The Pedagogy of Emancipation in Norge Espinosa's *Ícaros*

Vicky Unruh

This exercise in critical interpretation is dedicated to Sandy Messinger-Cypess, a stellar scholar, teacher, and friend, whose powerful spirit of intellectual risk-taking emancipated those of us fortunate enough to have accompanied her for part of her journey.

In October 2003, Norge Espinosa's play *Ícaros* opened at Havana's Teatro Trianón in a production by Carlos Díaz's Teatro El Público, Cuba's most consistently innovative theatre group of the past two decades.[1] Commissioned by Díaz, who directed the production, Espinosa's play draws on the ancient Greek Icarus myth but recasts its characters through the filters of mass cultural mythology from the contemporary world. The classical Icarus, we can recall, is the son of the artisan-architect Daedalus who forges a labyrinth on the island of Crete, domain of King Minos. The labyrinth harbors the monstrous Minotaur, to whom Minos annually sacrifices Athenian youth. Minos's daughter Ariadne, guardian of the labyrinth, falls in love with one of these youth, Theseus, and with Daedalus's help, gives him the thread to find his way through the labyrinth, slay the Minotaur, and escape. Minos punishes Daedalus's complicity by imprisoning him and his son Icarus. Daedalus in turn crafts wings of feathers, string, and wax for himself and his son. In their emancipatory flight, Icarus ignores his father's warning to avoid flying near the sun, loses his melted wings, and drowns in the sea.

Espinosa's *Ícaros* transforms this frequently recycled myth into a tale of the formation and education of youth charged with replicating the dreams of their parents' generation but also with emancipating themselves from the tyranny enmeshed in those dreams and the unreasonable expectations they may generate. The play's characters include Ariadna, Dédalo 1, Dédalo 2, Dédalo

3, and 6 Ícaros: Ícaro del Bosque, Ícaro de la Noche, Ícaro de la Estrella, Ícaro de Madera, Ícaro de la Lámpara, and Ícaro de Hierro. Rey Minos makes a single appearance toward the play's end, and the terror-inducing Minotauro, whose dream of destruction is projected onto a screen, also toward the end, constitutes the center of consciousness for Minos's power. In twenty-eight scenes organized into two acts, the play stages a myth-laden coming-of-age tale: the conjuring up of the Ícaros by the Dédalos; the Ícaros' birth from cracked eggs; their formal education by the Dédalos and, above all, by Ariadna; the Icaros' dissident improvisations on their assigned roles; and their varied destinies on flight day. In an early scene—"Navidades en Creta"—the Icaros receive gifts of costumes or dramatic accoutrements such as masks or capes that clarify their given names and designate their assigned identities from a pantheon of popular cultural heroes. Thus we learn that Ícaro del Bosque is Little Red Riding Hood, Ícaro de la Noche is Batman, Ícaro de la Estrella is Peter Pan, Ícaro de Madera is Pinocchio, Ícaro de la Lámpara is Aladdin, and Ícaro de Hierro is Superman. The Teatro El Público production included elaborate, inventive costuming, make-up, and masks, imposing sets of wings for the Ícaros, and a dynamic synthesis of music, choreography, and scenic design.[2]

Within this composite framework of Greek myth and the modern mass-cultural narratives embodied in the identities bestowed on the Ícaros by their creators and culture, the play showcases the impact on a society, its actors, and its imagination of abusive power. It does this through character references to fear, rage, or revenge toward authority; film collages of devastation projected onto a background screen; and the Minotauro's dreams of violent destruction. But *Ícaros* also unpacks an often less palpable but equally pervasive form of control—the power of pedagogy—discernible in the play's markers of recognition for a turn-of-the-millennium Cuban audience. Character references to their island location encourage spectators to make the interpretive leap from Crete—an island under the imposing shadow of nearby Athens—to Cuba: "isla que vive en sí misma atrapada" (38). Here citizens live under perpetual internal and external vigilance, and survival demands invention and improvisation. As Dédalo 3 remarks when the Dédalos and Ariadna are about to present the Ícaros with their wings, "[v]ivir en una Isla requiere estrategias, disfraces, acertijos, conjuros, y talento" (69). Moreover, the island in Espinosa's play is a confining place from which allowable departures and returns are few and home to a family divided not only by the power that limits inhabitants' mobility but also by profound generational change in response to

the mandates of the past. This disconnection is evocative of younger generations in Cuba, whose ties to the revolutionary utopian ideals that inspired their parents and grandparents are second or third hand, disconnected from their own lived experience, and unlikely to inspire action. As Ariadna explains in one of her monologues:

> Había una vez una familia que vivía en una isla, y que se pasaba los almuerzos hablando del terrible mando de su rey. Siglos enteros pasaban sobre la isla, y esa familia no cambiaba de conversación. De tanto escuchar cómo los padres maldecían, sin hacer otra cosa que sentarse a almorzar y escribir grandes cuadernos, los hijos decidieron no hacer la revolución que sus padres deseaban. (77)

With comparisons between *Ícaros* and Virgilio Piñera's iconoclastic *Electra Garrigó* (1948) as well as with Yerandy Fleites Pérez's *Jardín de héroes* (2010), Yoandy Cabrera locates *Ícaros* in a recurrent Cuban theatrical practice that recasts Greek myths into the plays' own contemporary contexts. Cabrera focuses on the deployment of Greek myths to stage generational conflicts that embody social change, to frame those conflicts in the enduring analogy between family and nation, and, through metatheatrical elements, to showcase the malleable role of theatre itself in that dynamic and its representations.[3] *Ícaros*, Cabrera argues, uses the analogy between Crete and Cuba as islands to highlight the limited travel mobility of Cuban citizens (under state policy at the time of the play's opening) and, through the conflict between Minos and the Dédalos, to rework the longstanding conflict between the state and artists and writers in Cuba.[4] For his part, Jaime Gómez Triana observes that *Ícaros* stages the protagonists' drive to "escape prefixed roles" and become autonomous individuals (12): "La pieza reflexiona, no sin ironía, sobre la función de los mitos, sobre las maneras de leer y explicar nuestra historia, sobre el legado y sobre el 'diálogo' que los más jóvenes sostienen con esa herencia. Creta y sus héroes, el teatro y sus personajes, reconstruyen aquí las circunstancias de hegemonía que imperan en el mundo actual" (12).

But in this context of the dominant models offered to youth—whether through formal education or popular cultural scripts—I would argue that *Ícaros* also encourages a reading focused on the longstanding, post-revolutionary Cuban connections among education, self-aware citizenship, and egalitarian ideals. Espinosa's play stages the impulse of one generation—the Dédalos along with Ariadna—to create a new kind of super being—the Ícaros—fashioned from their own imaginings but charged with carrying on the older generation's unfulfilled ideals and a revolutionary promise deferred.

If the Dédalos-Ícaros myth, coupled with the modern mythology of super heroes, provides a way to enact the dreams and pitfalls such projects activate, the Cuban revolution's imagined "new man," embodied in the thought of Ernesto "Che" Guevara, constitutes a site-specific version of such utopian, trans-generational ventures, a model that inhabits, to varying generational degrees, a Cuban theatre audience's cultural memory. Against the historical backdrop of a state pedagogy forged through the renowned 1961 post-revolutionary literacy campaign and institutionalized throughout Cuba's public education system, the classroom, actual or virtual, embodied in the teacher-student dynamic constituted an idealized workshop for creating such a new man and for emancipating citizens through social change. In this context, Espinosa's *Ícaros* de-mythifies the lingering concepts of the revolution's pedagogy as a path to social utopia, while at the same time reenergizing the concept of human education as an expansive intellectual adventure of the kind conceptualized by cultural theorist Jacques Rancière.

The image of the teacher-student exchange as the foundation for creating a perfectible new man was inculcated not only in post-1959 official state rhetoric, but also in such artistic works as Humberto Solás's 1968 film *Lucía* or in Octavio Cortázar's film *El brigadista* (1978). In contemporary Cuban artistic expression, by contrast, this relationship constitutes a charged, contested space, what Michel de Certeau would call a "practiced place" of everyday activity that possesses the capacity to undermine the official conception or functions of a particular cultural space (97-118). Since the early 1990s, when the economic crises catalyzed by the end of the Cold War and the Soviet withdrawal from Cuba were paralleled by a comparable crisis in cultural authority, literary and film portrayals of such "practiced places" as the school have engaged in a critical reworking of residual, if threadbare, revolutionary discourse or ideals. These critical inquiries may include outright rejection, selective reiteration, or recasting into new models of individual behavior and social interaction. In this vein, Espinosa's *Ícaros* participates in a wider, cultural conversation of contemporary Cuban literature and film that unpacks the teacher-student relationship idealized in cultural memory, with an eye toward activating an emancipatory pedagogy that revolutionary Cuba had once imagined but whose delivery over time fell short of that ideal.

Ícaros, then, re-stages a complex relationship between a teacher—Ariadna—and her students—the six young Ícaros in her charge. The initial attire of the Ícaros in the play's Teatro El Público staging—the familiar uniforms of Cuban school-children—reinforces this relationship, as do the numerous

scenes devoted to pedagogic interactions or training sessions led by Ariadna. Moreover, although Ariadna is its designated official teacher, the play echoes the call to arms of the literacy campaign era by re-staging a world in which educating the young is overseen by all: the centers of authority (embodied here in Minos and the Minotaur), the parents, intellectuals, and artistic creators embodied in the Dédalos, and the teacher, Ariadna, an all-encompassing enterprise that calls to mind Guevara's ideal of post-revolutionary Cuba as "a gigantic school" (372). Drawing on the literacy campaign model, Che imagined the teacher-student relationship (between urban, middle-class teachers and illiterate rural or urban students) as dynamic and liberating, a foundation for erasing class divisions and instilling in all the shared consciousness of a socially responsible new human being.[5] The state's overhaul of Cuban public education drew on this model's democratizing ideal of universal inclusion and the aspiration to social class leveling.[6] Political scientists, sociologists, and UNESCO agree that to this day Cuba is one of the most successful nations in achieving full citizen literacy.[7] But based on Paulo Freire's model of a critical pedagogy in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Ana Serra argues convincingly that the Cuban literacy campaign model fell short of a genuine critical pedagogy in that it was designed by others for the designated oppressed population rather than enacted through that population's own agency (39-40).

Drawing on Freire, Guevara, and progressive educators from multiple national contexts, Peter McLaren has defined "critical pedagogy" as "a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-stage" all of which aim to "eliminate inequalities on the basis of social class" (35). In principle, such pedagogy focuses on human beings in formation as a self-aware process of acquiring a new consciousness. In this sense, Cuba's literacy campaign model in some ways anticipated Jacques Rancière's 1987 notion of an emancipatory education that, based on the axiom of an equality of intelligence shared by teachers and students, can stimulate the irruption into the existing social order of new subjects whose very appearance enacts new ways of envisioning and organizing the world (*The Ignorant Schoolmaster* 35-36; Bingham and Biesta 32-38). But the emphasis on equality of *intelligence*, whereby students become aware of and take charge of their own learning, constitutes the key difference between Rancière's model of emancipatory education and Cuba's revolutionary pedagogy, which aimed instead toward an equality of *accessibility* to benefits

of citizenship. As Charles Bingham and Gert Biesta observe of Rancière's concept, "[emancipation] is . . . not simply about the move from a minority position. . . . Emancipation rather entails a 'rupture' . . . that makes the appearance of subjectivity possible" (32-33).

Through the teacher's manual *¡Alfabeticemos!*, Cuban literacy campaign organizers acknowledged the de facto teacher-student hierarchy that might undermine equality, with instructions encouraging teachers to establish respectful relationships with students, to avoid giving orders or using an "authoritative" tone of voice, and to foster collaboration (11-12). But a central paradox in this pedagogic model persists: in the quest for a change-fostering relationship through a tightly scripted scenario, students *and* teachers were to reiterate set material on designated topics, reinforced by a glossary of definitions.[8] As this model was injected into Cuban public school practice, the normative facet of the imagined teacher-student encounter grew increasingly dominant, in particular through a changing view of the teacher less as the students' conduit to assuming their own cognitive agency than as a state-designated guide for an official line. Thus, even while celebrating Cuba's universal literacy, scholars also underscore the system's totalizing nature and monolithic cast.[9] By 1981, in fact, the liberating, non-hierarchical instructor imagined through the literacy campaign model had mutated in official rhetoric into an agent of state ideology, or, in Fidel Castro's words "un activista de la política revolucionaria de nuestro Partido, un defensor de nuestra ideología, de nuestra moral, de nuestras convicciones políticas" ("Discurso").

In this context, contemporary works like *Ícaros* revisit the teacher-student relationship with a sharp critical eye cast on normative pedagogy on the one hand and, on the other, a drive to tap into the relationship's creative energy and potential. Mordantly satirical works such as Alejandro Aguilar's story "Paisaje de arcilla" (1997) or Daniel Díaz Torres's film *Alicia en el pueblo de Maravillas* (1991) are relentless in their portrayals of Cuba's pedagogic contract as an epistemological act of violence, a primal exercise of arbitrary power through the disciplined installation of a totalizing ideology into otherwise potentially creative minds.[10] But other Cuban writers and directors revisit the teacher-student pact in more nuanced ways, exploring the emancipating potential of alternative pedagogic scenarios. Thus *Ícaros* conjures up Cuban spectators' cultural memory of the new man ideal through a more inventive focus on learning and a fresh fascination with education's potential as a radical path to expressive freedom, intellectual adventure, and individual emancipation. Repeated references to the stage as a "taller" or workshop

where the 3 Dédalos craft the 6 Ícaros ("amasando oro, tierra, carne de pájaros, y ambar" [41]) and where Ariadna and the Dédalos educate them call to mind Che's "arcilla maleable" or "malleable clay" of Cuba's youth as the primary resource for his imagined new man (Guevara 380). But at the same time, the workshop setting frames the Ícaros less as perfectible beings than as humans-in-progress, fully possessed from the outset of their own cognitive talents, styles, and quirks. Opening stage directions, for example, present the incubating eggs of the Ícaros surrounded by wheels and tools of the Dédalos' *taller*, and the scene of their birth—"Los Nacimientos"—describes the as yet unschooled Ícaros' own creative activity in this workshop, suggesting an innate inclination toward invention and creativity: "*Los Ícaros, con las piezas, ruedas y herramientas del taller, arman en un juego, carros artefactos de guerra, máquinas imposibles*" (40). From the opening scenes, moreover, the Dédalos, speaking simultaneously and in one voice, frame their creation of a new generation—the Ícaros—not only as a rectification of past failures that have led to their entrapment in the island labyrinth—"encerrado en mi propia invención" (37)—but also as a reiterated ideal of liberation through a new kind of being: "Anoche soñé con una República / de hombres que volaban y podían escapar / Repúblicas Aladas, qué sueño tan perfecto, / ancladas en las nubes de mi imaginación" (38).

Once born, however, the *Ícaros* become immediate subjects of evaluation as the Dédalos inspect, admire, and "grade" them (40), a process that for a Cuban audience may call to mind the "expediente acumulativo" or "cumulative transcript" that, since the revolution, accompanies Cuban citizens throughout their education and life cycle and that, along with conventional academic grades, may include ideologically inflected evaluations of citizenship. Similarly, the Dédalos in their initial evaluations take note of several Ícaros' imperfections, cast as implicit failures that fall short of their ideals in creating a new generation. The Dédalos's observations on these supposed inadequacies call to mind the groups who were deemed to fall short of the masculinized new man ideal, for example gay men, and who were marginalized during the revolutionary state's most repressive years, often designated as the "quinquenio gris" of the 1970s.[11] As Dédalo 2 observes, "[e]ste, parece de madera. Debí mezclar mal / Una raíz de mandrágora. Y aquel, de tan débil, / Una niña parece, y no un varón. / Habrá que encerrarlos en el más oscuro / Rincón del Laberinto, para que no avergüencen" (41). Notwithstanding these individual singularities, however, the Ícaros are soon corralled into a regulating education. The play's fifth scene—"El Aprendizaje"—stylizes a

pedagogic assault of ideologically charged language evocative of the glossary for the literacy campaign manual, *¡Alfabeticemos!* In this parody of the forceful inculcation of basic verbal literacy, Ariadna, dressed in this case as the Disney character Cruella De Vil, marshals the school-uniformed Ícaros into formation: "*Con un nuevo toque de silbato. Ariadna se dirige a los Ícaros, con paso casi marcial que los obliga, instintivamente, a organizarse para el aprendizaje. Ariadna siempre evaluándolos con la mirada o el gesto, les enseña el lenguaje*" (43).

For this stage direction that opens the language class, the play-text includes an endnote that signals an intertextual connection here with *Una cuna*, a 1990 dance-based multi-media performance piece by the renowned Cuban choreographer, Marianela Boán.[12] *Una cuna,* which stages the education of a baby by parents who have conflicting goals for her future, also includes a satirical episode in teaching the baby language through such ideologically or historically charged words as "armas," "reunión," and "vendajes," terms that the baby babbles on parental cue (Carvajal). Language classes or vocabulary drills are also common critical targets in Cuban films of the period, for example in Fernando Pérez's *La vida es silbar* (1998) and *José Martí: El ojo del canario* (2010) and in Ernesto Daranas's *Conducta* (1914). Such scenarios offer artists like Espinosa not only a channel for critiques of rote or repressive teaching methods—what Rancière would call the "explication" method of the "stultifying pedagogue" (*The Ignorant Schoolmaster* 6-7)—but also sites for exploring more emancipating options. Rancière's concept of pedagogical emancipation is, in fact, anchored in language learning. For him, any human being who has successfully learned to speak their native language—something that most humans, in his view, can accomplish successfully on their own—possesses and has already employed all the basic operations of intelligence—"observing and retaining, repeating and verifying, . . . relating what they were trying to know to what they already knew, . . . doing and reflecting about what they had done" (*The Ignorant Schoolmaster* 10).[13] The role of teachers, then, is not to transmit their own knowledge through explication, a process that for Rancière leads to "stultification" of the student, but rather to maximize opportunities for the student's own "emancipation," defined as the "obligation" by circumstances or one's own will, to "use [one's] own intelligence" (*The Ignorant Schoolmaster* 15). A teacher still retains authority in a classroom, not as a repository of knowledge to be transmitted via explication, but rather as the person who directs students to "pass through a forest whose openings and clearings [the teacher] himself

ha[s] not discovered" (*The Ignorant Schoolmaster* 11). For Rancière this journey out of the woods constitutes the "intellectual adventure" of learning.[14]

On the surface, Ariadna's first language class for the Ícaros parodies all the markings of a "stultifying" pedagogue:

> ARIADNA: En el principio, era el Caos. Pero después era el Verbo. La primera palabra pronunciada por los dioses fue: Isla.
> LOS ÍCAROS: *(Con cierta dificultad.)* Isss . . . la ¡Isla! . . . ¿Isla?
> ARIADNA: *(Muy rigurosa, en plan profesora, repartiendo pliegos, láminas y pellizcos a los revoltosos)* ¡Isla! ¡Hogar! ¡Patria! ¡Frontera! ¡Costa! ¡Nación! (43)

Ariadna then instructs the Ícaros to emit rapid-fire synonyms for the words she calls out, reinforcing the answers she seeks with praise and caramels, prevaricating with off-script responses:

> ARIADNA: . . . A ver ¡sinónimos! Tú . . . *(Al Ícaro de la Estrella.)* ¡Rueda!
> ÍCARO DE LA ESTRELLA: (*Rápido.*) ¡Progreso!
> ARIADNA: ¡Bien! *(Le da un caramelo.)* Tú . . . *(Al Ícaro de Hierro.)* ¡Hazaña!
> ÍCARO DE HIERRO: ¡Héroe!
> ARIADNA: *(Dándole otro caramelo. Mantendrá este juego mientras los sinónimos sean correctos.)* Muy bien. *(Al Ícaro de la Noche.)* ¡Justicia!
> ÍCARO DE LA NOCHE: ¡Deber!
> ARIADNA: ¡Bravo, con un destacamiento así la escuela de Creta marcha adelante! *(Al Ícaro del Bosque.)* ¡Rey!
> ÍCARO DEL BOSQUE: ¡Lobo!
> ARIADNA: *(Dándole el caramelo con cierta reconvención.)* Un poco anarquista el niño, pero no está mal . . . *(Al Ícaro de la Lámpara.)* ¡Destino!
> ÍCARO DE LA LÁMPARA: ¡Mundos!
> ARIADNA: ¡Ambicioso! *(Al Ícaro de Madera.)* ¡Familia!
> ÍCARO DE MADERA: ¡Mierda!
> *Escándalo de la profesora, risa de los Ícaros. El Ícaro de Madera se gana un pellizco. La profesora lo pone de penitencia*" (44-45).

Ariadna punctuates similar sessions with marching, a stop-watch, and a blasting whistle, for example in scene 11, "En el gimnasio," where the Ícaros practice flying. On one level, Ariadna appears to hammer an absolutist conception of knowledge in synonym-antonym exercises rooted in a rigid, true-

false binary. In the parodic facet of her performance, then, Ariadna mimics a stultifying pedagogue. But her discursive parody, exaggerated body language, and stylized accoutrements enact an evident critique of the model. From the start, moreover, Ariadna sends her students radically mixed signals about what exactly she is teaching, as insinuations about the power of taking risks constitute a performative undercurrent to her strict verbal instructions about sticking to pedagogic scripts. Adriana, in fact, casts herself as a subversive entity seeking her own liberation (by a potential Teseo) through the students' own incipient emancipatory inclinations. In a monologue immediately preceding the first language class, for example, she reflects on the potentially destabilizing role of their pedagogic interactions: "En algunos de ellos puede esconderse mi Teseo, ese muchacho que podría devolverme la libertad. Los educaré y les daré mis secretos. Les enseñaré a fingir obediencia al rey que detestan, y a los padres a los cuales quisieran olvidar. Sé de estas materias lo suficiente: soy una experta en rebelión" (43). Other cues undermine the word lesson itself. "La gente es malintencionada, alumnos," Ariadna warns the Ícaros, "y no se le puede dar el gusto de creer que cuando se dice algo, se quiere decir lo contrario" (44). But Ariadna's fleeting asides and stage directions encourage doing exactly that, for example, indications that while the Ícaros repeat their teacher's words, images are to be projected on the backdrop screen either supporting or contrasting with these responses (44). Moreover, Ariadna betrays her admiration for the iconoclastic definition of "Rey" as "Lobo" by Ícaro del Bosque (aka Little Red Riding Hood) when she varies from her drill to classify it as "rather anarquistic" and rewards it with the caramel in spite of its deviation from the script. And in dressing down el Ícaro de Madera (aka Pinocchio) for his equation of "Familia" with "Mierda," Ariadna devotes significant onstage time to repeating with emphasis the very incendiary words that her rote curriculum prohibits. While harping on sticking to scripts in an officially monitored world, she wanders from that very script:

> Cuando se vive en un mito hay que tener mucho cuidado, alumnos. Y cuando se es de madera, hay que pensar mucho en el fuego. Mucho, muchísimo. Por cosas así ardió Troya . . . Prohibo mencionar palabras como Mierda, Caballo, Ítaca. Ítaca no existe, no existe más que Creta. Lo digo yo, la mejor profesora del Laberinto, que jamás me he perdido en él y tengo la clave para salir y entrar en él libremente. A ver, ¿a qué se mueren porque se las diga, eh? . . . Tendrán que aprender mucho . . . muchísimo. Y volar. Para eso hemos preparado las clases de aviación. Una conspiración tiene que estar bien organizada, tener

> un programa muy preciso. ¡Y yo siempre me mantengo dentro del programa! Así que cuidadito, cuidadito con esas palabras indebidas, o en la próxima clase de Química aquí va a haber uno que sepa lo que es el fósforo. (45)

In correcting Ícaro de Madera, the references to fire and matches for a being created from wood constitute a particularly provocative instigation to take risks, as Ícaro later finds matches in the pocket of his assigned Pinocchio costume and becomes addicted to smoking and fascinated with fire. But a more fundamental challenge to Ariadna's rote word lessons and admonitions to stick to the script is the motto that she requires the Ícaros to memorize and that she coaches them to declaim, chorus style: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's sonnet 149, "Encarece de animosidad la elección de establo durable hasta la muerte," to which she refers as the "Soneto a Faetón." In Greek mythology, Phaeton, we can recall, is comparable to Icarus in risk-taking, as he convinces his father to allow him to drive the chariot of the sun, a venture that leads to his own destruction. Just as artists have invoked the Icarus myth as an exaltation of art's creative power, so have Sor Juana's poetic allusions to Phaeton been read by critics as the poetic voice's laudatory equation of his courage with the intellectual risk-taking or adventure she ardently pursued.[15] On one level, the recitation of a motto or pledge by a group of students may call to mind for a Cuban audience the daily opening exercises in Cuban schools during which students pledge their aspirational allegiance to Che Guevara's example—"Pioneros por el comunismo: ¡Seremos como el Che!"—and may suggest a reaffirmation of the revolution's pedagogic ideals. But the pledge in *Ícaros* uses the words of a woman poet and intellectual to re-channel that quotidian pedagogic practice toward the aspirations for the kinds of intellectual adventure and emancipation embodied in Sor Juana's work.

On the surface, teaching the Ícaros to fly is the play's most obvious example of a pedagogic provocation to take risks. Nonetheless, the goal of the Dédalos in these lessons is to meet their own unfulfilled dreams and clear the path for their own liberation. The more profound instigation to the Ícaros to take intellectual risks of controlling their own learning lies in the bestowal of the costumes and props associated with their assigned identities as cultural heroes or story-book characters. Described by the Dédalos as the Ícaros' destinies and by Ariadna as disguises to keep others from detecting whose sons they are, the costumes, wrapped in enormous gift boxes, are presented during an officially proclaimed Christmas break to recipients who initially react with surprise, disappointment, or resignation. But once the Ícaros begin

exploring the costumes—and the ostensible identities they embody—those assigned to be Aladdin, Little Red Riding Hood, and Pinocchio in particular are stimulated to dig more deeply into the potential these assigned cultural identities pose: "*Bajo la mirada firme de Ariadna, los Ícaros se visten con sus nuevos trajes. El disgusto de Ícaro de la Lámpara es evidente, así como la fascinación de Ícaro del Bosque ante su caperuza, junto a la cual encuentra un manual cuyo título lee en voz alta: 'Cómo protegerse del Lobo aún sin haberlo visto nunca. Manual básico para señoritas'. A Ícaro de la Madera todo le da igual, pero su rostro se ilumina al descubrir, en el bolsillo de su pantalón, una cajetilla con unos pocos cigarros*" (52-53). Once the holiday hiatus of gift-giving ends, Ariadna calls the Ícaros back to school work, but also makes it a point to tell them that they can keep their disguises.[16] It is at this juncture, in fact, that Ariadna directs the Ícaros to declaim their allegiance to intellectual risk-taking embodied in the Sor Juana sonnet to Phaeton. Tellingly, Ariadna portrays this declamation as the school's "homenaje artístico a nuestro rey," a de facto affirmation of intellectual autonomy and adventure cloaked in the guise of an homage to power.

Thus the costumes or disguises described by the Dédalos as the Ícaros' destinies actually mask the cognitive exploration that they stimulate, the kind of risky adventure lauded in Sor Juana's sonnet. Once the Ícaros receive these costumes, in fact, much of the remainder of the play consists of their critical enactment and unpacking of the roles and identities these disguises embody. Through monologues or conversations with one another, the Ícaros engage in a cognitive process of trial and error in which they explore, test, and, in some cases invert, reject, expand on, or change those roles. Wrapped in the trope of playing with costumes and props, this cognitive process, in which meta-theatre intersects with epistemology, calls to mind the "taking on and putting off ideas, trying them over and over" that constitutes one of Herbert Blau's key definitions of performance (41). It also brings to mind once again Ranciére's concept of the pedagogy of emancipation that provides students with the opportunity to find their own way out of a forest of a teacher's creation, activating their ability to move from the unknown to the known. In the play this process not only emancipates the Ícaros to chart their own course irrespective of the risks, but also points to the actual variability and volatility of supposedly fixed identities imposed by cultural, familial, or pedagogic scripts. With the possible exception of Ícaro de Hierro, Superman, ostensibly the teacher's pet, all of the Ícaros rebel against their assigned identities, and even he disappoints her by failing the test as her imagined rescuer, Teseo.

Even Ícaro de la Noche, second in line as Ariadna's favorite, struggles to fit on the mask-cowl that defines his Batman persona and worries that he may have no actual countenance underneath. Ícaro de la Lámpara as Aladdin negotiates with a rebellious genie and prefers the competitive edge of his new magic carpet to the wings crafted by the Dédalos for his flight. Filled with rage, Ícaro de Madera, as Pinocchio, performs the most adolescent rebellion, making fun of Ariadna, speaking forbidden words, escaping into alcohol and chemical addictions, and literally and figuratively playing with fire**.** Ícaro de la Estrella in his guise as Peter Pan admonishes the older generation for saddling the young with a utopian Neverland, while failing to meet the basic material needs of the multiplying youth that populate it. For his part, Ícaro del Bosque as Red Riding Hood fantasizes about alluring encounters in the woods with the wolf.

Ícaro del Bosque's exploration of his homoerotic desires under the guise of Little Red Riding Hood may constitute the work's most extended and profound upending of the Dédalos' pedagogic expectations and cultural scripts and also its most familiar for the Cuban play goer in 2003. The Ícaro del Bosque gender identity shifts would immediately have called to mind Senel Paz's 1990 novella-length story *El lobo, el bosque, y el hombre nuevo* that formed the basis for Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's Oscar-nominated 1993 film *Fresa y chocolate*. This film portrays an emergent friendship between a dissident gay man, Diego, and a straight Cuban revolutionary, David, and is generally viewed as a critique of the state's persecution of homosexuals, particularly in the 1970s, and of the state's marginalization of those considered not to meet the masculinized norm of the new man model. But *Fresa y chocolate* also constitutes a critique of the revolution's pedagogy underlying the new man ideal, as Diego—whom we learn was rejected for his homosexuality and his dissidence when he tried to join the literacy campaign—undertakes the private tutorial of a one-on-one dialogue to fill in major gaps about literature and the arts in David's state-based education. Diego's experience with state rejection is similar in kind to the Dédalos' response to Ícaro del Bosque's weakness at birth, a quality that they ascribe to the absence of a clear gender identity and that provokes their shame and impulse to lock him away. In contrast to the Dédalos' propensity to grade the Ícaros negatively for divergences from cultural expectations that are portrayed as imperfections, however, the Ícaros' explorations with their costumes allow them to discover their own singularities, identities, and ideas. This process generates the Ícaros' ultimate

resistance to enact their designated destinies to fly and fulfill their creators' idea of a revolution.

The rebellion ensues fittingly with the Dédalos' formal presentation to the Ícaros of the elaborately crafted wings, creations that dazzle them but also bring home the reality of their creators' expectations. Two accompanying events enhance this realization and the Ícaros' resistance to their assigned mission. They share in the Minotaur's dream—projected on the background screen—that presages their eventual destruction and fall, a violent mix of "*imágenes de los héroes cuyas identidades han tomado los Ícaros*" (70). They also learn that, once they receive the wings, they are expected to relinquish the disguises whose decipherment has constituted their own assumption of agency. The Ícaros' collective refusal to obey this order and the Dédalos' condemnation of Ariadna for fostering the revolt—"¡Mal aprendieron en esas largas clases / donde solo la soberbia se les explicó!" (75)—constitute the scene "La familia se divide." As they resist the order, moreover, the Ícaros line up and together declaim once again the Sor Juana poem of intellectual emancipation that Ariadna has taught them.

Beyond Ariadna's explicit subversion of her disciplinary pedagogic role, the play casts her own persona as the site of a revolution that, in its incorporation of the Ícaros' search for their own distinct subjectivities as they reenact inherited scripts, values difference over the uniformity of the idealized new being(s) sought by the Dédalos. When the Dédalos condemn the results of her teaching, Ariadna defends it:

> No hables de alas a tus hijos si después no vas a dejarlos volar libremente. No les consigas como profesores a personas que buscan héroes para una revolución que es diferente. . . . Años educándolos en el odio al monstruo y a sus padres. Soy una buena profesora, aprendieron muy bien. Que me salven ahora. Del Minotauro, del Rey, del Laberinto, de la locura de Dédalo. Que me salven a mí. Que mi cuerpo libre sea para ellos, para el mejor de esos Teseos que eduqué. ¡Mi cuerpo, el campo de batalla de esa revolución! (77-78)

But as performed in this play, Ariadna's actual body is marked by two striking features. Even though she is the only character who endures until the play's end, through costume changes and rapid shifts in demeanor and tone, she is also the most prone to change, and this shifting persona itself provides a more potent model for the Ícaros than the language or exercise drills in which she leads them. Ariadna undergoes metamorphoses that, as Gómez Triana observes, evoke the roles of princess, mother, teacher, and

even of the minotaur himself (12), as in the scenes of the Ícaros' flights and the destruction they wreak; the minotaur tears off his head, covering himself in blood, under which Ariadna's face appears. The gender fluidity evoked in this juxtaposition reinforces the play's proposition that identities, including those of gender, are not fixed by assigned cultural roles, as in the challenge to gender binaries enacted by Ícaro del Bosque. The image of Ariadna as Minotauro also echoes the androgynous costuming in her pedagogic role as Cruella De Vil in early scenes, one of several Disney characters associated with gender ambiguity.[17] Ariadna's radical propensity for change, moreover, encapsulated in the scene titled "El ovillo de Ariadna," teases out the mythical character's metaphoric ties to skeins, webs, and labyrinths. Thus the body constituting the "battleground for a different kind of revolution" incarnates epistemological paths that undermine the disciplinary binary of Ariadna's own synonym-antonym drills and the direct transmission of knowledge characterizing Rancière's stultifying pedagogue. In countless literary and philosophical reiterations, the trope of Ariadne's thread has long emphasized the *process* of knowledge or problem solving in its multiple paths. Even when dogged by the legacy of mythic repetition, then, the Ícaros in Norge Espinosa's play enact such variations as, in the spirit of Rancière's emancipatory cognitive activity, they explore, improvise upon, tentatively embrace, or challenge the inherited myths they have been directed to incarnate.

The play's closing scenes include projected flights and falls by some of the Ícaros and widespread landscapes of destruction, including the fall of the towers imprisoning the Dédalos, the apparent disappearance of Minos, a confrontation with the Minotauro in which two of the Dédalos perish and one disappears, and the Minotauro's violent removal of his own head. But in the spirit of Ariadna's skein, the Ícaros' own trajectories are multiple, open-ended, and in some cases unclear. Some appear to have self-destructed, some may have succeeded in abandoning the island, while Ícaro del Bosque (now in a wheelchair) and Ícaro de Madera remain behind, contemplating the debris and the loss, arguing over their brothers' possible fates. The play closes with a solitary Ariadna's final invocation among the ruins of the protean, endlessly regenerative power of storytelling—"había una vez, había una vez, había una vez"—a link that brings to mind J. Hillis Miller's classic study of fiction and repetition, *Ariadne's Thread*. Norge Espinosa's *Ícaros* also ensnares the spectator in that thread's proliferating epistemological paths, through countless intertextual references in the play-text, allusions far beyond the identities of the six Ícaros. These citations with small variations or deformations draw

on a rich, diverse, and satiated archive of Cuban, Latin American, European, classical, and biblical texts. Although it is unlikely that any single spectator will unravel this intertextual skein, through this surfeit of contact points and variations, *Ícaros* consistently undermines the invariable impulse toward a stultifying pedagogy of interpretation and its consequent oversimplifications that may reduce or impoverish artistic portrayals of Cuban experience or somehow isolate or wall it off from other human experience. Instead *Ícaros* provokes a spirit of intellectual adventure in its spectators and readers as well as in its six young humans in formation. In this sense, the play intersects with Rancière's concept of theatre as well as his pedagogy. Theatrical emancipation, Rancière argues, rests on a premise of equality among performers and audiences and requires "spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the 'story' and make it their own story" (*The Emancipated Spectator* 22). Thus in its proliferating, unexpected juxtapositions of popular and classical cultural allusions, historical contexts, and performance traditions, *Ícaros* challenges spectators and readers to follow and forge the intricate paths of story creators and critical interpreters.

University of Kansas, Emerita

Notes

[1] The play text for *Ícaros* was published in 2010 by Editorial Letras Cubanas in an anthology of five Espinosa plays.

[2] According to the published play-text, the production of *Ícaros* included costumes by Vladimir Cuenca, scenic design by Alain Ortiz, original music by Ulises Hernández, lighting by Manolo Garriga, and visual concepts for staging by the plastic artist Regis Soler. The cast included Yailene Sierra in the lead role of Ariadna (33).

[3] A common practice throughout Latin America, the re-contextualization of Greek myth is particularly rich in modern Cuban theatre. Other examples include José Triana's *Medea en el espejo* (1959), Anton Arrufat's *Los siete contra Tebas* (1968), José Corrales and Manuel Pereira's *Las hetairas habaneras: una neotragedia cubana basada en* Las troyanas *de Eurípides* (1977); Reinaldo Montero's *Medea* (1997); Norge Espinosa's *Fedra* (2007), and Abelardo Estorino's monologue, *Medea sueña Corinto* (2008).

[4] In January 2013, the Cuban government lifted travel restrictions on most citizens, controls that had been in place since 1961. The tensions and negotiations between the revolutionary state and Cuban artists and intellectuals date to June 1961 with Fidel Castro's *Palabras a los intelectuales*, which included the renowned pronouncement "[D]entro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución nada" (11).

[5] In Guevara's analysis of the literacy-campaign model, the educating went both ways—from teacher to student and from student to teacher—neutralizing the hierarchies, Guevara argued, between mental and manual work. Rural citizens would learn how to read, and volunteers on location would do

physical labor, thus acquiring an enhanced awareness of inequalities and the need for social solidarity (Guevara 333-34, 372-74).

[6] On the transmission of the ideals of the literacy campaign model into the public education system, see Blum, Chapter 1.

[7] The 1964 UNESCO report that declared Cuba free of illiteracy is sustained in UNESCO's 2016 statistical report of Cuba's literacy rate as 100%. (http://data.unicef.org/resources/state-worlds-children-2016-statistical-tables/). As noted by comparative education scholar Anders Breidlid, "not even the most ardent critics of the Cuban political system can deny the impressive record of its educational system" (620).

[8] On the ideological content of literacy campaign materials and its translation into the Cuban educational system, see Medin, Chapter 5.

[9] Medin wrote in 1990, "The Cuban system is one of total education: total in the quantitative sense, since nearly the entirely population partakes of it . . . total in the generational sense; total in the existential sense, in that it embraces practically all spheres of human existence; and finally, total in the sense that it is exclusive . . . This principle of total education has remained essential, decisive, and constant, coherent with monolithic ideological unity and a society and state based fundamentally on mass organization" (77).

[10] Given the directness of their critique, not surprisingly, the open circulation of both these works was short lived at the time of their initial appearance. *Alicia en el pueblo de Maravillas* was shut down three days after it opened in February 1991. Although a Cuban edition of *Paisaje de arcilla* was published in 1997 and displayed in the 1998 international book festival in Havana, it was later withdrawn from circulation. A bilingual edition appeared in Chile in 2008.

[11] The term "quinquenio gris" was initially used to describe the years 1971-1976, a period marked by the repression of homosexuals and artists and intellectuals, although conventional wisdom holds that the punitive measures associated with the term date at least to the formation of the UMAP labor camps (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción) in the mid-1960s and that the "quinquenio" in fact lasted beyond 1976.

[12] Boan is director of the group Danza Abierta, which combines theatre, music, song, visual art, and some language into multi-media pieces anchored in dance.

[13] Rancière bases his educational concepts in language learning in the experiences of the nineteenth-century French schoolmaster, Joseph Jacotot, who, not knowing any Flemish, successfully fulfilled a contract to teach French to literate Flemish students who knew no prior French. A bilingual French/Flemish edition of Louis Fénelon's novel *Télémaque* (1699) constituted the only linguistic intersecting ground between teacher and students, a tome through which Jacotot required students to work their own way. In doing so, they successfully taught themselves French.

[14] Rancière titled the first chapter of his *Ignorant Schoolmaster,* which details the foundation for his concept of an emancipatory pedagogy, "An Intellectual Adventure."

[15] In Latin American literature, Vicente Huidobro's *Altazor* recycles the Icarus myth in the figure of the zealous experimental artist embodied in the poetic speaker. For a summary of some scholarship on Sor Juana's use of Phaeton see Myers.

[16] The repeated word for costume in Ícaros is "disfraz," a word that in Spanish can mean both "costume" and "disguise."

[17] See Putnam, for example, on transgendered characters in Disney films.

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