The Theater of Maria Aurèlia Capmany and the Reverberations of Civil War (History, Censorship, Silence)

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Maria Aurèlia Capmany (1918–1991) was one of the most prominent Catalan writers of the twentieth century, occupying a singular place in the intellectual and cultural life of Catalonia during the period of the Franco dictatorship and the democratic transition. Her theater is aesthetically daring in its integration of an ample range of contemporary dramatic modes, from intellectually complex to more popular forms of spectacle. Epic theater, monologue, documentary theater, historical drama, and “literary cabaret” (a genre of her own invention), all make repeated appearances throughout her theatrical trajectory. Moreover, on the whole her work stands as a testament to her preoccupation with history, particularly with the irreconcilable tensions between what Spanish poet Antonio Machado memorably called las dos Españas [the two Spains]. Liberalism vs. conservatisms, secularism vs. religion, working class vs. bourgeoisie—these tensions culminated during her own life with the twentieth-century conflict that was the Spanish Civil War, a conflict that resonates throughout her theatrical writing.

Capmany’s literary production, in general, is also evocative of the notion of écriteur féminin, in the Cixousian sense of the term, in its discursive rejection of patriarchal values and its frequent inscription of the female body. As Montserrat Palau has observed, Capmany’s vigorous anti-Francoism compelled her to become a pioneer with regard to the introduction and defense of modern feminism in Catalonia (“Maria Aurèlia Capmany”). As a feminist, she was always engaged in the struggle for freedom of expression and, in effect, the struggle for all types of freedom, both individual and collective. This engagement would merge seamlessly with her militant sense of Catalanism, for her plays contain frequent reflections with regard to the persistence and survival of her culture and her language. Indeed all the distinct ideological facets of Capmany’s literary personality were inevitably linked to her attitude of dissent and defiance vis à vis Francisco Franco’s dictatorial regime.

The story of Capmany’s theater thus represents a paradigmatic case of a female Catalan dramatist during the post-Civil War period and beyond, whose work for the stage, on an aesthetic level, was ever inclined toward experimentation and toward a rebellion against artistic norms, including
those implied by the terms of Francoist censorship. Her dedication within the realm of the performative spectacle was truly "total," for she came to exercise not only the vocation of playwright but also that of actor, adaptor, choreographer, costume designer, director, teacher, and translator. One could add to this list, as Ramon X. Rosselló has noted, her commitment as a cultural critic, administrator, and activist.

Despite this utter devotion to the theater, Guillem-Jordi Graells, responsible for the edition of Capmany’s complete works, has observed that she was a narrator above all else, whose greatest calling was to be a novelist ("Maria Aurèlia Capmany" 21). While the narrative genre constituted the terrain in which her literary achievements attained their greatest fruition and repercussion, it is also the case that, because of the obstacles imposed by Francoist censorship, her theater texts were never truly allowed the opportunity to realize their full potential, to come to fruition on the stage, as well as in print, as she might have wished. The reigning powers in Francoist Spain—political and otherwise—appear to have understood the compelling, influential, and even magical ability of theatrical performance to comment, critique, or merely awaken collective consciousness. In Capmany’s case, they appear, as well, to have been rather unsettled by her aesthetic experimentation. Her contentious relationship with the Spanish censors concerning the performance and publication of her plays is thus indicative of the degree to which she undoubtedly touched upon a series of situations that were considered uncomfortable, or even threatening, to the dominant institutions of authority, situations that these institutions had an interest in suppressing or altogether silencing.

In two plays in particular, Vent de garbi i una mica de por (1965) [Southern winds and a bit of dread] and L’ombra de l’escorpió (1971) [The shadow of Scorpio], Capmany cultivates the use of allegory and metaphor to speak to the repetitive cycle of antagonism between the two Spains, which emerges as a constant in Spanish history. Echoes of the Spanish Civil War reverberate throughout these plays, in which she offers an inventively poetic reflection upon a series of historical memories that refuse to be erased from the collective consciousness. Like many of her works, these are plays that speak about injustice, that attempt to portray a political, social, and/or religious reality occurring in history that is the same as, or analogous to, the context in which the works were written. Furthermore, like many of her works for the theatre, their realization was affected by the tentacular internal machinery of Francoist censorship. The analysis that follows will offer a glimpse into the institutional and bureaucratic functioning of this censorial machinery.

Unlike the outright silencing of a play, censorship, as Marvin Carlson has observed, often entails a set of lesser restrictions, such as the rewriting of a text or the modification of a mise en scène in order to make it acceptable or palatable according to an arbitrary set of criteria. Censorship, therefore, might compromise the intentions, diminish the artistic integrity, or even alter the meaning of a play, without necessarily silencing it completely.
It can, consequently, occur at different stages in the production process. For instance, a text can be completely prohibited, or mutilated, before it makes its way to the stage (so-called "preventive" censorship), or a performance can be shut down after it has already been produced (so called "repressive" censorship). Such was the distinction that was first established in Ancien Régime France (Carlson 29–30). It was also, in essence, the model adopted by the Ministerio de Información y Turismo in the Spain of the Franco dictatorship, whereby, in addition to the required submission of a text for review, the intermediary viewing of a dress rehearsal was often de rigueur.6

Despite the highly problematic consequences of both forms of censorship, preventative and repressive, theater artists, as well as censoring agencies, have known all along that alterations to a sanctioned text can arise in surprising ways at any moment in the production, as well as the publication, process. Indeed the relationship between theatrical censorship and its victims (or, more generally, between censorship and freedom of expression) is dialectical and multidirectional, a relationship captured vividly by theorists that include Michel Foucault, in his description of the rapport between taboo and transgression as a jeu des limites [play of limits] (754–56); Judith Butler, who conceives the censoring process in performative terms, as a type of preemptive constraint with regard to the production of speech (130–33); or Michael Holquist, who, likewise, perceives censorship to be a dynamic process in which there is a continual exchange between oppression and rebellion. Censors, Holquist observes, are "locked into a negotiation, an exchange with the works they seek to abridge" (16–17; emphasis in original). Censorship is never without contestation and, paradoxically, its very existence is contingent upon the presence of an oppositional discourse. Thus censorship and rebellion, like taboo and transgression, coexist in a never-ending dialogue, a dialectic of reciprocity, mutual dependence, and necessity, in which they are perpetually forced to rely upon each other for affirmation of being. One consequence of this situation is the characteristic arbitrariness of censorship, its tendency to take aim haphazardly, to fire and misfire merely for the sake of making its presence known.

For Holquist, one finds at the core of censorship a "monolingual terror of indeterminacy" (21). Censorship is driven by an inherent desire to stabilize meaning and avoid ambiguity. The censorial endeavor to anchor each signifier to a stable and immutable signified has thus frequently stimulated in those dramatists who are willing to rebel, such as Capmany, a series of strategies of protest and artistic transgressions designed to frustrate the desire for a fixed and determinate meaning. Allegory, historical drama, and other parabolic or Aesopian tactics have habitually been employed as strategies designed to vex or dissuade the censorial gaze. Even satire and absurdism have held their own in bewildering the censors. In dodging their inquisitorial gaze, many playwrights, Capmany included, operating in oppressive situations have thus learned to write between the lines, to create palimpsestic works of art in which one level of meaning is readily apparent, while
another remains suppressed or hidden. In effect, the employment of a discourse of *doubles entendres*, of veiled and shrouded meanings, establishes a gap between what is visible and what is invisible, creating an indeterminate zone of slippage that is sometimes (but not always) beyond the grasp of the censors (Holquist 14–16).

Capmany’s activities in the theater, especially in the early stages of her career, were intimately connected to her pedagogical endeavors and her involvement in the independent theater movement; that is, in a variety of non-professional and non-commercial environments, such as the Agrupació Dramàtica de Barcelona, the Escola d’Art Dramàtic Adrià Gual, and the Grup d’Estudis Teatrals d’Horta, which emerged in the margins of official culture but whose impact on Barcelona theatrical life was no less significant. Shortly after the experience of her first play, *Tu l’hipòcrita* (1959) [You, the hypocrite], fruit of her collaboration with the Agrupació Dramàtica de Barcelona, Capmany would leave the ADB in 1960 to create, alongside director/playwright Ricard Salvat, the Escola d’Art Dramàtic Adrià Gual (EADAG). Based at the so-called “Cupola” of the Coliseum Cinema in Barcelona and established under the auspices of the Foment de les Arts Decoratives, the EADAG offered its members the opportunity to immerse themselves in the dominant currents of the international theater scene, developing its activities across three areas: acting, directing, and research. Their interest in international drama was matched by their concern with disseminating the work of Catalan authors, thus creating a situation that Gonzalo Pérez de Olaguer has aptly characterized as “effervescent” (179).

By the time the EADAG officially closed its doors in 1978, the school had played a crucial role in shaping the careers of some of the most innovative Catalan theater professionals of the moment. Within the context of the Barcelona theater scene, the productions staged by the EADAG’s eponymous company, which aspired to professionalization, represented an alternative to the official and/or commercial theater that was typically exported to Barcelona from Madrid. As Pérez de Olaguer recalls, the EADAG was intent on offering a theater that was never escapist, always critical in its intentions, and able to cultivate an enlightened sense of social and aesthetic consciousness (179).^8^ 

Capmany immediately assumed a decisive role within the EADAG, as an author, translator, director, actor, teacher, choreographer, and costume designer (Graells, “La producció literària” xviii). This was also the context in which she staged some of her own plays, including *Vent de garbi i una mica de por*, which premiered at the Palau de la Música Catalana in June 1965 on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the EADAG. The play was performed under Salvat’s direction, with a scenic design by Maria Girona and costume design by Albert Ràfols Casamada. The production also included the participation of several students from the school who would go on to forge distinguished professional careers: Feliu Formosa, Josep Minguell, Lluís Quinquer, Pere Salabert, Carme Sansa, and Josep Maria Segarra.
In *Vent de garbi i una mica de por*, Capmany casts a sharply accusatory gaze upon a complacent Catalan bourgeoisie and its passive indifference with regard to approaching political storm clouds. This complacency is played out in three acts, situated in three seaside towns in Catalonia, during three parallel moments in time, which are presented in reverse chronological order: Cadaqués, during the summer of 1964, a period of riots and turbulence among the working class; Sitges, during the summer of 1936, just prior to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War; and Caldes d’Estrac (also known as “Caldetes”), during the summer of 1909, the period of La Setmana Tràgica [Tragic Week] in Catalonia. In creating the play, Capmany sipped from several artistic sources, combining techniques drawn from epic theater, documentary theater, and even the popular-satirical sainete [a brief comic play involving popular customs], with poetry and songs that prefigured her subsequent work in cabaret theater.

Josep Anton Codina recalls in his chronicle of Capmany’s “theatrical adventure” that the first time the playwright mentioned the production to students and colleagues at the EADAG, she explained that it would include “molt de ball” [a lot of dancing] and that the dancing could be taken to be a faithful expression of societal attitudes (253). Two characters, a man (“Home”) and young woman (“Noia”), play the role of presenters, creating a theatrical frame of distancing (Brechtian or otherwise) that accentuates the attitude of social protest emanating from the play. With thirty years of separation between each act, Capmany offers a series of ironic portraits of parallel circumstances situated at some of the most emblematic summer resorts habitually frequented by a comfortable Catalan bourgeoisie. These are propitious places in which to escape from reality. Dance, then, serves as a powerful metaphor for the attitude of evasion, impassive aloofness, or even oblivion displayed by the bourgeoisie when confronted with the crises affecting the working class. In effect, Capmany’s condemnation of the privileged class would become a common thread appearing throughout much of her later work.

The second act of the play opens—as do all three acts—with a dialogue between the man and the young woman. A large travel poster is unfurled, advertising the seasonal charm of the Mediterranean town of Sitges. The young woman, employing a cordial tone, describes the scene as follows: “Fa un dia de calma a mar. Sobre el mar quiet el sol dibuixa grans taques olioses. Fa molta calor. Els estiuëjants s’aturen de tant en tant de no fer res ...” (166) [It is a calm day at sea. The sun sketches large glassy stains upon the tranquil sea. It’s very hot. The summer vacationers occasionally take a break from doing nothing ...]. The date corresponding to this portrait of tranquility is none other than 17 July 1936, the day of the military uprising in Melilla that would mark the beginning of the Spanish Civil War; yet the characters in the play are surprisingly impervious to the political and social unrest that is taking place outside their protected summer enclave.

Subsequently, the young woman, along with a young man (“Xicot”), will break into a song and dance number incorporating gestures reminiscent of
the American musicals of the 1930s. The melody, derived from the Cole Porter song “The Continental,” was made famous by the musical *The Gay Divorcee* (1934), with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Their song and dance stand in contrast to the lyrics, which provide, in a satirical vein, news of current events from the outside world, including the activities of Hitler’s air force: “ens ha dit que Hitler / lara ra rara / lara ra rara / ja multiplica / els avions / i que les fàbriques / no fan torrons” (170) [they’ve announced that Hitler / lada da dada / lada da dada / is already increasing / the planes / and that the factories / are not making nougats]. When the character of Don Narcís asks Sr. Miserachs (who is reading the newspaper) about the current situation in Morocco, he finds that Sr. Miserachs is more inclined to discuss the latest fashion in bathing suits than concern himself with current events (175–76). Similar ironic critiques of the carefree attitude of the privileged class continue to surface throughout the play.

According to Codina, *Vent de garbi* was a success among audiences; but the critics were less generous, as they were unable to comprehend fully the political message embedded in the metaphor of dance, nor were they able to grasp entirely the meaning of Capmany’s play with space and time: “No sols utilitzava unes tècniques noves per a nosaltres, sinó que ens oferia també l’obra de teatre política més lúcida i important fins aleshores” [Not only did she employ a series of techniques that were very new to us, but she offered us the most important and lucid work of political theater up until that time]. He also relates that the Minister of Information and Tourism, Manuel Fraga himself prohibited “personally” any subsequent presentation of the production (254).

The particulars regarding this censorship, which limited the production to a single performance, are unknown; however, we do possess details concerning the frustrated attempt on the part of Ricard Salvat to stage the play in Spanish (as *Viento del sur y un poco de miedo*) in 1966 at the Teatro Nacional de Cámara y Ensayo, an “official” drama center set up by the Franco regime ostensibly for plays of limited distribution (foreign works and experimental endeavors of lesser commercial value, such as the “independent” theater projects). The censorship file obtained from the Archivo General de la Administración (AGA) in Alcalá de Henares contains an application from Salvat for a production with an unknown date, along with his Spanish translation of the text, which had been published in December 1965 in a special issue of the *Yorick* theater review commemorating the sixteenth anniversary of the EADAG. The Junta de Censura de Obras Teatrales (JCOT), under the auspices of the Ministerio de Información y Turismo, deliberated with regard to the viability of the production in two separate sessions held in March 1966, and five censors were asked to provide their assessment. (In fact, one meeting would have been the norm, and readings by three censors would have been more typical.)

Censor Florencio Martínez Ruiz detected the presence in the text of a “posible denuncia política” [possible political denouncement], which he
considered to be nonetheless “tolerable.” In his report, however, which recommended a series of suppressions, he noted that the play was “peligrosa para un teatro de cámara, pues está muy fragmentada y ello lo hace resultar confusa o poco clara en su mensaje” [dangerous for a chamber theater, because it is very fragmented and this makes it seem confusing and less than clear in its message]. Another report, by censor Sebastián Bautista de la Torre, offered a summary that corroborated the tentative attitude expressed by Martínez: “[S]e mezcla lo amatorio con lo político. Todo a través de noticias de cada época, pero en las que parece advertirse una cierta intención soterrada que resulta un tanto sospechosa” [Amorous scenes are mixed with politics. All transmitted through the news from each time period, but in which there appears to be a certain hidden intention that seems rather suspicious]. He went on to note that the play had already premiered in Catalan one year prior at the Palau de la Música Catalana, and that it had already been published in Spanish; therefore, for a minor production, he did not have any great qualms, with the exception of a few deletions concerning certain political references that he believed inappropriate.

The collection of experimental techniques employed by Capmany, it would appear, generated a degree of unease among the censors, creating an air of suspicion with regard to the presence of some sort of subversive discourse. At the same time, Capmany’s aesthetic strategies were sufficiently innovative and unfamiliar to have diverted their attention somewhat from her irreverent attack. Marcelo Arroita Jáuregui proposed that the production be authorized only for chamber sessions (albeit not at a national theater), along with a required viewing of a dress rehearsal. While his assessment, written in a condescending tone, demonstrated a cursory understanding of the critical strategies employed by Capmany, he never really arrived at the crux of the text: “La tesis de la autora parece ser que, en cualquier época, los lugares de veraneo son iguales y que, mutatis mutandis, las situaciones sean siempre las mismas: frivolidad, obsesión por la moral más cazurra, despreocupación, ‘sed de amor,’ egoísmo. Y una total ignorancia en relación con la verdadera situación del mundo” [The author’s thesis appears to be that, in any time period, summer vacation spots are identical and that, mutatis mutandis, the situations are always the same: frivolity, obsession with the lowest of virtues, carelessness, “thirst for love,” egotism. And total ignorance with regard to the true state of the world].

The fifth and final censor, Jorge Blajot Pena, a catholic priest with an exceedingly literal interpretation of the play, warned of the need for caution, although he was at a loss to pinpoint any precise censorship norm that might have impeded the play from being authorized. He also subjected to the Junta’s discretion a few additional passages, including a reference to Mussolini and fascism and a song that appears at the end of the third act, which alludes to Prime Minister Antonio Maura and the War in the Rif (the so-called Second Melillan Campaign). This was one of many clashes between the working masses and the bourgeoisie that prefigured the Spanish Civil
War. Of "Las coplas de Don Antón," he noted, "creo que pertenecen al folklore de la época y me parecen suprimibles [The versos concerning Don Antón I believe belong to the folklore of the period and they seem expungeable to me]. The song, which was crossed out by hand in the submitted copy of the text, appears to have inspired a great deal of commotion among the censors. It offers a sarcastic critique directed at the conservative politics of Prime Minister Maura, whose attempt to foment Spanish political influence and commercial interests in North Africa incited the general strike of July 1909 that gave way to Tragic Week in Catalonia. The chorus of the song, marked for deletion, which was to have been performed as a large-scale dance number, appears with the following lyrics in the Spanish text under review:

_Todos a coro. Hombres_

¡Ay, Don Antón Don Antón
los que quieren progresar
te piden con gran fervor:
—Márcbate y no vuelvas más.
Porque el hijo del Progreso
cuando te oye nombrar
siente el último suspiro
del que hiciste fusilar! (26)

[Full chorus. Men

Oh, Don Antón Don Antón
those who want to progress
beg of you with great fervor:
—Go away and never come back.
Because the son of Progress
when he hears your name
senses the final breath
of the one you sent to be shot!]

At a meeting of the JCOT held on 29 March 1966, the production was authorized (albeit with numerous suppressions) for a single session of chamber theater. A handwritten note by José María Ortiz, then Jefe del Servicio de Teatro [Head of the Theater Service] of the Ministerio de Información y Turismo, clarified that it was not to be staged at the Teatro Nacional de Cámara. There is no evidence, however, that any such Spanish-language production of _Viento del sur y un poco de miedo_ ever took place. We can conclude, therefore, that the censoring powers did, in fact, manage to silence this version of the play.

The published version of the text in Catalan appeared in 1968, in a volume within the "Biblioteca Rauxa" series of Editorial Moll, of Palma de Mallorca, together with the piece for cabaret theater _Dones, flors i pitança_ [Women, flowers, and pittance] and two short plays (_Dos quarts de cinc_...
[Half past four] and Breu record de Tirant el Blanc [Brief memory of Tirant el Blanc]). The edition coincided with the year of the professional production of Vent de garbí i una mica de por at the Teatre Romea, where the Nova Companyia de Barcelona premiered the text on 29 October, under the direction of Codina and the sponsorship of Ventura Pons. Two files from the AGA document what was then a “voluntary deposit” of the published text. A single censor observed perceptively that the play attempts to demonstrate “que la burguesia catalana, en cualquier situación política, opta siempre por la evasión” [that the Catalan bourgeoisie, in any political situation, always opts for evasion]. The text was accepted without further ado, and there is no evidence of any hindrance with regard to its publication.

L’ombra de l’escorpió premiered on 8 October 1971 under the direction of Josep Montanyès at the Teatre Prado, within the context of the fifth Sitges Theater Festival. It represents the culmination of a period of intense activity in Capmany’s theater trajectory. Here she blends the myth of Cassandra with an epic tale of war: specifically, the thirteenth-century battle of Muret in southern France, in which Languedoc was besieged by an army of Albigensian crusaders. The play is imbued with subtle references to the contemporary period, of the clash between Fascism and Republicanism, between Catalanism and Francoism, and between so-called winners and losers. The title contains a strand of hopefulness in its astrological reference to the season of autumn, when, as Capmany observes, life begins to enter a period of darkness, only to be later reborn (“Cinc maneres de dir la veritat” 525).

Montanyès, who was founding director of the Grup d’Estudis Teatrals d’Horta, had commissioned Capmany to write a play tailored to the needs of the group, which would highlight the talent of some of its most prominent members and, at the same time, preserve its choral interests (Graells, “La producció literària” xxxiii). The cast included many names recognizable to spectators of today: Joan Nicolás, Carme Solé, Maria Martín, Joan Miralles, and Fermí Reixach, in addition to Lluís Pasqual and Imma Colomer (these last two, curiously, in minor roles). Following the premiere at Sitges, the production was transferred to the Centre Parroquial d’Horta, a venue that typically served as a base for the group, where it was programmed for an entire season.

Capmany situates the action in the commune of Termes, on the eve of the battle, in which the fictitious protagonist Sabina de Termes, whom the author describes in her preface to the play as a countess condemned to both “lucidity” and “rectitude,” finds herself willing to die for her cause (“Cinc maneres de dir la veritat” 525). She thus centers the action on one of the earliest examples of oppression of Catalan culture—in effect, the final battle of the Albigensian Crusade when, as she explains, “moría un rei català i s’iniciava la destrucció sistemàtica i total d’un dels pobles més rics i més civilitzats d’Europa” (“Cinc maneres de dir la veritat” 535) [a Catalan king was killed and thus began the total and systematic destruction of one of the richest and most civilized peoples of Europe]. The effort on the part of
The French to eliminate Catharism in Languedoc is analogous here to the endeavor on the part of the Francoists to purge Catalanism from Spain. Capmany thus uses this historic episode to evoke for the spectator certain resonances with regard to the Spanish Civil War and the period of dictatorship that followed. She takes full advantage of the allegorical power of historical drama to allude subtly to a series of preoccupations from the realm of her more recent experiences with war, injustice, intolerance, and freedom of expression. In the characterization of Sabina, she also creates, as was so often characteristic of her work, an analogy between feminism and Catalanism.

Sabina describes the setting as “Un castell noble i enlairat i... pobre. Els bàrbars del Nord tenen assetjada la nostra terra perquè cobegen els nostres camps i el camí del mar. I prediquen una falsa croada, que no és més que el desig de guany” (537) [A noble and prominent... and poor castle. The northern barbarians have besieged our land because they covet our fields and the road to the sea. And they preach a false crusade, which is nothing more than the desire for their own gain]. Spectators able to read between the lines, to navigate the play of interlinearity in silent complicity with the playwright, would have understood the subtle geographic evocation of Catalonia and the subtle allusion to Franco’s habitual use of the term “Crusade,” when referring to his Nationalist uprising and “movement.” The text also contains echoes of two aesthetic threads that are fundamental to Capmany’s theatrical fabric: an interest in documentary theater and the influence of Brechtian epic devices. She adds to these elements a subtle critique of the Catalan bourgeoisie, which had, by this time, become a hallmark of her work.

Documents from the AGA detail both the theatrical, as well as editorial/literary, censorship of the play. The dossier pertaining to theatrical censorship contains a copy of the text in manuscript form, which was filed with the JCOT on 19 August 1971, prior to the premiere at Sitges. The text was examined, as was customary, by three censors (Luis Tejedor, María Nieves Sunyer, and Emilio Aragones), each with varying opinions. Tejedor recommended that the production be limited to spectators of at least eighteen years of age, but he did not see the need to require the inspection of a dress rehearsal. He justified his opinion by underscoring the high aesthetic quality of the play and the characterization of Sabina de Termes, who “no puede ser más digna” [could not be more respectable]—despite the fact that Sabina and her brother, the count (don Ramon de Termes) “están adscritos a una secta herética, pero la autora apenas hace hincapié sobre este punto” [are members of an heretical sect, but the author barely emphasizes this point]. He ends by noting that L’ombra de l’escorpi is a work of high quality, “escrita con verdadero amor,” [written with true love], that is “altamente teatral” [highly theatrical]. Sunyer insisted on the need for a “rigorous” scrutiny of the dress rehearsal. Her report, written by hand, was suggestive of her ecclesiastic background, for she took issue with Capmany’s portrayal of “las costumbres disolutas o licenciosas del clero” [the depraved and licentious
habits of the clergy]. Aragonesés, finally, was the most severe in his assessment, recommending that the production be limited to chamber theater sessions and demanding the inspection of a dress rehearsal. He also included a series of suppressions referring to several mentions of a “Crusade,” in addition to a reference to Pere II of Aragon as “king” of the Catalans, which he regarded as a “falseamienlo tendencioso de la historia” [tendentious falsification of history] (as specified in the “Norma 14, 3°” of the censorship code of 1963). He ends by noting that the play would only be appropriate for the Sitges Festival.

Despite the expressed concerns, the JCOT agreed, at a session held on 24 August 1971, to authorize the production for spectators older than eighteen years of age, with the requirement that a dress rehearsal meet with subsequent approval. The Secretary of the Junta, José María Ortiz, left a handwritten note in the file stipulating that the scenic design, costumes, and props be required to reflect with exactitude the period in which the play takes place. His comment exhibits a certain degree of uneasiness with regard to the capacity of meaning in this historical drama to remain unstable, to vacillate between the middle ages and the contemporary period.

The expurgated passages (which were crossed out in ink) include a final fragment of dialogue appearing at the end of the epilogue of the play. Here, in what Capmany likely intended as a Brechtian gesture, the characters break the fourth wall to address the audience directly in a colloquial tone. They describe the fall of the Catalans at the battle of Muret on 12 September 1213:

PERE: I la veu dels vençuts va ser ofegada.
SABINA: I la veu dels vençuts va ser escarnida.
COMTE: Pero algun poeta n’ha guardat la memòria. (572)

[PERE: And the voice of the vanquished was drowned.
SABINA: And the voice of the vanquished was mocked.
COUNT: But a poet has maintained the memory of it.]

Their narrative account of this ill-fated day is evocative of the vanquished Republican underdogs of the Spanish Civil War; not to mention another tragic moment in Catalan history: the fall of Barcelona during the War of the Spanish Succession on 11 September 1714. In the epilogue, moreover, Sabina alludes to “el silenci” [the silence] that ensued, along with a decades-long war, all of which followed the five-year “crusade”: “I despues es va fer el silenci. I sempre haureu sentit contar amb unes quants paraules, no gaires, una guerra que va durar quaranta-cinc anys” (572) [And then came the silence. And you will have always heard it told with few words, not too many, a war that lasted forty-five years]. Her words conjure an image of civil war, censorship, and oppression, as well as a numerical echo of the Franco dictatorship (which, in the end, did not quite last as long as forty-five years, but certainly came close to this approximation). The metatheatrical allusion
to the poet, indeed, might very well be taken to be a reference to Capmany herself, who clearly was not inclined to forget these crucial moments in Catalan history.

The text of *L'ombra de l'escorpió* was published in the twilight of the Franco period, in 1974, by Editorial Gorg, of Valencia, with prefaxes by Rafael Ventura Melià and Egon de Castellrosselló. The censorship file concerning the publication includes a copy of the text, offered as a “voluntary deposit,” in addition to a required form, which was signed on 3 March 1974, by Gonzalo Castelló Gómez in representation of the publisher, specifying a projected print run of 4,000 copies. Each of the two censors’ reports, with illegible signatures, expressed a negative appraisal with regard to the viability of the publication of the text. The first, from 30 January 1974, observed that “La obra se limita a revivir el hecho histórico y no contiene implicaciones políticas directas, si bien quiere ser como un símbolo de las ‘derrotas’ de Cataluña” [The play limits itself to reviving an historical event and does not have any direct political implications, even if it wants to be like a symbol of the “defeats” of Catalonia]. It concluded, nevertheless, by expressing the opinion that “no contiene fundamento para su impugnación” [it does not contain any basis for its prohibition]. The other report, dated 1 February 1974 and written by hand, expressed a more extreme view, condemning with an indignant tone the allegorical capacity of the play to vacillate between historical time and the present:

And in effect, the author seeks to draw an analogy between the Spanish War of Liberation and the Albigensian Crusade; no wonder she has chosen a conflict that has the name Crusade, like ours. It does not matter that the time, the circumstances, and everything is different
and the similarity does not exist. The intention is obvious, precisely because in that war King Pere sided in favor of the Cathars for political reasons. And the crusades represent evil, as she would have it.

The keys that the author gives in this “historical” drama of timeless meaning, are evident. Even the title lends itself to political interpretations, perhaps too subtle with regard to our neighbors, the Cathars, and the language wants to be modern and, if not ambiguous, ductile so that everyone can apply it to their ideology, but with an inclination toward Catalanism.

Tendentious clues and statements can be found on pages 8, 9, 11, 50, 56, 58, 60, and 69. Accordingly, the play—which without these clues and statements, could—in the most extreme case—pass without serious objection, is totally objectionable.

The final resolution, captured on a card bearing the date of 5 March 1974, was expressed with a single and concise word: “Silencio” [Silence]. It was a silence that signified what was then known as a “silencio administrativo” [administrative silence], a way for the JCOT to express the determination not to publish the play, while recognizing the difficulty of silencing it outright, given the repercussions that public opinion might have engendered at this late date in the evolution of the Franco regime. This “silence,” which was, at once, a “yes” and “no,” represented a kind of intermediary—and blatantly hypocritical—measure within the censuring machinery of the Francoist bureaucracy. Shortly after the resolution, in July 1974, Franco would enter the hospital in what was, in essence, the “beginning of the end” of his dictatorship (Payne and Palacios 475).

The limits of censorship, of what is permitted and what is not, as demonstrated in the foregoing sampling of materials drawn from the case of Capmany, are often exceedingly arbitrary and frequently tied to aesthetic, as well as thematic, considerations. Capmany’s theatrical trajectory represents a unique case in the history of Catalan theater for its variety and richness in experimental forms. She no doubt took some cues from Brecht in utilizing the power of the theater to its full advantage to allegorize and create hidden meanings, inciting spectators to construe a political message—be it anti-Francoist, humanitarian, feminist, or Catalanist—that was hidden among layers of history. This experimental audaciousness at times inspired a certain degree of discomfort, or even agitation, among the censors, arousing suspicions with regard to the possibility of a political critique or a threatening portrayal that might have been concealed beneath the historical facade.

In his “Arthur Miller Freedom to Write Lecture,” Salman Rushdie, one of the most eminent of contemporary censored writers, observes that when a work is labeled a censored work, it then becomes, as a consequence, defined by censorship. Our understanding of the work is ineradicably altered, and the work thus becomes indelibly defined in a way that,
in effect, may run contrary to the original artistic intention. Censorship is, for Rushdie, so artistically stifling that the very prospect of its existence leads to the demise of all creative expression: “The creative act requires not only freedom but also the assumption of freedom. If the creative artist worries if he will still be free tomorrow, then he will not be free today.” Rushdie, intent on demystifying the role of censorship and its effects upon literature, thus vehemently rejects the idea that censorship might serve as a positive impetus for artists; that is, the popular notion that censorship presents hindrances that challenge and stimulate a writer’s creative imagination. In the case of Capmany, where history, censorship, and silence intersect, this notion certainly could not have been farther from the truth. The consequences of censorship played a destructive role with regard to her endeavors as a dramatist, and we can only imagine how her career might have evolved if her theatre had not been subjected to the oppressive impediments that it was obliged to endure.

Notes

1. Cf. for example, Capmany, *La dona a Catalunya: Consciència i situació* [Women in Catalonia: Their consciousness and situation].
2. On Capmany’s feminism, see also Lluïsa Julià.
4. See, for example, the censorship code of 1963 (“Orden de 9 de febrero de 1963 por la que se aprueban las ‘Normas de censura cinematográfica’”).
5. On the various stages in the evolution of Capmany’s theater, see Rosselló, in addition to Josep Anton Codina, Guillem-Jordi Graells, and Agustí Pons.
6. On the conditions of censorship in Spain, see the very comprehensive studies by Manuel L. Abellán, Berta Muñoz Cáliz, and Michael Thompson.
7. See Enric Gallén and Jordi Coca.
8. Pérez de Olaguer is citing theater critic Enrique Sordo.
9. Graells clarifies that, in a later revised version of the text and as a result of the intervention of Josep Anton Codina, the date was modified to 1968 (“La producció literària” lxiv).
10. Codina was assistant director for the first production in Catalan of *Vent de garbi* and was also, in part, responsible for the second production, at the Teatre Romea, in 1968.
11. Cf. Thompson (105) and María Francisca Vilches de Frutos.
12. In 1966, Spanish Minister of Information and Tourism Manuel Fraga instituted a new “Press Law” (Ley 14/1966, de 18 de marzo, de Prensa e Imprenta) governing all printed publications, which placed the burden on authors and publishers to “voluntarily” submit their work to the censorship office for theatrical works, the Junta de Censura de Obras Teatrales. It was an insidious attempt to cloak the Ministry’s totalitarian practices in a kind of veiled form of liberalization that would create a new image of openness, which was habitually known as “apertura” [opening]. See Sharon G. Feldman and Francesc Foguet.
Works Cited


The Theater of Maria Aurelia Capmany


Palau, Montserrat. "Dones catalanes = Persones oprimides: El feminisme i el nacionalisme de Maria Ayèlia Capmany." Palau and Martínez Gili 131–49.


