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Eugenia Helena Houvenaghel

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INTRODUCTION



## Creating Epistolary Spaces of Proximity: Spanish Women's Letters from Exile

Eugenia Helena Houvenaghel 

Fenix Network for Research on Female Exiles, Refugees, and Migrants, ICON Research Institute for Cultural Inquiry, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands

This monograph focuses on the alliances forged by Spanish women intellectuals—writers, artists, actresses—in exile during Franco's dictatorship (1939–1975). The studies included in this dossier foreground the relations and communities created by exiles to bridge the distances that separated them from various groups of friends and colleagues. The groups comprise, first, their fellow-exiles, who had found a host country in the United States, Latin America, or Europe; second, the 'insiles,' consisting of their compatriots who remained in Spain during the Francoist regime; and, third, the new friends they made in the host country and from whom they would at a later stage be separated once they had relocated or returned to Spain. The studies compiled in this issue resort to exiled women's private correspondence and show how the letters enable the exiles to create an epistolary space of proximity. This effect of rapprochement, in spite of the physical distance that separated the correspondents, is the most salient feature of the alliances and communities that are studied in this dossier.

The scholars who participate in this special issue enter into dialogue with the rapidly growing scholarly interest in Spanish women exiles' correspondence via private letters, which was the key medium of communication of the mid twentieth century. Recent years have seen the publication of several new works and projects on the field of women's letters written in the context of Spanish exile (Aznar Soler; Houvenaghel, "Il sé," "La juventud"; López Izquierdo; Montiel Rayo, among others). New archival discoveries, new analytical approaches, new digital practices, and new conceptual frameworks have been the hallmark of this scholarship. The studies included in this dossier continue in this line of work by making ample use of unpublished materials that are preserved in archives. Another specificity of the special issue is the interdisciplinary approach that synthesizes history, art history, literature, and gender. This interdisciplinary method in combination with the use of unexplored materials shed new light on the different functions of the epistolary alliances, created by Spanish women intellectuals.

The content of these letters written by women intellectuals in exile to their friends residing in other, distant places, can usually be described as mixed in that it combines professional and emotional components. The scholars who participate in the first section of this dossier—Francisca Montiel Rayo, María Teresa Navarrete Navarrete, and Inmaculada Real López—pay special attention to the development of women exiles' professional careers, which were hindered by the consequences of the exile and by the rule of the Franco dictatorship in Spain. From this point of view, these researchers show how the support, advice, and information transmitted by letters had beneficial effects on the correspondents' lives. From a Spanish perspective, these studies included in this first section explore how letters sent from exile to the home country enabled women to reinvigorate existing pre-war Spanish networks, to keep contact with evolutions on the

professional field in the home country, and to reach a degree of visibility in Franco's Spain. From a broader, international viewpoint, these letters from exile to Spain show a shared interest in professional contacts, career opportunities and new cultural developments outside Spain, especially in the United States and in Latin America, but also in Europe.

The second set of articles moves away from the women's professional activities and puts more emphasis on their emotional development in exile. The researchers whose work is included in this second section—María del Carmen Alfonso García and Eugenia Helena Houvenaghel—reflect on the insights that these epistolary texts yield in the exiles' interior worlds. Their articles stress how these women shared their emotions, imaginations, ethical values, personal struggles, and intimate fears and hopes with their correspondents. The studies included in this second section emphasize that letters have the potential to take the reader inside the minds and hearts of exiled women intellectuals. This second set of articles uses the letters as unique sources of information that enable the scholar to present a clearer picture of the new emotional bonds that the women established during their exile with the inhabitants of the host countries. Much remains to be discovered about these new alliances that were forged during exile. Private correspondences are an important source of information to move forward on this aspect and to comprehend how these women reconstructed their identities and developed themselves in a transnational context.

Francisca Montiel Rayo (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) opens the monograph with the contribution. "Un puente epistolar entre las dos Españas: Cartas de escritoras exiliadas a Carmen Conde (1940–1980)." Montiel Rayo's starting points are the pre-war networks that women intellectuals established back in Spain, before the military uprising of 1936. These networks were based on strong personal and professional relationships among these Spanish women who were developing literary careers. Her article focuses on the efforts made by the participants in these pre-war networks to renew contact after the war and the subsequent Franco dictatorship had separated them. The letters sent by the exiled writers María Teresa León, Concha Méndez, and Ernestina Champourcín, to the 'insiled' writer Carmen Conde built a shared space of dialogue for these women writers, who had difficulties in further developing their professional careers, both in Spain and in exile. In this epistolary space of proximity, mutual support was offered, literary experiences exchanged, and professional achievements applauded.

In her analysis "Mediación cultural y poesía: Cartas de las poetas españolas exiliadas a Concha Lagos," María Teresa Navarrete Navarrete (Uppsala Universitet) zooms in on the letters that the insiled writer Concha Lagos received in the fifties, sixties, and early seventies, from the exiled writers Concha Méndez, Marina Romero and Julia Uceda. Navarrete's study sheds light on Concha Lagos' role as a cultural mediator back in Spain, in her capacity as director of the literary journal *Cuadernos de Ágora* and the poetry collection *Ágora*. By enabling the publication and promotion of Méndez's, Romero's, and Uceda's work in Francoist Spain, Lagos gives Spanish readers and critics inside Spain access to poetry of exile. The merit of Concha Lagos's mediation in the context of Franco's dictatorship, argues Navarrete, is twofold: she is able to overcome the dictatorship's attempts to silence literature written by women and she succeeds in going against the dictatorship's intention to obscure the literature written in Spanish exile.

Inmaculada Real López (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) starts her contribution "Flujos comunicativos y puentes culturales: Cartas de Maruja Mallo desde el exilio (1939–1962)" with a portrait of Maruja Mallo. Real López emphasizes how Maruja Mallo exported the Spanish pre-war model of the 'modern woman' from Spain to Latin America. Mallo represented this prototype both in pre-war Spain and during her Latin American exile, by dedicating herself exclusively to her artistic career, with great independence and freedom of spirit. The main focus of this study is on Mallo's professional needs and career development, which is why the artist's epistolary

network, made up of contacts in both Spain and Latin America, is analyzed. Real López gives special attention to the letters written by Mallo to the Spanish painter Rafael Zabaleta and argues that this correspondence is characterized by cosmopolitanism. Mallo's letters create an open space to discuss the activities, evolutions, and opportunities in the artistic circles of Latin America, the United States, France, and Spain.

Carmen Alfonso García (Universidad de Oviedo), in her article "*Y ahora voy a contarte despacio todo: La dimensión confesional en las cartas de Elena Fortún a Inés Field (1948–1951)*" gives a central place to the strong emotional and spiritual bond that the Spanish writer Elena Fortún forged, during her exile in Argentina, with the Argentine professor Inés Field. While staying temporarily in Spain to prepare her return to the homeland, Fortún experienced great emotional distress caused by the suicide of her husband, Eusebio de Gorbea, who had stayed behind in Buenos Aires. Fortún, who was consumed by feelings of guilt, found support in writing letters to her Argentine friend. The article studies how this epistolary relationship constructs, in these difficult circumstances, a space of intimacy that enables self-healing and the identity reconstruction of a fractured self. Alfonso García connects Fortún's letters to confession as a literary genre, as conceived by María Zambrano. The study convincingly argues that Fortún's correspondence shares some characteristics with the internal inquiry processes of the spiritual letters traditionally written by religious women to their confessors. Inés Field, in her capacity as interlocutor of this epistolary confession, is imagined and represented in Fortún's letters as a spiritual guide. The intertextual analysis of the epistolary material demonstrates how Fortún's readings of work by Thomas a Kempis and Ignacio de Loyola on confessional exercises are interwoven in her letters.

Eugenia Helena Houvenaghel (Universiteit Utrecht) closes the special issue with the study "A Place for Us: Spatial Proximities in the Correspondence between Maria Casarès and Albert Camus (1944–1959)." The exiled Spanish actress and the French-Algerian writer, who fell in love in Paris, lived most of the time separated from each other and developed an intense epistolary relationship. Houvenaghel's study emphasizes how both correspondents struggle with the same spatial and identity issues which have two dimensions: the distance that separates them from their respective home countries and the distance that separates them from each other. The study considers how Casarès and Camus renegotiate, through dialogue, their spatial identities to overcome these problems. By identifying with symbols that remind them the places to which they feel attached, in both their home and host countries, the correspondents succeed in joining the two parts of their spatial identities. These symbols enable them to create a sense of belonging in the host country without losing their bond with the country of origin. The correspondents subsequently use these symbols to create a shared space of intimacy and affection in their letters, and to portray the absent recipient and the self, which are both united in this space.

In summary, this special issue describes how women affected by Spanish exile developed bonds of professional and personal support and renegotiated their identities via epistolary relations. This issue foregrounds the historical value of letters: they are fundamental in providing detailed information on the functioning of Spanish exiled women's alliances during exile. The dossier also illustrates the autobiographical character of these letters in their dialogical context: the strong bond between the sender and recipient of the letter plays a fundamental role in stimulating and facilitating possibilities for synergetic identity renegotiations.

## ORCID

Eugenia Helena Houvenaghel  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7877-2065>

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