

THE FRIGHTFUL STAGE AND THEATRE TRANSLATIONS IN SALAZAR'S PORTUGAL¹

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Abstract

The present study aims to examine and compare the different censorship methods used by the Portuguese authorities with regard to printed and performed theatre translations. Despite the fact that translations normally enjoyed a relatively more privileged position in *Estado Novo* Portugal than national literature — especially, if the author happened to be a prominent literary figure of international acclaim — they were also subject to severe censorship on stage. Nevertheless, if the play was intended for publication in book form, the authorities showed considerably less concern. Censorship procedures even diverged widely depending on whether the literary work was supposed to be published or put on stage. Through a detailed analysis of works by Shakespeare, the article sets out to give possible explanations as well as representative examples of the conflicting nature of censorship practices in *Estado Novo* Portugal.

Keywords: Theatre Censorship; Book Censorship; Translations; Information Control; Repressive Censorship; Prior Censorship; Estado Novo; William Shakespeare; Direcção Geral de Serviços de Censura; Inspeção Geral dos Teatros.

Resumo

Este estudo procura examinar e comparar os diferentes métodos de censura usados pelas autoridades portuguesas, com enfoque nas peças de teatro traduzidas, quer impressas, quer encenadas. Apesar das traduções de peças teatrais normalmente beneficiarem de uma posição relativamente mais privilegiada no Estado Novo em Portugal, quando comparadas com a literatura nacional - especialmente se o autor fosse uma figura literária proeminente com aclamação internacional -, elas estavam igualmente sujeitas a um severo controlo da ditadura nos palcos. No entanto, se a tradução da peça tivesse como fim a publicação de livro, as autoridades mostravam muito menos preocupação. Os procedimentos de censura divergiam muito, consoante o texto teatral se destinasse à publicação ou a ser levado a cena. Através de uma análise detalhada das obras de Shakespeare, este artigo propõe-se explicar, bem como apresentar exemplos representativos da natureza conflitual das práticas de censura no Estado Novo em Portugal.

Palavras-chave: Censura ao Teatro; Censura ao Livro; Traduções; Controlo da Informação; Censura Repressiva; Censura Preventiva; Estado Novo; William Shakespeare; Direcção Geral de Serviços de Censura; Inspeção Geral dos Teatros.

1. Censorship Imposed on Books

Unlike theatre productions, books were not subject to prior censorship in *Estado Novo* Portugal, but rather repressive censorship. Problematic books were as a rule confiscated by the authorities after being published. Sequestration of books after publication, nevertheless, might

inflict serious financial losses on the publishing houses, and even force them to bankruptcy. This, in fact, acted as a deterrent, and was a deliberate mechanism of repression. Moreover, imported books and other sorts of publications were inspected by custom officials, while private mailing was occasionally monitored by post office clerks (Azevedo, 1999: 77).

The provenance of the books is usually indicated in the censorship reports. Most of them were provided by the *PIDE* (International and State Defence Police), the Portuguese Post Office, or the Customs Services. In addition, several books were presented probably by the publishers or translators themselves for approval or requested for censorship by the official bodies. Books were generally examined by the censors of the *Secção de Livros* (Book Censorship Section), which was established in Lisbon in 1934 and organically belonged to the *Direcção Geral de Serviços de Censura* (General Censorship Directorate) (Gomes, 2006: 115).

The assumption that repressive censorship imposed on books was not completely efficient is also confirmed by several censorship reports admitting the authorities' inability to control the book industry. Censors — albeit unwillingly— often authorised previously published books which had circulated unnoticed in the country for years, including, among others, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (R4261/1949), *A Farewell to Arms* by Hemingway (R5154/1959), a French translation of *Gretta* by Erskine Caldwell (R7847/1966), and a collection of works by the "Angry Young Men" (R8051/1967).

The publication of books before 1974 such as those by Miguel Torga, Jean-Paul Sartre, Joseph Stalin or Vladimir Ilyich Lenin also suggests that authorities were not capable of filtering out all the supposedly politically detrimental publications. Teresa Seruya implies that in the absence of prior censorship, publishing houses could more easily run the risk of publishing politically less reliable authors, since authorities could not possibly devote close attention to every single book published in the country (Seruya, 2010: 138). Moreover, publishers and booksellers also had their own methods of evading the vigilance of the censorship bodies: The more democratically inclined publishing house *Seara Nova*, for instance, distributed its publications first to its subscribers and supporters, and there were also a small number of bookshops which clandestinely sold prohibited or suspect books to reliable domestic customers (Seruya, 2010: 138-9).

These inconsistencies on the part of the Portuguese authorities as well as the lack of prior censorship as opposed to censorship imposed on the theatre, cinema, television, and the press prove that the Salazar administration did not seem to attach particular significance to books and literature in its political apparatus, especially not in a country where the illiteracy rate was still extremely high.² Teresa Seruya and Maria Lin Moniz call attention to the fact that Portuguese censorship bodies consciously made a distinction between the uneducated "mass" who were supposedly more prone to harmful influences and the so-called elite who were regarded as being more "strong-willed and not easily influenced" (Seruya and Moniz, 2008: 14). Books which were written in languages other than Portuguese or publications sold at an elevated price were more likely to be approved by the censors, since they were available only to a restricted group such as the French translation of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* in English (R9120/1971) or the very expensive collection of English crime stories in French entitled *Crimes admirables* (R 6185/1957).

2. Theatre Censorship in *Estado Novo* Portugal

As far as theatre censorship is concerned, both prior and repressive censorship were common practice during the *Estado Novo* era. Besides the fact that artistic directors and theatre

managers were required to submit their lists of plays before the start of the theatre season, every playscript was thoroughly inspected by the censors of the *Inspecção Geral dos Teatros* (General Inspectorate of Theatres). If the playscript happened to be approved by the officials, the performance still had to be observed at the final rehearsal by at least three censors so as to guarantee that neither the actors nor the director would alter the officially authorised text to any extent as well as to ensure that the actors were all decently dressed (Cabrera, 2008: 35-36).

Carmen Dolores, a well-known Portuguese actress of the era, also founder of the *Teatro Moderno de Lisboa* (1961-1965) recalls an incident when — due to a short lapse in memory mainly caused by the stressful presence of the censors in the auditorium — she deviated from the original text and improvised a few lines. The censors immediately noticed the alteration, but fortunately, it was not considered to be a threat to society, and, therefore, no measures were taken to ban the play (Dolores, 1984: 140).

Dolores also complains about the difficulties she and her ensemble encountered with respect to submitting plays to the General Inspectorate of Theatres. She states that they proposed eight works, while the office authorised only one or two of their repertoire. In fact, the early cessation of *Teatro Moderno* was also due to bureaucratic delays on the part of the Portuguese censorship authorities, which finally forced the theatre company to fail to meet the terms of their contract with the Gulbenkian Foundation, which resulted in the suspension of sponsorship payments (Dolores, 1984: 141).

Indeed, the complicated and unnecessarily protracted censorship as well as bureaucratic procedures severely hindered the work of all theatre practitioners in the *Estado Novo*, and it might also have served as the first line of filtering and controlling artistic productions of the era. Authorities' deep fears of subversive ideas and works created a very complex bureaucratic system, which allowed only the most determined theatre makers and companies to realise their artistic ambition.

Examining the censorship reports on theatre performances in Salazar's Portugal, one of the most conspicuous elements for the researcher is that theatre practitioners constantly attached theatre translations in book form to their applications. It was very often the case that while the theatre translation had been authorised to be published, or more precisely, the publication seemingly did not give rise to any discontent with the governing forces, the play was indeed bowdlerised or banned, when it was staged.

3. William Shakespeare on the Portuguese Stage

William Shakespeare's works in printed form, for example, were never censored. Nevertheless, five censorship reports still stored at the National Archives of the Torre do Tombo reveal that such a legendary author was considered a potential danger to the Portuguese readers: three collective volumes in English: *Four Great Historical Plays* (R6114/1957), *Four Great Comedies* (R6115/1957), *Four Great Tragedies* (R6113/1957), and two Portuguese translations: one of *King Lear* (R2317/1943), and another of *Julius Caesar* (R3025/1947). All of these plays were eventually authorised by the censors.

A numerical comparison between works by Shakespeare published in book form and works put on stage suggests that Shakespeare seemingly was more popular among Portuguese readers than among spectators (See Table 1).

Shakespeare's Works Published in Book Form	Shakespeare's Plays Staged
56	37

Table 1: Shakespeare Works Published and Staged in Portugal between 1933 and 1974

A great number of the theatre performances were indeed censored. According to Table 2, eight of the thirty-seven performances were bowdlerised, and one play was even banned twice. Intriguingly, the only Shakespearean play which was banned from the stage under the Salazar regime was *Julius Caesar*.

Banned	<p>Julius Caesar, Ateneu de Coimbra, Coimbra (1964)</p> <p>Julius Caesar, Teatro Moderno de Lisboa, Lisbon (1964)</p>
Bowdlerised	<p>Twelfth Night, Teatro Clássico Universitário do Porto (1953)</p> <p>Much Ado about Nothing, RTP (1960)</p> <p>Romeo and Juliet, Teatro Nacional D. Maria II (1961)</p> <p>The Merchant of Venice, Teatro da Trindade (1963)</p> <p>The Merry Wives of Windsor, Círculo de Cultura Teatral (1963)*</p> <p>The Taming of the Shrew, Vasco Morgado (1964)</p> <p>The Merry Wives of Windsor, Círculo de Cultura Teatral (1966)*</p> <p>The Merchant of Venice, Círculo de Cultura Teatral (1966)*</p> <p>Othello, RTP (1968)</p>

* The play was not premiered.

Table 2: Shakespeare Productions Censored in Estado Novo Portugal

In 1964, two Portuguese theatre companies: the *Teatro Moderno de Lisboa* and the *Ateneu de Coimbra* intended to commemorate the Shakespeare quatercentenary by putting *Julius Caesar* on stage. However, neither of them was authorised to do so. Although the relevant censorship report is missing, a telephone interview with the playwright and translator, Luiz Francisco Rebello confirms that *Julius Caesar* was also prohibited on stage in the *Teatro Moderno*. According to Rebello, the theatre directorate of the *Teatro Moderno* submitted a French translation to the censorship committee, and Rebello himself also produced a basic Portuguese outline of the original text. The play was nonetheless suppressed. As a result of the prohibition, Rebello chose the much lesser known *Measure for Measure*, which was authorised without any delay (Rebello 2011).

The other company, *Ateneu de Coimbra*, would use the translation by the anglophile scholar and translator, Luis Cardim. The fact that the translator was a liberal-minded republican and a long-standing opponent of the *Estado Novo* regime might not have facilitated the authorisation of the performance, but it was clearly not the only reason for the ban.

Cardim translated *Julius Caesar* in 1925, and also published an essay on the play a year later, entitled "The Killing of Julius Caesar in Shakespeare's Tragedy" (Torre, 1987: 291). João Almeida Flor calls attention to the oddity of Cardim having translated the play

in 1925 when it had already been translated twice in the 10-year span from 1913 to 1923. Although Flor also stresses that in the absence of adequate historical evidence, any theory concerning Cardim's motivation in translating *Julius Caesar* should be regarded as mere speculation, he adds that the topicality of the play in the Portugal of the First Republic deserves more academic attention: the history of the sixteen-year-long First Republic was characterised by short-lived military insurrections and autocratic governments of clear dictatorial tendencies such as, for example, the administration of Sidónio Pais, who himself was also assassinated. *Julius Caesar* would accordingly provide a fruitful platform for debating contemporary social and political issues of the period as well as general questions about the role of violence as a viable method for removing dictatorships in the course of history (Flor, 2004: 254).

Evidently, the play — due to its perceived subversive nature — was still considered a potential threat under Salazar's authoritarian administration. In 1964, when Humberto Delgado, opposition politician and ex-presidential candidate, founded the *Frente Portuguesa de Libertação Nacional* (Portuguese National Liberation Front) in Rome, no official entity would authorise a theatre performance which could have been easily interpreted by the audience as an incitement against Salazar's dictatorial rule. Consequently, they rejected the theatre company's request on the paradoxical grounds that the play would require innumerable cuts, which would be unacceptable in the case of the work of a famous playwright such as Shakespeare (R7620/1964).

The cuts requested by the censors are indicated in pencil in the report, and most of these problematic texts dwell on the question of tyranny or propagate democracy. For instance, when Brutus finally decides to kill Caesar, he speaks about his doubts whether after coronation Caesar would abuse his power, but in the end he comes to the conclusion that power would certainly corrupt Caesar eventually, and compares him to a serpent's egg, which should be killed in the shell (*Julius Caesar* 2.1).

Julius Caesar's repeated refusal to accept the crown in front of the crowd at the procession undoubtedly bears a certain resemblance to Salazar's initial reluctance to accept any ministerial position in the Dictadura Militar. Propaganda later also accentuated Salazar's almost unearthly and virtuous character: he became Prime Minister for one reason and one reason alone and that was to serve the best interests of his nation.

With reference to the nine plays which were authorised only with cuts, Table 3 shows that fifty-three small extracts were omitted altogether at the censors' request: twenty-five phrases were deleted from the plays for referring to adultery, twenty because of their sexual connotations, seven extracts for containing abusive language, and one scene for its homosexual implication.

53 cuts from 9 playscripts

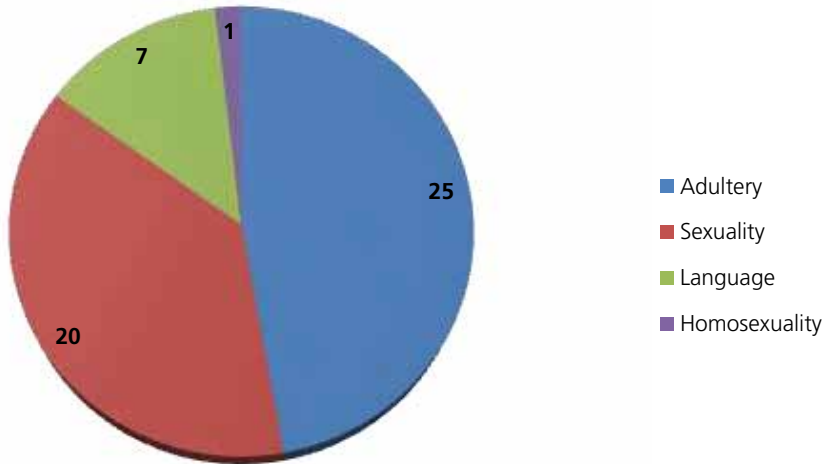


Table 3: The Cuts Required by the Portuguese Censorship Committees from Shakespeare Productions in Estado Novo Portugal

The censors' almost paranoid fears of sexual innuendos deprived the audience of several classic Shakespearean puns as well as from their brilliantly executed translations. For example, in the play *Romeo and Juliet* when the two servants Gregory and Sampson refer to taking the women's head (The heads of the maids) or virginity (maidenheads), the Portuguese translator, Luís Sousa de Rebelo played with the Portuguese words *cabeço* (small hill) and *cabeça* (head) in the text (*Romeo and Juliet* 1.1). Both words were blue-pencilled of course. Moreover, words with any reference to adultery such as *cornos*, *chifres* and their derived forms meaning horns or being cuckolded or the word *veado* (buck) were equally eliminated by the censors (R6153/1960, R7162/1963, R7356/1963, R8232/1966).

4. Conclusion

According to the censorship reports stored at the National Archives and at the National Theatre Museum of Portugal, forty Shakespeare productions were subject to inspection during the *Estado Novo* era, but only ten playscripts were censored, and only one of them was banned on political grounds. None of the remaining nine plays were blue-pencilled because of their political connotations, but exclusively as a consequence of their allegedly offensive nature to public decorum. It appears that with the exception of *Julius Caesar*, Portuguese authorities did not see any political threat in Shakespeare's plays.

It is also very important to note that even if the translation was published after the play was staged, no cuts were required in the printed form later on, nor did the Portuguese authorities ban any previously published works by Shakespeare due to the supposedly obscene phrases or scenes they found unacceptable on stage. In addition, comparing the unnecessarily complicated and lengthy censorship process required for theatre and entertainment productions to the

procedure imposed on books, it seems reasonable to assume that the Salazar administration showed far more concern and adopted a comparatively more hostile attitude towards theatre performances than towards book production.

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² In 1930 61.8% of the Portuguese population was illiterate, while in 1940 the illiteracy rate was still 49.0%, in 1950 40.4%, and in 1960 31.1% (Nóvoa, 1992: 476). According to a UNESCO study, for example, in the 1940s in Belgium only 3.3%, in France 3.6%, in Hungary 4.7% of the population could not read and write (UNESCO, 1957: 33).

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