Selecting a foreign content or theme for a play is one type of intercultural theatre.¹ Such a choice might appear to demonstrate a playwright’s lack of interest in local culture. However, as Erika Fischer-Lichte points out in *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre*, “the starting point of intercultural performance is not primarily interest in the foreign, the foreign theatre form or foreign culture from which it derives, but rather a wholly specific situation within one’s own culture or wholly specific problem originating in one’s own theatre” (153). If the familiar culture dominates in this type of intercultural performance, then why does a playwright decide to set a play in a foreign context?

In the case of theatre from Spain and Latin America, Juan Villegas notes that playwrights sometimes encode their ideological positions, especially in situations of political repression (54). Displacing the setting of a play to another cultural location conceals the immediate, local implications of the political message, an important tactic for a playwright producing under conditions of implicit or explicit censorship. Since a play script produces meaning for a specific audience in a limited cultural context, Villegas urges critics always to consider in their readings the dates when the text was written or the play premiered (51). If such crucial information is missing in the reading, critics can dehistoricize the play, examining only its aesthetical workings and ignoring its ideological position and meaning for the spectators, which, Villegas warns, “lleva a los críticos a proponer su universalidad, aunque los destinatarios del texto teatral lo perciben primariamente como un mensaje político de significación inmediata” (54).

Playwrights of the Costa Rican New Wave Theatre, who began writing in the 1980s and continue to write in the present, have displaced the settings of some of their plays. However, the
reasons for that displacement often do not stem from political repression. Costa Rica, which abolished its army in 1949 after the Civil War, has been relatively free of dictatorships and threats to its democratic government. As tensions escalated in the Central American region between 1975 and 1980, writers and artists in Costa Rica experienced much freedom of ideological expression. According to playwright Samuel Rovinski, the Costa Rican government adopted a stance “no sólo, tolerante sino promotora de una corriente crítica social que ponía en la picota tanto a los dictadores del continente como los casos de injusticia social o de abusos de autoridad que aparecían en la propia sociedad costarricense” (61).

Alvaro Quesada Soto identifies the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua in 1979 as a turning point in the political climate for writers and artists in Costa Rica:

El teatro y la cultura en general—cuando no sea la cultura de masas o el embrutecimiento comercial—pasan a ser considerados actividades superfluas, o bien peligrosas y subversivas…cuando la intervención norteamericana en la región y su consiguiente manipulación ideológica, provocaron una histeria filofascista donde toda posición crítica ante la ideología oficial venía a ser considerada antipatriótica y sediciosa. (80)

This sharp shift to the right in Costa Rican politics could appear to explain why Víctor Valdelomar sets his play, El ángel de la tormenta (1990), in the Languedoc region of France during the thirteenth-century Catholic crusade against Catharism. Some of the characters in the play are historical figures. However, other characters are invented and certain events are different from those recorded by historical sources. These changes make it clear that the play is commenting on Costa Rica’s situation during the Nicaraguan counterrevolution supported by the United States during the 1980s.

While it could be that the playwright wished to address this volatile issue more indirectly, other facts suggest that the displacement is not primarily motivated by fear of political repression. El ángel de la tormenta was published and staged by Teatro Ubú at the University of Costa Rica in 1990, three years after the Central American Peace Plan, proposed by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, was signed by the other Central American presidents and the same year that the Sandinista government was defeated in elections by an opposition coalition. Additionally, the play Ultima noticia, written in 1979 by Guillermo Arriaga, published in 1983 and premiered in 1984 by the Teatro Universitario, is set in contemporary Costa Rica and openly
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questions the freedom of the Costa Rican press during the Nicaraguan revolution and counterrevolution.³

If fear of political repression is not a primary motive for writing a play about medieval France, a careful reading of the play script reveals that Valdelomar establishes parallels between France and Costa Rica in order to question the nature of power and the viability of the current political system, consisting of nation-states, to negotiate solutions in the age of globalization. In the staging, the wardrobe and scenery suggest medieval France, and the characters do not use the voseo when they speak; however, the events that transpire clearly refer to Costa Rica.⁴

Quesada notes that historical displacement is a strong tendency in the New Wave theatre. He lists as examples the plays 1856 (1984) by Juan Fernando Cerda and Rubén Pagura, which is set in the Costa Rican past, and Juana de Arco (1986) by Cerda, which dramatizes the French heroine’s fight against English invaders. Quesada insists upon these historical plays’ relevance to contemporary Costa Rica:

Son obras que recurren a la representación de conflictos del pasado para establecer un paralelo con la crisis de identidad y soberanía nacionales en un presente dominado por la intervención económica, política y militar de los Estados Unidos y los organismos financieros internacionales. (82)

Whether they are set in Costa Rica or in another cultural context, the New Wave plays express a concern for the political and economic situation of contemporary Costa Rica.

Although all of the New Wave plays engage the Costa Rican socio-political context, very few of these plays are set outside of Costa Rica. For example, Deb Cohen, in a review of the anthology edited by Carolyn Bell and Patricia Fumero, Drama contemporáneo costarricense: 1980-2000 (2000), calls attention to how Jorge Arroyo’s Sentencia para una aurora (1987) “no cabe bien con las otras, siendo una obra histórica sobre una persona extranjera en vez de reflejar la actualidad costarricense” (209). Out of the ten plays comprising the anthology, only Arroyo’s play does not take place in Costa Rica. Looking at the settings of plays not included in the anthology produces similar results, with the vast majority set in Costa Rica. As exceptions to this trend, besides El ángel de la tormenta and Juana de Arco, Leda Cavallini’s monologue and ballet Io coronada de claveles (1998) features the Greek mythological character of Io from Aeschylus’s Prometheus Bound, and Jorge Arroyo’s monologues Sentencia para una aurora and Azul Marlene (1997) are set in Europe.⁵ In the first of Arroyo’s plays, the historical figure Mata
Hari speaks the night before her execution in France during World War One, while in the second play, a transvestite who dresses like the actress and singer Marlene Dietrich talks to Jewish cellmate Otto in a Nazi prison during World War Two. All of these plays with non-Costa Rican settings, except Io coronada de claveles, have been staged in San José.

The issues involving the nation-state and politics, which El ángel de la tormenta discusses, coincide with those presented in recent scholarly debates about globalization. Although there is a tendency to consider globalization to be an economic process, Fernando Mires points out that the term originated as a political concept:

La verdad es que si hay que aceptar el término globalización, no podemos omitir el momento político en que surgió, y éste no fue otro que el marcado por el derrumbe de las dictaduras comunistas en la URSS y en Europa del Este. Incluso, estoy seguro de que si no hubiese terminado el “mundo comunista”, nadie hablaría hoy de globalización. (24)

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, which ended the cold war, there arose a questioning of the nation-state. According to Roland Robertson, the national society, an idea that is central to globalization, entered a phase of uncertainty in the late 1960s and had developed crisis tendencies by the early 1990s as the international system became “more fluid” with the “end of bipolarity” (58-59). While many agreed that the nation-state was in crisis, they did not believe that it would disappear, but instead would continue “to be a fundamental locus of power and cultural referent for rooted and uprooted citizens, for those who live at the centre and for the millions who live at the margins” (Waisbord). What would change, however, would be the nation state’s exclusive claim to loyalty. As Carlos Pabón notes,

En los tiempos de la globalización el Estado nacional se hace cada vez más anacrónico y otras formas de adhesión e identidad se disputan su lugar. Aún cuando las naciones Estado continúen existiendo, la erosión sostenida de las capacidades del Estado nacional para monopolizar lealtades estumiliará la formación de identidades divorciadas de Estados territoriales. (375)

When facing political problems, people might not necessarily align with the nation-state and can find solidarity beyond the nation’s borders in the search for resolutions. The dates when Valdelomar’s play was written and performed, in addition to the fact that it looks beyond national borders when confronting problems in Costa Rica, suggest that it questions the role of the state in determining the political future in the age of globalization.
María Bonilla, in the introduction to the published play script of *El ángel de la tormenta*, groups Valdelomar’s plays into two stages. She observes that each of his earliest plays, including his most successful work *Como semilla ‘e coyol*, *Macedonio el viejo*, the unpublished *Artelio Cornetas y los papanatas* and *Todos te queremos mucho, Aurelia*, “aborda algún tema que afecta a la Costa Rica de hoy en día: inmigración, guerra, despojo del campesino, militarismo” (1). *El ángel de la tormenta*, and *Aoyaque, el espíritu del fuego* are examples of the later stage of more mature productions in Valdelomar’s dramaturgy, when, according to Bonilla, the playwright begins to focus on historical events. Valdelomar looks to these events no con la intención de reconstruirlos, ni siquiera de hurgar en la realidad histórica, sino para establecer analogías con lo contemporáneo y enfocar causas y consecuencias de hechos pasados, que sean válidas hoy en día para comprender hechos presentes y delinear proyectos futuros. (1)

I agree with Bonilla that Valdelomar does not situate *El ángel de la tormenta* in medieval France in order to instruct the audience about the crusade against Catharism or to question the veracity of the historical record. In fact, the play presents very little information from historical sources on Catharism. Moreover, comparing the play to these sources makes it clear that the playwright alters a key event in the play, making it more analogous with contemporary Costa Rica.

Interestingly, critic Andrés Sáenz, as a member of the audience during the performance directed by Bonilla, does not mention in his review what the play’s historical French setting could signify to Costa Ricans (332-33). However, placing the play’s treatment of the historical theme in the context of the date of the play’s publication and performance (1990) suggests that the play encourages the spectators to link the crusade to eradicate heresy in medieval France to the use of Costa Rica by the United States as a staging ground for contra attacks against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua during the 1980s.

Costa Rican readers and audience members of *El ángel de la tormenta*, having felt the political, economic and cultural impact of the previous decade stemming from the Nicaraguan counterrevolution, would be able to understand that the play’s foreign setting alludes to the current situation in their own country. The tens of thousands of Nicaraguan refugees who came to Costa Rica during that decade would be a visible reminder of the conflict taking place within Costa Rica and its northern neighbor (Honey 8). Additionally, Costa Ricans would be aware of previous conflicts between the two nations. As Martha Honey, in *Hostile Acts*, explains:
Costa Rica and Nicaragua have a long history of territorial and political hostilities, stemming from 1824 when Costa Rica annexed the Nicaraguan province of Nicoya. This touched off a series of border disputes and squabbles. In the 1850s, North American adventurer William Walker invaded Costa Rica from Nicaragua in an unsuccessful bid to set up a slave state. Following Costa Rica’s 1948 civil war, the losing side twice—in 1948 and 1954—launched attacks on the central government with the help of the Somoza dictatorship. Likewise, anti-Somoza forces staged several abortive invasions from Costa Rica, and in the late 1970s, Costa Rica gave arms, political support, and military bases to the Sandinista rebels fighting against Somoza. (9)

Before presenting a thorough analysis of the United States’s involvement in Costa Rica during the 1980s, Honey reviews these prior events in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, which “helped pave the way for the creation of the contras’ Southern Front during the 1980s” (9).

After the Sandinistas in Nicaragua defeated the Somoza regime in 1979, the resulting victory soon led to the development of different war fronts on Nicaragua’s borders with Honduras and Costa Rica. Unhappy with the leftist Sandinista government, the United States supported counterrevolutionary attacks launched by contra troops from military bases in Honduras during the Reagan administration in the 1980s. Another front of war developed on the Costa Rican/Nicaraguan border. The Anti-Sandinista group ARDE, led by Edén Pastora and Alfonso Robelo, who had been active in the Sandinista movement in the late 1970s and become disillusioned with the social revolution, fought along this border zone until the late 1980s. While the United States could openly support the military operations on the Northern Front, it had to secretly support the Southern Front because “the Reagan administration was barred by Congress from taking military actions aimed at toppling the Sandinista government and was permitted to use the contras only to interdict the supposed flow of arms north, from Nicaragua to the FMLN guerrillas in El Salvador” (Honey 11). The Costa Rican constitution, prohibiting “the presence of any foreign military group—contra or U.S.—without the legislature’s prior approval,” was another obstacle to the actions on the Southern Front (Honey 11).

Despite pressure from the United States to sanction military action against the Sandinista government, Costa Rica’s President Luis Alberto Monge (1982-1986) “adopted an official policy of ‘unarmed neutrality,’ under which the thousands of Nicaraguan exiles in the country could engage in peaceful political activity but not in armed resistance” (Honey 11). This stance,
however, did not stop the Southern Front’s military campaign. Instead, it maintained a covert presence; if contras were discovered operating within Costa Rican territory, they temporarily left Costa Rica to give the impression of complying with the neutrality policy. At the same time, the United States exerted political and economic pressure on Costa Rica to abandon its neutrality.

Ultimately, these pressure tactics proved unsuccessful. Costa Rica’s President Oscar Arias (1986-1990) maintained the policy of neutrality and promoted a peace plan to negotiate diplomatically with the five Central American leaders an end to the region’s conflicts. As a result of his efforts, “Arias was able to outmaneuver a US administration obsessed with defeating the Sandinistas militarily, and in 1987 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize” (Molina and Palmer 123). Although the military aggression ended after the presidents signed the peace plan in 1987, Costa Rica continued to feel the impact of the Nicaraguan revolution and counterrevolution. Many of the Nicaraguan refugees remained in Costa Rica, and more Nicaraguans arrived in Costa Rica in search of employment.

While El ángel de la tormenta does not focus on Nicaraguan immigration, it does emphasize how U.S. dominance attempted to subordinate Costa Rica’s political position during the Nicaraguan counterrevolution. Two of the eight characters in Valdelomar’s play are historical figures: Pedro de Castelnau, the papal legate, and Raimundo VI, the count of Toulouse. The first of these historical characters arrives in an unnamed, fictitious kingdom in the Languedoc region in southern France. After excommunicating Raimundo, Pedro de Castelnau requests King Orosio’s help in mounting a crusade against heresy in Toulouse. He asks Orosio not to defend Raimundo and to permit troops from the county of Turin and the duchy of Gascony to establish camps in the kingdom, from where they will attack Toulouse. Orosio is unable to decide immediately whether to support the legate. The king and Queen Irene are concerned about opening a trade route to Flanders and are reluctant to violate the holy peace, Paz de Dios, an agreement among the nobility in the neighboring lands. Even if, as Teodolfo, their head guard, points out, the war would not take place in their kingdom, Irene, saying “igual nos afecta, Teodolfo,” recognizes that the Flemish merchants would not risk traveling to their kingdom (8). Additionally, Orosio and Irene wish to conceal a secret from Pedro de Castelnau and the Catholic Church: since Irene has been unable to conceive a child, Orosio has impregnated their servant, Cármina, and he and Irene intend to pass off the child as their own.
When the women descend to the dungeon to hide from the legate, they meet Dicuil, a mysterious prisoner who identifies himself as “un caminante”, a wanderer who brings his knowledge of nature to different lands. After Irene and Cármina leave the dungeon, Pedro de Castelnau interrogates Dicuil:

LEGADO. No trates de engañarnos. ¿Quién eres?
DICUIL. Un caminante.
LEGADO. ¿Dominico?
DICUIL. No.
LEGADO. ¿Cátaro entonces?
DICUIL. No.
LEGADO. ¿Albigense?
DICUIL. No.
LEGADO. ¿De la orden de los humillados?
DICUIL. No. (12)

First, Pedro de Castelnau asks Dicuil if he is a friar from one of the orders sent by the Catholic Church to preach against heresy. When the prisoner says no, the legate asks him if he is a heretic, a Cathar or an Albigensian, which Dicuil also denies. As the questioning continues, Dicuil admits that he was in Toulouse but says that he comes from far way, that he is neither from Toulouse nor the kingdom where he is a prisoner. Suspicious that Dicuil’s answers and knowledge of herbs are signs of heresy, Pedro de Castelnau orders the guards to torture Dicuil and burn the parchments in which he had compiled his learning.

The historical characters, the geographical setting, and the mention of Catharism during Pedro de Castelnau’s interrogation of Dicuil indicate that El ángel de la tormenta takes place during the early 1200s. However, the historical, geographical, and cultural distance in the play from contemporary Costa Rica is not as vast as it initially seems. Valdelomar creates the dramatic situation so that the audience and readers can see that Orosio and Irene’s kingdom faces the same situation that Costa Rica did during the 1980s when the United States pressured the Central American nation to allow the contras to attack from its territory the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. The parallel between the kingdom and Costa Rica becomes even more apparent after a massive flock of black birds attack the kingdom. Calling the birds “demonios”, after characterizing the crusade on an earlier occasion as “la gloria de defender al cristianismo…de
derrotar al demonio,” Pedro de Castelnau blames Toulouse for unleashing the deadly assault (10, 16). As the legate urges Orosio to commit to the crusade against Toulouse, Alcuino, a merchant, confides in Irene that he saw foreign troops caring for the birds in the Bosques Azules region of the kingdom. Alcuino also informs Irene that he had given Dicuil shelter, and that Dicuil was arrested after encountering the foreign troops with the birds in Bosques Azules. Alcuino’s information reveals that Pedro de Castelnau and the foreign troops, who are present in the kingdom without Orosio’s permission, deliberately ambushed the kingdom, blaming it on Toulouse so that Orosio, upset and enraged, would commit to war against Toulouse. The legate and the troops’ actions are similar to those taken by the United States against Costa Rica in the 1980s, as documented by Martha Honey: “Costa Rica, the region’s only real democracy, was to become the base for what is known in the covert trade as ‘simulated terrorism,’ actions designed to be blamed on one’s enemy and to cause a public outcry. Simulated terrorism is a well-established CIA tactic” (341). This deceptive tactic is used in an attempt to persuade both Orosio and the Costa Rican state to abandon their policies of neutrality.

Although the attack against the kingdom in El ángel de la tormenta is analogous to acts of violence in Costa Rica by the contras, covertly supported by the CIA, that were blamed on the Sandinistas, historical sources do not mention the use of this maneuver by the Catholic Church in the crusade against Catharism in Langeudoc, nor is there evidence suggesting that the Cathars physically attacked Catholics. The only violence prior to the crusade is that against the Church sponsored by the count of Toulouse, Raymond VI. Malcolm Lambert relates that Raymond, while never abandoning the Catholic faith, employed mercenaries and “was guilty of violently anticlerical acts, imprisoning the abbots of Moissac and Montauban, pillaging churches and chasing away from their bishoprics the bishops of Vaidon and Agen” (63). These actions, and the count’s refusal to swear to a “peace of the legates” in 1207, “precipitated a breakdown of relations between him and Pierre de Castelnau” (Lambert 99). Ultimately, the count continued employing mercenaries, and the church excommunicated him. The Papal Bull of May 1207 justified this decision on grounds “which ranged from Raymond’s maintenance of Aragonese who ravaged the land and his confiscation of the patrimony of the bishop of Carpentras, to the protecting and receiving of heretics” (Lambert 99-100).

In Valdelomar’s play, the Paz de Dios that Orosio is reluctant to break by supporting military action against Toulouse, corresponds to the historical “peace of the legates”. Lambert reports that
this oath, which “lasted with minor infractions for some six years,” was “sworn to by the leading magnates of the area, including Peter of Aragon” (99). The antagonism between Raimundo and Pedro de Castelnau in the play also is faithful to historical accounts. However, in *El ángel de la tormenta* the legate in his appeal to Orosio mentions neither the count’s employment of mercenaries nor his violent acts against the church:

Desde que aprobó y apoyó el comercio de Tolosa con Persia, sabía muy bien en qué lío se estaba metiendo. Ahora los herejes lo rodean como moscas, predicen sus insolencias, insultan la Autoridad Espiritual y proclaman a voces el nuevo conocimiento…

conocimiento que puede llevar a la cristianidad al caos. Muy pronto habrá un hereje detrás del conde de Tolosa aconsejándolo, si es que ya no lo hay. (9-10)

Instead, the legate emphasizes the count’s economic and religious practices. According to Pedro de Castelnau, Raimundo knowingly courted trouble by approving trade with Persia. This economical expansion to the East opened the door for heretics to arrive and preach their beliefs, challenging the dominant Christian orthodoxy. By emphasizing Raimundo’s ties to the East, Valdelomar approximates the situation to that of Costa Rica after the Nicaraguan Revolution. Just as the Catholic Church disapproved of Raimundo’s looking to Persia for an economic transformation that brought with it new religious beliefs, the United States was unhappy with the Sandinistas’ Marxist and socialist ideals, ideologies that originated in Eastern Europe. The legate’s fear that a heretic is or soon will be advising Raimundo politically corresponds to U.S. concern that the Soviet Union is influencing Nicaragua’s political decisions. In each case, a hegemonic authority, the Catholic Church or the United States, feels threatened in an area where it previously asserted power. The invented kingdom in Valdelomar’s play, like Costa Rica during the 1980s, finds itself pressured by the hegemonic power to support the destruction of alternative beliefs or ideologies.

Additional comparison of *El ángel de la tormenta* to historical accounts of the crusade against Catharism reveals that Valdelomar tends to depart more from these sources than to follow them closely. Writing an intercultural play that displaces the action and time to medieval France, Valdelomar intends to address what is happening currently in the local context. It is likely that the Costa Rican readers and audience members, or those familiar with the Costa Rican context, would not know much about Catharism. Therefore, the playwright adapts the historical material so that the audience and readers can relate it to their own experiences. Besides setting the play in
Languedoc during a time of peace threatened by hostilities between Raymond and the papal legate, the playwright does not present much more information about the historical events; nor does he explore the Cathars’ beliefs. As I have shown in the case of the character Pedro de Castelnau’s appeal to Orosio, Valdelomar selects and emphasizes the aspects from the crusade’s historical record that correspond most closely to the context of the Nicaraguan counterrevolution in Costa Rica during the 1980s. For the most part, however, Valdelomar does not follow the crusade’s history but rather creates symbols and events to represent the situation that Costa Rica faced in the covert war between the United States and Nicaragua. The most obvious change in the play is when the birds attack the neutral kingdom and Pedro de Castelnau blames the violence on Toulouse. However, the playwright makes other modifications to the historical record that further explore Costa Rica’s options in confronting and resolving its present circumstances.

In the rush to escape from the attacking birds, Cármina falls and miscarries Orosio’s child, exposing the king and queen’s secret. Pedro de Castelnau orders Cármina’s imprisonment, but attempts to use Orosio and Irene’s desire to have a child as a bargaining chip to get them to agree to support a military attack on Toulouse. In return for their cooperation, the legate, as a representative of the Catholic Church, promises to sanction Orosio’s future attempts to have another child with Cármina by offering to be the child’s godfather.

In the final act of the play, the legate admonishes Irene for sending out a parchment to convoke a peace council among the leaders of Languedoc. He reveals that he has intercepted Teodolfo and cut off his tongue to punish him for being the council’s messenger. Alcuino interrupts to report that the birds have multiplied and, because they are hungry, are attacking the troops and the kingdom. When Pedro de Castelnau sees that the soldiers are killing the birds, Irene informs him that she ordered them to destroy the birds in order to protect the castle and the kingdom. Angry, the legate orders that the queen be imprisoned for her disobedience, and he offers to go outside personally and climb the highest tower in order to pacify the birds.

Alcuino, looking through the window, reports on the legate’s progress in feeding the birds. At first, he sees Pedro de Castelnau rising in the air and the birds perching on his shoulders and arms in order to eat. Then, suddenly, the birds knock Pedro de Castelnau to the ground. This attack on the legate indicates a weakening of his authority and suggests that the violence he inflicted upon others has now turned against him. However, the events that follow it point to an
uncertain future for the kingdom. Alcuino states that the pope will send another legate to the kingdom, suggesting that, although a particular leader has fallen, the overall system of power remains intact. Irene asks Orosio to send the parchment convoking the peace council. As the play ends, Alcuino, disagreeing with the queen’s request, destroys the parchment, and the birds begin to caw like they did during the prior attacks.

The political status of the kingdom remains uncertain at the end of *El ángel de la tormenta*. The kingdom has been unable to maintain an adequate supply of food to keep the birds from attacking the castle. Orosio appears willing to obey the church’s orders and does nothing to help Irene summon the peace council; nor does he protest when Pedro de Castelnau dictates her imprisonment. Although Pedro de Castelnau has died, it is possible that the pope will send another legate to the kingdom to replace him. Even if the church should opt not to dispatch another legate, Irene still will encounter resistance to her plan to negotiate peace. Alcuino reminds Irene that the merchants in the kingdom have a vested interest in the war. They wish to realize a financial return on what they spent in supplying the army with food, clothing and weapons. Alcuino therefore destroys Irene’s invitation to the leaders of Languedoc and warns her:

Sería muy grave que una ofensa hiciera que los mercaderes lanzaran su carne al mar, quemaran sus telas y que ni un solo barco de los que van a Flandes se moviera del puerto. Detener la guerra sería una grave ofensa para nosotros, sus humildes siervos. Usted elige. (31)

Discovering the foreign troops in the kingdom does not offend Alcuino. He only complains to Irene and the legate because the troops took supplies without compensating him. Alcuino views the end of the war as an offense to his earning potential and pressures the queen to abandon the peace council by threatening that the merchants will sabotage the kingdom’s trade with Flanders. The kingdom, in deciding its political course, is subject not only to coercion from the external, global authority of the church, but also from this group of merchants located within its own territory. According to Alcuino, the merchants are essential to the kingdom’s survival: “Ni una sola piedra de este castillo se podría mantener firme de no ser por las contribuciones que mes tras mes y año tras año pagamos los mercaderes” (20). The image of not even a single stone in the castle being able to stay in place without the merchants’ economic support indicates that the
merchants feel they are the kingdom’s foundation and have the right to determine its political future. It is not certain that Irene’s peace plan will succeed, given that Alcuino and other merchants actively oppose ending the war.

Valdelomar adds the merchants’ opposition to the peace council to reflect how certain factions within Costa Rican society collaborated politically and economically with the United States during the counterrevolution. Honey notes that there were U.S. AID collaborators of neoliberal ideology within the Costa Rica government “who viewed Costa Rica’s existing economic model--based on consumer goods industries, production for the local and regional market, a large state sector, and a few traditional agricultural exports--as incapable of pulling the country out of its economic crisis” (64). Groups on the far right and far left also sought to end neutrality. Rumors of a coup by these groups to oust President Monge and install Armando Aráuz, who had close ties to the U.S. Embassy, prompted the pro-neutrality Security Minister Angel Edmundo Solano to tell reporters on August 8, 1984, “as he left a stormy Council of Government meeting that he had ordered the metropolitan police and OPEN--Costa Rica’s equivalent to a national guard--on ‘maximum alert’” (Honey 84).

Although Alcuino and the merchants in Valdelomar’s play adopt a position similar to that of Costa Ricans favoring U.S. economic and political policies during the 1980s, Irene and Teodolfo’s position is comparable to that of a large number of Costa Ricans who advocated neutrality. On May 15, 1984, between twenty and thirty thousand Costa Ricans gathered in downtown San José, in the country’s largest march to that date, to demonstrate for peace and neutrality. Endorsed by President Monge, Liberation party leaders, and Archbishop Román Arrieta, this march “was supported by a broad coalition of trade unions, youth and university groups, former presidents Figueres and Daniel Odúber, University of Costa Rica rector Fernando Durán, a number of government officials, and a contingent of U.S. residents” (Honey 309). Despite pressure from outside and within their country’s borders, Costa Ricans who favored maintaining neutrality defended their point of view until the other Central American nations signed President Arias’s peace accord.

Valdelomar’s departure from historical accounts of the Albigensian Crusade in the final act of El ángel de la tormenta encourages the audience and readers to think not only about Costa Rica’s policy of neutrality during the Nicaraguan counterrevolution in the 1980s, but also about the future of the Costa Rican nation in the age of globalization. Published and performed in 1990,
the play reached the audience and readers as the cold war was coming to an end after the collapse of the Soviet Union and globalization, defined by Malcolm Waters as “a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding,” was accelerating (3). According to Waters, the impact of globalization, which emerged as a consequence of the expansion of modernization, European culture and capitalist development, could be felt throughout the world, and, consequently, in each part of the world “every set of social arrangements must establish its position in relation to the capitalist West” (3).

This need for a society to relativize itself, or compare itself interactively with other societies, could also account for the play’s open ending. Valdelomar situates the play in the origins of Western, or European, modernity. In this sense, the fall of Pedro de Castelnau, foreshadowed by Raimundo’s statement that the legate will no longer be able to command armies by rising into the heavens, functions as a sign of the significant decline in the Catholic Church’s power that would indicate the beginning of European modernity. According to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, the shift from divine to secular power over worldly affairs, which took place between 1200 and 1600 in Europe, is “a symptom of the primary event of modernity: the affirmation of the powers of this world, the discovery of the plane of immanence” (70). Raimundo’s assertion that the people will fight against the legate’s abuses can be understood as a type of consciousness emerging in political, scientific, artistic and theological fields that Hardt and Negri mark as the origins of European modernity: “What is revolutionary in this whole series of philosophical developments stretching from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries is that the powers of creation that had previously been consigned exclusively to the heavens are now brought down to earth” (73).

At the end of the play, Valdelomar encourages the audience and readers to relate the kingdom’s options in confronting the beginning of this modernizing process to ways in which Costa Rica could position itself in regard to the process of globalization. Catharism, the Catholic Church’s crusade against heresy and the merchants’ assertion that economic matters determine the kingdom’s political course allude to ideologies that had arrived in Costa Rica and to which the Costa Rican nation must respond: Marxism and neoliberalism. Walter Mignolo calls these Christian, Marxist and neoliberal ideologies examples of “global designs,” which “were conceived and enacted from a particular local history generally identified as ‘the West’” (301).
However, because these ideologies, or theories, originated in a specific location, they are not necessarily useful when they are implemented in other regions of the world as part of a colonial system, which in recent years has evolved into a global colonialism. These ideologies arrive in spaces that Mary Louise Pratt calls “contact zones”: "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination--like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (4). Mignolo recently has developed a similar definition of these spaces, which he has named “the colonial difference”: “the space where local histories inventing and implementing global designs meet local histories, the space in which global designs have to be adapted, adopted, rejected, integrated, or ignored” (ix). Costa Rica, as a nation that emerged from a colonial system, is now facing forms of global colonialism, and Valdelomar invites the audience and readers of El ángel de la tormenta to consider how Costa Rica can respond to this process.

Although, as Pratt and Mignolo have indicated, there are a wide range of responses to global designs and conditions created by globalization, Valdelomar at the end of the play concentrates on two particular responses that Costa Rica could articulate. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Costa Rican state needed to decide what its role would be in the global context of the crisis of Marxism and the end of the cold war. One possibility is to adopt a neoliberal model in which the economic market guides human behavior, similar to the point of view expressed by Alcuino and the merchants in the play, who wish to continue a war because it is financially profitable. Another option is political action on a regional or transnational level, presented in the play in Irene’s plans to convocate a peace council. This second possibility does not reject expanding trade across borders. Irene is in favor of establishing trade with Flanders. However, she does not support a war for economic profit if it will harm other aspects of human life in the kingdom. Valdelomar does not reveal the ultimate course taken by the kingdom. Does economic policy predominate and the war continue, with the kingdom subordinate to the Church’s hegemony or to new hegemonic forces emerging in the kingdom? Or does the regional council negotiate an end to the war and offer an alternative to hegemonic power? Valdelomar suggests that adopting a neoliberal model might have harmful consequences and points to the beneficial possibilities offered by political action on a transnational or regional level. The play’s unresolved ending
stresses that the Costa Rican response to globalization is still an ongoing process and invites the audience and readers to think about different ways of responding to globalization.
Notes

1 Erika Fischer-Lichte classifies the adoption of foreign elements in plays on three levels: “1) contenido o tema, 2) pautas literarias, y 3) medios de puesta en escena” (“El cambio en los códigos teatrales” 13).

2 El ángel de la tormenta premiered on April 26, 1990, and was directed by María Bonilla.

3 Arriaga won the Joven Creación Prize and the Aquileo Echeverría National Theatre Prize in 1979 for Ultima noticia, which was his first play. See Carole Champagne’s dissertation for a reading of this play. Manuel Ruiz directed the 1984 staging.

4 The published play script includes photographs of the characters from the staging by Teatro Ubú on pages 2 and 4. The stage directions indicate that the scenes take place in the great hall and the dungeon of a castle (3).

5 Io coronada de claveles was published in Tarde de granizo y musgo y otras obras. Although the stage directions do not specify a geographical location for Io coronada de claveles, they do instruct that the character of Io dress like a woman from Ancient Greece (13). Io does not use the voseo when she speaks.

6 The information about Azul Marlene comes from Arnoldo Rivera’s newspaper article published in La Nación, in which Arroyo explains that the play serves as a companion to Sentencia para una aurora: “Mata-Hari se ubicaba en la Primera Guerra Mundial, con una mujer. Ahora es la Segunda Guerra y con dos hombres, uno de ellos homosexual. Las dos obras ocurren en una celda, son de un acto, y solo en la mitad de Azul Marlene se rompe el monólogo.”

7 Juana de Arco was staged by Teatro 56 at the Sala de la Calle 15 in 1986 and by the Teatro Municipal in the Sala de la Aduana in 1990. See Sáenz for reviews of these performances. Sentencia para una aurora, awarded the Aquileo Echeverría National Theatre Prize in 1996 in Costa Rica, premiered in 1995 in Puerto Rico at the University of Cayey. It was also staged in 1995 in Barcelona de Anzoátegui, Venezuela, in 1996 in Costa Rica at the Sala Vargas Calvo, and in 2001 in Belo Horizonte and Sao Paulo, Brazil (Bell and Fumero 119; Díaz). Azul Marlene premiered at the Teatro Lawrence Olivier in 1997 (Bell and Fumero 119).

8 Finding the performance boring, Sáenz writes that he left the theater early, after the first scene of Act Two. Nevertheless, Sáenz does point out an underlying political meaning of Juan Fernando Cerda’s Juana de Arco in its 1986 staging by Teatro 56. Although the critic reviews the performance unfavorably, he states that “era posible hacer una lectura de la obra según la
cual Juana es Nicaragua; Warwick y los ingleses son los ‘yankes’; Cauchon y los inquisidores, los ‘contras’” (97).

9 Honey, after investigating a shooting on September 28, 1983, at the Peñas Blancas border crossing in Costa Rica, concludes that “the incident had been orchestrated by the CIA and contras to scuttle the New Neutrality Proclamation and escalate the war against Nicaragua” (306). She later details similar CIA-orchestrated incidents, including a bomb explosion on May 30, 1984 at La Penca, during a press conference with Edén Pastora, and an attack in Las Crucitas on May 31, 1985, which killed two Costa Rican civil guardsmen. Honey documents other examples of simulated terrorism in Costa Rica after the La Penca bombing: “a 1985 assassination attempt on Pastora, a phony ‘Sandinista’ attack on the border town of Los Chilies (sic), a series of bombings against the U.S. embassies in Costa Rica and Honduras, and the murders of U.S., Costa Rican, and contra officials in both these countries” (341).

10 Lambert explains that Catharism has historical ties to the East, but adapted to conditions in Western Europe:

Catharism is a protest movement rejecting the Western Church. Their leaders are aware of a link to the East, and as the late twelfth-century journeys of Cathar leaders to Constantinople and the Balkans indicate, Eastern cradles of belief have prestige, and continue to have it right into the fourteenth century. But it is never subservient to the East: as soon as we have records of its existence, it is unmistakably and thoroughly westernized and develops a life of its own. (32)

11 See Malcolm Lambert, The Cathars, and Zoé Oldenbourg, Massacre at Montségur: A History of the Albigensian Crusade, for more information about Catharism and the crusade against it.

12 Roland Robertson employs the terms relativize and reflexiveness to describe this process of a society’s interactive comparison with other societies.

13 Regarding the origin and nature of global colonialism, Mignolo points out:

In the second half of the twentieth century the emergence of global colonialism, managed by transnational corporations, erased the distinction that was valid for early forms of colonialism and the coloniality of power. Yesterday, the colonial difference was out there, away from the center. Today it is all over, in the peripheries of the center and in the centers of the periphery. (ix)
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