendered spaces and how they reflect/affect the very construction of gender (179). In *Feminism and Geography*, Gillian Rose proposes the concept of paradoxical space, or “the possibilities of multiple positioning in space that challenge the everyday oppression of women, notably though an objectification by a male gaze in space” (Hetherington 27). The subject of feminism must recognize the power of the dominant rhetoric and the possibility

²⁰⁵ “Cuarenta metros cúbicos de soledad, el cuarto,” begins Chacel's poem “Ausencia” from the 1978 collection *Versos prohibidos* (the poem was written in the 1940s, however).

of defiance while inhabiting both the centre and the margin—a paradoxical geography (Rose 155). But by allowing themselves to be the Other *together*, “not only do women empower themselves through refusal and constitute for themselves an identity on their own terms, but they also challenge the spatiality of their location, ... they create a place for themselves” (Hetherington 27). Similarly to the heterotopia—fashioned by the deviant subject *and* the society that rejects them—gendered spaces are not only a subjugating patriarchal construction, but also a reclamation of space and an integral part of women’s identity. Drawing from Black and lesbian feminism, Rose states that “all women are subject to constitution not only by gender but by sexuality and by class and by race and by religion, and by a whole range of other social relations ... experienced simultaneously” (151).

In section 4.1.3, we reflected on what constitutes lesbian literature. Most novels with lesbian protagonists in the 1920s and 1930s either alienated the characters or faced brutal criticism and bans—like Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* did—or their sapphic content was so obscured that only the most discerning readers would notice; such was the case for Woolf’s *Orlando* (Pratt 104). According to Annis Pratt, passionate female friendships flourished in literature when lesbianism was unknown, but drew suspicions as it became more widely acknowledged (96). And much like many works of lesbian literature—destroyed or never committed to paper at all—lesbian intellectual experiences in Madrid have largely been erased from history.²⁰⁶ Moreno-Lago explains: “existieron las reuniones y círculos sáficos entre las intelectuales en el Madrid entre los años veinte y treinta, pero se han olvidado por falta de escritos directos que lo legitimen” (215). This is in fact the case for women’s stories and experiences dating back centuries; queer or not,

²⁰⁶ Gough’s characteristics of male power include the destruction of documents pertaining to lesbian existence. See section 1.3 for more on Gough’s theory. Similarly, Claudia Cabello Hutt notes that many queer women had no heirs to preserve their documents, or that they were censored or misread (29).

female writers have not had ample opportunity to leave their literary mark on the world. Like Rich, Pratt uses the term “continuum” to refer to female experience—the continuum between the borderline (or marginal spaces) and the new spaces created by women’s fiction (100). She relates this continuum to the realm of the clandestine: “The necessity of disguise, encoded messages, and secret agents in novels of friendship recurs in the lesbian novel where heroes must find their ways through the labyrinths of sexual politics in both the external world of male society and internal world of women’s embattled psyche” (100).

From a geocritical perspective, “Los espacios literarios ... no son lugares imaginarios de las autoras, sino que constituyen una ficcionalización de la realidad que vivieron en los ambientes vanguardistas e intelectuales” (Moreno-Lago 216). Borrowing from traditional geography the term *geocódigo*, which refers to longitude and latitude coordinates, Moreno-Lago applies it to locations protected with coded language to ensure the safety of the authors in times of censorship (217). In this case, the hidden queer havens are geocoded as cafés, *tertulias*, Paris, or secrecy itself. While secrecy plays a relevant role in these physical spaces, it also becomes a metaphorical space where queerness can exist in the margins. At the same time, secrecy is an important component of the coded language characters (and authors) use to allude to queerness or even voice their experiences and identities directly. Moreno-Lago’s study on Chacel’s *Acrópolis* (1984), Fortún’s *Oculto sendero*, and Durán’s *Así es* (manuscript, c. 1970-1980) proves that cafés are a safe space for the queer community, largely made up of artists, though they often cater to gay men while excluding queer women (225-226).²⁰⁷ She highlights the academic aura of the café and its free-thinking environment that tends to accept sexual nonconformity (225-226).

²⁰⁷ Like Simmel, Mónica Vázquez Astorga proposes that cafés are “espacios públicos de sociabilidad y de encuentro cultural” (17). *Así es* plays on the expresión *ser así*, “un eufemismo generalizado utilizado como voz pública y código de reconocimiento para designar aquellas personas cuya identidad de género no comulgaba con los estándares establecidos (Carretón Cano

Even so, the café often remains masculine territory and offers little respite from patriarchal views, in stark contrast to the *tertulias* that “no forman parte [del territorio masculinizado] y se sienten desligadas, desterritorializadas” (Moreno-Lago 227).²⁰⁸ These female *tertulias* are created by intellectual and/or artistic women who need room to express themselves differently, away from the rigid confines of heteropatriarchy. This reminds of Pratt’s argument on the new space novel, a genre set in a new physical or metaphorical space that usurps gender roles, recreates relationships with mothers, daughters, and friends in addition to lovers, and “revolves around epiphanic moments, or peak experiences, of erotic or metaphysical vision or both of a better world beyond genders, beyond sexual politics” (107-109). In the lesbian novel, however, this is often only temporary due to the encroaching society that opposes the new space (109). Borrowing terms from Foucault and Pablo Pérez Navarro, one could label this sort of space a heterotopia of resistance—Othered but necessary for sociopolitical and personal advancement (Pérez Navarro 6). Henri Lefebvre’s definition of representational spaces also fits the café: it embodies “complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, [and is] linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art” (qtd. in Hetherington 22). Hetherington adds that cafés exhibit a utopian element—a yearning for social advancement (23).

18). Durán fled to Argentina in 1937 and lived in exile until 1949. For more on Durán, see Eva Moreno-Lago’s 2025 *Victorina Durán, una vida llamada teatro*.

²⁰⁸ In a comparison of English and French cafés, Ray Oldenburg proposes that the French bistro, despite its “male tradition” does not invite resentment between the sexes and is a “third place belonging to everyone” (146). This space also serves as a political forum, while the “capacity of these environments to inspire author and artist has become legendary” (156). Hetherington states that cafés “became a space of the bourgeoisie and an embodiment of their utopian ideals first in London and later in Paris” (16) and is in his opinion a heterotopic space with its own social ordering (17). The Spanish café exhibits many similarities to its French counterpart, though according to Vázquez Astorga, in the 1920s many classic cafés saw themselves forced to adapt to modern post-WWI social tendencies, with bars robbing cafés of their role as the principal site for exchanging ideas (20).

The second *geocódigo* Moreno-Lago highlights is Paris, hailed for its artistic advances and its freedom, both artistic and sexual (223). Women from different parts of the world, such as the Americans Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) and Natalie Clifford Barney (1876-1972), arrived in the City of Lights, many flocking to the famous *rive gauche*, to find emancipation and embrace vanguard thought (224-225). Their community quickly gained fame for their artistic modernism and many of their members were openly bisexual or lesbian.²⁰⁹ In the works of Fortún, there is an additional location for new beginnings: the United States, the country Capdevila-Argüelles labels a “mundo nuevo para la mujer nueva y la nueva sexualidad” (Introduction, *Oculto* 59).²¹⁰

Finally, Moreno-Lago highlights the clandestine, silent nature of feminine encounters and the importance of queer spaces (219), naming secrecy the third *geocódigo*. Moreno-Lago proposes that encrypted codes, secrets, and euphemisms prove that homosexuality could only be adopted freely within what Carretón Cano calls the “más estricto decoro y nunca con pública ostentación” (qtd. in Moreno-Lago 221). Unfortunately, Spanish sapphists had limited spaces where they could leave behind this clandestine decorum, and not all the intellectual spheres where they operated were inclusive of openly lesbian and bisexual women. Although the Lyceum Club and its fellow organizations were indispensable for intellectual female growth, certain members rejected homosexuality and gender nonconformity (Moreno-Lago 228). As a consequence, lesbians in urban Spain could not depend on others to create spaces for them or allow them into established spaces. They made incredible advances on their own while facing adversity:

²⁰⁹ The women of the Left Bank, explains Shari Benstock, contributed not only to the Parisian cultural and literary scene, but also to how we define the (male-led) modernist movement (3-4). Of this group of 22 French, British, and American women studied by Benstock, 13 were lesbians (8). Natalie Clifford Barney, in particular, lived her lesbianism publicly; she also made it her life’s work to challenge the negative perception of lesbians through her writings and activism, and hosted salons that acted as support groups for women like her (10-11). See also Moix’s “Natalie Clifford Barney (1876-1972): la Amazona” and Eleanor Medhurst, “Paris Lesbos. The Sapphic Capital.”

²¹⁰ At the end of *Oculto sendero*, María Luisa is on her way to meet Carmenchu in America.

Son mujeres transgresoras que tuvieron que trazar estrategias, como la creación de estas reuniones privadas, para romper los roles establecidos sobre la identidad femenina para poder conseguir su emancipación y su libertad sexual. Estos movimientos informales consiguieron unir a las mujeres y establecer una corriente de sororidad que continuó en el exilio y traspasó las barreras de la distancia que las separaban (Moreno-Lago 233)

Some lesbian intellectuals, like the protagonists studied by Moreno-Lago, met one or twice a week in one of their homes.²¹¹ Outside of their safe circles—cafés, *tertulias*, Paris—lesbian interactions had to be even more subtle. The scholar concludes that intellectual (and often homosexual) women left the realm of the domestic looking for freedom, entered the public sphere to find others like them, and created new private spaces together—complete with new codes independent of men’s pre-established norms (232).

There is another important queer space that is not significant in the works that Moreno-Lago studies, but is, as we have seen, in Fortún’s *El pensionado* and Vicente’s *Zezé*. While adult lesbians flourished in the freedom of Paris, a large urban haven, young queer women also found each other in the reduced, finite boarding school space, a domain propitious to the development of the ambiguous type of lesbian relationship we explored earlier, which Vázquez García and Andrés Moreno Mengíbar label “amistad romántica” (220). According to Vicinus, as boarding schools gained popularity and female students prepared to enter the public sphere, female friendships and adolescent crushes developed between boarders of a similar age, or between a student and a teacher. Facing the challenges of living away from the family home and in a more public domain, these girls were drawn to the close relationships their fellow boarders offered (604). Like Paris, boarding schools extended a sense of community and a space away from the control of family,

²¹¹ Ahmed proposes that queer spaces are often fleeting, temporal (106). But the periphery also serves as a space of creation.

reminiscent of van Gennep's liminality—a space between life stages (see section 3.5). The lesbian experience within the boarding school has been captured both in cinema and in literature, to a lesser extent.²¹²

In *Oculto sendero*, Fortún leans into two of Moreno-Lago's three *geocódigos* in particular: secrecy, which is a central theme throughout the novel, and the *café/tertulia* space.²¹³ First, *tertulias* take place at Fermina's home or in Lolín's study (Fortún 383, 386), which shared many traits with Durán's study (Moreno-Lago 230). Like the *café* gatherings, "Los salones de escritoras son un ejemplo concreto de geocodificación" (Moreno-Lago 231) in that both spaces are created for the community and rely on the silence of their members. For example, the bar *Dublín*, "mezcla de bar, brasserie, y salón de té" (Fortún, *Oculto* 456), is a safe space for homosexuals, but only those on the inside know it; keeping the secret, then, becomes primordial if the bar is to remain safe. When María Luisa is allowed in, her friend swears her to secrecy: "Carmenhu me pone en antecedente de lo que no está a la vista, aunque advirtiéndome que guarde el secreto más profundo, porque, aunque es del dominio de todos, fuera de la peña jamás sale nada" (459). Nevertheless, the protagonist does not feel completely at ease in this space when she is displaying her art due to

²¹² Lesbian boarding school films include *Mädchen in Uniform* [*Girls in Uniform*] (1931, Germany) and its remakes in English, French, and Spanish, *The Children's Hour* (1961, USA), *Loving Annabelle* (2006, USA), *Lost and Delirious* (2001, Canada), *The Secrets* (2007, Israel), and many others. *Mädchen in Uniform* was also written into a book, *Das Mädchen Manuela* [*The Child Manuela*] by Christa Winsloe in 1933. Studies pertaining to queer boarding school literature, other than those about Winsloe's novel, comprise Chris Roulston's and Vicinus's respective studies on other English novels and Chantal Zabus's work on Nigerian author Unoma Azuah.

²¹³ Paris does not feature prominently in *Oculto sendero*, although the protagonist and her friend discuss the possibilities the French capital would offer. According to Moreno-Lago, Paris "aparece rodeado de mucha ilusión, como un viaje truncado que nunca llegan a hacer María Luisa y Lupe ... Quizás el motivo por el que no aparece es porque las que se reunieron en esta ciudad fueron «muchas mujeres libres de las obligaciones que conllevan el marido y los hijos» (Weiss 25), que no era el caso de ellas dos" (225).

some of the (male) patrons' critiques—as Moreno-Lago notes, in “estos cafés ... no se podía escapar de la mirada patriarcal” of the predominantly male art scene (227).

Like the hotel in *Ellas*, the bar Dublín is undoubtedly a “hétérotopie ... de deviation” (Foucault, “Des espaces autres” 4) in that it is an othered space filled with sexually deviant bodies who know this queer haven can only exist if it remains a secret. It is not a perfect space, given its masculine airs, but it contributes to the LGBTQ+ network of safety and community. The title of *Oculto sendero* already suggests that something in the novel will be hidden, and it is indeed the sphere of concealment that prevails when it comes to lesbian experiences.²¹⁴ Sometimes, a simple pronoun holds great significance. For example, Julieta claims that nobody will be compassionate towards María Luisa when they discover her lesbianism because “los que son normales *nos* desprecian” (448). Julieta, divorced and closeted, has given María Luisa an encrypted message, a sign of shared experiences, just by including herself grammatically in her advice to María Luisa.²¹⁵ Julieta quickly stops talking after this sentence, then changes the subject, but the use of *nos* is not lost on María Luisa, who thinks, “Aquel *nos* que la colocaba a mi lado, puso entre nosotros una inquietud y un silencio...” (448). Fortún explicitly shows the crucial role of silence, of talking about homosexuality without really talking about it, through language—her own and her characters'. Alongside the geocoded locations and ambiguous queer fashion examined earlier, this allows queer people to recognize each other.

²¹⁴ Capdevila-Argüelles calls it an “oculto sendero de autoría y amor” that demands the reconstruction of one's identity (Introduction, *Oculto* 60), and Julieta tells María Luisa it is imperative to “pisar con pie firme” along this hidden path (Fortún, *Oculto* 445).

²¹⁵ The closet, metaphor for secretly being queer, highlights the paradox of LGBTQ+ spaces—the closeted sexual Other occupies not the margin but the centre of the normative space, an outsider able to watch from within (Rose 151-152). The closet could also be read as a secrecy-related geocode.

The journey through these codified spaces is difficult and lonesome; this is especially the case with *Oculto sendero*'s protagonist, first because of her traditional, conservative family and later because of Jorge Medina. When María Luisa seeks out other women like her—weird girls—to build a sense of trust and community, her husband criticizes her friendships and even gaslights her into abandoning certain friends, like Carmen. First, he is firm: “No volverás a casa de esa mujer ... y te prohíbo que continúes esa amistad...” (313). Then, he pretends that he is not forcing her to change anything: “Es decir, tú puedes hacer lo que quieras ... Ya te he dicho que puedes continuar teniéndola [la amistad]” (313-314). Finally, he forbids Carmen from entering their home, and when she knocks on their door, the maid has her leave (314)—this effectively isolates María Luisa from the “negative” influence of someone Jorge considers *deshonrada*. Forbidden friendships are another commonality between literary weird girls. Even *Quiero*'s protagonist has a few friends her husband prohibits her from seeing because he does not think them *mujeres decentes*. So María Luisa, detached from queer culture first by her family's values and then by her husband's decree, cannot recognize herself in others' experiences until much later in life.

It is more than two thirds into *Oculto sendero* when María Luisa develops a relationship, platonic or otherwise, with another lesbian. Although the protagonist is married to a man, her new acquaintance Fermina immediately notices the cut of her clothes and pegs her for an artist, lamenting: “¡Qué desastre es una mujer como nosotras casada!” (Fortún 380). Like when Julieta uses *nos*, classifying María Luisa and her as the same, Fermina's use of “nosotras” includes her in the definition she has assigned to María Luisa—although not explicitly stated, both women are lesbians. She is one of the many androgynous women who encourage María Luisa on her journey of queer self-discovery. Fermina has a reputation, a sort of “mala fama” (Fortún 382) due to the people with whom she associates, and both Jorge and María Luisa's sister-in-law are concerned about how this may reflect on their family. Nevertheless, María Luisa revels in her new friendship,

meeting a group of artistically inclined homosexuals, including Lolín, a married woman; Rafita, said to be “un invertido” (385); Rosita Aguilar, a beautiful poet who is María Luisa’s first kiss (with a woman); and later Florinda, a rich heiress with whom María Luisa has sexual relations. Evidently, this queer community shares more than its inversion—as the doctor mentions to María Luisa when she approaches him with concerns about her identity, this case “es más frecuente de lo que se supone, sobre todo tratándose de artistas” (433).²¹⁶ Do homosexuals have more natural talent in the arts, as the doctor’s essentializing opinion suggests, or are the arts perhaps a more liberal space with freedom for self-expression not found elsewhere?

While same-sex relationships are not limited to artists, intellectuals, or rich heiresses, María Luisa’s circles certainly are. Carmenchu, one of our protagonist’s friends, introduces her to more artists: the art critic Júpiter, the violinist Leonarda, the theatre critic Jaimito, and two more women, Lupe and Rosalía. This unusual group meets at the bar Dublín and has many interpersonal dramas, especially competing romances.²¹⁷ Now a member of this “subcultura de invertidos” (Capdevila-Argüelles, Introduction, *Oculto* 49), María Luisa discovers much about the world and the different kinds of people in it from an open perspective, rather than a homophobic one. Although the protagonist’s new friends are keenly aware of their marginal status within Spanish society, they treat their queerness as something natural and encourage María Luisa to feel more comfortable in her own skin, inviting her into their community. This is a far cry from the heteropatriarchal standards her family enforced on her during her youth. By the end of the novel, María Luisa affirms that these are her people, if only to herself: “Los míos son esos que despreciáis, Joaquinito,

²¹⁶ Gerald Heard (1889-1971), an author whom Fortún read frequently, identified a gland behind the nose as the cause of the sexual appetites that “salen a la luz en el arte y la poesía” (Capdevila-Argüelles 23), strengthening the idea of the art world as more in tune with homosexuality.

²¹⁷ Again, this reminds the reader of the Hotel Majestic in *Ellas*, though Fortún is much kinder to her characters than Burgos.

Fermina, Lolín, Rafita... los parias de una sociedad normal que no tiene otro fin más que reproducirse, los que habéis echado de vuestras honradas casas ... Ellos son mis compañeros de camino y me voy con ellos” (494). This response to what María Luisa imagines her brother-in-law will say about her leaving her husband and country proves that the protagonist has grown since the beginning of the novel, when she struggled to find a community with which she felt at home. Having a supportive chosen family—which is common for LGBTQ+ individuals even today—also highlights the significance of kinship, support, and shared experiences.²¹⁸ But Elizabeth Freeman counters that a queer chosen family is often impossible for those without certain economic, racial, gender, and national privileges (304). As members of the bourgeoisie, both María Luisa and Fortún herself, though they faced many hardships as queer women, had the benefit of social and cultural advantages that their working-class contemporaries would not have been able to access.

Comparatively, in *El pensionado*, there is a sense of community built during the characters’ boarding school days that helps them during different parts of their journeys. Within the microcosmos of the Santa Casilda boarding school, just like outside it, the safety of the queer characters depends on their secrecy. Their relationships flourish, as we saw in section 4.1.3, until the nuns discover their “deviance.” The loss of secrecy also signifies the loss of the safe space the girls had built within their school—Manón is leaving for France, Totó for the Philippines, Ofelia’s mother can no longer afford tuition, and Trudi is, of course, expelled. The *Pubertad* section ends on the sad goodbye between Totó and Ofelia, the last contact within the boarders’ queer support system until adulthood. Throughout their adult lives, although they enter spaces that offer them

²¹⁸ This remits to kinship theory, which Freeman connects to queer belonging. Kinship theory goes hand in hand with the name Claude Lévi-Strauss, who proposed that the exchange of women between families for purposes of procreation became “the cornerstone for – the elementary structure of – ever larger social and political structures” (Freeman 300).

safety—cafés, the theatre, and eventually Paris—Trudi and Ofelia (like Fortún herself) are living “al margen de la vida” (Fortún, *El pensionado* 444), but find solace in the safe spaces recognized only by others like them.²¹⁹ For example, once grown, Ofelia reconnects with her childhood friends, starting with Trudi, and the tone of the novel becomes more optimistic, even nostalgic for the connections and freedoms of the boarding school. Ofelia is comforted by talking to another queer woman at a *tertulia*, allowing herself to speak openly for the first time and begin healing her soul (379-380). One day, she happens to run into Totó in the street and, through Trudi, she rejoins her support system. They regularly meet at a café, and some former boarders even surreptitiously express affection for each other by holding hands under the table. Totó also has a studio in Madrid that offers refuge for certain members of the group—we see again the creation of a safe female/queer space.

At the end of the novel, Ofelia and Totó are thriving in Paris and Adela and Trudi are on their way to the same freedom. Paris is, for both the characters and Fortún and Durán alike, the third *geocódigo* that allows for “una libertad de expresión artística y, ... amor entre mujeres,” as well as freedom from the family’s control (Moreno-Lago 223-224).²²⁰ Like the historical women of the Left Bank, the fictional former boarders have diverse backgrounds: Manón is French, Totó is Filipino, Ofelia is a working-class Spaniard, and Trudi and Adela are bourgeois Spaniards.²²¹ Their small international microcosmos acquires an additional cross-border and transnational

²¹⁹ The theatre—in this case a puppet theatre that draws significant crowds—is also the backdrop for several scenes of Vicente’s *Teresilla*, though it cannot keep this naïve protagonist safe from the man who seduces and abandons her; it does, however, award her mother an air of confidence at running this business (85).

²²⁰ In *Teresilla*, the titular protagonist also finds temporary freedom from her parents’ expectations and judgement in Paris, though her experience is both happy and overwhelmed by life in the French capital (207).

²²¹ It is suggested that even Merrivier had arrived to the boarding school directly from the Left Bank.

dimension when the latter four leave Madrid.²²² Echoing the experiences of the women of the Left Bank, Ofelia describes Paris as a “paraíso de los artistas” that also allows for the short-term and even long-term emancipation of the two lesbian couples (Fortún, *El pensionado* 468). Unlike Spain, where such (mis)conduct occurred only in private circles, the French capital offers sexual freedom from both a legal and societal standpoint (Moreno-Lago 223). In *El pensionado*, Paris provides a new beginning and, therefore, a happy ending for the same-sex couples, which distances Fortún’s narrative from the tragic lesbian trope that characterizes so many queer stories, such as Hall’s foundational *The Well of Loneliness*, and even from the melancholic tone at the end of her *Oculto sendero*.²²³

4.2.2 Finding a Room of One’s Own

Although both Carmen de Burgos and Elena Fortún centre their narratives on queer characters, they take different approaches to certain prevailing themes, namely the demonization or humanization of the LGBTQ+ community. But both writers were also feminists—however much they lacked intersectionality—and addressed issues that plagued women regardless of gender expression or sexual orientation, such as education and violence. While *Quiero* only alludes to the abysmal state of women’s education in Colombine’s era—which was beginning to improve through the Second Republic’s efforts—Fortún explores in depth the idea that women should be allowed a place in the intellectual sphere. Through *Oculto sendero*’s protagonist’s quest for artistic realization in spite of the obstacle that is her husband, the author muses on the following questions:

²²² Totó and Ofelia leave first, then write to Trudi to suggest she and Adela join them in this multicultural hotspot, where they hear many different languages (sometimes even French!) and surround themselves with art and good friends (Fortún, *El pensionado* 469).

²²³ Similarly to *Oculto sendero*’s protagonist, in *The Well of Loneliness* Stephen Gordon violently detaches herself from anything feminine and experiences intense attraction to women, much like her author, Radclyffe Hall. Her story can be read as either a lesbian or a transgender novel, or perhaps a mixture of both. Regardless, the takeaway is that nonconformity and women loving women only lead to suffering.

Why aren't women allowed in these spaces? Why do men get to decide whose work has value? And what would happen if we did open academia to women, giving them room to create? The concept of owning a room is crucial in Woolf's discourse as seen earlier; the author of *Orlando* firmly believes that women need both financial freedom and independent space to write fiction.²²⁴ While Woolf's argument pertains to women writers in particular, María Luisa cannot reach her full artistic potential until she has her own room in which to create and the means to leave her husband, Jorge.

The main character's intellectual and artistic inclinations—traits remitting to the modern woman who begins to demand space in academic and cultural spheres—first appear during her childhood. Her parents are opposed to this path, but *tía* Manuela hires Jorge as her art teacher. He teaches her a lot about art and brings her novels to read because a “pintor debe leer mucho” (228). Jorge raves about her work, even offering to marry her later in their lives so she may continue on an artistic path. When her mother finds out, however, María Luisa must bid Jorge farewell. Luckily, they meet again years later and get married. But the supportive, modern man María Luisa thought she was marrying turns out to be an egotistical, manipulative narcissist whose interest in her creative talents decreases dramatically. Her growth as an artist is obstructed by Jorge, whom the protagonist and the reader once thought of as an ally, and whose ego turns out to be the main obstacle to María Luisa's career.

²²⁴ Beatriz Caamaño Alegre compares this room to the *garden* of one's own that the protagonist of Spanish writer and journalist Magda Donato's (1898-1966) “La protegida de las flores” (1920) asks of her fairy godmother (35). Blanquita, the young main character, rebels against her king when he cuts down the flowers of her garden, and flowers—a symbol of femininity—become a weapon when they begin harassing the monarch at night. Living without a male guardian or spouse, Blanquita's self-assured character remits to the new woman who includes reading and studying in her daily activities (33-34).

Many of Gough's characteristics of male power, outlined in section 1.3, are evident in *Oculto sendero*. Beginning with "to cramp [women's] creativeness" (Gough 768), Jorge considers his career as an artist more valuable than his wife's, and he disrupts her creative aspirations when he encourages her to focus on running the household instead. He leaves her with literally no physical space in which to create, effectively trapping her in the home due to lack of funds. So, she must hide to create art, especially once her friend Lolín encourages her to paint many *abanicos*, to avoid upsetting her husband: "Los pinté escondiéndome de Jorge, esperando que se fuera al instituto, y recogiendo las pinturas antes de que volviera..." (Fortún, *Oculto sendero* 388). If Jorge is home, "Pintaba en el cuarto de baño, a veces sentada en el suelo, y con los tubos de pintura que Jorge tiraba por inservibles... luego los abanicos se secaban en el estudio de Lolín" (389). Her artistic output is limited by the space she can occupy, a fate not uncommon for women in Fortún's era, and for the author herself.²²⁵ As Daphne Spain posits, "Women and men are spatially segregated in ways that reduce women's access to knowledge and thereby reinforce women's lower status relative to men's"—knowledge men use to "produce and reproduce power and privilege" (3).

Rich proposes that the "ancient, continuing envy, awe, and dread of the male for the female capacity to create life has repeatedly taken the form of hatred for every other female aspect of creativity" (*Of Woman Born* 40). Similarly, Woolf highlights the losses in the literary field due to "the doors that have been shut upon women" (83). She traces her reasoning back to the historical financial management by men—since women were not legally allowed to own their earnings, they saw little benefit to engaging in business, as their reward would be spent by their spouse (22-23).²²⁶

²²⁵ Capdevila-Argüelles explains that Fortún's marriage was an unhappy one, partially because of the author's literary recognition—Eusebio felt emasculated by her success (and the money she brought in) and began to hate her (Introduction, *Oculto* 17).

²²⁶ Woolf applies this rhetoric to the academic sphere: "If only [a woman] and her mother and her mother before her had learnt the great art of making money, and had left their money, like their fathers and their grandfathers before them, to found fellowships and lectureships and prizes and

Connecting this to the intellectual sphere, Woolf explains that women need that room of their own because, traditionally, no space has existed in academia and no money has been set aside to fund their studies and creative output. But with the space to create, a woman can find financial freedom—then she can afford an autonomous space in which to practice her craft, and make more profits from her art. This cycle of independence also allows women to enter the public sphere and have a greater effect on their society and culture. María Luisa, not a writer but a painter, cannot fully develop her art until she has an adequate space in which to do so: her intellectual community, her friends' houses, and especially a space away from Jorge.²²⁷

Her husband not only limits her physical room but is also cruel when critiquing her art. The one time he compliments her work after marriage is when he does not know she is the artist behind the *abanicos*. His initial reaction is enthusiastic: “Quien ha pintado esto tiene sentido del color, tiene imaginación... ¡ya lo creo! Tiene verdadero talento ... el pintor está por encima de su obra... es un técnico del arte” (389). However, his tune changes quickly once his wife admits to being the artist; while still being honest about their worth, he is indifferent and sarcastic, and blames María Luisa anytime something in his art studio seems amiss, such as an absent paintbrush.²²⁸ Although his wife has not touched his supplies, Jorge's bruised ego does not listen

scholarships appropriated to the use of their own sex ... we might have looked forward without undue confidence to a pleasant and honourable lifetime spent in the shelter of one of the liberally endowed professions. We might have been exploring or writing; ... or going at ten to an office and coming home comfortably at half past four to write a little poetry” (21).

²²⁷ Capdevila-Argüelles highlights how *Oculto Sendero* “documenta la relación del yo de mujer con la palabra escrita, el arte, el saber o la educación así como las cortapisas y acicates puestos por el otro masculino ... con el poder o deseo sea de permitir sea de impedir el desarrollo de la autoría y del conocimiento de la mujer cercana” (27-28). Indeed, while María Luisa's father had control over her education as a child, Jorge takes the reigns once they marry and does his best to intervene when his wife wants to study or practice her craft.

²²⁸ In the *Fin del otoño* section, now separated from his wife, Jorge is once again able to admit María Luisa's art has merit—he worries she is being underpaid and undervalued for her latest portraits (490).

to reason, threatening to abandon art altogether if he does not have adequate materials (390). This shows his male privilege—while his wife paints on the bathroom floor without protest, Jorge has the luxury of complaining about his extensive resources.²²⁹ Reading the *Verano* section of the novel, it is obvious that Jorge takes personal offense to his spouse's achievement and indirectly blames her for his own shortcomings. Nevertheless, both find various successes in the art world as they move between different Spanish cities including Madrid and the countryside; for María Luisa, children's portraits, which started as small commissions, become a significant cornering of the market. Once emancipated from Jorge, María Luisa is free to paint at her leisure and develop as a professional artist. As *Oculto sendero* demonstrates, an independent space is crucial not only for lesbians but for women in general in these times of social transformation. Woolf's insistence that women need a room in which to create goes beyond the physical; it also signifies the mental space required for artistic production and the respect that comes from being valued enough to have a physical room.

Although *El pensionado* does not emphasize questions pertaining to women and creativity to the same degree as its predecessor, there is a lot more freedom for the boarders to express themselves through art from a young age. The protagonists demonstrate their artistic and intellectual skill on a few occasions; first, at the boarding school, the girls write a short book (each girl oversees one chapter) about the beautiful Elvira, whom Trudi suggests they model after Adela, and her true love Enrique, who shares many traits with Trudi. The plot is as follows: when Elvira's father prohibits the relationship and sends his daughter to a boarding school, Enrique dresses up

²²⁹ Capdevila-Argüelles shows a parallel between author and protagonist in that both “verán su trabajo como secundario al del hombre que las acompaña, seres débiles martirizados por la fuerte y no natural personalidad de sus esposas” (Introduction, *Oculto* 31).

as a girl and joins the school so they can be together.²³⁰ Unfortunately, the students are unable to finish the book, as Tomasa loses the notebook, and when the nuns discover it, they expel Trudi. Many years later, Trudi becomes a set and costume designer, and Ofelia starts publishing short stories in magazines. Once she is dating Totó, the two work together as author and illustrator to continue publishing stories. These artistic pursuits remind the reader of the close association of *artista* and *tercer sexo* by *Oculto Sendero*'s characters and real doctors alike. In *El pensionado*, however, the main artists do not get married and are not limited by their husbands, like María Luisa and Fortún herself.²³¹

Oculto Sendero closely replicates Fortún's own experiences as a *chica rara* who, in adulthood, not only suffered under the weight of traditional marriage and motherhood, but also struggled to find a space in which to grow as a queer woman intellectual despite familial and societal limitations.²³² Conversely, *El pensionado*'s narrative voice becomes a "vehículo de una dimensión autobiográfica colectiva" (Capdevila-Argüelles, Introduction, *El pensionado* 31) that gathers many facets of the lesbian experience and reclaims female agency. Both novels show that uninhibited by (usually male) authority figures, queer female characters are free to grow and create and play an active role in the Spanish cultural sphere. However, where the 2016 novel reproduces the tragic lesbian trope to a degree, allowing its protagonist a certain freedom but not an everlasting romantic relationship, *El pensionado* ends on a refreshingly positive note notwithstanding the

²³⁰ In a humorous scene, the older girls who are writing the book tell the younger boarders about its plot and characters, causing them confusion between Trudi and Enrique. Trudi's chapter closely reflects her complicated relationship with Adela, and even *El pensionado*'s narrator conflates the two: "Adela... no, Elvira, caía en los brazos de Trudi... Bueno, de Enrique, y se besaban amorosamente" (192).

²³¹ Capdevila-Argüelles highlights that Ofelia shares a few traits with her author, but is not an exact reflection of her (Introduction, *El pensionado* 9).

²³² Like María Luisa and Adela, Fortún "quiso dejar de compartir cama con su marido" (Capdevila-Argüelles, Introduction, *Oculto Sendero* 57).

challenges the protagonists have faced at the hands of their families, teachers, and society. Instead, it focuses more on queer joy, community, and liberation.

4.3 Violence Toward (Queer) Women

4.3.1 Challenging Traditional Marriage

When discussing violence towards women, one may not expect to see marriage and motherhood as headlines. Nonetheless, in the field of Social Sciences, it is widely accepted that forced marriage is a human rights violation and a form of gendered violence, since the victims are primarily women and girls (Parella et al. 139). Sònia Parella et al. propose that “el matrimonio forzado debe ser analizado como parte de un proceso y no como un evento puntual, pues las dinámicas que giran en torno a este tipo de abuso comienzan en la infancia, mediante los procesos de socialización y la transmisión de valores familiares y culturales en torno al matrimonio” (139). Similarly, in “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” Rich explains how women are impacted by dominant discourses. Referring to the American context, she demonstrates how women are given advice on marital sex and child-rearing by male healthcare professionals whose beliefs reproduce what capitalism needs from women in terms of production and reproduction (179)—a perspective reminiscent of Gough’s third characteristic, “to command or exploit their labor to control their produce” (768). Women are pressured into marriage and motherhood by medical, social, and economical discourses that care little for their wellbeing and chastise them for speaking out against the injustice.²³³ They thereby become the victims of the professionals’ prescriptions, for example the preservation of the “sacredness of the home—the ‘scientific’ romanticization of the home itself” (179). This space, of course, remits to the longstanding angel of the hearth expectations, the figure of the perfect wife who supports her husband spiritually,

²³³ Male violence, Massey adds, is “a large part of what maintains the institution of marriage and its variants in contemporary society” (225).

physically, and emotionally from her place within the private sphere, never straying or complaining.²³⁴

In Spain, Church and State worked together to limit women's opportunities and justify their oppression through medical and legal recourses. The previously mentioned Spanish doctor and professor Nóvoa Santos, for example, strongly believed in the inferiority of womankind, describing feminism as “esa plaga que se extiende como nube de langosta devastadora” (*Indigencia* 172) and claiming that educating women is both unnatural and increases their chances of developing hysteria and other nervous disorders, as well as “trastornos de las funciones sexuales” (173-174).²³⁵ Similarly to the anti-queer medical-pathological rhetoric explored in the previous chapter, contentions such as these are used to validate women's marginalization, which depends on a strict hierarchy, and to impede them from taking any action to improve their plight. Already in the 19th century, several Spanish writers and activists, such as Pardo Bazán and Acuña, recognized this injustice and spoke out against it. Acuña, for example, declares in 1888 that marriage puts women in a relationship of servitude because “laws, religion, and customs mould women's souls into the ‘raqúiticos destinos de la sierva’” (Arkinstall 157). Nevertheless, by refusing to conform, a woman risks being ostracized by the medical community, her peers, and even the nation, which fears any challenge to preestablished social structures.

²³⁴ In the late 19th century, Spanish educator and journalist Julián López Catalán (1834-1890) proposes a definition assessed by Nash: “Defined in 1877 as ‘an angel of love, consolation to our afflictions, defender of our merits, patient sufferer of our faults, faithful guardian of our secrets, and jealous depository of our honor,’ she was also evoked as mother, spouse, or daughter: ‘as a mother she is the life and sweetness of the family, as a wife the vale of tears of her husband, as a daughter, an angel who keeps watch and prays for the lovingness and peace of the home’” (“Un/Contested” 28).

²³⁵ Nóvoa Santos even gives the example of a studious young girl whose menstrual cycle had stopped until she gave up her books and her writing, thereby returning to a proper social and physiological womanhood (*Indigencia* 173).

For queer women, discrimination and violence are double, because in addition to the possibility of forced marriages, compulsory heterosexuality pushes them into relationships with men despite their attraction to women—bear in mind Gough’s second characteristic, “to force male sexuality upon them” (768).²³⁶ As Rich argues, compulsory heterosexuality implies that a) women are innately attracted to men and will inevitably marry them, and b) any sapphic tendencies are “an acting-out of bitterness toward men” (“Compulsory” 178, 185)—note that in both cases, women are defined in relation to men. It is worth remembering that for Krafft-Ebing, lesbianism was a neurological issue because he could not fathom that a healthy woman would spurn “the entire species of man” in favour of women (Miles 304). Negating lesbian existence is in itself a form of violence, and one in which 1920s and 1930s Spain, though on a quest for modernization, still took part.²³⁷ One of the fears of a phallogentric society, explains María Mercedes Gómez, is that with female homosexuality, the phallus—the supreme symbol of masculinity—begins to lose its dominant status (81). Like the supporting characters of *Ellas*, who worry that they cannot tell the difference between heterosexuals and homosexuals, Iris Young notes that “los límites entre las sexualidades son menos definidos, menos visibles y bastante flexibles y porosos” than the more visible dividers of sex/gender and race (qtd. in Mercedes Gómez 82). This anxiety, combined with the distress of losing the privilege of maleness, turns to hatred as the group representing the threat is ostracized and repressed (81). This is in itself a form of social violence often accompanied by

²³⁶ This characteristic includes rape, marital rape, prostitution, intimate partner violence, compulsory heterosexuality, and more (“Compulsory” 183-184).

²³⁷ Luz Sanfeliu adds that in 1886, Krafft-Ebing developed “una escala de inversión sexual que iba desde las mujeres que no manifestaban la anomalía en su apariencia física ni en su comportamiento, hasta las más degeneradas, aquéllas que sólo eran femeninas en sus órganos genitales: en todo lo demás sentían y vivían como hombres” (45-46) that contributed to the pathologization of lesbians and encouraged their perception as perverted. This medical discourse, explored in depth in the previous section and chapter, demonstrate how lesbianism is promoted as “deviant” or “abhorrent,” while ignoring it renders it invisible (Rich, “Compulsory” 178).

instances of physical harm—for example, a husband engaging in sexual activity with his (secretly) lesbian wife, who does not consent or has no choice but to consent. Pushed into relationships that favour power imbalances, with partners who are not attractive to them, all the while being marginalized in society and at the mercy of pathologizing medical rhetoric is, in our opinion, a multifaceted form of violence that all too often leads to internalized homophobia, self-hatred, and suffering.

Just like Burgos, Fortún defends women's rights in her literature, though her grassroots feminism indisputably includes queer women. Even with the discriminatory discourses of key institutions and figures who influenced her, like the Church, Marañón, and Nóvoa Santos, the author's writings showcase the injustice Spanish women—lesbians especially—face in various parts of their lives. Fortún likens heterosexual marriage to slavery both in terms of control and violence, leaving no room for female pleasure or growth. *Oculto sendero* harshly criticizes the institution of marriage, one with which Fortún herself was largely dissatisfied. Gender expectations for married women are clearly established in the novel, often told through older female characters; as the driving force behind a conservative family in a society that offered limited paths to women, María Luisa's own mother constantly upholds female subjugation as the natural order, claiming women's lives are a constant sacrifice (349). But the protagonist vehemently rejects the idea of marriage: “todo eso de casorios [la] tenía sin cuidado” (139). Often she announces she will never marry, likely due in part to her peers' and her mother's insistence that “Para la mujer no hay más camino que el matrimonio” (220), a job that entails managing the husband's money, sewing his clothes, entertaining him by playing piano, and making him happy (221). Unsurprisingly, this does not enchant María Luisa—why would she want to dedicate her life to a man's desires?—and she has not even realized she is a lesbian yet.

As she gets older and starts experiencing unwanted attention from older men, her aversion to marriage becomes more severe. While her mother would love to marry María Luisa off to an older, well-to-do man named Antonio, the protagonist is undeterred: “Antes de casarme con Antonio prefería morir... ¡Sí, morir!” (273). But like Fortún, the protagonist ends up unhappily married to a man. According to Capdevila-Argüelles, the author presents “el matrimonio como una institución esclavizadora que legitima la venta del cuerpo de la mujer al hombre” (Introduction, *Oculto* 39), which recalls Gough’s sixth characteristic of male power: “to use [women] as objects in male transactions” (768). While there is no exchange of money, María Luisa goes from belonging to her family to being Jorge’s possession.²³⁸ Indeed, as of her wedding night, María Luisa is now expected to perform sexually to please her husband, but her first experience is so traumatic that she contemplates suicide the next morning: “me desperté cansada y dolorida ... El más absoluto desencantado había vaciado mi alma y mi pensamiento. Me asomé al balcón que daba sobre un patio y miré al fondo... ¡Si me dejaría caer! Era tercer piso y me mataría... ¡Todo acabado! ¡Qué bien! Ya ni marido, ni casa, ni hijos...” (302). Luckily, Jorge startles her out of this depressing fantasy and our protagonist drudges onward.

Over the course of the next few months, María Luisa reflects on “esa vida de la recién casada ... en la que la joven esposa se presta dócilmente a satisfacer los apetitos reprimidos o mal saciados del hombre en plena virilidad...” (302), wondering if this is the case for all women. She begins to make excuses to avoid sex, claiming she has a headache, or is too tired, or has to wake up early (326). Nonetheless, María Luisa must continue to have intercourse with her husband, as is her duty, because the married woman exists to procreate and satiate her husband’s sexual desires, regardless of the revulsion she may feel towards him. Sexual activity may be just one of the aspects

²³⁸ Similarly, Señora Arroyo wanted her daughter to marry Antonio, the rich friend who gave the family many gifts—likely in an attempt to “purchase” María Luisa.

of womanhood she is forced to endure for the sake of normalcy, but it is certainly Fortún's most obvious rejection of heterosexuality. She describes María Luisa's aversion to male genitalia as *horror, espanto, and repugnante*. With the doctor, the protagonist calls it "horror al macho" (432), and with her friend Julieta, she identifies heterosexual sex as "un acto contra naturaleza" (448). For María Luisa, sex is dirty and incompatible with female pleasure (Capdevila-Argüelles, Introduction, *Oculto* 39), unlike what she later experiences with her female lovers.

But compulsory heterosexuality is not the protagonist's only challenge after marriage. Once María Luisa moves out of the family home and into her adult life, her new family constantly reminds her of a woman's place in society and in the home, contributing to the heteropatriarchal marketing that maintains traditional gender roles. María Luisa's brother-in-law, who orders his wife around as if she were his maid, promotes the following:

una madre de familia debe levantarse la primera y acostarse la última, ... debe educar a cada uno de sus hijos según su temperamento, debe cuidar esmeradamente de que en la ropa no haya jamás un descosido, ni falte un botón, debe tener un carácter igual, inalterable, debe ser alegre y activa sin desfallecimientos... debe sentir el arte y la belleza al mismo tiempo que su marido... vibrando al unísono... (371-372)

María Luisa, after one of his "sermons," ironically asks if there is a book that describes the tasks of the father, and her brother-in-law "desde entonces [la] miró con desconfianza" (372).²³⁹ Of course, there is no such manual.²⁴⁰ Married men and fathers are expected to have control over their wives and daughters respectively, and Jorge's fragile masculinity is challenged by his wife's queer

²³⁹ Frustrated with her brother-in-law, and sensing that he is violent with his wife behind closed doors, the protagonist refers to *La perfecta casada* (1583) and tells him it is out of date (Fortún, *Oculto* 371-372).

²⁴⁰ That said, men also suffer at the hands of the patriarchy, especially gender nonconforming men and *invertidos*.

ways, even as she tries her best to conform to social norms. As the novel progresses, it becomes more and more difficult for the protagonist to pretend she is happily married, and she rejects the position of subjugation she is supposed to occupy: “siempre él [Jorge] y yo una prolongación de él, sin más ideales que los suyos, sin más alegrías que las escasas que le deparaba su carácter melancólico” (429). In her career and in her personal development—and much like the scores of women whose plight Woolf laments in *A Room of One's Own*—, María Luisa is limited because of her husband and the strict position she must maintain if she is to remain a *mujer decente*.²⁴¹ She is a victim of the aforementioned societal violence that compels her to marry a man and become an extension of him rather than her own person, as well as of the sexual violence that comes from an inability to safely say no to heterosexual intercourse within her marriage.

Similarly, *El pensionado*'s Adela must always comply to her husband's sexual demands—even just pages after going through a terrible labour to deliver a stillborn baby and discovering the child died due to the syphilis with which her spouse knowingly infected her. Even before her pregnancy, Adela is contemplating suicide (Fortún, *El pensionado* 416)—just like María Luisa. Even so, when Adela tells her mother, “¡A mí me repugna! ¡No puedo!” on the topic of sex with her husband, the mother responds, “¡Tu deber de esposa cristiana te exige el sacrificio!” (463). It is interesting to note that much like Fray Luis de León, Azucena, eccentric and honour-obsessed,

²⁴¹ Near the end of the book, when María Luisa is finally actively trying to leave her spouse, Jorge tells her “una divorciada no es nunca decente” (451), but by the time the protagonist is ready to talk to her female lawyer friend, Jorge has gotten used to the idea and has found a new woman who is “buena y honrada” (475), though the relationship does not last. Capdevila-Argüelles brings forth the term *matrimonio fraternal* to represent the eventual relationship between María Luisa and Jorge. The protagonist offers her husband “un cariño fraternal en camas separadas” (32) once she realizes she can no longer keep up the heterosexual charade. Luckily for Jorge and María Luisa, the couple is free to separate officially; divorce became legal in the Second Spanish Republic in 1932, although it was outlawed by Franco in 1939. Fortún's inclusion of a historical detail helps situate the novel: “Por fortuna la República nos da resuelta esa cuestión [de divorcio]” (475).

calls sexual relations with a spouse a sacrifice and a duty—perhaps remitting to her own past, of which we know little.²⁴²

Marriages of convenience protected queer women from being outed and allowed them to benefit from the financial and social freedoms of having a husband. In *Oculto sendero*, Florinda and Lolín are among those who marry men to hide their true selves. Even *El pensionado*'s Manón, “maravillosamente bien casada” yet certainly not in love (302), only uses her marriage and children as a cover for her lesbian lifestyle.²⁴³ But *El pensionado* does not submit its central protagonists—namely, Trudi and Ofelia—to the same level of homophobia as María Luisa faces in *Oculto sendero* novel. While the latter reflects Fortún's own experiences, the former takes a slightly more positive approach to the plight of queer women in society. Trudi does suffer greatly, as does Adela, but their traumas are due to their womanhood rather than their sapphism or *chica rara*-ness. Neither they nor Ofelia and Totó internalize society's homophobia, nor do they often hear other characters disparage the LGBTQ+ community (or any of its “dishonourable” characters), the exception being Adela with her mother. Compared to María Luisa, whose parents and husband spent ample time inhibiting her access to the queer community, *El pensionado* not only highlights the presence and experiences of queer women, but generally does so away from male influence. Rich coins the term lesbian existence to “[suggest] both the fact of the historical presence of

²⁴² Using the case of a secondary character, Adela's mother, the novel also addresses structural violence, denouncing the social system that keeps the poor from meeting their basic needs, combined with a lack of financial options for impoverished women to improve their situation. While the narrator presents Azucena Inmaculada as a foolish, overdramatic, overbearing mother to poor Adela, a short interlude portrays her as yet another victim of capitalism and patriarchy. Through the brief ramblings of an inebriated acquaintance, Adela and the reader discover that Azucena was, in her youth, a destitute sex worker, dancing at a club and leaving with whomever would offer her a few *pesetas* or even a hot meal (466). The acquaintance laughs at the irony of this woman labelling herself “Inmaculada” after her past sexual transgressions, while Adela goes to bed without dinner, devastated.

²⁴³ Similarly, lavender marriages, between a gay man and a lesbian, protected both parties; this term was especially used in early 20th-century Hollywood.

lesbians and [their] continuing creation of the meaning of that existence” (“Compulsory” 192), adding that lesbians are not simply a female iteration of male homosexuals (193). In *El pensionado*, this existence takes shape in how the protagonists define themselves individually rather than as extensions of the men in their lives. Fortún tells her stories in such a way that almost any reader of this novel or *Oculto sendero* would root for the protagonists despite the contemporary discourse on both women and lesbians as lesser or even sinful beings.

4.3.2 Defying Expectations Around Motherhood

Women’s bodies—contraception, sexual freedom, maternity, abortion, motherhood...—are as much the topic of public debate today as they were in the first half of the 1900s. Motherhood, the divine purpose of half the population, in addition to being reductive, is not without its dangers: even in 2020, around 287,000 mothers died of childbirth-related causes worldwide (“Maternal Mortality”), an astounding number even if it has decreased since the early 20th century. But this statistic reflects mortality rates, not the pains of pregnancy and giving birth. In her groundbreaking *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Rich expounds that many cultures believe the agony of childbirth is a punishment from God (128).²⁴⁴ Some claim it is woman’s destiny to suffer, the very purpose of her existence (129, 159). For this reason, Rich differentiates between two concepts of motherhood: motherhood as the relationship between a woman who can reproduce and her potential offspring, and motherhood as a punishing institution dependent on male control (*Of Woman Born* 13). The latter alienates women from their bodies, distinguishes between the public and private spheres, and degrades feminine potential and self-realization (13, 42). Hinging on the dichotomy of good/bad mother, a woman must abandon her individual identity

²⁴⁴ In the Bible, for example, part of Eve’s punishment for taking the forbidden fruit from the Garden of Eden is the pain of childbirth: “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy conception; in pain thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (*American Standard Version*, Genesis 3.16).

to take on the identity of Good Mother, or risk societal criticism and her own guilt for being a Bad Mother and failing in her role. As Rich put it in 1976 (and it holds true today to a great extent), “Typically, under patriarchy, the mother’s life is exchanged for the child ... The self-denying, self-annihilating role of the Good Mother (linked implicitly with suffering and with the repression of anger) will spell the ‘death’ of the girl who once had hopes” for herself (*Of Woman Born* 166). A Bad Mother, then, might be one who spends time on intellectual or artistic pursuits rather than on domestic chores, one of the many arguments doctors and male intellectuals put forth to bar women from the public sphere.²⁴⁵ Patriarchal motherhood, according to Rich, goes hand in hand with institutional violence and should be abolished (*Of Woman Born* 263, 280).

Looking back to the 1920s, when doctors proclaimed that a woman’s only purpose was motherhood and society was attempting to navigate the emergence of the modern woman, being a proper parent would have held even more importance.²⁴⁶ As we saw in the previous chapter, this dichotomy also extends to the Victorian angel-wife/prostitute or Freud’s Madonna/Whore complex, to which Carlos Feal Deibe adds that the duality of good/bad mother stems from male fantasy: a woman both untainted and lascivious (257). The pure, chaste mother, whose only pleasure derives from maternity, is the perfect antithesis to the nymph that makes up the other half of male fantasies. Ignoring the risks, she dedicates her life to carrying and raising her children, since this is the only reason she exists—at least according to leading voices in the medical

²⁴⁵ According to Ríos Lloret, the woman who refuses her maternal mission—either by not having children or not caring for them well—are proof of the “decadencia” plaguing 19th-century Spain (190).

²⁴⁶ This remits to Gough’s fourth characteristic of male power, “to control or rob them of their children” (768), which includes a mother “binding” a daughter’s mind for marriage (Rich, “Compulsory” 184), like Adela and María Luisa’s mothers do. Expanding on this, we propose that forcing women to have children also serves as additional means of control. This contributes to the fifth characteristic as well, as having children does help confine mothers to the domestic space—“to confine them physically and prevent their movement,” for example with prescriptions of full-time mothering (Gough 768).

community.²⁴⁷ In “Un/Contested Identities: Motherhood, Sex Reform and the Modernization of Gender Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Spain,” Nash explains that with the turn of the 20th century, the basis of gender discourse moved from a religious to a scientific authority (32). By the mid-1920s, doctors had become the “most influential source in the formulation of cultural values that redefined women’s identity through motherhood” (33). And with Marañón leading the charge, medical professionals did undeniably intervene in the politics of motherhood (33). Though Marañón declares the sexes equal, he also believes in motherhood as women’s primordial function, as we saw in the previous chapter.

Similarly, Spanish doctor Carlos Jiménez Díaz (1898-1967), like many of his peers, praises maternal love, which Aldaraca clarifies is born of their need to rationalize their contradictory perspectives of women: pure and void of sexual desire, or sexually frustrated and disordered (84). Dr. Ángel Pulido Fernández (1852-1932) emphasizes that this maternal love stems from the “el instinto de la reproducción” (qtd. in Aldaraca 84). Again, Aldaraca interjects: Pulido’s theory is that women satisfy their sexual needs and express passion through pregnancy and childbirth only (84). Dr. Juan Drumen (1798-1863), meanwhile, declares in his 1850 *Tratado elemental de patología médica*, “La maternidad, que es la función principal de las mujeres, determina en ellas condiciones predisponentes del estado nervioso. La aparición del flujo menstrual, la preñez, el parto y la lactancia... la conducen a este estado” (qtd. in Aldaraca 77). He establishes a clear link between women’s reproductive organs and their emotional instability in order to substantiate their inferiority to men. In 1908, Nóvoa Santos laments that more and more women—especially in the upper class—are going against their very nature and abandoning “el camino para que su

²⁴⁷ It is ironic that women, who carry an unequal share of the burden of reproduction, are charged with raising the very same boys who will uphold patriarchal structures and the girls who will drown in them.

organización está conformada” (*La indigencia* 175). The path in question is the “supremo fin de concebir y albergar en sus entrañas las futuras existencias” (175). Even Unamuno equates motherhood with eternal life, alarmed by the rise of the modern woman under the Republic (Johnson, *Gender* 168, 204). The (male) consensus is, then, that the value of women’s existence relies on their ability and willingness to procreate—a belief that heavily influences society and impedes its modernization—thereby simultaneously enforcing their position in the gender hierarchy and minimizing the possibility of fulfilment through any creative or productive outlet, i.e. art, study, or work.

Moreover, Ríos Lloret points out that “Gran parte de la clase médica del XIX representará a la mujer como un ser fisiológicamente *preso* de su naturaleza biológica, de tal manera que su existencia se reduce a periodos, *la pubertad, la maternidad, la menopausia*” (190; emphasis added). Likely influenced by these biological categories, both of Fortún’s novels are divided into parts corresponding with different life stages. *Oculto sendero* begins with *Primavera*, the period of María Luisa’s youth. Then comes *Verano*, ranging from her late teens to the death of her daughter, and finally *Otoño*, not the end of her life but a season of new beginnings. The novel ends with a brief fourth section called *Fin del otoño* that spans only 14 pages and covers María Luisa’s quest for divorce and her potential move to France, Brasil, or the U.S., ultimately deciding on the latter. Shortly after María Luisa notices physical markers of age in her face while hoping her latest crush, Lupe, will join her on her way to America—Lupe does not, since she is in love with Leonarda—the novel ends with the line, “Ha empezado a nevar...” (495), the oncoming winter suggesting the end of an era. Similarly, *El pensionado*’s three sections, *Pubertad*, *Floración*, and *Plenitud*, first cover the boarding school days, then the young adult years filled with strife, and finally the events leading to the eventual escape to France. Ríos Lloret’s notion of imprisonment within the female body primarily takes shape in *Pubertad* for Trudi and *Verano* for María Luisa.

But in both books, there is a rupture with the traditional stages of a woman's existence: by the end of the third part, the characters have broken free of the limits imposed upon them by society and family alike.

The idea of the female body as a site of moral and physical impurity, a subject we addressed in the previous chapter, is evidenced through the topic of menstruation, which paradoxically is perceived as unclean in many cultures, while also marking a body as female and ready to partake in its primordial function of maternity. In *El pensionado*, Fortún approaches menstruation differently in relation to homosexuality, using it to mark a rift in the strict trajectory of puberty-maternity-menopause. Murcia Estrada proposes that with the *chica rara*, "female queerness implies exceptionality and a certain loss of identity that is perceived as assimilation to the masculine" (85). In Trudi's case, this assimilation to the masculine is welcome until the arrival of her menstrual cycle provokes a great crisis of gender identity. Incompatible with her androgynous sense of self, her first period prompts feelings of body dysmorphia and a hatred of this "womanly" experience we can connect to a rejection of maternity—the stage after puberty—, now possible due to her newfound fertility. It is in the second chapter of the novel that the 15-year-old reacts with disgust and desperation to her first menstrual period in a dialogue with a nun and a doctor. The cloistered nurse explains that God deemed women should undergo such misery and should "resignarse sin rebeldía" (Fortún, *El pensionado* 75, 77). Trudi's response is a desperate outburst of no's and *no quiero*'s, shame and anguish, tears and screams.²⁴⁸ Feeling betrayed by her body, she asserts that she does not want to be like other women to both the nun and the kind doctor Don Heliodoro (75, 80), if being a woman means menstruating and acting more ladylike.

²⁴⁸ This taboo topic ("son cosas que no se hablan," says the nun) is addressed by the characters using euphemisms and pauses marked by ellipses: "[Trudi] se ha tenido que quedar en la enfermería... No es por nada... ¿sabes? Creo que es *eso*..." and "Pues... Como ya tiene quince años... El desarrollo... Y esta mañana..." (Fortún, *El pensionado* 75, 78).

In *Oculto sendero*, meanwhile, as we saw in section 4.1.2, *chica rara* María Luisa rejects feminine clothing and pastimes in her youth. By the second part, *Verano*, we witness her childhood anguish regarding the eventuality of motherhood transform into a serious aversion to an inevitable fate: once married, she is unable to escape getting pregnant. This leads to a dual representation of motherhood as an institution and an experience, clearly distinguished by Rich and exemplified by Fortún. On the one hand, Rich proposes that the inability to avoid pregnancy is part of the “invisible violence of the institution of motherhood” (*Of Woman Born* 277). Our protagonist has no contraceptive measures to protect herself, nor can she refuse her husband’s sexual needs. She also suffers during the delivery, describing it as a “trance terrible, espantoso, sobrehumano, más allá de toda idea del dolor” (Fortún 320), with words such as “me desangraba” and “agotadoras agonías” and “peligro” peppering the following page (321). But little attention is paid to the mother’s “psychic crisis of bearing a first child” (Rich, *Of Woman Born* 36), with the doctor laughing off her preoccupations and her own mother’s criticism (Fortún 322)—here, the institution of motherhood prevails again in that María Luisa’s wants, needs, and fears are disregarded in favour of her husband’s and child’s.

On the other hand, our protagonist requires time to adjust to her role of mother and to the *experience* of having a daughter.²⁴⁹ When María Luisa’s mother asks her, a few days after María José is born, if she loves her baby, María Luisa’s first response is no, although soon thereafter, “el instinto que toda hembra lleva en sus entrañas” awakens and she becomes obsessed with her daughter, never leaving her side (322-323)—now, she can experience motherhood as a relationship between parent and child. For a moment, María Luisa leans with gusto into her traditional role of mother, but just three chapters later—though between “Maternidad” and “Fin de verano” 11 years

²⁴⁹ In a comical discussion between a doctor and María Luisa, the latter exclaims, “¡Si parece una mona!” when she first sees her newborn (322).

pass—young María José wastes away from an unnamed illness. When her daughter dies, María Luisa is devastated, and never again wishes to have a child. Her grief ends the second part of the novel, *Verano*, on a disturbing note: “No, no; que nadie llore a mi hija, que era mía sola... ¡nadie más que yo tiene derecho a llorarla! ¡Había brotado de mis entrañas milagrosamente...! Y yo, ¡¡ay!!, la lloro, no por lo que la he querido, sino porque algunas veces no la he querido bastante... ¡Hija! ¡Hija! ¡Hija!” (365). These final words in *Verano* indicate that María Luisa feels guilt regarding her relationship with her daughter. According to Rich, “The institution of motherhood finds all mothers more or less guilty of having failed their children” (*Of Woman Born* 223), and this loss would certainly provoke such feelings in both the mother and the society that deems raising children her only purpose. Although it is not made explicit at any point, María Luisa (and probably Fortún as well) likely feels guilt for her child’s *death* as well.²⁵⁰ María José’s passing is one of two instances where a line of “.....” replaces any text. If we refer to our paragraph on the other use of these ellipses in 4.1.3, we could argue that in both instances they replace descriptions of incidents one might consider shameful: lesbian sexual activity, yes, but also the death of a child. From María José’s birth to her untimely demise, María Luisa undergoes a great change. At first, she could not connect with the child she had birthed, and 12 years later, she refuses to even allow Jorge to share in her pain, claiming María José for herself. María Luisa has never wanted the role of Mother in the traditional sense—becoming pregnant to fulfil a duty, giving birth traumatically, and being relegated to the domestic realm. However, she experiences the relationship between mother and beloved daughter beyond patriarchal notions of motherhood; in

²⁵⁰ Certainly María Luisa still feels grief—and probably shame—at the start of the next chapter, “Hogares,” which begins the final section of the book. This chapter is set two years later, with María Luisa still dressed in mourning black and carrying a profound sadness as she meets her nieces and nephews for the first time (she and Jorge have not seen his brother and Consuelo in a decade); nine-year-old Juan’s eyes remind María Luisa of María José’s (370).

other words, in spite of the institution that put her in this position, María Luisa loves being a mother to María José for those 12 years.

Oculto sendero's protagonist does not believe her destiny is motherhood, however, nor does she intend to have any more children after María José's passing.²⁵¹ Instead, she focuses on her art and slowly growing into her identity. The accident of childbirth is a twist of fate—a cruel one, allowing María Luisa to discover the joys of motherhood only to strip them away—rather than a cosmic vocation. In fact, the author herself knows all too well the grief of losing a child, as her second-born son, Manuel, died at only 11 years old in 1920; she must have been thinking of him as she expressed María Luisa's raw grief on paper. In addition to potentially having a therapeutic effect on Fortún, the inclusion of this plot point proves that homosexuality and parenthood are not mutually exclusive. It is important to note that María Luisa's entrance into the queer community does not happen until years after María José's death. Nevertheless, unlike *Ellas*'s lesbian mother Luisita, *Oculto sendero*'s protagonist does not forego her child in order to pursue lovers; she is trapped in a heterosexual marriage, yes, but the reader knows she is queer and still gets to see her lovingly raise a daughter. The main characters of both *Oculto sendero* and *Quiero vivir mi vida* share a distaste for the sacrifices of parenthood, but where Isabel's unwillingness stems from her virulent intersexual condition, María Luisa is humanized by her profound love and subsequent grief for the child she inadvertently has, proving a queer mother is not automatically a failed mother. In this novel, Fortún rejects the influential traditional views of the medical community, allowing her protagonist—though *Oculto sendero* remained unpublished for

²⁵¹ Rich proposes that “Women who refuse to become mothers are not merely emotionally suspect, but are dangerous. Not only do they refuse to continue the species; they also deprive society of its emotional leaven—the suffering of the mother” (*Of Woman Born* 169).

decades—to express all the dissatisfaction and rage against the violent institutions of marriage and motherhood Fortún was never fully able to address in life.

4.3.3 Falling Prey to Physical Violence

Women have been the victims of violence in every era, in every country—one need only remember the missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada and the United States, the female infanticide in China and India, the honour killings in the Arab world and Europe, the female genital mutilation in certain African nations, the rape of female prisoners of war in conflicts across the planet, and more.²⁵² The examples are interminable, longstanding, widespread, and devastating. Even today, “One in three women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence, mostly by an intimate partner” (“Ending”). This staggering statistic has led to the use of terms such as femicide and epidemic to describe local, national, and global crises of violence against women. And more often than not, men are the perpetrators of these violent acts. In “Silencio a gritos,” a study on lesbian representations in 1970s and 1980s literature, Simonis blames the patriarchal gender structure for this epidemic:

No hace falta insistir en que el sistema sexo/género es generador de la violencia contra las mujeres y que existen múltiples formas de violencia, más o menos sutiles. ... La frecuencia de los episodios violentos dirigidos a las mujeres ha sido tanta y tan simultánea en todos los rincones del planeta que lamentablemente ha revertido en una especie de aceptación y tolerancia perversa que no beneficia en nada a su erradicación. (110)

²⁵² According to a United Nations brochure on rape as a tactic of war, “between 250,000 and 500,000 women and girls were raped in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda” and many others were raped in other armed conflicts; the majority of these crimes also go unpunished. The same brochure shares a comment from Major General (ret.) Patrick Cammaert, former UN Division Commander for Eastern DRC (MONUC): “It is perhaps more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in an armed conflict.”

The hierarchical system that places men above women—justified by religion, medical discourse, philosophical texts, and countless other sources provided principally by men—ensures that those who maintain the status quo are not punished, regardless of the methods they use to stay in power.

This is especially the case with sexual violence because the patriarchy has associated so much shame with female promiscuity and blames the woman for her own victimization. Male entitlement to female bodies also plays an important role in sexual violence, as is outlined in Crenshaw's "Mapping the Margins" that starts by recognizing a shift in perspective: once considered individual issues, domestic violence and sexual assault are now seen as systemic and social (1242). While this change has yet to occur in Fortún's era, many of Crenshaw's arguments predate the shift; race, class, and sexual orientation have always intersected with sex and gender-based violence. Valerie Smith adds that "To the extent that rape is constructed as a crime against the property of privileged white men, crimes against less valuable women—women of color, working-class women, and *lesbians*, for example—mean less or mean differently than those against white women from the middle or upper class" (qtd. in Crenshaw 1269; emphasis added). Note the use of property, a term in line with notions of ownership—women's bodies are a commodity to be possessed and used by the men who have power over them. Sexual violence is about power and ownership as much as or more than it is about sex. Interestingly, Spanish literature has addressed this theme since the first Castilian narrative work, the anonymous epic poem *El poema de Mio Cid* or *Cantar de Mio Cid*, dating back to the mid-12th century, in which the hero's daughters are beaten and abandoned by their husbands whom El Cid had humiliated for their cowardice.²⁵³ It is also explored in various forms in Fortún's unpublished works alongside prostitution and intimate partner violence.

²⁵³ In the centuries since, the theme of honour killings and purity has reappeared time and time again in Spanish Literature. Pedro Calderón de la Barca's (1600-1681) *El alcalde de Zalamea*

In the late 18th and early 19th century in Spain, female sexuality was, especially among the bourgeoisie, based on the inexistence of desire (Ríos Lloret 181). Consequently, the “ninfómana, símbolo de una sexualidad femenina temida y desconocida” (Vázquez García and Moreno Mengíbar 217), and the prostitute, who abandons domesticity in favour of economic independence and makes a living from sex (210, 224), certainly do not have a place within an honourable society. Tsuchiya lists the most common subjects classified as deviant in literature at the end of the 19th century: the prostitute and the adulteress, but also the hysteric, the modern woman, the revolutionary, and the homosexual, all of whom represented “transgression, disorder, and degeneration” (17). Curiously, both medical practitioners and authors at the turn of the century linked the lesbian to the prostitute, the ultimate agent of degeneration (Tsuchiya 180). Some analyses even put forth that the corrupt, sexually indulgent escort could easily slip into sapphism, a similar form of sexual perversion (181). These “amores femeninos *contra natura*” (Vázquez García and Moreno Mengíbar 210), generally pathologized in both literature and society, are presented differently by Fortún. Though the protagonists know they must keep their relationships private, it is in fact *heterosexuality* that is characterized—either through sexual violence, disillusionment, or disgust, as we have seen—as toxic and degenerate. Fortún’s novels not only advocate for the tolerance of homosexuality, but also condemn the vilification of all deviant sexualities, namely the prostitute and other victims of sexual violence.

In a troubling episode in *El pensionado* during which Trudi goes to a party with her boyfriend Fefe and tries alcohol for the first time, soon becoming incapacitated, Fefe violently assaults her: “A puñadas, a mordiscos, a trompazos, [Fefe] la vence al fin y es suya... ¡Lo que los hombres dicen suya, porque nunca lo fue menos que en este momento en que su cuerpo se ha dejado

(1651) is an example, though he refuses to kill his daughter and exacts his revenge another way. Similarly, Pardo Bazán’s aforementioned “El indulto” tackles domestic and sexual violence.

vencer...!” (254). They later end up at a “casa de mal vivir” where she is found by police and brought home in shame the next morning, now associated with the taboo figure of the prostitute (257). Eight days later, her father passes away, and decisions regarding Trudi are left to her brother and his cruel wife, who decide to send her to a *reformatorio* where she is systematically tortured for months.²⁵⁴ This consists of sensory deprivation, isolation, cruel punishments, poor hygiene, malnourishment, and verbal berating. Capdevila-Argüelles confirms that this mistreatment is consistent research on real reforms for “fallen” women, something Fortún also criticizes in her journalism (Introduction, *El pensionado* 42; Fortún, “La Casa-Escuela”). Trudi suffers alongside other victims of patriarchy: village girls sold into prostitution before even reaching puberty, girls raped by a father, a brother, or the man of the house where they worked as nannies... (266). Like them, Trudi is blamed for her plight and spends the next decade being shunned, worst of all by Adela’s mother who refuses to allow her to see Adela (until she becomes gravely ill after childbirth) in order to preserve her “pureza inmaculada” (344). Trudi is seen as a sexual deviant and would therefore jeopardize Adela’s reputation.²⁵⁵ That said, in spite of her untimely association with sex work, Trudi is in fact a rape victim, not a prostitute—though in either case, we would consider her a victim of male violence and control.²⁵⁶

Like Adela, consistently raped by her husband, Ofelia, assaulted by her teenage cousin, and Trudi, raped by her boyfriend, the protagonist of *Oculto sendero* is, too, a victim. Sexual violence

²⁵⁴ This time, both men and women contribute to the fifth characteristic of male power, confinement and restriction of movements.

²⁵⁵ In hearing about Trudi’s trauma from Ofelia, Natividad laments the society that would blame the female victim rather than the brutal male perpetrator (Fortún, *El pensionado* 257), a perspective in line with 21st-century feminism.

²⁵⁶ In addition to any physical or sexual violence they may undergo, “Las lesbianas sufren un tipo de violencia que no es visible ... pero que no deja de ser menos injustificable. Violencia que es silencio, indiferencia, negación, exilio interior, escarnio, coda una serie de imposiciones que llevan a la invisibilidad” (Simonis 110). This form of violence is one with which Fortún was intimately acquainted, never intending for her *Bildungsroman* to surface.

follows María Luisa from her youth to adulthood, the first incident being a physical assault by a group of boys (“otro había deslizado sus manos ásperas por mis muslos y trataba de meterlas por la boca de los pantalones...” 192). Later, when staying at a hotel with her family, they meet a judge who, unlikely to face legal consequences for his actions, takes many liberties (“El señor juez me quería mucho y constantemente me llamaba para decirme que era una chica muy salada” [193]). He sexually assaults María Luisa in the next pages, but she escapes before he can penetrate her—the mother and the other women staying in the hotel agree that “Menos mal que no la ha desgraciado para toda su vida...” (196); in other words, her experience is not as serious because she was not dishonoured by losing her virginity outside of marriage. But the would-be rapist faces no punishment other than being pressured into leaving the hotel and no law enforcement figures are brought into play. María Luisa finds this attack horrifying, but less so because she does not know what could have happened to her because “era solo en la cama donde pasaban ciertas cosas” (196). The protagonist has received no sexual education in the name of propriety, which actually leaves her more vulnerable because she does not recognize the dangers.

In the *Verano* section of the novel, María Luisa is again assaulted by an older man, Antonio, who finds her alone in the evening and kisses her aggressively (277). He continues to harass her, trying to convince her to marry him, and María Luisa’s mother even encourages her to accept Antonio’s advances. But all the protagonist and reader feel is “asco al hombre predador que se cree *con derecho* a disponer del cuerpo de la mujer a su antojo” (Capdevila-Argüelles, Introduction, *Oculto* 39; emphasis added). Even once María Luisa is married, Jorge feels like he owns her body, and our protagonist continues to be a victim of aggression. Remembering Crenshaw’s comment on male entitlement and Smith’s use of the term “property,” we can establish that Jorge feels entitled to María Luisa’s body as she is little more than his property; and though

marital rape is only prohibited by Spanish law in 1992, Fortún's writing alludes to nonconsensual intercourse occurring within the marriage.

Conversely, like Burgos, Fortún also narrates violence in same-sex relationships, where the heteropatriarchy is both reproduced and challenged. To understand this duality, we must first question the notions of masculine and feminine, of man and woman; in this vein, Butler proposes that gender is a social construct and that the ambiguous categories of *man* and *masculine* can easily apply to any body, not just male ones (*Gender* 9). Even in 1976, Foucault links the perception of sex and sexual orientation as binary to the fact that these are social constructs (Posada Kubissa 148). So why are certain characteristics—confidence and influence, but also dominance and anger—associated by society with masculinity?²⁵⁷ While in *Oculto sendero* Jorge and his brother manipulate and assault their wives, and in *El pensionado* Adela's husband does the same, the latter novel includes same-sex relationships with intimate partner violence as well. María Jesús Fariña Busto explains that “una sexualidad disidente para el sistema como la lesbiana, ... desafiaba los cimientos de un régimen construido sobre la subordinación de las mujeres a los hombres” (80). In this sense, a relationship between two women—one of whom exhibits “masculine” traits such as being angry and controlling—becomes all the more paradoxical. As we established in the previous chapter, Colombine criticizes male violence through Isabel and Juana in a reversal of roles meant to denigrate intersexuals while condemning men who act the same way.

However, in *El pensionado*, Fortún bases Ofelia's relationships on the opposition of masculine strength and feminine submission to satirize heterosexual marriage and criticize male

²⁵⁷ Although anyone can be violent with a partner, statistics prove that men are the perpetrators in most cases of intimate partner violence.

violence without dooming queer people as a whole.²⁵⁸ Indeed, these sapphic couples imitate a strict gender hierarchy while *also* opposing the binary through their dissident sexuality (Capdevila-Argüelles, Introduction, *El pensionado* 12), and any abusive behaviour is framed as an individual's temperament rather than a symptom of the larger intersexual scourge. Fortún plays with the notions of gender and sex in the construction of her characters, developing a dynamic between the masculine, controlling Natividad and the seductive, feminine Ofelia and focusing on bodies, genders, and masks that challenge the male-female binary (Capdevila-Argüelles, Introduction, *El pensionado* 12). Natividad reproduces traditional male domination in her relationships; she also takes on more masculine traits, beginning with her very name. "Natividad Guerrero," she says, introducing herself to Ofelia, "*Nacida para dar guerra*" (Fortún, *El pensionado* 213). This divorced woman in her thirties exudes arrogance and, even during their first encounter at an afternoon tea, feeds Ofelia in a way that suggests control (213-214). After a few weeks of companionship, Natividad kisses Ofelia for the first time, and from there becomes even more possessive. When they go shopping for clothes together, Natividad only wants to buy Ofelia "vaporosos, ingenuos, claros, casi infantiles" dresses (238) that mark Ofelia as docile. Natividad also demands they spend time together every day, for more and more hours, thus limiting the time Ofelia has to see her family and friends—much like *Oculto sendero*'s Jorge does with his wife. When they take a lengthy vacation together, Ofelia discovers "el carácter extremadamente duro y viril de Natividad" (271) that is obvious in both her treatment of her employees and in her management of Ofelia's activities—where they will eat, when they will go swimming, and when they will start sharing a bed.

²⁵⁸ First is Natividad, "que se erigió un dueño casi tiránico" (Fortún 362), then Manón who, since the beginning, uses romantic/possessive language, and finally Totó, who demands Ofelia move in with her and her family and enjoys seeing her in "su papel de mujer... [suya]..." (423).

According to Capdevila-Argüelles, Natividad “controla y posee a Ofelia como un hombre burgués a su amada” (Introduction, *El pensionado* 11). Once married and now divorced, this virile woman rants about how all men are egotistical pigs who, in the bedroom, “rompe[n], rasga[n] y se cebea[n] en la carne fresca y joven como un gorrino” (Fortún, *El pensionado* 243). It is therefore ironic that Natividad is prone to fits of rage that sometimes lead to intimate partner violence, for example when she prohibits Ofelia from going to Toledo with Manón (371). Ofelia refuses to submit to her will, so Natividad strikes her repeatedly then begs for forgiveness, but Ofelia ends the relationship instead (372). Natividad is a perfect example of a masculine female body, but only if we understand masculinity as it was most commonly presented in Fortún’s era rather than as the ambiguous, abstract notion it has become in contemporary gender theory. She is controlling, dominant, and even violent—in other words, according to Fortún, much like a traditional man. But where Burgos’s texts clearly depict intersexuals (and men) as a danger—ironically or not—, Fortún’s characters are more nuanced and complex. She plainly condemns heterosexual marriage in *El pensionado* and especially in *Oculto sendero*, recreating aspects of her own unhappy matrimony and satirizing the “institución reguladora del papel de la mujer en la sociedad” (Capdevila-Argüelles, Introduction, *Celia* 31). At the same time, she presents the reader with scenes of intimate partner violence that not only satirize male violence in their recreation of a binary gender hierarchy, but also show how a woman can internalize patriarchal ideals that take shape in her queer relationships.

4.4 Conclusions on Elena Fortún

Like Burgos, Fortún encountered discriminatory medical discourse in the context of her country’s uncertain modernization. Using the concepts of binary gender and the homosexual, or invert, as a third sex—one the reader is inspired to support rather than reject—this chapter considered the influence of medical rhetoric on literature. Once again, we recognized how the

figure of the doctor serves to voice some of society's beliefs but holds a much smaller role compared to Colombine's character. Then, moving into a more social rather than medical categorization, we surmised that Martín Gaité's *chica rara* and nontraditional clothing are a signifier of both modernity and homosexuality that reflect the ambiguities surrounding sexual orientation and identity in Fortún's era. But there is no room for doubt when it comes to the sapphic sexual passion the author represents in her works. Rather than obscuring lesbian desire or rendering it for a voyeur like many (male) texts do, Fortún's characters are active subjects whose wants and needs drive the plot forward. As such, both novels respond to Farwell's and Faderman's criteria for a lesbian narrative.

The concept of space was once again crucial in understanding our chapter's novels. Drawing from Rose's paradoxical space and Moreno-Lago's *geocódigos*, we were able to reconstruct the incongruous and invisible locations—both physical and metaphorical—that make up *Oculto sendero* and *El pensionado*. Also important was Woolf's room of her own, which Woolf and Fortún demonstrate is necessary for female intellectual/artistic creation and financial independence. Finally, both Burgos and Fortún address violence toward women in their literature. Marriage, explains the latter, puts a woman in a position of servitude, while maternity begets the dichotomy of Good/Bad Mother. Although Burgos presents queer women as bad parents, Fortún focuses on the love they have for their children in spite of their unconventional aspects. Rich's compulsory heterosexuality, however, reminded us that neither marriage nor motherhood are freely made choices for LGBTQ+ women in this era. Both are also connected to physical and sexual violence, which Fortún depicts as experiences common to women and girls of all ages. While Burgos explores queerness more critically, exposing its potential dangers and pathologies, Fortún promotes (compulsory) heterosexuality as degenerate and cruel instead. We can conclude that her LGBTQ+ characters are far more nuanced and multidimensional, even if a handful,

Natividad for example, have some less desirable traits. But, most significantly, these are portrayed individual failings rather than condemnations of the queer community as a whole.

In conclusion, Fortún is the part of the last generation caught in between two centuries; she arrived late to modernity and authorship, living her life half out of the metaphorical closet and leaving only allusions to her homosexuality (Capdevila-Argüelles, Introduction, *Oculto* 62, 8).²⁵⁹ Her personal investment in her protagonists' plight is likely what kept *Oculto sendero* and *El pensionado* off the bookshelves for so long. She lived in a space where she could never truly embrace her identity fully, an experience shared by many other queer people even today. Though Fortún's novels centre on queer women's self-discovery and realization, she critically explores binary gender, expectations of womanhood, and sexual trauma in a way that reaches far beyond (fictional and actual) queer circles. Fortún's posthumous novels take on a refreshing approach to exploring the tumultuous yet meaningful lives of LGBTQ+ characters; and given her own homosexual leanings, these works of fiction become even more impactful as the author's official "coming out." In questions of feminism, it is impossible to work toward true female liberation without also considering queer women, who have always been at the centre of fundamental issues such as gender roles, compulsory marriage and motherhood, and escaping domestic spaces. Indeed, as Simonis argues, "La opción lesbiana es sumamente desestabilizadora y peligrosa para el sistema patriarcal porque siente como una amenaza la independencia del hombre que la lesbiana asume en su programa vital" ("Silencio" 109). While some were taught to fear this disruption—like Carmen de Burgos, who perhaps did not realize that her fight against sexism should have included rather than ostracized intersexuals—others began to hope that with the Second Republic,

²⁵⁹ María Luisa voices this same discontent on behalf of her author: "¡Ah, las muchachas modernas! Las veía solas por la calle, con su cartera bajo el brazo, camino de la universidad, del instituto, de la escuela... ¿Por qué había yo venido al mundo diez años antes de mi tiempo?" (363).

progress was possible. Unfortunately, by the time Fortún was ready to put her faith on paper, her nation had been plunged into a fascist reign of terror that would outlast her... but thankfully not her queer/feminist stories. While the author was never able to live openly as a lesbian and passed away long before the Spanish government would legalize same-sex marriage (2005), her words are instrumental in a cooperative reconstruction of LGBTQ+ stories from the early 20th century.

Conclusions

Framing its analysis with medical, psychological, social, and religious discourses from the first half of the 20th century, *Redefining the Woman: Sexual Dissidence and Identity at the Onset of Spanish Modernity* has demonstrated how three female authors engaged with questions of gender and sexuality through their fiction. After tracing the history of women's and queer rights in Spain in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, we turned first to Ángeles Vicente, whose short stories and novellas reveal not only her interest in spiritism, but also her condemnation of the religious authorities, social limitations, and dangerous male figures that seek to constrain female mobility and bodies. Her views on sexuality unambiguously argue that homosexuality is natural and that prostitution, while harmful, is the product of a societal system rather than the fault of the individual sex worker. In the next chapter, we examined how Carmen de Burgos's selected works engage with medical and national discourses on gender and sexuality—namely, prostitution, adultery, and homosexuality. Her ambivalent conclusions on LGBTQ+ matters contrast with her strict feminist beliefs surrounding the threat of traditional marriage and motherhood. Spatial politics served as a lens to analyze the sexual identities and behaviours the author includes in *Ellas* and *Quiero*. Lastly, Fortún's chapter addressed the same medical and social discourses on queerness as Colombine's, but from a sapphic perspective, once again highlighting spatiality in the author's arguments on women's and lesbian spaces. Concluding with what the author identifies as three forms of violence towards women—marriage, maternity, and physical/sexual abuse—this chapter proved that Fortún's manuscripts, though unpublished in her lifetime, are instrumental in reconstructing early 20th-century sapphic modernity.

Looking at these texts shows how profoundly contemporary discourses influenced Spanish writers. For example, the burgeoning field of sexology, with its attempts to describe, catalogue, and marginalize sexual “deviance,” plays a major role in Burgos and Fortún's works, while the

even more recent discipline of psychology provides a background for Vicente's stories. In all three authors, readers encounter the inclusion of queer characters, reflecting their slowly increasing visibility in this period. For Burgos, medical discourse on queerness was closely associated with her projects and concerns for the nation, underlining her ambiguous position on women's sexuality. While many of her texts, including *Ellas y ellos ó ellos y ellas* and *Quiero vivir mi vida* to a degree, clearly expound her feminist agenda, her uncertainty regarding the LGBTQ+ community—fueled by doctors such as Marañón—results in an injurious if somewhat sympathetic portrayal of queer men and women. Conversely, though they were exposed to much of the same discourses, Vicente and especially Fortún depict queerness, identity, and desire as authentic lived experiences that neither threaten the nation nor concern anyone outside the LGBTQ+ community. Vicente's approach in her controversial *Zeze* is to present homosexual eroticism as natural and even trivial—the plot would largely remain unchanged even if the protagonist did not engage in same-sex acts. Unlike leading 19th- and 20th-century sexologists, Vicente avoids labelling expressions of sapphism: they are simply one of the many elements of Zeze's story. Fortún, meanwhile, incorporates homophobic medical and social beliefs at the beginning of *Oculto sendero*, but over the course of the novel, both the protagonist and the author seem to embrace their queer identity instead, a perspective which continues, relatively uninhibited, into *El pensionado de Santa Casilda*.

Furthermore, all three authors share a preoccupation for the violence women face, primarily at the hands of men. For Vicente, a principal danger for women is the Don Juan figure, who seduces and abandons his victims to an oft-miserable outcome. For Fortún, we framed marriage, motherhood, and physical/sexual abuse as forms of violence society imparts on its women, paying particular attention to the impact of what Rich calls compulsory heterosexuality on queer women. Burgos, despite her condemnation of violence, frequently casts LGBTQ+

Spaniards as its perpetrators, thus disseminating negative stereotypes about the queer community. Instead of denouncing the ways in which all women suffer under patriarchy, she seemingly sacrifices “intersexuals” to make a point about male and queer violence that does little to advance Spain’s quest for modernity.

However, all three writers also challenge Spain’s traditional views on women’s roles, starting with Vicente’s *Teresilla*, whose entire plot is dedicated to exposing the failures of a society based on outdated honour codes. In *Zezé* as well, the author showcases her hopes for a modern woman—a traveller, with educational and vocational opportunities, who finds freedom outside the institution of marriage. Fortún, too, challenges expectations around marriage and motherhood, likening these orthodox gender roles to a form of slavery and highlighting, in particular, how queer women are doubly impacted by the oppressive demands of Spanish tradition. Similarly, Burgos subtly references the ways in which women are limited by conventional paths, what Marañón considers women’s salvation (*Tres ensayos* 84). And although Colombine agrees with the doctor on many points, she does not view motherhood and female social progress as incompatible. Conversely, the very arguments she proposes in favour of heterosexual women contribute, at the same time, to her negative portrayal of queer women: their unsuitability for marriage or parenting jeopardizes the social structures upon which the Spanish nation depends. Nevertheless, Burgos does not shy away from presenting the dangers and hypocrisies of motherhood either: a lover with child gaining more rights than a legal spouse, the pain of childbirth, and cultural pressure to have more children.

An interesting commonality between Vicente and Burgos is their inclusion of prostitution, a subject far less central in Fortún’s novels. Engaging with Tsuchiya’s and Nash’s studies on sexual “deviance” and the family, we examined social perceptions of prostitution and its links to other form of nonconforming sexuality, such as adultery and sapphism. In *Zezé* and *Teresilla* especially,

Vicente explores the figure of the sex worker, criticizing her existence but blaming men and society at large, not the victim, for her descent into this profession. Both authors also portray another form of prostitution—the “sugar daddy”-type arrangement—in which one partner benefits financially and the other, sexually. In *Zezé*, the titular protagonist must depend on an older man during her convalescence, and Teresilla’s *donjuán* is the beneficiary of an older woman he ultimately murders. Likewise, Burgos includes several heterosexual and homosexual pairings of this nature, demonstrating how financial need is frequently the driving force behind sexual “deviance.”

Furthermore, Vicente, Colombine, and Fortún focus on the importance of space in their constructions of Spanish women’s experiences, prompting us to borrow Foucault’s term *heterotopia* to designate Othered spaces with an unorthodox social order, including asylums and other locations into which social “deviants” are forced. Indeed, Vicente plays with the notion of (in)sanity in a psychiatric facility, raising the questions: Who is mad, and who decides what is considered as such? Gilbert and Gubar help us answer these queries, underlining the connections between nonconforming women and labels of insanity. For Fortún, key spaces—or geocodes, to use Moreno-Lago’s term—include Paris, cafés and *tertulias*, and the realm of the clandestine, to which we have added the boarding school and even the United States. These locations signify safety, community, and new beginnings for queer Spaniards like Fortún’s characters and the author herself. Equally significant in *Oculto sendero* is Woolf’s *room of one’s own*, a dedicated female space that promotes female artistic, academic, social, and financial development. Only with the room and the economic independence necessary for growth can a woman pursue the intellectual interests traditionally reserved for men. For Burgos, adding Jones’s concept of the queer heterotopia to Foucault’s proposal, we concluded that marginalized spaces can simultaneously function as safe spaces that foster a sense of community.

Spain in the first half of the 20th century was developing in every sector—cultural, global, political, economic—until rising tensions and the July 1936 coup d'état launched Franco's campaign of terror, effectively thwarting not only women's mobilization, but also democracy and human rights as a whole. Only after Franco's death in 1975 was Spain able to resume social progress, particularly for queer rights.²⁶⁰ In 1977, Barcelona held its first Pride Parade, which included a group of trans Spaniards bravely marching through the streets and, finally, two years later, homosexuality was decriminalized. Both same-sex marriage and adoption by gay couples were legalized nationwide in 2005, and in March of 2023, the *Ley Trans* was approved, removing important barriers for trans Spaniards to update their gender in the civil registry. These recent wins for the queer community have placed Spain at the forefront of pro-LGBTQ+ legislation in Europe. Contemporary and 20th-century laws, politics, publications, and social discourses demonstrate the necessity of research projects that aim to recover the forgotten pieces of Spain's literary and cultural history, in which women's and queer rights and identities were far more prevalent than the ensuing years of dictatorship lead one to believe.

While the Master's memoir that inspired this dissertation was underway, scholars Nuria Capdevila-Argüelles and Jeffrey Zamostny were working on the English edition of one of our primary texts, *Oculto sendero* (*Hidden Path*, 2021). In addition to demonstrating a renewed interest in Fortún's unpublished works, this translation also offers a much wider scope of readers the opportunity to explore early 20th-century Spain, emphasizing in particular the precarious position of (queer) women within a contested modernity. Hopefully, Vicente's writings and more of Burgos's works will likewise be translated for this same purpose and to grant these three authors

²⁶⁰ Of course, queer activism did not completely vanish during the regime; many authors still included LGBTQ+ themes and characters in their (unpublished) texts, which have since been brought to light.

the recognition they deserve as foundational female voices in Spanish literature. Further research on these writers and their female contemporaries is required in order to share them with a wider audience—translation being key—and amend the injustices that excluded their names from the Spanish literary canon; not only because their writings deserve recognition, but also because women's voices and experiences belong there. Though as Gloria Fortún proposes in her introduction to the 2023 edition of *Zeze*, our goal should not be including such works in a canon where they will always be the exception, but rather the creation of a new literary canon that demands a broader re-examination of how women have been portrayed in the “great” works of literature and a recentering of literature around female experiences (16-17). It is our intention to continue along this path of inquiry.

Today, debates persist over women's control of their own bodies and their participation in public life. There is still outrage over queer people's desire to simply exist without discrimination or violence. In many parts of the world, sexual freedom remains taboo, restricted by concerns over reputation, national image, and rigid gender divides. When Vicente, Burgos, and Fortún wrote their texts, they were already fighting for women's emancipation and grappling with the uncertainty around new understandings of gender and sexuality. Over a hundred years later, this dissertation is attempting to continue their work by shedding light on noteworthy voices in a centuries-old battle for respect, compassion, and liberation. Besides paving the way for future research in Queer Theory and Gender Studies in Spain and beyond, this dissertation seeks to remind readers that the current pursuit of equality is not a trend, but a longstanding project built across time and space. It is our hope that, despite the rise of conservatism, the world will continue to move toward the inclusive society that so many academics, activists, community leaders, and ordinary people have been working to create for generations.

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