

# Censoring the outsider: the theatre of Albert Camus in Franco's Spain

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Date of deposit	15/01/2019
Document version	Author's accepted manuscript
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Citation for published version	O'Leary, C. M. (2019). Censoring the outsider: the theatre of Albert Camus in Franco's Spain. <i>Modern Drama</i> , 62(3), 292-319.
Link to published version	<a href="https://doi.org/10.3138/md.62.3.0971r">https://doi.org/10.3138/md.62.3.0971r</a>

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## **Censoring the Outsider: The Theatre of Albert Camus in Franco's Spain**

### **Abstract**

This article analyses the significance and reception of Albert Camus's theatre in Spain under the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975), which differed from the treatment of his work in France and elsewhere. The state censorship files at the Archivo General de la Administración (AGA) in Alcalá de Henares reveal how performances of Camus's theatre were considered rallying points of opposition to the dictatorship and yet were often tolerated. An analysis of this contradiction helps us not only to fill a gap in Spanish theatre history, which generally focuses little on foreign drama, but also to throw light on the use of foreign drama as a form of protest and, moreover, give insight into the transnational legacy of Camus's theatre.

## Censoring the Outsider: The Theatre of Albert Camus in Franco's Spain

*Whatever our personal weaknesses may be, the nobility of our craft will always be rooted in two commitments, difficult to maintain: the refusal to lie about what one knows and the resistance to oppression.*

(Camus, Nobel Speech, 1957)<sup>1</sup>

The theatre of Albert Camus (1913-1960), generally viewed in France and elsewhere as his least interesting and important work (Margerrison 68; Sonnenfeld 106), was perceived differently in Spain under the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975). The state censorship files reveal how performances of his theatre were considered rallying points of opposition to the regime and yet were often tolerated.<sup>2</sup> An analysis of this contradiction helps us not only to fill a gap in Spanish theatre history, which generally focuses little on foreign drama, but also to throw light both on the use of foreign drama as a form of protest and on the regime's response to it.

While not as obviously political as the work of Brecht and Sartre, Camus's humanistic writing had great resonance in Spain, particularly among the youth; the interest was reciprocal, as Spain, the country of his mother's forebears, was one of Camus's enduring preoccupations. Spain was, for him, "the wound that would not heal", and he engaged with it in essays, articles and plays throughout his career (1966, 59). Of

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<sup>1</sup> See the full speech at [www.nobelprize.org](http://www.nobelprize.org).

<sup>2</sup> The censorship files consulted are held at the Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte (MECD), Archivo General de la Administración (AGA), Alcalá de Henares (Madrid). All further references to censorship materials are from this archive.

his five original plays, two are set in Spain (*Révolte dans les Asturies*, 1936; *L'État de siège*, 1948) and four of them (*L'État*; *Caligula*, 1938; *Le Malentendu*, 1943; *Les Justes*, 1949) were eventually staged there during the dictatorship.

The censorship files reveal that most of the applications to stage Camus's theatre in Spain came from two sources – university and *cámara* (especially independent) theatre groups – at a time when student and cultural opposition to the dictatorship was on the rise.<sup>3</sup> Even when applications were made to stage his theatre in commercial venues, they were associated with practitioners who sought to reform the stage or ultimately the state. This article contends, therefore, that Camus's plays were employed as a weapon in a political battle with the Spanish dictatorship waged by those who sought an alternative society and saw culture as one of the means to achieve it. The regime's response indicates a fear of foreign influence and ideas, later replaced by a more sophisticated understanding of how censorship and other less obvious restrictions could be used to lessen their impact and, indeed, to bolster its own reputation.

### **Theatre Censorship in Spain**

THE PLAGUE.- *I bring you silence, order and absolute justice.*

(Camus, *L'État de siège*)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Vilches de Frutos for a useful discussion of the various non-commercial groups and how they changed over time.

<sup>4</sup> The translations into English of Camus's theatre are mine throughout.

The circumstances in which Camus's work could be staged in Spain were strictly controlled. The theatre, as a public, shared experience, was carefully monitored by a regime intent on promoting certain values and on censoring authors whose work contravened them.<sup>5</sup> Many of the censors were writers and journalists sympathetic to the regime; others were civil servants or members of the Roman Catholic clergy. Politics and religion were their main concerns but, in addition, the censors often saw themselves as arbiters of taste and quality.

While censorship of the stage had existed prior to the dictatorship, an attempt was made under Franco to create a comprehensive system that would control the production and reception of culture at all levels of society. The regime, concerned to protect its own values and ideology, perceived a particular threat from the theatre, related to the fact that it drew groups of people together in a communal space for live performances that were less easy to control. Under Franco, regulation of the stage operated through a combination of censorship and other forms of restriction, including on production runs and audiences. Moreover, the censors' verdicts often stipulated monitoring of the dress rehearsal for compliance with the cuts made, and to make sure that costume and sets of foreign plays were not suggestive of Spain.

The Orden 15 julio, 1939 created a national *Sección de Censura* and required that all plays be submitted for censorship. Censors drew up reports that gave a brief plot outline and appraised the literary, political and religious merits of the play. In the 1960s, reform of

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<sup>5</sup> For further information about theatre censorship in Spain, see Abellán (1980); Muñoz Cáliz (2005); O'Leary (2005). For information on the censorship of foreign dramatists in particular, see Merino-Álvarez's TRACE project (TRANslations CEnsored, [www.ehu.es/trace](http://www.ehu.es/trace)).

theatre censorship legislation was introduced as part of a wider process of liberalization, or *apertura*. The Minister in charge, Manuel Fraga, introduced comprehensive censorship legislation in 1964, applying the previous year's cinema legislation to the theatre (Orden 9 febrero 1963). Under this new legislation, there were four possible verdicts: (1) the play could be approved for all audiences; (2) only for over 18s; (3) only for small theatre clubs (*teatros de cámara*); or, (4) it could be banned. Cuts could be applied to the first three options and the third option offered a window through which minority, well-educated audiences had the chance to view more avant-garde or political plays, which were normally banned for mainstream theatres. This was seized upon by opponents of the regime, who saw a chance to stage alternative, foreign modes of thinking about society and politics; for the authorities, it was an opportunity to manage a growing, youthful opposition by allowing a limited voice of dissent within a carefully controlled environment (see Wellwarth 156). The censorship files reveal how each side considered the political usefulness of the theatre of Camus to further its own interests. Before considering the state's response to attempts to stage Camus's theatre in Spain, it is worth exploring why those opposed to the regime might have been attracted to this particular writer's work.

### **Albert Camus, Spain and the Theatre**

Long after the end of the Spanish civil war (1936-1939) and the establishment of the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975), Camus continued to write about the plight of Spain. In his articles and essays, particularly in the French Resistance newspaper, *Combat*, Camus condemned the Franco regime and criticized Western governments for abandoning the

country.<sup>6</sup> Camus never changed his views on Spain and, as John Cruickshank tells us, in November 1952 he resigned from UNESCO in protest at their admission of Francoist Spain as a member (18; 140).

He also had strong links to Spanish Republicans exiled in France, as noted by Phyllis Zatlin, who suggests that his appeal in Spain “no doubt included a political undercurrent beyond the committed content of the works themselves” (117). For his part, Stephen Eric Bronner relates that Camus had a lengthy friendship and a “stormy affair” (56) with the exiled actress, María Casares, who not only played the female lead in several of his plays but was the daughter of the Spanish Republican politician and (briefly, in 1936) Prime Minister, Santiago Casares Quiroga. This association did not go unnoticed in Spain. Those who wished to stage his work there, many of them members of student or independent theatre groups, were engaged in a form of political activism and, therefore, not only focused on the themes of his plays but on the authority and reputation of Camus himself.

While Camus’s political stance on Spain can be seen as an important factor in the decision to stage his plays as a form of protest, so too can the plays themselves.<sup>7</sup> A brief examination of them demonstrates why. Camus was strongly committed to the theatre and was first drawn to it when still in Algiers, where, as Robert Greer Cohn tells us, “he

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<sup>6</sup> Editorials on Spain published in *Combat* are dated September 7 (2006, 29-30); October 5, 1944 (2006, 59–61); October 24, 1944 (ibid., 86–88); November 21, 1944 (ibid., 116–18); December 10, 1944 (ibid., 137–38); January 7-8, 1945 (ibid., 166–67); May 27, 1945 (ibid., 220–21); August 7, 1945 (ibid., 235–36).

<sup>7</sup> See *Théâtre, récits, nouvelles* (1962).

founded a politically-inspired theatre group”, for which he wrote as well as directed (30).<sup>8</sup>

Camus’s views about theatre are best represented in his 1955 speech, “On the Future of Tragedy”, in which he stated: “our time coincides with a drama in civilization which might today, as it did in the past, favor tragic modes of expression” (1970, 300). His comments on tragedy versus drama and melodrama are also significant:

the forces confronting each other in tragedy are equally legitimate, equally justified. In melodramas or dramas, on the other hand, only one force is legitimate. In other words, tragedy is ambiguous and drama simple-minded (...); melodrama could thus be summed up by saying: “only one is just and justifiable”, while the perfect tragic formula would be: “all can be justified, no one is just”. (ibid., 301)

Yet it could be argued that Camus’s own dramatic works fail to live up to his goals for tragic theatre. In his five original plays, with the possible exception of *Les Justes*, there is a conflict in which only one of the sides could be said to be “just and justifiable”, so there is little in the way of a dilemma with the potential for a tragic outcome; his characters are emblematic rather than complex. Several critics have stressed his failure to deliver the type of theatre that he aspired to and point to flaws that include the privileging of ideas over drama, the lack of complexity in his characters, and his

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<sup>8</sup> E. Freeman finds it fitting “that Camus’s lifelong struggle against fanaticism should end, as it began, in the theatre”, as his last works were theatre translations (147). He was an admirer of Calderón de la Barca and Lope de Vega and translated the former’s *La devoción de la cruz* in 1953 and the latter’s *El caballero de Olmedo* in 1957. He also adapted the works of various other authors for the stage. See John Philip Couch (1959) and Manuel A. Esteban (1980) for further details.



didacticism, especially in *Les Justes* and *L'État de siège* (Marsh 22-24; Cruickshank 210-11; Freeman 88, 91; Couch 28; Lazare 212). This article argues that the same faults that were found with his theatre in France and elsewhere, were precisely what made it so attractive, as well as so threatening, in Franco's Spain. With themes that could be interpreted politically and characters symbolizing particular ideological stances, Camus's plays lent themselves well to the propagandistic intentions of those wishing to stage them in Spain.

The first of Camus's dramas, *Révolte dans les Asturies*, written in 1936 when he was still a member of the Communist Party, is indicative of his use of the theatre as a social and political tool, and was a collaborative piece for the Algerian Workers' Theatre.<sup>9</sup> The play was inspired by the Asturian miners' strike and revolt in 1934, which was followed by a brutal armed response led by General Franco at the behest of the right-wing government. These events, as Walter G. Langlois explains, "took on great symbolic importance for Leftists everywhere" (884).<sup>10</sup> It contains several elements of the proletarian theatre of the time – emblematic characters, audience participation, radio broadcast, demonization of the enemy, a plea for solidarity, and a clear political message – and is situated within the agit-prop theatrical tradition.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Germaine Brée for a reproduction of the full statement of intent of the group (34). Four authors were credited in its creation, although as Langlois notes, Camus was the main one (912). See also Freeman (20). On the Théâtre du Travail, see Bronner (48); Freeman (14–17).

<sup>10</sup> See Preston (1975) and Schubert (1984). On the censorship of the French version, see Langlois (913 n55) and Brée (35).

<sup>11</sup> It is also striking to note the echo of Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* in the third act, when the

*Caligula*, about the Roman Emperor of the same name, enacts on stage the tyranny that ensues when he pursues a pure vision of the absurdity of life to its logical end. Following the death of his sister, who was also his lover, the once admired Emperor defies all established laws and values and cruelly toys with and abuses his subjects until he is challenged and his death orchestrated by Cherea, the one courtier who really understands him. When first staged in France in 1945, it was read as a political allegory on Nazism, Fascism, absolutism, and the values of the 1930s (Lazere 213; Cruickshank 198-199; Bronner 52), even though that was not Camus's intention (Freeman 54). In Spain, as elsewhere, it was considered a timely political piece.

*Le Malentendu*, first staged in 1944, which draws on a folk story mentioned in *L'Étranger* (1942), is built around a dramatic misunderstanding – a mother and daughter who fail to recognize their returned kin, and who rob and kill him in order to fund a better life for themselves. Some critics have focused on its anguish, guilt and absurdity (Lazere 215; Thody 14), while others have linked its ambience to the occupation of France and the Vichy regime (Bronner 61; Freeman 56).

Camus's *L'État de siège* (his second play about Spain), while it is thematically close to *La Peste* (1947), was not, according to its author, an adaptation of the novel (Lazere 217). The Plague, which arrives in the Spanish port of Cadiz, is represented on stage as wearing a type of uniform with a medal, and his successful rise to power is aided by the collusion of the bourgeoisie, while the Church abandons her flock in their moment

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revolutionaries on trial refuse to name the killer of the grocer, instead claiming that he was killed by “the people”.

of need. For Richard J. Golsan this work, like *Révolte*, is praiseworthy for its “valuable insights into Camus’s perspective on the political situation in Spain” (407).

When it was staged in France in 1948, despite the prestige of those involved, *L’État de siège* was judged a failure by French critics, and indeed by Camus himself (Sonnenfeld 107; Cruickshank 190; Thody 107-08; Freeman 76). The play was interpreted politically in France and, according to Marsh, “in Jean-Louis Barrault’s production, the actor playing the part of *La Peste* wore a Nazi officer’s uniform” (19). Cruickshank’s take on this is an interesting one and he is critical, not of the costume and production (which was criticized by many), but of the “oblique references to Hitler, Franco and Stalin” contained within the play, which, he argues, “weakened the mythic power of *L’État de siège* by reducing it to a jumble of loosely related contemporary allusions” (212; 213). Of course, such contemporary allusions were what made it so appealing in Spain and both Golsan (408) and Thody (45) argue that, despite general criticisms of totalitarianism, the work can be read as a direct attack on Francoist Spain.

This view is supported by Camus’s response to one of his critics, Gabriel Marcel, who censured the author for setting the play in Spain, rather than in the Communist East; in Camus’s riposte, published in *Combat* on November 25, 1948, he rejected the idea, writing: “Why Spain? Because a few of us refuse to wash that blood from our hands (...) Because you and so many others have lost your memory” (2006, 298; 299). In Spain, as we shall see, the play appealed to certain politically-minded theatre groups.

*Les Justes*, premiered in France in 1949, deals with the political assassination of a Russian Grand-Duke at the hands of a revolutionary group, and focuses on the ethical dilemma facing the terrorists. For the protagonist Kaliayev, idealism and morality dictate

that he cannot carry out the assassination on the first attempt, because the Grand-Duke is accompanied by two children. He later completes his mission, and justifies the political killing in moral terms, for he is willing to accept punishment and his own execution for the life he has taken. Freeman notes, “like *L’État de siège*, *Les Justes* is about rebellion against tyranny, and it was intended by Camus to possess a relevance to contemporary European politics” (100).

It was this relevance to European – and particularly Spanish – politics that made Camus’s theatre, despite its dramatic deficiencies, so attractive to those who wished to stage a cultural attack on the regime. The censorship archives reveal the practitioners’ successes and failures in their attempts to stage his plays and, moreover, give us insight into the shifting practice of censorship under Franco.

### **Who staged Camus?**

Many of the applications come from university theatre groups (Teatro Español Universitario, TEU), which although dependent upon the state-sanctioned students’ union (Sindicato Español Universitario, SEU), were the site of some of the most innovative theatre taking place in Spain in the late 1950s and 1960s (Rodríguez Tejada 531).<sup>12</sup> From beginnings with a heavy focus on the classics in the early 1950s, many TEUs began to focus on foreign drama as well as the works of the Spanish realist generation and of previously-silenced dramatists, such as Valle-Inclán and Lorca. According to Alberto Castilla, who was active in the TEU sector from the 1950s and director of the TEU

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<sup>12</sup> The *University Law* of 1943 created 12 university districts, each with a TEU supported by the SEU.

Nacional from the 1964 until its demise shortly afterwards, it was marked by experimentation and “a form of cultural militancy and intellectual debate” (237).<sup>13</sup> Like the independent theatre that followed, the TEUs were generally opposed to the mainstream commercial theatres and dismissive of the bourgeois public, which it saw as supportive of the regime (Huerta Calvo).

Indeed, according to Gómez Oliver, despite the limitations imposed by the regime, the university became one of the few spaces where some freedom could be exercised (99). Signs of trouble from the university sector arose when a new generation of students (many of them the children of Nationalists) challenged the authority of the regime and demanded more freedom. Left-wing groups had also begun to organize secretly on campuses and, in February 1956, student protests led to the brutal repression of the student leaders by the regime. From the early 1960s, student activists attempted to infiltrate the government-sponsored SEU and they established contact with workers’ groups which were also attempting to challenge the power of the regime. One of the students’ key targets, according to Castilla, were the Departments of Cultural Activities of the SEU, from where there emerged “an intense, anti-francoist activity, via magazines like *Acento*, film clubs, seminars, conference series, poetry recitals and via the TEU, in its theatrical activities” (237).

Despite the regime’s best efforts, student opposition continued and came increasingly out in the open. In February 1965, a large demonstration in Madrid, supported by respected academic leaders, was brutally repressed. A year later, as Gómez Oliver tells us, a new students’ union, the *Sindicato Democrático de Estudiantes*

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<sup>13</sup> Quotations are provided in English translation, and footnote and bibliographical references are to the Spanish originals.

Universitarios, was established in Barcelona and became “a powerful instrument of anti-Franco agitation and of active and passive participation by thousands of students”, who sought access to culture and freedom of expression that was not filtered by the regime’s censors (103). The work of students in this context, he suggests, became a training ground for democracy (103). In fact, it was also in the university theatre sector where many of the illustrious figures in Spanish theatre served their apprenticeships.

It is clear then, that it is at the point when a new generation of students begins to question the authority of the regime that the theatre of Camus is chosen for staging. Later, some of the greatest independent theatre groups, many of which grew out of – and went much further than – the university groups, turned to Camus and other foreign dramatists to suggest alternatives to both the theatrical scene and the political status quo. These diverse independent groups were united in their opposition to the regime; their demand for greater freedom of expression; a desire to reach a broader public; the influence of foreign drama, ideas and techniques on their work; and a wish to innovate and experiment. They often created their own dramas, some of which were not text-based; when they staged the works of others, their choice of texts reflected their goals. It is evident that their staging of works by Camus, was a political as well as an artistic statement.

The few commercial applications to stage Camus’s theatre in the *apertura* period and beyond were associated with figures such as José Tamayo, who had long been associated with the reform of the Spanish stage and the incorporation of outside influences, and Adolfo Marsillach, who embraced the political potential of foreign drama in some of the most notorious performances of the dictatorship.

## The Censorship of Camus's Theatre in Spain

The fate of Camus's plays in Spain reflected the adaptive nature of the regime's censorship. Initially some attempts to stage his theatre were thwarted, but as social and political change affected censorship practice and both sides sought to exploit the liberalization of censorship practices for their own ends, Camus's theatre eventually made it to the stage. There are several reasons for this: Camus was not Spanish; he had parted ways with the Communist Party in the 1930s and while remaining a socialist, publicly rejected Marxism, most obviously in his articles for *Combat*, notably "Neither Victims nor Executioners" (1946), and in his essay *The Rebel* (1957); and he was perceived as less morally corrupt than other major foreign dramatists.

*Révolte dans les Asturies* was never staged in Franco's Spain and there is no record of any application to stage it.<sup>14</sup> It seems obvious that this is because theatre companies knew that any attempt was likely to fail. The other four plays were each the subject of several applications, sometimes timed to provoke the regime. Eight applications were made to stage Camus's *Caligula* between 1957 and 1971; *Le Malentendu* was the subject of eleven applications in total, the first in 1955 and the last in 1978; a total of eight applications were made to stage *L'État de siège* from 1960 to 1977. As for *Les Justes*, it was Camus's most successful play in Spain, with a total of fourteen applications between 1960 and 1973, its theme chiming with the rise in youthful

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<sup>14</sup> A Spanish edition, translated by José Monleón, was published by Cuadernos de Ayalga/Testimonio in Oviedo in 1978, after the dictator's death.

opposition to the regime.<sup>15</sup> José Monleón commented on its popularity amongst minority club theatres, attracted by its “ethical-political” theme, and noting that most adapted Camus’s play to simplify the argument about the justification of political violence (1973a, 66). Pedro Altares, too, noted that it was “an obligatory milestone” for university theatres in Spain (29).

Yet, despite the potential for *Caligula*, *L’État de siege*, and *Les Justes* in particular to be read as denunciations of totalitarian rule, the censors reading Camus’s work in Spain focused almost exclusively on the depiction of sexual morality and religion. We can assume, however, given what we know of them, that those wishing to stage the plays were keen to draw political parallels with the Franco regime.

If we trace the official censorship of Camus’s theatre in Spain, we can see how changes in political circumstances, as well as the regime’s ideas about foreign dramatists and concern for its own reputation, affected the reception of his work over time. The files also reveal the inconsistencies of the censorship system and the negotiations that took place behind the scenes.

### **1950s and early 1960s**

The first applications to stage Camus’s theatre were in the mid and late 1950s. In this period, the censors often acted as literary critics and their elitism is evident. The regime was well established, the power of the Church was still relatively strong, and the mainstream theatre offered a diet of mostly apolitical works. Nonetheless, the developing

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<sup>15</sup> While there was also an earlier application, dating from 1950, there is no evidence that it was staged (73/10264. File O-32/50).



university and independent theatre sector allowed for the representation of some alternative values, albeit to minority audiences. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the growing strength of the independent and student theatre sector saw the emergence of game-playing on the part of both theatre companies and the censors. The former embraced the opportunity to stage more provocative works; the latter believed both that damage could be limited by imposing restrictions on audiences and productions runs, and that the regime's 'liberal' credentials could be established by allowing them to be staged at all.

The first attempt to stage Camus's theatre in Spain came from the independent theatre sector when in January 1955 Dido Theatre company applied to stage *Le Malentendu* (*El error*) at the Instituto Boston in Madrid, in late January and early February.<sup>16</sup> The reports show concern about religion and highlight the censors' use of audience restriction. The files show that it was authorized by the censors, although correspondence from the artistic director (unusually for the time, a woman), Josefina Sánchez Pedreño, to José María Ortiz, Head of the Theatre Section, dated 15 September, states that the proposed production did not go ahead, as the authorization from the dramatist did not arrive on time. She also sought permission for staging at the International Institute for Girls in Spain in October and, to help her case, states that Camus's work does not appear on the *Index of Forbidden Books*. It was authorized on 18 October 1955 for one performance only, but on 25 October Pedreño sought and achieved

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<sup>16</sup> 73/9168 File 279-55. Alberto González Vergel, who had come up through the ranks of the TEU and would be Director of the Teatro Español in the 1970s, and an influential director in the post-Franco period, was the named director for the production.

permission for three more performances. The same company would be the first to stage *Caligula* – as a monologue rather than the whole work – in Spain in 1960, albeit with restrictions limiting it to a single performance, in a club setting, and for adults only.<sup>17</sup>

Similar restrictions in terms of audience and location were imposed on a 1958 application by the Teatro de Cámara del Instituto de Estudios Alicantinos to stage *Le Malentendu* in the Teatro Principal de Alicante, and another, in 1959, from the Teatro de cámara y ensayo Lope de Rueda in Seville to stage the same play.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, the report on the latter also reveals the censor’s view of Camus’s work as both non-partisan and too sensational and gruesome to be threatening.<sup>19</sup>

The files on *Les Justes* from this period demonstrate the elitism of the censors, who considered the play to be beyond the comprehension of Spanish audiences. Unease about the political content of the play is also evident. In April 1960, La Comedia Española applied to stage the play in a *cámara* performance at the Teatro Eslava, Madrid. In his report, Gumersindo Montes Agudo described it as a “tormented work”, and noted its thorny theme, which he deemed unsuitable for general audiences. In an echo of some of the aforementioned French responses, he also suggested that the play was too cerebral. Similarly critical and elitist in his judgement, Bartolomé Mostaza commented that it was not suitable for a general public due to its “excessive mental load”. The third censor, Fr

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<sup>17</sup> 73/9213 File 17/57. Dido (1954-1965) was interested, like all independent theatre groups, in challenging the status quo and bringing foreign and absurdist works to the Spanish stage (See Bloin, 2006; Cornago, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> 73/9274. File 254/58.

<sup>19</sup> 73/9299 File 221/59.

Manuel Villares, while acknowledging Camus's fame, was alert to the dangers posed by the political message of the play and, in particular, the "exaltation" of the type of revolutionary "who personally sacrifices everything for an idea and who does not wish to sacrifice innocents" and concluded that it was only suitable for *teatros de cámara*. It was authorized without cuts but limited to a single performance; the company applied again in 1963, with the same result.<sup>20</sup>

Applications to stage Camus's work from university theatre groups also began in the 1950s. The first of these was from the Teatro Universitario Nacional de Madrid, which applied in 1957 to stage *Calígula*. The application was made by Mario Antolín Paz, a key figure in the TEU in the 1950s and 1960s and later Subdirector General de Teatro from the late dictatorship and transition to democracy (1971-1976). The play was read by three censors. Manuel Díez Crespo described it as "defeatist", made no comment on the political or religious content, and considered it aesthetically good; Emilio Morales de Acevedo considered it "a superior work" with no expression of political or religious beliefs; but Fr Manuel Villares's verdict held sway. He condemned the author's "mad and degenerate" Calígula, a character who embodied all of the baseness and perversity of humankind and concluded that the play should not even be authorized for minority theatres. In an indication of the influence of the church at the time, and perhaps also hinting at the trouble that was already brewing in some of Spain's universities, despite the other two positive reports, the play was prohibited.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> 73/9321. File 39/60.

<sup>21</sup> 73/9213 File 17/57.

By the time of a new application from a university group, there is some evidence of a shift in the censors' interpretations of Camus's work and its potential impact. The application, dated 1960, from the Teatro Español Universitario (TEU) de Barcelona was to stage *Caligula* in the Teatro Guimerá for a single night in May 1961.<sup>22</sup> A moral report by Fr Avelino Esteban y Romero is noteworthy for what it reveals about the pragmatism of the censors. While acknowledging that this is "pagan work" in theme, protagonist and plot, he remarked that this unchristian circumstance was the reality of the times. Nonetheless, he suggested the elimination of certain scenes, which he deemed "atrocities" which went against both natural law and religion. The copy of the text in the files shows that his suggested cuts on six pages referred to Caligula's carnal acts, including incest, and to the stupidity and cruelty of the gods. Of particular interest, however, is the priest's suggestion that an additional political report would be advisable, and his further recommendations that it be restricted to over-18s, and that geographical limits to performances (he does not say where) should apply. In fact, Esteban y Romero was one of the few Spanish censors to refer to a possible political reading of the text, which is surprising considering both how it was interpreted in France, and the increasing anti-regime activism from the university sector in Spain. The verdict in this case also provides clear evidence of the regime's goal of using theatre restrictions (in addition to cuts) as a tool of censorship, and it was authorized for over 18s for a single performance with five cuts.

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<sup>22</sup> 73/10269. File 0-142/60.

So, while we can see a pattern of a more sophisticated form of control emerging, and the restricted approval of a work that was earlier considered problematic, the play *L'État de siège* remained out of bounds. The files on the application from the TEU de Oviedo in January 1960 reveal evidence of political apprehensions on the part of the censors, although morality is also mentioned in the reports, which overall underline the censors' attempts to protect Spain's image.<sup>23</sup> The Head of the Theatre Inspection Service warns that the play is "anti-Spanish" and "markedly tendentious", and states that "it is not worthy of public staging in Spain". Yet the author of the report, mindful of the need to take reputation and political circumstances into account, went on to propose a series of 25 cuts and further changes that would be necessary should it be decided that the play could be authorized. These included the suppression of depressing, immoral, blasphemous, nihilistic or existentialist expressions, and the removal of all references to Spain. The file also contains a letter from the Provincial Delegate in charge of censorship in Oviedo, which was sent with that report to the Director General of Cinema and Theatre at the Ministry in Madrid. The letter concludes that even with the outlined changes the play should not be permitted on stage. The obvious political parallels with, and specific references to Spain led to a verdict of prohibition on 28 January.

### ***Apertura (1962-1969)***

This period, which saw Spain becoming less focused on the past and more outward looking, brought about a shift in the official attitude towards Camus and his work in line

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<sup>23</sup> 73/9319 File 19/60.

with a general tendency towards increased tolerance of foreign social and political drama. The files show that the regime was increasingly cognizant of its standing abroad when making decisions about censorship. Yet there was a keen awareness on the part of the censors of the partisan use of foreign drama and their task, as they saw it, was to balance this against the potential for reputational damage to the regime. This was the period in which an opportunity to stage Camus's theatre in commercial venues was recognized and seized upon by practitioners; it is also the time in which minority language productions of Camus's theatre made it to the stage. Yet this was also a time in which various groups (in particular students and workers) challenged the regime's authority and we see evidence of the impact on the theatre of heightened political unrest.

Those wishing to capitalize on the easing of restrictions and to use Camus's reputation to mount a protest against the regime generally understood the limits of what the regime would countenance, so we see that despite the liberalization of the regime's cultural policies, there were no applications to stage *L'État de siège* during the *apertura* period. The renown of Camus and the political ideas associated with him was instead harnessed in productions of other, less obviously provocative, works which were much more likely to get past the censors and would be received as intended by a politically-minded, albeit often minority, audience.

Between 1966 and 1968 *Le Malentendu* was authorized several times for staging by *cámara* and independent theatre groups, each time without cuts, but limited to a single performance.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, applications to stage *Les Justes* for single performances or for

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<sup>24</sup> Teatro Estudio (Ferrol), 73/9274 File 254/58; as "*Tardía revelación*" (1967) File 351-67; 352-67; Ateneo in Oviedo 73/9299 File 221/59.

studio theatres were approved with few complications. The reports make clear that the precedent of authorization for *cámara* was the reason.<sup>25</sup> It nonetheless seems likely that those wishing to stage it were aiming to make a political point. For example, two of the applications (in 1968 and 1969) were made by Miguel Narros at the Teatro Estudio de Madrid (TEM). One of the most influential figures in twentieth-century Spanish theatre, Narros believed in its political and social role and, as Rosana Torres (2013) claimed, “he exercised his leftism and his anti-Franco militancy both in his daily life and on the stage”.<sup>26</sup>

This period also saw the first applications for Catalan and Basque versions of Camus’s work, both for *Les Justes*. This too, represents a significant shift since the early years of the regime, when performances in Spain’s minority languages were banned as the regime sought to consolidate a uniform national identity. In fact, even after performances in minority languages were allowed from the late 1950s, there continued to be restrictions on performances and editions of works translated into those languages as the regime stressed the unity of the state. Janet W. Díaz suggests that literature written in minority languages, “even when not prohibited, faced stricter and more capricious censorship than comparable compositions in Castilian”, but also makes the case that the use of minority languages in the cultural sphere was read as a form of protest (214). These productions, therefore, can be seen as politically engaged.

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<sup>25</sup> Applications from Grupo Occidente in 1968 and Sociedad Excursionista “Manuel Iradier” in Vitoria in 1969 (both 73/9321 File 39/60).

<sup>26</sup> 73/9654. File 170/68.

The first Catalan application in 1965, by the Teatre Experimental Català, led to authorization of *Els justos* for over 18s with a single cut (Kaliayev's suggestion that, with the help of God, he would be blinded by hate and thus able to carry out the murderous act), and viewing of the dress rehearsal; the same conditions applied to *Gizon-zuzenak* in 1967, but without cuts. Jarrai, the theatre company involved, was formed in San Sebastián in 1958 and reflected a new type of Basque theatre, open to outside influence. Arantxa Iurre tells us that Jarrai staged works by both foreign and contemporary Basque dramatists, and she claims that the group's goals were social and political as well as artistic (80).<sup>27</sup> A Catalan production of *Le Malentendu* (*El malentès*) by the Adrià Gual theatre company and directed by Ricardo Salvat was also authorized for over 18s with a single cut in 1966.<sup>28</sup>

The censorship rules meant that once a play had been approved for a certain type of production, similar productions would normally also be authorized. This was always conditional on political circumstances. An increase in student opposition to the regime meant that an application from a university theatre group in Salamanca in late February 1969 to stage *Les Justes* was viewed with a less than sympathetic eye by the censors.<sup>29</sup> A national state of exception had been declared on 24 January for a period of three months

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<sup>27</sup> *Els justos*, 73/9493 File 30/65; 73/9579. File 25/67. It is surprising that the usual cut demanded was not enforced in the Basque version.

<sup>28</sup> 73/9565 File 288/66. His next production at the Teatro Romea was Brecht's *La bona persona de Sezuan* in December the same year. Salvat was, until his death in 2009, one of the most important critics and directors of Catalan theatre, whose influence spread much further than that region.

<sup>29</sup> 73/9702. File 86/69.



in the name of “the defence of the peace and progress of Spain and the exercise of the rights of Spaniards”.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, in a speech at the time, Fraga, the Minister in charge of censorship, denounced “the escalation in university disturbances”, which justified the government’s action.<sup>31</sup> In this context, he insisted on a new review of the play. Bartolomé de la Torre, in his report, stated that he did not consider the work itself to be dangerous, but argued for caution in the politically sensitive climate. These concerns were echoed in the report on the same play by two other censors. Martínez Ruiz concluded that in “normal circumstances” the play could be authorized but suggested that these were not normal times; Muelas too, argued that the play could be used to “cause incidents”, presumably ones that involved an attack on the regime’s authority. In the end, however, it was authorized without cuts for *teatro de cámara*, with an inspection of the dress rehearsal. This may have been a pragmatic decision, as to ban it at a time of heightened tension when it had previously been authorized would surely have been used by the student opposition and other critics of the regime to condemn the lack of freedom in Spain.

The greatest change in the *apertura* period was the authorization of commercial productions of Camus’s theatre, as it revealed a regime balancing the fear that the plays

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<sup>30</sup> In the decree, which was signed by Franco and his Vice-president, Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, the regime blamed “minority actions that were systematically directed at disturbing the peace and public order of Spain” and linked to “an international strategy that has reached numerous countries” – presumably since May 1968. (*Decreto-Ley 1/1969*, 1175).

<sup>31</sup> Text of speech, dated 25 January 1969, in File “Declaraciones y Discursos”. MECD. AGA. IDD 104.04 Topogr. 82-68 Ca. 576.

and the ideas they contained could reach, and potentially influence, a broader audience against its belief that it could use such productions to claim that there was no democratic deficit in Spain.

The first commercial application for *Calígula* dates from October 1962 and was for staging in the prestigious Teatro Bellas Artes in Madrid in November.<sup>32</sup> It was made by the influential and respected director, José Tamayo. While not a political radical, Tamayo was a theatrical innovator who brought to the commercial stage, not only challenging foreign drama by Thornton Wilder and Bertolt Brecht, but also the best of thought-provoking Spanish drama.

The censors' reports reflect a shift in attitude towards the foreign. Bartolomé Mostaza described the work in his report as both a tragedy and a philosophical thesis, but also as intellectually honest. Marcelo García Carrión stressed the philosophical side of the play, praised its literary worth, and read it as “a condemnation of all forms of absolutism”. The madness of the protagonist, he argued, removed any danger from the work, although, in an indication of his dim view of the public, he suggested that certain cuts relating to adultery and incest were needed due to the cultural level of the average spectator. The verdict was not delivered in time for the programmed performances, and we know that it opened in Madrid a year later, in October 1963 (Zatlin 119), following an initial staging at the Teatro Romano in Mérida in June, which was sponsored by the Dirección General de Bellas Artes of the Ministry and linked to the state-sponsored

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<sup>32</sup> 73/9420 File 294/62. Translation by José Escué Porta. Tamayo later recalled the success of *Calígula*, which lasted four months on the Madrid stage and then toured Spain for almost three years, a contrast, he noted, with its lack of success in New York, where it lasted a mere four days in 1963 (20).

*Festivales de España*.<sup>33</sup> The reports on the Mérida production in *ABC* claimed, incorrectly, that this was the Spanish premiere of the play; we know in fact that a complete version of the play was first staged by the TEU Barcelona in May 1961.

The review of the Madrid production by Enrique Llovet made the point that Camus chose to write plays because “the stage is an ideal platform for the conversion of ideas into action” (63), a sentiment that was obviously shared by those electing to stage his work in Spain. The review in *Triunfo* by the conservative intellectual, Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, was perhaps more typical of how theatre reviews in the press functioned as part of an overall system that denied or ignored the political while stressing the liberalism of Spain. He praised the rigour and professionalism of the production and saw in it proof that an “intellectual” theatre could also be successful (69).

The next application for a commercial production of Camus’s theatre came from the Berta Riaza-Ricardo Lucía theatre company in December 1965, when they sought permission to stage a version of *Les Justes* based on Escué’s translation in the Teatro Arniches during the 1966 season.<sup>34</sup> This young company had enjoyed success in 1963 with a staging of Arthur Miller’s social drama *All my sons*, with its critique of capitalist greed and patriotism betrayed, and were making a name for themselves as innovators in terms of the dramatists they chose to stage. The application was read by the censors Vázquez Doderó and Mostaza, both of whom judged the play suitable for over 18s, albeit

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<sup>33</sup> Jesús Delgado Valhondo reported in his review that the Mérida premiere was a resounding success and that the Director General de Bellas Artes, along with other officials, was in attendance (65-66).

<sup>34</sup> 73/9523 File 239/65.

with reservations about its political content. It was then referred to Fr Artola and Pedro Barceló for further comment.

In his report, Fr Artola acknowledged the reputation of the play amongst the educated classes, recommended one cut (the same reference to God's help as in the Catalan version), and suggested adding a note to the programme, providing an interpretation that distanced it from the regime. Barceló concurred, and the play was authorized for over 18s with the agreed cut and with the condition that the staging had to reflect the historical period in which the action is set, and could not draw parallels with Spanish circumstances. The censors had found a balance that satisfied them: further applications for the same version of the play all led to the same verdict.

The most complex file on Camus's theatre from the *apertura* period relates to an application for a commercial production of *Le Malentendu* in 1969, and reveals the impact on censorship practices of the political battles of the day.<sup>35</sup> By now, the weaknesses of the regime were increasingly evident, opposition to it was overt, and the Catholic Opus Dei and the more liberal factions of government were in open conflict.<sup>36</sup> The application, dated May, to stage the play at the Poliorama Theatre in Barcelona in September, came from the newly-formed Gemma Cuervo – Fernando Guillén Company, but crucially with the support and experience of Adolfo Marsillach as director. The

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<sup>35</sup> 73/9717 File 207/69.

<sup>36</sup> The Opus Dei "technocrats" were extremely conservative socially but led the largely successful economic reform that began in the late 1950s; they clashed with some others, like Manuel Fraga, who were more socially liberal and believed in introducing some reforms, albeit in order to hold on to power (Smith, 2018 p. 276; Preston 1986, 14).

actors, according to César Oliva, wished to highlight their political commitment (30). The fact that Marsillach was involved would have set off alarm bells amongst the censors, as he had staged some of the most politically provocative theatre of recent times.<sup>37</sup> The files reveal how the regime sought to manage this potentially scandalous production.

It was read by three censors, Fr P. Artola, Mr Bautista de la Torre and Mr Vázquez Dodero, on 3 June. Artola's report simply referred to the fact that it had previously been authorized; Bautista de la Torre expressed some reservations about the servant character but judged it suitable for over 18s. He suggested the elimination of the word "God" at the end but wondered if this cut was acceptable in such a well-known work and sought the views of other censors. Vázquez Dodero limited his judgement to a single word: "prohibited".

As there was no agreement among the initial three censors about how to interpret the play, it was sent to a further two censors on 10 June. Fr Cea damned the play as "an ungodly, blasphemous and atheist work", criticized Camus and his characters for their unwillingness to accept God and their failure to understand why He permitted evil. He went on to denounce the crude portrait of evil in the play and argued that God was represented as pitiless, cruel, dehumanized and tyrannical before suggesting prohibition in accordance with the censorship legislation, articles 14.1 and 17.1.<sup>38</sup> Aragonés, on the

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<sup>37</sup> In 1968, for example, he had staged Peter Weiss's *Marat-Sade* to great critical acclaim and consternation on the part of the authorities (73/9544. File 149/66). In a note on the production, published in *Primer Acto*, he hinted that the fact that *Le Malentendu* had been written in "occupied territory" made it relevant to Spain (37).

<sup>38</sup> Article 14.1 prohibits the disrespectful representation of religious beliefs and practices, and Article 17.1

other hand, was not convinced that the servant would be read as representing God and, therefore, considered the play acceptable for over 18s, without cuts.

Such discord led to the convocation of a plenary session of the censorship board, where it was read by a total of sixteen censors. Most of the discussion was around the treatment of God and religion, and there were various interpretations of the work, its importance and the perceived threat to the spectators' morals.

In his plenary report, Fr Artola was seemingly swayed by the views of some censors who interpreted the work as demonstrating "the spiritual sincerity of Camus". Moreover, his comments reveal how the regime sought to frame problematic works for public consumption, suggesting that the programme notes should focus on the work's "anguished sincerity", while avoiding reference to Camus's atheism, and insisting that the director should not turn the work into a "blasphemous exaltation", but rather "a painful exploration of darkness". Manuel Díez Crespo described the play as denigrating the human condition without offering possible salvation, while Martínez Ruiz commented that Camus seemed to be moving closer to God, and Elorriaga simply read it as a crime story.

For a Miss Morales, despite its cruelty and unsuitability for commercial venues, it was a worthy play; for Muelas it was "a magnificent work"; García Carrión found that it failed to reach the dramatic heights of Camus's other plays; Mampaso, while noting its pessimism, praised its quality; and, for Tejedor, the literary superiority of the work overrode any political concerns. Galí went even further, suggesting that the play could be improved by the removal of the last utterance, "¡No!", and replacing it with a guttural

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prohibits anything that attacks the Catholic Church, its dogma, its moral and worship, Orden 9 febrero 1963, p. 3930.

sound, arguing that the play would lose nothing and the spectator would be left with hope. Several censors referred to the international reputation of Camus, presumably conscious of the potential negative reflection on the regime if it banned his work.

Unsurprisingly, in the context of the rise of Opus Dei in government, some expressed disquiet about possible religious interpretations of the play. The reports of the Church censors held particular weight, as other censors, such as Suevos and Ortiz, openly acknowledged their influence. Both Miss Sunyer and Mr Soria were also troubled by blasphemous phrases. Moreover, we see evidence of moral relativism in the comments of Martínez Ruiz, who noted that, as plays by Sartre had already been authorized in Spain, the more honest and searching works by Camus should not pose a problem.

The censors' elitism can again be seen in their assumptions about the intellectual abilities of the theatre-going public. Indeed, what the play was criticized for in France – its over-intellectual content at the expense of theatricality – was what saved it in Spain. Fr Artola noted that the cerebral nature of the play meant that more naive spectators would not be in danger and that others – presumably the less ingenuous, minority audiences – would not be scandalized, as they recognized it as a classic of world theatre. Soria argued that the dangers of the play were mitigated by its complexity and Fraga suggested that the audience restrictions meant that only minority – and therefore more educated – spectators would see it.

Following the plenary, the company agreed to cut negative allusions to God and prayer, and also the aforementioned final “¡No!” uttered by the old servant in response to a plea for God's help. In the fraught political climate of the day, such references had political overtones, and a play known for its fatalistic commentary on the absurdity of life

and the absence of God, could be read as a direct challenge to the powerful Opus Dei technocrats in government. Nonetheless, with these cuts, it was authorized for over 18s. In the end, the censors need not have worried so much as, according to Oliva, it was a flop and failed to complete its projected three-month run (30).<sup>39</sup> A. Martínez Tomas, writing in *La Vanguardia*, described the play as “out of date”, hinting that Camus was also; suggested that Marsillach’s innovations in terms of lighting, rhythm and voice failed to convince; and noted that the response from the public was a mixture of enthusiastic applause and hostile shouts of “get off the stage”(49). José Monleón, in his review for *Triunfo*, claimed that Marsillach wished the public to understand that this was “a political, moral and philosophical allegory”, and not a simple anecdote, nor an anti-Catholic work, but rather a didactic piece about the need for freedom (1969, 20).

### **The Late Dictatorship**

By the early 1970s, the politics of performances were more overt and the censors’ varied interpretations of the plays highlighted increasing fractures in the unity of the regime. Opposition to Francoism was growing and plans for the future were being made; even within the regime it was becoming clear that change was inevitable. The political mood was reflected in some flexibility, which saw previously unacceptable works make it to the stage, although there were no guarantees and this openness was punctuated by severe clampdowns.

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<sup>39</sup> He mentions, however, that it did go on to enjoy a successful run in Valencia.



Applications by independent groups to stage *Caligula* and *Le Malentendu* were generally unproblematic in this period, a reflection of both the political times and the performance precedents.<sup>40</sup> The most striking application to stage *Le Malentendu*, for example, came from a branch of the Sección Femenina in June 1973 (la Compañía teatral Regiduría Sección Femenina, run by Antonio J. Cobo Sánchez, with Alfredo Osset Casteleiro as Director), and from the same company and director for staging in Colegios Mayores in late 1973. This organization was the Women's Section of the Spanish Fascist Movement, the Falange, more usually associated with the staging of children's theatre. The decision of a branch of the Sección Femenina to stage Camus's existential play, with its negative portrait of female characters who betray the idea of family in the name of freedom, is an interesting one, demonstrating the difficulty of simply dismissing "everyday" Francoist organizations and the people involved with them as pro-regime and instead suggesting that they were complex, human, and reflective of alterations in the political landscape.<sup>41</sup>

*Les Justes*, for its part, attracted applications from some of the most politicized independent theatre groups, presumably because they saw its theme of political revolution as relevant to the times. Most applications were successful for single performances and with a single cut (the same allusion to God as before), with two

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<sup>40</sup> *Caligula* was staged by the Valle-Inclán Co. in Cadiz in 1971, 73/9863 File 347/71; *Le Malentendu* was staged with the usual cut by a club theatre in Tarragona in 1971, another in León in March 1973 (for two weeks), the TEIN in Almería in April 1973. 73/9717 File 207/69.

<sup>41</sup> For more on the complexities of this organization and how it changed and developed over time, see Lorée Enders (1999).

exceptions: in February 1972, when Histrión 70 (Orense), applied to stage the work in a theatre competition and, in April the same year, an application from the Centro de Iniciativa y Turismo (Tolosa) for a Basque production by the Grupo “Iztueta”.<sup>42</sup>

Histrión 70, which was founded in Orense in 1970, was known for staging both its own works and those of “silenced” Spanish dramatists (Plaza and González Yuste 61). *Los justos* was initially authorized with a single cut as before, then withdrawn and a new application made, as the Sainz de Robles’s version was unacceptable to the author’s representatives (the files say to the author, but he was dead). The theatre company sought an urgent response to the new application based on Escué’s translation but did not receive it in time for the production to go ahead.<sup>43</sup>

In the early 1970s, increased activism by Basque nationalists, some of it in support of striking workers, led to increased hostility towards the region from the regime, which would have had an impact on the prohibition of Basque-language plays. The 28 April 1972 application for a Grupo “Iztueta” production of *Les Justes* (*Gizon-Zuzenak*) was prohibited for its breach of norms 14.1 and 15.<sup>44</sup> The unnamed local censor declared it “terrorist propaganda” and the report by a member of the central Censorship Board,

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<sup>42</sup> Histrión 70: 73/9920. File 90/72 (the original application). They won 3<sup>rd</sup> prize (*ABC*, 23 May 1972, p. 81). *Gizon-Zuzenak* 73/9940 File 261/72. Applications to stage *Les Justes* also came from the Corral de comedias (1973) 73/9523 File 239/65 and Sociedad “El Fénix” de Educación y Descanso, Tarragona (most likely linked to a syndicate) (1973) 73/9321 File 39/60.

<sup>43</sup> 73/9523. File 239/65.

<sup>44</sup> Orden 9 febrero 1963. See footnote 37 for 14.1; article 15 outlawed works that fostered hatred between races, classes or social groups, or that promoted moral or social divisions.

Albizu, was similarly clear: “the play contains a type of exaltation of the terrorist and, given the special circumstances in which the Basque country finds itself, I consider it wise to deny authorization.”

In contrast, a clear example of a successful political performance of Camus’s work came when the well-known TEI Pequeño Teatro staged *Les Justes* in Madrid, at their theatre, the Pequeño Teatro de Magallanes, in January 1973, and then brought it to Seville in October.<sup>45</sup> While the files indicate that the play was authorized with the usual cut, we know that the company adapted the work to eliminate doubt about the end justifying the means.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, critic Monleón declared that this adaptation was contrary to Camus’s intentions and claimed that the dramatist’s fundamental idea that the terrorist must pay for his political action in order to justify it, “does not appear in the TEI’s version” (1973b, 53). This was clearly a partisan version tailored to a specific public (Spain in 1973, rather than France in the 1940s) and stressing the justification of political action without the moral dilemma that is at the core of Camus’s play.

It was also during this period of both heightened unrest and hope for change, that *L’État de siège* finally made it to the Spanish stage. Bululú, an independent theatre company which had been involved with Marsillach’s notorious production of *Marat-Sade*, made an application in September 1972, based on a version of the play by Federico Carlos Sainz de Robles. This theatre group was clear about its goals: “artistic creation at the service of the concrete needs of our society” (104). Surprisingly, *El estado de sitio*

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<sup>45</sup> 73/9523 File 239/65. *ABC* (Seville edition) reported that people queued to see it there (Arjona 65).

<sup>46</sup> See Monleón 1973a, p. 67 and 1973b, p. 53.

was authorized, albeit restricted to *teatros de cámara*.<sup>47</sup> Bululú may have been testing the waters with this application, however, as they did not specify location or dates for the production.

The censors' reports make for surprising reading. García Cernuda commented on the pessimism and nihilism of the work, yet argued that it was "too intellectual" to be dangerous and concluded that it ought to be limited to *cámara* "for its bitterness, total lack of spirituality, hopelessness", which, he argued, could make it dangerous for the general public. Luis Tejedor also judged it suitable for *cámara*, but his report is the most revealing. It is extremely positive and refers not only to the greatness of the author, but also to the "cultured" translator (perhaps assuming that it was Sainz de Robles senior) who together created a work that he describes as "well-intentioned". The third censor, Florentino Soria, recognized the play as a socio-political parable and a reflection of Camus's philosophy, and suggested – like so many other censors – that the complexity of the play (he refers to the metaphysical and symbolical aspects) alleviated any dangers. The censors' focus on Camus's philosophy, rather than on the politics of the piece, which initially seems bizarre, can be explained by the fact that Sainz de Robles's version of the play contained no references to Spain; Camus must have been spinning in his grave. In

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<sup>47</sup> 73/9969. File 494/72. It was Federico Sainz de Robles Rodríguez (son of Federico Sainz de Robles Correa, the journalist, critic, essayist, dramatist and occasional censor) who translated Camus while a student, rather than his better-known (at the time at least), father. The son would later be known for his role in the Spanish judicial system, particularly during the transition period, and for his defense of democratic rule during the attempted coup in 1981. See the entry on him in the Real Academia de la Historia by Hernández Ibáñez.

this bowdlerized form, it was authorized for *cámara*, without cuts, but with monitoring of the dress rehearsal. For those wishing to perform it, the fact that it was about overthrowing a tyrant still made it worth staging, as did the fact that its original setting would have been familiar to many who saw it.

A few weeks later, in October 1972, Jesús Sastre, who was a member of Bululú but here applied in his own name, made an application to stage Sainz de Robles's translation in the commercial Teatro Goya. In the section of the form where the details of members of the company are required, he has written "undetermined to date". This appears to be a ploy by Bululú to obtain authorization for a commercial production for the 1972-73 season. While the censors seem oblivious to Sastre's theatrical home in Bululú and were positive in their reports, they were insistent that the play could not be staged in a commercial venue and was only authorized for a single function in a *teatro de cámara*. The reason given was the political circumstances: opposition to the regime was on the rise, in particular from students. Censor Ruiz Martínez's report and verdict of prohibition is indicative. He cited the political intentions of this particular version of the play; the political activity on university campuses; the representations of clashes between the police and the public; and the presence of cruelty.

Although there were fewer applications in this period from the declining university theatre sector, some of the files make for interesting reading.<sup>48</sup> In 1971, for example, *Calígula* was authorized without cuts for a production by a group from the

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<sup>48</sup> Files on applications from a student theatre company in Cuenca (73/9274 File 254/58) to stage *Le Malentendu* in 1972 and from the University theatre group "Episteme" in Alicante (73/9321 File 39/60), to stage *Les Justes* reveal nothing new.

University of Deusto, despite what censor Zubiaurre referred to as the “political-moral problem of the tyrant’s death”.<sup>49</sup> His concerns were logical, given the political atmosphere in the Basque country following the Burgos Trials of December 1970 in which several ETA leaders were sentenced to death in a military show trial that backfired to give a propaganda victory to the accused and their supporters. Notwithstanding the political circumstances, however, the majority of censors obviously felt that to censor it would cause further reputational damage to the regime, particularly given that it had earlier been authorized for the commercial stage and featured in the programme of the state-sponsored tour, the Campaña Nacional de Teatro 1970-71.<sup>50</sup>

One of the most interesting student applications from the period was an application from the El Grupo “Taular – 12” in July 1973 to stage *L’État* at a student residence in Madrid. This application was based on a translation by Pedro Laín Entralgo and his wife, Milagro Laín Martínez, which differed from the Sainz de Robles’s one most obviously in its reference to Spain.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the prologue to the published translation, dated August 1971, frames the play for a Spanish reader in a manner that is revealing of

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<sup>49</sup> 73/9900 File 639/71.

<sup>50</sup> Official notification of the plays and companies involved was published in the state’s legal bulletin. See Orden de 30 de septiembre de 1970.

<sup>51</sup> *El Estado de sitio*, Alianza, 1972. 73/10035. File 326/73. A former Falangist and an intellectual of the right, who held strong religious beliefs, Laín would not have been perceived as a threat by the censors, yet he also supported students and stood up to the regime in 1956 and, as a result, lost his post as rector of the University of Madrid.

the need to square a drama that can easily be read as anti-Franco and is therefore likely to be censored, with the desire to bring the work and its message into the public domain. He praises Camus for choosing a Spanish city to represent “the most elevated and most profound” aspects of mankind (3); he links the old order represented in the play to *l’Ancien Régime*, thus distancing it from Spain and from the current order there; he identifies the rule of the Plague with “the tyranny of pure and absolute reason”; and in rather biblical language refers to “the rebellion and self-denying sacrifice” of Diego, which heralds a new dawn (he terms it “a third reign”) of love of life, liberty and justice (4). Yet the prologue concludes on a different political note, with an interesting reference to the alliance of Church and politics in the City of Cadiz during the discussions of the Cortes of Cadiz held in a Franciscan oratory in 1811, which led to the liberal Spanish Constitution of 1812 and which, among other things, sought to replace the absolute power of the Head of State with the sovereign power of parliament. This, in 1971, could be read as a political statement about the future of Spain.<sup>52</sup>

The censors, who saw the published version as part of the application, could not agree on the interpretation of the play or its authorization. Jesús Vasallo praised it and thought it suitable for over 18s; Fr Artola considered it only suitable for *cámara* and stressed the need to monitor the dress rehearsal because of the references to Spain; the third censor, Alfredo Mampaso, opted for prohibition. Citing articles 14.2 and 15, he argued that, while the ideas of thinkers such as Sartre and Camus could no longer be

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<sup>52</sup> For more on the Spanish Constitution of 1812, see Hamnett (1977).

ignored by the cultured man, the fact that the action was set in Spain caused a problem. If the play was set in an imaginary country, he suggested, it could be authorized.<sup>53</sup>

The political balancing act that censorship required was an increasingly tricky one. General Franco had handed the reins of government to Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco in June 1973, yet he too was an aged hardliner. The desire for change from within and beyond the regime was growing, and the theatre reflected social and political unrest and tested established limits more and more. An internal letter from the Head of the Theatre Promotion Section to the Subdirector General of Theatre warned that it was not easy to prohibit the work of Camus in this day and age and, in particular, for university performances. Moreover, he suggested that because Sainz de Robles's version of the play, albeit without reference to Spain, was authorized for *cámara*, this made the prohibition of the work a problem.

The warning was heeded, and two further reports were sought, yet this only added to the confusion. Fr Cea considered it dangerous in the political climate of the day and urged prohibition, stating: "it sounds like a call to rebellion". Recognizing that if the play had been authorized before, it might be again, he also suggested a long list of cuts (15 in the first act and 4 in the second). The final censor, Antonio Zubiaurre, was pragmatic in his verdict, opting for *cámara* only and with five cuts (including references to the military-style police, the Guardia Civil), but commenting that the Spanish setting was not such a problem given the abstract and fantastical nature of the piece. Indeed, he considered the work to be an example of Camus's "Christian ethics" and argued that it

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<sup>53</sup> Article 14.2 prohibited a denigrating or undignified representation of political ideologies or attacked state institutions or ceremonies that should be treated with respect. Orden 9 febrero 1963, p. 2930.



was not practical to view the rehearsal, as it was in a university. It was finally authorized on 14 July with the suppression of all references to Spain, although the central theme was clear enough to an audience looking for a political message.

### **The Transition to Democracy**

Franco died in 1975 and the slow process of transition to democracy began. While initially the regime's censorship continued, albeit inconsistently applied, in January 1978, it was removed. It was replaced by an alternative system of control, established by Royal Decree (Real Decreto 262/1978) and details of a new classification system were outlined in new legislation in early April (Orden 7 abril 1978). Under this new scheme, plays were categorized as suitable for all; for over 14s; for over 18s; or "S"-rated (not suitable for the average spectator and excluded from state funding). By now, political messages, allowable in the press, were less in evidence on stage and many involved in the theatre took an opportunity to challenge moral and sexual, rather than political, taboos.

In this period, the reception of Camus's theatre experienced one final change. We saw how from initially being considered an enemy of Franco's Spain with works too immoral and politically dangerous for Spanish audiences, Camus and his plays gradually came in from the cold, considered less deviant than those of other foreign dramatists and less ideologically problematic than the political works of Spanish authors. In the end, he came to be seen in Spain much as he was viewed elsewhere: as one of the great figures of contemporary European literature.

The clearest evidence of change was the response to two applications to stage *L'État* from July 1976 and 1977 (both the Laín Entralgo version).<sup>54</sup> While these applications were made after the death of Franco, these were still uncertain times regarding censorship and, more broadly, the political future of Spain. The application from the Este de España theatre company (Valencia), dated July 1976, led to authorization for over 18s with cuts to eliminate references to Spain. The second of these, an application from the Grupo Universidades Laborales Logroño, in February 1977, is more interesting.

The files reveal disagreement on the interpretation of the play. Some still considered it a problem due to its Spanish setting, the representation of the *guardia civil* and the armed forces as well as the intention of those wishing to stage it, but others found that the play went beyond a criticism of Spain and was acceptable once the set and costumes were not suggestive of Spain. The most surprising aspect was the judgement of some censors that the work is canonical. Barceló viewed it as “a traditional title, unproblematic”, and recommended it for over 14s. Guerra Gutiérrez described it as a “bellísima” work, very suitable for students, for what it represented in terms of literary movements and theatrical trends, and also judged it suitable for over 14s. It was eventually authorized without cuts, for over 18s, an indication of how much times had changed.

By April of the following year, Camus’s reputation in Spain had been completely rehabilitated, as the application from Grup Espontani for a Catalan version of *Le*

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<sup>54</sup> 73/10035 File 326/73.

*Malentendu* shows. While the killing at its heart and its undermining of “a positive meaning of life” meant that the play was not approved for the widest possible public, under the new legislation it was authorized for over 14s, without cuts, and was deemed “a work of transcendence, exploring the depths of human existence”.<sup>55</sup>

## **Conclusion**

As we have seen, the official reception of Albert Camus’s theatre in Spain from the late 1950s until the transition period reflects the changes in political circumstances and censorship legislation. Plays that were initially banned were later authorized with restrictions, before eventually – for some censors at least – being considered canonical. Their reports point to the impact of his international reputation on the censorship of his work, highlighting the differing treatment of foreign and domestic dramatists.

The censors’ discussions of Camus’s plays and the aims of those seeking to stage them perfectly exemplify the game-playing and balancing act of censorship. Camus’s so-called “Mediterranean moderation” (Bronner x), his rejection of revolutionary Marxism, and his moral stance allowed his work to be presented to the censors as less threatening, while his standpoint on Spain and his representation of political violence against an oppressor were the political messages that those staging his work wished to present to an audience in particular of student and independent theatre that was primed to receive it. Zatlin notes that Camus’s “existentialist analysis of guilt and responsibility appealed to the moralistic vein of Hispanic culture” (127), yet many of the censors failed to grasp his

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<sup>55</sup> 73/10231 File 243/78.

undermining of conventional, bourgeois morality. For those opposed to the regime, his moral stance was about exposing myth and hypocrisy and, as Brée tells us, Camus saw lucidity as “the first of the moral obligations of men” (30), a notion that resonated with many opposed to a society constructed on the myth of a superior Nationalist Catholic race and of a Spain that was made “una, grande y libre” (united, great and free) by the dictatorship.

The dynamics of censorship in Spain can be seen in the negotiations for advantage in competing political messages directed at the theatre-going public. Whilst Camus’s privileging of philosophical and intellectual concepts over dramatic action meant that his theatre was ripe for exploitation as anti-regime propaganda by those allied to the left-wing opposition to the regime, ironically, this also served the censors as an excuse to suggest that it was not appropriate for the commercial stage, as it would not be understood. The regime could, therefore, claim liberal credentials by allowing his work to be staged, even if in reality the audience for it was extremely restricted.

In the end, it is difficult to state with any certainty which side was most successful in terms of political censorship and game-playing. While most of Camus’s works generally did not reach or persuade large audiences in Spain during the dictatorship, the performances of these plays were themselves acts of solidarity. Indeed, it can be argued that productions of Camus’s works contributed to a counter-culture that kept hope and an alternative political identity alive among a group of mostly young practitioners and activists, many of whom were already, or were to become, influential in the Spanish theatre. The list of those involved in the staging of Camus in Spain under Franco reads

like a who's who of democratic theatre, and the work they did then was a sort of training ground for later practices.

Ultimately, the perceived failings of Camus's drama, which led to such criticism in France, were not seen as such in Spain, where it was not simply staged as theatre, but rather as political protest. Indeed, those who staged Camus's theatre echoed Diego's plea in *L'État de siège* in their address to the Spanish public: "Take off your gag and shout with me that you are no longer afraid".

**Funding:** This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council under Grant AH/E007686/1.

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