

The worlds of *Celia* by Elena Fortún

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Abstract

Elena Fortún (1886-1952) is an important Spanish children's writer, the author of a famous series of novels about Celia, who first appeared at the end of 1920s in stories published in a children's supplement of a popular magazine. Told in the first person by a seven-year-old girl, these simple and humorous stories present an ordinary childhood in an affluent Madrid family using familiar elements of setting and time frames simultaneous with the reader's activities. In the 1930s the stories became successful novels of education. Though the episodes of Celia's life trace important social changes in the middle-class life of the 1930s (family relations, emergence of feminism, economic decline, the civil war and its aftermath), a distinct quality of Fortún's text is also the child's Quixotic inability to separate the real world from the world of her prodigious imagination, which allows her to construct interpretations subtly critical of the adult world.

Key words

Elena Fortún, Celia, childhood, fantastic world, Spain, 1930s

Światy Celi w powieściach Eleny Fortún

Abstrakt

Elena Fortún (1886-1952) jest znaną hiszpańską autorką opowieści o Celi, które najpierw publikowane były w specjalnym dziecięcym dodatku do poczytnego magazynu pod koniec lat 20. XX wieku, a w latach 30. stały się serią nadzwyczaj popularnych powieści o edukacji. Proste i zabawne opowiadania posługują się pierwszoosobową narracją siedmioletniej dziewczynki ukazując zwyczajne dzieciństwo w zamożnej madryckiej rodzinie i używając znanych odbiorcy elementów tła przestrzennego oraz chronologii nawiązującej do rytmu życia odbiorcy. Epizody z codziennego życia Celi ukazują ważne zmiany społeczne zachodzące w Hiszpanii lat trzydziestych (relacje rodzinne, pojawienie się feminizmu, pogarszanie się sytuacji ekonomicznej, wojna domowa i jej konsekwencje), ale znaczącą cechą opowiadań jest dziecięca nieumiejętność oddzielenia rzeczywistości i świata wyobraźni, co łączy Celię z postacią Don Kichota i pozwala jej tworzyć humorystyczne interpretacje świata dorosłych, które są w istocie krytyczne.

Słowa kluczowe

Elena Fortún, Celia, dzieciństwo, świat fantastyczny, Hiszpania, lata trzydzieste

1. Introduction

In the interwar period Spanish society began its modernization although without managing to distance itself from its difficult turn-of-the-century legacy. At the beginning of the century, the literacy index of the young population was still very low and literature for children was developing in accordance with a traditional scheme based on the re-creation of popular environments and the importance of exemplary children firmly led by the hand of a narrator. Thanks to the initiative of some publishing houses (Calleja and later Juventud) which translat-

ed great works of European children's literature, already at the start of the twentieth century young Spanish readers learned to enjoy novels and stories created especially for them, and freed from the moralistic ballast of the nineteenth-century tales.

The pioneering efforts of the publishing houses led to strengthening the importance of the children's press – magazines, newspapers and supplementary materials for children – which in the 1920s became a powerful force for the promotion of vanguard movements in Spanish literature and visual arts. These circumstances created opportunities for new authors to publish frequently. The presence of such authors as Bartolozzi, Magda Donato, Antoniorrobes, or Elena Fortún in children's publishing, was a decisive factor in the process of modernizing Spanish literature for children and raising it to the European level.

Elena Fortún, whose real name was Encarnación Aragoneses (1886-1952), was a professional writer without solid academic education, but keen on culture and, in her adult years, immersed in the literary world owing to thick social networks established by female intellectuals of that time and to her husband's dedicated fondness of theatre. Her works, published since 1920s by general publishers, reveal her interest in progress and her dedication to modern ideas: feminism, abolitionism, spirituality, education and hygiene, and fashion. The author was one of the first members of the Lyceum Club, a space created for women, founded in Madrid in 1926 in the image of clubs already existing in other European capitals. That was where she made friends with María Lejárraga, a writer and journalist, the wife of a playwright and a man of the theatre Martínez Sierra. She also attended the Residence for Young Ladies (*la Residencia de Señoritas*¹), where she participated in

¹ The Residence for Young Ladies (*la Residencia de Señoritas*), created in 1915 by María de Maeztu, was the first official centre aimed at university education for women. The inspiration came from the famous Residence for

the Course of Library Science, first as a student, until she obtained the degree of a librarian, and later as a teacher of “Story narration”. Elena Fortún went to Paris to learn about the functioning of the children’s library *L’Heure joyeuse* where once a week children took part in a “story time”, and soon she started organizing sessions of what is now referred to as “storytelling” for students of the public school in Ortigosa del Monte during their long summer holidays, and, during her exile, in libraries belonging to the Municipal Library of Buenos Aires.

Through María Lejárraga who was familiar with her narratives and sense of humor, in 1928 Elena Fortún established contact with Torcuato Luca de Tena, then the director of *ABC* paper and the illustrated magazine *Blanco y Negro* (“Black and White”). The author was invited to collaborate in a supplement for children, *Gente Menuda*, at the time when the magazine was an object of deep formal renovation which turned it into the “favorite publication of Spanish families”. This reorganization also included the supplement which, with the competent participation of Elena Fortún, tuned into the most complete and best-selling children’s periodical publication in Spain in the first third of the twentieth century. According to Mercedes Chivelet (2009: 69), in 1906 the print run of *Blanco y Negro* – and therefore of the supplement – amounted to nearly sixty thousand copies, and in 1928 and 1929 it exceeded a hundred thousand copies.

Although the first texts by Elena Fortún were published in *Gente Menuda* in June 1928, it was the following year when she started to publish a series which would later gain numerous fans among the children readers of the supplement as well as adults. Its protagonist is Celia Gálvez, a girl of seven – “the age of heart” – born in Madrid, like her creator, and from a well-off family. In each episode Celia tells an anecdote in the first person, frequently addressing the reader in order to en-

Students (*Residencia de Estudiantes*), created by the Free Institution of Teaching and the main centre of modernization in Spain.

courage them to read subsequent episodes. This technique also reflects the protagonist's desire to introduce the reader into the text as an interlocutor of the narrative voice and, as a result, as another protagonist of the stories. The presence, growth and psychological evolution of the protagonist in the real time, as well as the adjustment of the scenery of her adventures in accordance with the actual seasons of the year and holidays, made the series very successful. The readers were preparing for their summer holidays or for Christmas at the same time as their fictional friends – the children of the Gálvez family. In this way, week after week the relationship between the characters and the readers was becoming stronger and stronger. Undoubtedly, the experience of growing up at the same time as the protagonist of a story makes the reader want to maintain contact with the character who progresses with them.

In 1932 Elena Fortún introduced another protagonist of the series, a boy called Cuchifritin, very similar to his big sister but at an age – six years old – which allowed him to express himself in a way that appealed to young children readers, who the writer felt more competent to address. Moreover, the choice of a male protagonist resulted in an increase of the number of readers – which possibly was the motive of the change. Many boys who were not interested in Celia's adventures, enjoyed reading about her brother. The series continued to be published until July 1936 when it was tragically interrupted by the *coup d'état* which initiated the Spanish civil war. However, Elena Fortún continued her journalistic activities and finally published a social report combined with a child story in the magazine *Crónica*.²

² Apart from numerous children's stores, Elena Fortún published in *Crónica* a series of articles focused on social topics: the right to education, social injustices of pre-war Spain and the consequences of the civil war, especially hunger and homelessness. The author published her last work in this magazine on December 11, 1938.

Meanwhile, towards the end of 1933 the publisher Manuel Aguilar started to issue the adventures of Celia in a book format, until it amounted to five volumes. The book format changed the story series into a novel. According to María del Prado Escobar Bonilla (1996-97: 60) the episodes of the story are closely linked to one another thanks to family relations between the characters and strong consistency in supra-textual ties. In order to strengthen the textual unity the author highlights thematic connections between chapters of each book with an introduction and, sometimes, an epilogue.

Success came immediately: readers of the supplement were waiting for the book format as less ephemeral than a press publication. The publisher Manuel Aguilar made sure that the release of the first copies of the books about Celia – *Celia lo que dice* and *Celia en el colegio* [*What Celia says* and *Celia at school*] – coincided in time with the Book Fair celebrated in Madrid in the spring in 1934, where the author herself sold almost four hundred copies of the second volume.³ Having realized how successful the series was, Aguilar insisted on the third volume – *Celia novelista* [*Celia the novelist*] – to be ready as soon as possible. In the Fair of 1935 the last volumes of the adventures of Celia as a child were sold – *Celia en el mundo* and *Celia y sus amigos* [*Celia in the world* and *Celia and her friends*].

Before describing the worlds of Celia it is essential to highlight that the principal features of the novels by Elena Fortún are simplicity of narration, presence of humor and dominance of dialogue over description. Conversations between the protagonist and her numerous interlocutors are the most important tool of characterizing the fictional figures and of evaluating their psychological evolution throughout the books. Thanks to the author's attention to detail and her accuracy in

³ The Book Fair in Madrid started in 1933; it was a part of a private initiative, but it participated in the process of promoting books and reading, launched by the first republican governments.

reflecting various speech registers depending on the speakers' social background and age, conversations are the main source of humor in her novels.

The novels about the Gálvez family are the main part of Elena Fortún's artistic work.⁴ These dynamic and imaginative stories, fruits of the passionate, generous and perceptive personality of the author, dedicated to the psychological creation of Celia, make it a real novel of education and a thorough chronicle of one of the most violent times in the history of Spain: including the end of the interwar period, the arrival of the Second Republic, the civil war and the author's exile.

The author herself, while presenting the protagonist of her books, elaborates on the dual character of her "everyday nature":

Celia is a girl like any other, one of these girls we see on a bus going to school. She lives in Serrano Street and she has a dad and a mom who scold her and pamper her, and who are fair and unfair with her, depending on their mood. Her story is simple from the outside and marvelous inside. It is an ordinary life where every day you can put on magic garments and, through fantasy and imagination, live in a world of adventures and miracles. (Fortún 1935: 153)⁵

⁴ An autobiographic novel written by Elena Fortún during her exile in Argentina has been recently published for the first time as *Oculto sendero* [*Hidden track*] (Seville, Renacimiento, 2016).

⁵ "Celia es una niña como otra cualquiera, de las que vemos pasar en un autobús que las lleva a casa desde el colegio. Vive en la calle de Serrano, y tiene un papá y una mamá que la riñen y la miman, y son justos o injustos con ella, según el estado de sus nervios. Su historia es sencilla por fuera y prodigiosa por dentro. Es una vida vulgar, que todos los días se viste con el ropaje de maravilla, fantaseando, imaginando y viviendo en un mundo de aventura y de milagro" (Fortún 1935: 153).

2. The fantastic world of Celia

It soon turns out that the anecdotes that inspire many chapters in these novels come precisely from the absence of border between Celia's simple real world of her domestic space, and the world of her prodigious imagination. In her head, the girl constantly leaves her domestic space behind and immerses herself in fiction, distancing herself from the reality which often seems hostile to her. It also gives her an opportunity to fulfill her desire to communicate and live other, more interesting lives. Imagination helps her overcome difficult situations, such as the loss of her position in the family due to her brother's birth, and loneliness caused by her parents' frequent travels. In her fantastic lives, Celia mixes reality with fantasy and confuses the identities of people and objects, as well as the nature of events. Situational absurdity provoked by such confusion is the major source of humour in the first novels, though the humour is rather melancholy, as the protagonist is not always able to disentangle the problems she herself creates. As if she were a new Don Quixote, her passion for reading fairytales and adventure books is the main origin of Celia's fantasies, which she confirms in a conversation with her father's friend who observes:

- Blimey, what imagination! Do you learn about the fairies and the old man on the moon at school?
- No way! At school they know nothing. It's only some wonderful books that I have which explain everything. (Fortún 1980a: 68)⁶

The incorporation into her imaginary world of the elements of Andersen's famous story, *The enchanted princes*, inspires one of the most significant episodes of *Celia en el colegio*: "Celia

⁶ "– ¡Caramba, qué imaginación! ¿Y es en el colegio donde aprendes eso de las hadas y del viejo de la luna? – ¡Quia! En el colegio no saben nada. Es en unos libros preciosos que yo tengo, donde explican todo" (Fortún 1980a: 68).

and Princess Leonor” (1980b: 96-100).⁷ The school gardener Celia her that in the adjacent house seen from the garden lives “a Russian or Chinese girl..., I don’t know. Yesterday I saw there a man and his brother who has a wooden arm” (1980b: 97).⁸ When she finds out that the girl’s name is Leonor, Celia suspects that she is a story protagonist and, when she finally sees her, she has no doubt about it: “It was her, my God, it was her! She’s grown up a lot; but many years have passed since then...” (1980b: 97-98).⁹ However, her classmates are skeptical:

Having eaten, Milagros came to ask me:

- Is it true that you have seen Princess Leonor?
- Yes. Do you want to see her?
- But is it her? How do you know that?
- Look. Her name is Leonor, she’s a princess, her brother doesn’t have an arm, and she’s wearing a ribbon on her forehead...
- Then it’s her... (Fortún 1980b: 98)¹⁰

Celia approaches the alleged princess shyly:

It’s just if you would like some nettles to finish the tunic for your brother... Here there are lots. [...] Yes, nettles... We know it all... We’ve read it in *The enchanted princes...* (Fortún 1980b: 99)¹¹

⁷ In other versions of the tale the princess’s name is Elisa and the title of the story is “The wild swans”. Celia learns that the princess must weave eleven shirts – from thread that she has to obtain from nettles – for her eleven brothers turned into swans. But she does not have enough material to weave a sleeve for her youngest brother’s shirt so when he regains his human form, one of his arms remains a swan’s wing.

⁸ “Una señorita rusa o china..., no sé. Ayer ha venido un señor, que es su hermano y tiene un brazo de madera” (Fortún 1980b: 97).

⁹ “¡Era ella, Dios mío, era ella misma! Había crecido mucho; pero es que han pasado muchos años desde entonces...” (Fortún 1980b: 97-98).

¹⁰ “Después de comer vino Milagros a preguntarme: – ¿Es verdad que has visto a la princesa Leonor? – Sí. ¿La quieres ver tú? – ¿Pero es ella? ¿Cómo lo sabes? – Fíjate. Se llama Leonor, es una princesa, su hermano no tiene brazo, y ella se pone una cinta en la frente... – Entonces, sí es...” (Fortún 1980b: 98).

And, when her friends claim that the stories are not true, she replies outraged: “You believe so... Everything has been written in the books because it happened” (Fortún 1980b: 98).¹² With this claim Celia expresses her certainty that writing is able to make things real, even if they are completely invented. Without this certainty – again Quixote’s legacy – the intensity with which the girl assumes the conditions of her fictional models would not be convincing.

With her childish logic Celia constantly tries to decipher the world that adults have adjusted to their needs and, above all, the rules of language, interpreting it with the help of schemes provided in the stories she reads. When her parents decide to send her to a boarding school, she quickly accepts her new situation, and it is she who comforts her father, preoccupied with the absurd educational practices of the religious schools of that time, with a very insightful argument: “But this school is like a story book!” (Fortún 1980b: 18).¹³ Consequently, the school rules, incomprehensible to Celia at the beginning, become easy to interpret in her fictional frame.

However, Elena Fortún does not limit the child’s imagination to the suggestions of these stories: while Celia is in the boarding school run by nuns, religion – with its rites, sacred history, and lives of the saints – shares the function of the stories. Influenced by the fervent atmosphere prevailing in the school, the girl identifies an old beggar – “wearing torn clothes, with a white beard” – as Saint Peter and decides he must have some shelter on a rainy night. She asks her friends, the altar boys, for help but they initially refuse her request:

¹¹ “Era por si querías ortigas para acabar la túnica de tu hermano... Aquí hay muchas. [...] Sí, ortigas... Nosotras lo sabemos todo... Lo hemos leído en *Los príncipes encantados...*” (Fortún 1980b: 99).

¹² “– Eso creerás tú... Todo lo que está escrito en los libros es porque ha pasado...” (Fortún 1980b: 98).

¹³ “¡Si este colegio es como un libro de cuentos!” (Fortún 1980b: 18).

- Listen. Do you know Saint Peter?
- Here we go!
- Yes, it's this old man who begs for alms at the door...
- Ah! The drunk guy with the beard... What about him?
- You should let him sleep in the church.
- No way!
- If you let him sleep inside tonight when it's raining, tomorrow I'll give you a box of cards.
- It's not much...
- And a fountain pen... [...]

That night I slept peacefully. I heard it was raining and I thought that Saint Peter was sleeping right by the heater in the big chapel...

Soon I woke up scared. I heard the garden bell and someone was running down the stairs. Mother San Jose ran right by my bed and I heard her say: 'My Jesus, have mercy on us!' [...]

- There's a fire in the church! (Fortún 1980b: 188-189)¹⁴

A cigarette that the old man lights at night sets fire to the church walls. This time the unfortunate consequences of Celia's mistake affect people as well as the property, and make the nuns lose their patience and punish Celia in one of their absurd ways.¹⁵

Legends and stories told by minor characters of the saga, like for example Ms Benita, "a woman who looked after mom

¹⁴ "– Escuchad. ¿Conocéis a San Pedro? – ¡Anda ésta! – Sí; es ese viejo que pide limosna en la puerta... – ¡Ah! El tío borracho de las barbas... ¿Qué le quieres? – Debíais dejarle dormir en la iglesia. – ¡Ni más ni menos! [...] – Si le dejáis dormir dentro esta noche, que va a llover, mañana os regalo una caja de estampas. – Es poco... – Y una pluma estilográfica... [...] Aquella noche dormí más tranquila. Oía llover, y pensaba que San Pedro estaría durmiendo junto a la estufa de la capilla grande... De pronto me desperté asustada. Tocaba la campana del jardín, y corrían por la escalera. La madre San José pasó corriendo junto a mi cama y le oí decir: – ¡Jesús mío, ten misericordia de nosotras! [...] – ¡Hay fuego en la iglesia!" (Fortún 1980b: 188-189).

¹⁵ Compare *Celia en el colegio* (1980a: 188-89). After the episode, the mother superior decides to dismiss Mother Isolina from the monastery, who was the most understanding about the child's behavior.

when she was little” (Fortún 1980a: 110),¹⁶ spark her imagination, too. Ms Benita’s detailed descriptions of spirits and their celestial origins provoke confusion in Celia, who believes that she recognizes one of them in a German boy, “very blonde and very white, however not transparent as Ms Benita says, in flesh-colored trousers and a pointed hat...” (Fortún 1980a: 139).¹⁷

Dreams, fever and unconsciousness spark Celia’s imagination in a similar way. At this point we should contextualize these resources with vanguard literature of that time, where the oneiric and the absurd are reclaimed, and where two recognized avant-guardists, Antoniorrobes and Manuel Abril, publish their works in *Gente Menuda* at the same time as Elena Fortún.

Today it is accepted that the processes of imitation and identification with the models in stories are essential for a child’s growth, who in her innate playful space feels constant longing to be someone else and does not stop trying to fulfill it. The models that Celia follows are not different to the ones offered to other children, but her imaginative hyperactivity and the intensity with which she lives her fantasies are distinct. The little reader is fascinated by the audacity and determination with which Celia takes on the role of her models, in spite of the indifference or rejection that her frequent violation of the rules created by adults provokes.

Putting herself by Celia’s side, as if she herself did not belong to the world of adults, the author right from the beginning takes the side of child, of her rights and her integrity as a person. The world of adults, as Elena Fortún describes it in the prologue to *Celia en el mundo* [*Celia in the world*] is “unreasonable in calling things with wrong names, speaking with fixed

¹⁶ “[...] una señora vieja, que también cuidó a mamá cuando era pequeña” (Fortún 1980a: 110).

¹⁷ “[...] muy rubio y muy blanco, aunque no transparente como dice doña Benita, con pantalones encarnados y un gorro en punta...” (Fortún 1980a: 139).

phrases, rejecting children's stories and accepting the ones invented by adults at their whim..." (Fortún 1980c: 7).¹⁸

In her desire to be someone else, in her determination to fulfill that desire, in her suffering without any protest, we can see Quixotic traces of the protagonist of these novels. Just as Cervantes resorts to the alleged craziness of Quixote to severely criticize the society and politics of his time while avoiding possible repercussions, so Elena Fortún uses Celia's seemingly innocent adventures to present, episode after episode, ridiculous clichés typical of the bourgeois society of that time. Carmen Martín Gaité describes it as follows:

Elena Fortún's effectiveness, as well as her survival as a writer, consist in the liveliness and realism of dialogues which, put in a child's mouth, facilitate social criticism hidden behind ingenuity and irony. I believe that in this case a child is an excuse [...]. (Martín Gaité 2002: 100)¹⁹

The fragment describing repressive and irrational educational methods of religious institutions and their devastating logic, juxtaposed with the innocence of a child, is certainly significant. However, while Cervantes defended himself by putting the description of inquisitorial methods in the mouth of an alleged madman, Fortún received severe criticism and did not avoid censorship of the Francoist regime which banned all her work in 1945. In result the volume *Celia en el colegio* from that year was not published until 1968, and some of her other novels only appeared in 1992.

¹⁸ "[...] tan poco razonable, que llama a las cosas con nombres equivocados, habla con frases hechas, rechaza los cuentos de los niños y admite los que las personas mayores han inventado a capricho..." (Fortún 1980c: 7).

¹⁹ "La eficacia de Elena Fortún, así como su pervivencia, consisten en la viveza y realismo de unos diálogos que, al ser puestos en boca de niños, facilitan una crítica social encubierta tras la ingenuidad y la ironía. Me atrevo a decir que en este caso un niño es un parapeto [...]" (Martín Gaité 2002: 100).

The author finds another source of humor in the breakdown of the symbolism of language, which moves the child to the world entirely different from the reality of adults. The incorporation of absurd and surreal situations into Celia's domestic life leads to semantic transgressions and is greatly appreciated by readers. The child's interpretations of polysemic terms cause numerous funny confusions. For instance, Celia confuses the meaning of *monte*²⁰ which she hears used by Basílides (her Uncle Rodrigo's cook) while talking about Monte de Piedad²¹ where she goes frequently on Sundays. Celia is tired of city life – “[...] I'm fed up with seeing just houses and houses, and the streets made of rock, and the trees growing out from holes in pavements...” (Fortún 1980c: 65)²² – and insists on Basílides taking her one day with her:

- Are there flowers there, Basílides?
 - No, not exactly there. But there are some around the corner.
 - And what about rabbits?
 - What are you talking about? There are rabbits at the poulterers' but the man doesn't like them.
 - I'm talking about the mountain..., living rabbits...
 - Maybe there are some cats, and probably some rats!...
- What a strange mountain! (1980c: 66)²³

Surprised by the sight of a big room full of counters – where people obtain their loans – and seated on a bench waiting for their turn, Celia assumes that they are in a train station from

²⁰ Here: *mountain* or *pawn shop* (translators' note).

²¹ The Montes de Piedad (or Montepios) were a kind of a charity fund (created on the initiative of Franciscan friars in Italy to fight with usury) where the ones in need could exchange their belongings for money.

²² “[...] yo estoy harta de no ver más que casas y casas, y calles de piedras, y los árboles saliendo por los agujeros en las aceras [...]” (Fortún 1980c: 65).

²³ “– ¿Habrà flores en el monte, Basílides? – Allí mismamente no. Pero los hay a la vuelta de la esquina. – Y conejitos, ¿hay? – ¿Qué dices?... Hay conejos en las pollerías, pero al señor no le gustan. – Yo digo en el monte..., conejos vivos... – ¡Si acaso habrá gatos, y puede que algún ratón que otro!... ¡Vaya un monte más raro debía ser!” (Fortún 1980c: 66).

where they will be taken to the *mountain*. She comes back home frustrated: “And you call that a mountain in Madrid? Don’t laugh!... You are all fools, you don’t even know what a mountain is...” (Fortún 1980c: 70).²⁴

Fortún also takes to the limit literal interpretations of fixed phrases and lexical metaphors. For example, Celia gets angry with her Uncle Rodrigo’s friend with whom they travel together on a train:

The man wearing a beret is coming with us... I’m angry with him! He says that we’ve caught the train on the fly... That’s not true! We found it at the station and it wasn’t flying... (Fortún 1980c: 185)²⁵

3. The world of the liberal middle class in Madrid in the 1930s

It is not a coincidence that Elena Fortún chose sceneries deeply rooted in the Spanish ground as a background of her protagonist’s adventures. The author herself expresses the necessity that the protagonist “wanders around Spanish pine woods, drinks cool water from earthenware pitchers, lives in a small white house in Castilla, so that the reality and the story become one in her soul” (Fortún 1935: 149-153)²⁶ although she would prefer to put Celia in an urban environment, in accordance with her own middle-class roots. It is worth mentioning what María Martínez Sierra said about it in her notes presumably devoted to the adventures of Celia:

²⁴ “¿Y a eso le llamáis monte en Madrid? ¡No te rías!... Aquí sí que sois tontos, que no sabéis lo que es un monte...” (Fortún 1980c: 70).

²⁵ “El señor de la boina se vino con nosotros... ¡Le tengo una rabia! Dice que hemos cogido el tren al vuelo... ¡No es verdad! Lo encontramos en la estación, y no estaba volando...” (Fortún 1980c: 185).

²⁶ “[...] camine por pinares de España, beba aguas frescas de un botijo de barro y viva en una casita encalada de Castilla para que realidad y cuento se hagan una sola poesía en su alma” (Fortún 1935: 149-153).

Spanish children, congratulations. For the first time the protagonist of your favourite story that reaches your soul is born and raised in Spain. Little Red Riding Hood picked strawberries and met the wolf in a German forest, where also Sleeping Beauty lived. Puss in Boots knocked on the door of a French castle, and a castle in France was also the Ogre's abode [...] (Martínez Sierra 2002: 88)²⁷

Although the first stories about Celia contain very few historical references, they are full of geographical, social and cultural ones. The principal setting of her first adventures is Madrid of the liberal middle class of the 1930s, a developing city which – thanks to the constant influx of rural population, coupled with reduction of mortality – reached one million inhabitants at that time. To improve their comfort and to meet the requirements of the government, urban changes led to the creation of new districts and roads for modern transport. This evolution resulted in increasing cultural activity as well as the linking the high culture with the popular one and the traditional with the modern.

Celia comes from a well-off family, her parents are erudite and elegant; the liberal profession of her father allows them to live in a house in Serrano street, located in an elegant part of Salamanca, own a car, a chalet in the mountains in Madrid, and a set of servants, among which there is an English governess who looks after the child and teaches her the language. The family lives a typical modern life: they go to the theatre and cinema, and engage in numerous social activities, like going for walks, paying visits, having tea etc. They travel to Switzerland and France and go to popular beaches, like the one in San Sebastian or the Sardinero beach.

²⁷ “Niños españoles, estáis de enhorabuena. Por primera vez, la protagonista del cuento que llega a vuestro espíritu nace y vive en España... Caperucita recogía sus fresas y encontraba a su lobo en un bosque alemán y en un bosque alemán se dormía la Bella Durmiente. El Gato con Botas llamaba a la puerta de un castillo francés y en un castillo francés vivía el Ogro [...]” (Martín Gaité 2002: 88).

In the affective distance which the family customs of the time imposed on the relations between parents and children, Celia will find – while being looked after by servants or in the boarding school – a great support and understanding from her father, a free spirit, affectionate and understanding, but allowing his wife take care of the intellectual and emotional development of their daughter. On the other hand, the mother, who perfectly represents the model of a modern Madrid woman in a high social position, and who the child adores, behaves in a very distant and inconsiderate way, despite the sadness it causes in Celia.

Although the mother is neither an emancipated woman nor a perfect mother and housewife, thanks to her servants she maintains some of her liberty, which she devotes to leisure and social life. She herself enumerates the tasks – “talk to the cook, write two or three letters and [...] have tea with my friends from Lyceum” (Fortún 1980a: 28)²⁸ – which prevent her from giving her daughter as much attention as she would like her to. In the fragments about the mother we can also see her tendency toward negative judgment of the child.

The complex relationship between Celia and her mother – studied in detail by Capdevila-Arguelles²⁹ – proves the “uncertain position of maternity in modern woman’s life, being the key point of a debate of the emerging Iberian feminism” (2009: 122).³⁰ Elena Fortún, who shared reluctance towards housework with Celia’s mother, does not seem to be capable of solving, through the characterization of this protagonist, the mod-

²⁸ “[...] tomar la cuenta a la cocinera, escribir dos o tres cartas y [...] tomar el té con mis amigas del Lyceum” (Fortún 1980a: 28).

²⁹ Nuria Capdevilla-Arguelles analyses the role of Celia’s mother in the Introduction to *Celia madrecita* (Seville, Renacimiento, 2015), and the topic of motherhood in the times of the first feminism in the Introduction to *Oculto sendero* (Seville, Renacimiento, 2016).

³⁰ “[...] la incierta posición que la maternidad tenía en la vida de la nueva mujer moderna, constituyendo un punto clave de debate en el incipiente feminismo ibérico” (Capdevila-Arguelles 2009: 122).

ern dilemma of combining maternity with the development of social identity.

However, far from limiting Celia's universe to her relations with the upper social classes, the author likes to contrast the customs of this society with those of the lower classes. The facades of beautiful houses on Serrano Street hide a series of modest homes, lofts, and tiny apartments accessed through back stairs, where poorer people live, as, for example, the indefectible doorman. In fact, the first book of the series, *Celia lo que dice*, opens with one of the most widely commented scenes because of its significance from the social point of view. On the night of the 6th of January Celia, already in bed, has a dream in which she is talking to the black king who has entered her room through the balcony.³¹ Unfortunately, the previous year she forgot to leave a present for Solita, the doorman's daughter, which Baltasar comments on as follows: "I only leave toys on rich children's balconies; but I do it so that the rich forward them to the poor. If I had to go to all the houses, I would not finish in one night" (Fortún 1980a: 12).³² When Celia wakes up and sees toys on her balcony, encouraged by this egalitarian message,³³ she does not hesitate to share them with Solita, to her parents' displeasure:

What did you give to Solita?

A goat...

My God! A really expensive toy!... [...]

Look dad, I'll explain.

Could you be quiet? Girls don't lie and they don't believe their dreams are true...

Soon there appeared Juana, gesticulating wildly.

³¹ One of the Three Kings who in the Spanish Christmas tradition leave toys for kids [Spanish children traditionally receive presents on the 6th of January instead of Christmas (translators' note)].

³² "Solo dejo juguetes en los balcones de los niños ricos; pero es para que ellos los repartan con los niños pobres. Si tuviera que ir a casa de todos los niños, no acabaría en toda la noche" (Fortún 1980a: 12).

³³ According to Beatriz Caamano Alegre (2007: 5) this and other episodes suggest communistic idea of equality between the rich and the poor.

Sir, Pedro the doorman is here with some toys. He says...
 Alright, alright – dad interrupted her – tell him that they’re for his daughter. (Fortún 1980a: 13)³⁴

Understanding certain cultural practices, like travels, cinema, or commemorative parties, helps distinguish one social class from another. When Carnival parties begin, Celia’s parents decide that their daughter will attend an elegant costume ball for children, impeccably dressed up as *Incroyable*. Celia quietly envies Solita’s plans who, wearing a flowery dress, a gift from her godmother, is planning to go to “Uncle Juan’s tavern, [...] to eat some delicious meat” (Fortún 1980a: 25).³⁵ She had already been there the previous year and she had had so much fun that she lost her shoe, to her godmother’s great disappointment. Everything starts to make sense to Celia when she hears the servant’s comment: “They’d better send her [Solita] to school, she’s the Cinderella of the house” (Fortún 1980a: 27).³⁶ The fairy godmother, the party dress, the lost shoe... Celia understands that her friend is the protagonist of one of her favorite stories, which only strengthens her desire to get closer to her.

The relationship with Solita is also an excuse – followed by many others – invented by the author to give Celia an opportunity to see Madrid from a different perspective and to contrast the customs of the upper middle class with the ones typical of the lower social classes. Celia always prefers to spend time with the boys who play in the streets, to the ones who go with their *misses* to Retiro, the most emblematic park in Ma-

³⁴ “– ¿Qué es lo que le has dado a Solita? –Una cabra... – ¡Válgame Dios! ¡Un juguete carísimo!... [...] – Verás papá; yo te contaré. – ¿Te quieres callar? Las niñas no mienten ni creen que es verdad lo que sueñan... De pronto apareció Juana haciendo aspavientos. – Señor, aquí está Pedro, el portero, con unos juguetes que dice que... – Bueno, bueno – interrumpió papá –; dígame usted que son para su hija, que se los dé...” (Fortún 1980a: 13).

³⁵ “[...] ventorro del tío Juan, a merendar unas chuletas muy ricas” (Fortún 1980a: 25).

³⁶ “Más le valiera que la manden al colegio [a Solita], que es la Cenicienta de la casa” (Fortún 1980a: 27).

drid. This is also the case when she is admitted to a religious boarding school, where the altar boys – “Lamparon” and “Pronobis”, coming from the town where the school is situated – will be her best friends with whom she will share a good part of her adventures in *Celia en el colegio*.

However, the high economic status of the privileged social classes started to weaken towards the end of the 1920s. The adverse international economic situation had a strong negative effect on the fragile Spanish economy and deepened its structural imbalance. In the first book, *Celia lo que dice*, the father already regrets his extravagance: trips abroad, visits in fashion houses, summer holidays, which all weaken the economic situation of the family. Celia, full of the already mentioned Quixotic spirit, decides to find a job as a servant, but her skills – “...putting babies to sleep, watching chickens so that they don’t run away, feeding pigeons, pulling out weeds” (Fortún 1980a: 145)³⁷– are no use to the farmers living in the small town where Celia’s family are spending a part of their summer. This economic instability will be the reason why her parents’ more and more frequent and distant travels will be getting longer and longer. Celia soon abandons her home, which eventually disappears as a consequence of the increasing nomadism of her parents. Her stays in subsequent schools and friends’ houses do not last long either. The episodic disconnections from her close family give Celia opportunities to act freely and to immerse herself in fantasies. Her itinerant situation constantly obliges her to leave behind people, things and situations, while little notice is taken of the abandonment that she suffers.

Not all the members of the Gálvez family are in a difficult economic situation: Uncle Rodrigo, Celia’s father’s retired military brother and a bachelor, enjoys a privileged life from bene-

³⁷ “[...] acunar a los niños, cuidar de que las gallinas no salten al huerto, dar de comer a las palomas, arrancar la hierba de los paseos [...]” (Fortún 1980a: 145).

fits, participating in all cultural novelties offered by modern Madrid. He comes back to Madrid from Morocco and brings along Maimón, a young Moroccan servant – who will be Celia's good friend. Having found out about the loneliness of his niece and her unfinished education, Rodrigo decides to educate her in his own way, which means nothing else than familiarizing her with the social practices of adults living their modern and cosmopolitan lives.

It will be in *Celia en el mundo* [*Celia in the world*] where Celia, after a short walk around the boarding school premises, will learn from her uncle about the peculiarities of social routines in Madrid: walks, social gatherings, the twelve o'clock mass, the visits, terraces in Retiro Park where they serve snacks, casinos, and tea salons with jazz bands... Due to lack of experience in raising children, Uncle Rodrigo's concern about Celia's well-being has some unpleasant consequences for the girl: cold showers, cod liver oil..., but also leads to her summer holidays in Jean-les-Pins, a place on the French Riviera with its beaches popular among elegant people. There Celia will meet Paulette, a fascinating friend, the only person who understands her easily and who will recurrently be by her side until her adulthood. Celia and her uncle's stay in a Parisian palace, which closes this volume, also marks a sudden end of Celia's cosmopolitan education as she is admitted into a Spanish school with a long tradition, where she has adventures described in *Celia y sus amigos* (1942) [*Celia and her friends*]. At all times, Celia lays bare the striking social and cultural differences of that time. Her account of the adult reality from a child's point of view provokes a series of funny situations, where ingenuity hides important criticism.

4. Paradise lost

After four years of letting other family members play the main role in the story, the author lets teenage Celia take the floor

again in *Celia, madrecita* [*Celia, oh dear*] published in Madrid towards the end of 1939. In this novel, Elena Fortún describes the beginning of the disintegration of Celia's worlds after her mother passes away, as the girl herself foresees at the beginning of the novel, when her grandfather makes her look after her little sisters: "I cried about my fourteen years which had been happy until my mother's death; my three years of high school which I considered lost, and the birds in my head, flapping their wings in agony" (Fortún 2015: 41).³⁸

Set during the Spanish civil war, the novel meets the requirements of the editor who asked the author to write a chronicle describing the impact of the strife on the generation brought up in the comfort of the interwar period. There are strong contrasts between this book and the previous five novels: Celia must abandon the comfortable urban environment and the student life without any major preoccupations, to immerse herself in the provincialism of the tiny Spanish town of Segovia, and take on rigorous responsibilities of a housewife with numerous obligations, worsened by a difficult economic situation.

Finally, adults treat the teenager as a grown-up woman, forcing her to abandon the last traces of her magical world. They see Celia as mature now, and there are other – younger – characters who will take on the role of imaginative children eager to live fantasy lives and lacking the ability to tell the reality from fiction:

Girl, we needed you so much to help us put this gang in order! They live in the fictional world of stories that they invent. Sometimes we unknowingly take part in a story... The other day poor

³⁸ "Lloré sobre mis catorce años que habían sido felices hasta la muerte de mi madre; mis tres cursos de bachillerato, que consideraba perdidos, y los pájaros de mi cabeza que aleteaban moribundos" (Fortún 2015: 41). In this confession we can again find similarities between Celia and Don Quixote, who, before he dies, realizes that the knights errant do not exist, at least not in his times. For a detailed analysis of Celia as a quixotic character, see Fraga (2012).

Tomas, who went out to smoke his pipe in the garden, ended up being thrown a pitcher of water in his face to disenchant him... Everything is enchanted here, according to the girls, and you never know if you are a fairy godmother or a princess..., or Balaam's donkey... (Fortún 2015: 199)³⁹

The story, where one can sense the tension of Spain moving towards the war, ends on the 18th of July 1936,⁴⁰ but the author will meet Aguilar's requirements and complete another volume while in exile: *Celia en la revolución* [*Celia in the revolution*], however, will not be published until 1987, and then reissued in 2016.

Celia en la revolución presents the miseries of the war with great strength and truth but marks a definite end of the protagonist's innocence: she is trapped by revolutionary events and yet remains clueless about political ideals. Her adventures reflect everyday life in the three most significant centers of republican resistance: Madrid, Valencia and Barcelona. The progressive loss of Celia's familial bonds due to the war has a liberating effect on the author's voice, who now finds no obstacles to merge her protagonist's voice with her own. This openly autobiographic end confirms the identification of the author with her protagonist throughout the series, up to the point when numerous critics identify Celia as an authentic alter ego of Elena Fortún.

The author left Spain shortly before the end of the war and lived for nine years in exile in Argentina where she kept up her creative activity: she continued both as a journalist and a writer producing new stories about Celia and her brothers.

³⁹ “– Hija, ¡qué falta hacías aquí para poner orden en esta pandilla! [...] Viven en un mundo prodigioso de cuentos que ellas se inventan. A veces, nosotros tomamos parte en el cuento sin saberlo... El otro día, el pobre Tomás, que salía a fumar su pipa al jardín, se encontró con que le tiraban a la cara un jarro de agua para desencantarle... Aquí todo está encantado, según las niñas, y nunca sabes si eres un hada o una princesa..., o la burra de Balaam...” (Fortún 2015: 199).

⁴⁰ The Spanish Civil War started on the 17th July 1936 (translators' note).

Soon after returning to Spain, she died in Madrid (on the 8th of May 1952) after a long illness suffered in solitude alleviated by reading and correspondence from her friends.

Translated by Beata Knabe and Jadwiga Węgrodzka

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