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## [Introduction to] Barcelona Plays: A Collection of New Works by Catalan Playwrights

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# **BARCELONA PLAYS**

**A COLLECTION OF NEW PLAYS**

**BY CATALAN PLAYWRIGHTS**

Translated by

Marion Peter Holt

and

Sharon G. Feldman



Martin E. Segal Theatre Center Publications

New York

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## Preface

From the end of the Franco dictatorship in the mid-1970s to the first decade of the twenty-first century, Barcelona's theatre experienced a remarkable rebirth and transformation. Performance groups such as La Fura dels Baus, Els Joglars, Dagoll-Dagom, and La Cubana flourished with distinctive productions in which spectacle and movement usually overshadowed textual elements. In 1976, the Teatre Lliure (Free Theatre) was established by a talented group of actors, directors, and scenographers in their own flexible performance space. It quickly set new production standards with a repertory of international plays. Soon the Catalan language, suppressed for more than three decades, became the vehicle of expression for a new generation of playwrights waiting in the wings, challenging the spectacle and pantomime of the collectives with a "teatre de text" in which dialogue was the essence. In 1996 Catalonia would inaugurate its own National Theatre, housed in a modern, state-of-the art complex. Six years later, the pioneering Teatre Lliure expanded its facilities from its single stage in the Gràcia neighborhood to a reclaimed exhibition hall from the Barcelona International Exposition of 1929. Thus, a second modern theatre complex, with two distinctive performance spaces, was added to the city's growing production facilities. Barcelona has now become one of the most vibrant theatre centers in Europe, and works by Catalan playwrights are staged far beyond the city of their origin, in many languages.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the image of the city itself had nearly disappeared from the Catalan stage. Leading playwrights were creating a type of Eurotheatre in which character names were eschewed in favor of generic names and specific locales were seldom essential to a play's theme or development. Toni Casares, artistic director of the Sala Beckett, a major alternative performance venue, chose to focus upon this absence in preparing the programming for the 2003-2004 season. In a series titled "The Action Takes Place in Barcelona," he took the initiative in encouraging both established and promising younger playwrights to create new dramatic works set in Barcelona and reflecting its diversity by dramatic evocation. The series, which included Lluïsa Cunillé's *Barcelona: Map of Shadows* and Pau Miró's *It's Raining in Barcelona*, earned Casares and the Beckett a prestigious Generalitat de Catalunya Prize. The same year, Sergi Belbel's *Strangers* had its premiere at the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya's Sala Petita. It is a play that does not name Barcelona explicitly, but we may assume this gripping story of a family over two generations and their interactions with two distinct waves of immigrants,

does indeed relate directly to the cultural diversity of the Catalan capital. Josep M. Benet i Jornet's *Salamander*, which had its premiere in 2005, deals with the extinction of species, culture, and language, including the Catalan language. The early scenes are set in southern California where its reluctant protagonist sets off on a journey of discovery and revelation that leads him to a neighborhood in Barcelona where his grandfather had once lived. The interwoven subplot of the play deals with the Catalan diaspora brought on by the Spanish Civil War. All four plays offer contemporary perspectives of the city and at the same time transcend their locales in theme and theatrical viability. What these works have in common beyond their varied relationships to a specific city is a universality that enables their characters and dramatic conflicts to speak to audiences worldwide. These four plays also represent outstanding playwrights of three generations. Josep M. Benet i Jornet won his first literary award and achieved his first staging in 1963 when he was only twenty-three years old, but only after the demise of the Franco regime in 1975 could his talent flourish. He would become the leading exponent of thematically challenging and structurally innovative theatre in Catalan and an example for a rising generation of young dramatists. Sergi Belbel and Lluïsa Cunillé would arrive on the scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s as new and distinctive voices. Today yet another generation of young playwrights is continuing to demonstrate the impressive talent centered in Barcelona. The Teatre Nacional de Catalunya is helping their careers with its T-6 internships, appointments that assure the playwrights production opportunities at the TNC's Sala Tallers or at a cooperating alternative theatre in Barcelona. Pau Miró is one of the most promising of this new generation and one who has been selected by TNC for a T-6 internship.