

## Collaborative Rewriting in Cuba's Teatro Escambray

As we have seen in the Introduction and we will be analyzing throughout this book, there are many definitions of rewriting and there are many ways that texts are rewritten. Perhaps the most interesting incorporation of revisions is that of self rewriting, as we see with the example of Grupo Teatro Escambray, a theater group that revises its own work based on community feedback. Teatro Escambray, in the early years of its existence, made criticism from the audience a fundamental element to the work that they created and produced, as evidenced in the play El paraíso recobrao [Paradise Regained] (1978). There are three *published* versions of this play (and surely countless unpublished ones), each revised based on interaction with the community to which the text was proposed, in an effort to make the work better and more effective. In this way, the reader-spectator of El paraíso recobrao can understand the impact that revisions have on the individual text and the idea of theater in the Escambray region, in Cuba, in the Caribbean, and in theater more generally. Unsurprisingly, we see that rewriting allows the group to perfect its objective through honing the story and its language. Moreover, this particular way of revising permits the theater group to grow closer to the community in which it lives and understand their perspectives from within. Rewriting connects the theater community with the people that it is trying to affect, thus delivering the Revolutionary promise of integrating all communities into the Revolution. These effects reveal that the theater of revisions does more than perfect the final product; it changes the entire community in which it moves.

As has been argued in the Introduction, the role of rewriting is central to all of theater—after all, collaboration is key to the production of a theatrical text: The producer and director comment on the playwright’s text, the actor interprets these words as actions, etc. Many theater groups, though, have made revision and collaboration a central tenet to their originating purpose. One such theater group is Cuba’s Teatro Escambray, which was established in 1968 as a response to the claim that theater was too distant from the people.<sup>1</sup> The origins of Teatro Escambray emerged from the ideas that questioned the role of the intellectual in the Revolutionary society that was being created in the wake of the Revolution of 1959. Several artists saw an impetus to create theater that connected with the people and the Revolutionary ideas that were being institutionalized. These were ideas that had been penetrating into the intellectual world following the triumph of the Revolution when there was first an emphasis on consolidating the military victory. As the political hold became less tenuous, Fidel Castro and his government turned their eyes to the artistic and social spheres and the function of the artist transformed completely.<sup>2</sup> A small group of theater artists decided to abandon the Havana stages that they saw as divorced from the reality of the people and “Mostrando una enorme confianza en la Revolución, se lanzaron al vacío [Showing enormous confidence in the Revolution, they threw themselves into the void]” (Pogolotti 13).

In an effort to make the Revolutionary lessons a part of the rural areas that were disconnected from the official thought process in terms of proximity and ideology, members of the Havana theater community decided to live and practice in a region of concern. After the initial years when the Cuban Revolution of 1959 needed to politically and militarily consolidate its hold on the Island nation, the arts community began to reflect on what was being created and how these products did or did not reflect the new goals of the Revolutionary society. Some believed that there needed to be a shift in thinking and creating away from concern over those that were not accepting of these new ideas (as seen in the art that was created and produced in Havana). Instead, there should be an emphasis on those that *were* creating the Revolution.<sup>3</sup> In this way, in 1968 as a result of conversations at the Cultural Congress of Havana, some members of the theater community in Havana—well-known names in Havana such as Sergio Corrieri, Albio Paz, Flora Lauten, Gilda Hernández, among others—decided to create a theater company that would respond to the realities of the country at the moment rather than what they saw as external

problems or “alienating and alienated theatre” (Weiss 144). In the words of Sergio Corrieri, a founder of the group, in this new world that was being created, “artistas y pueblo deben ser la misma cosa [artists and the people should be the same]” (366). Thus, Teatro Escambray—even before it was Teatro Escambray—was formed on the premise that the theater being made and produced would be in close contact with the people among whom it lived and for whom it was written.

Seeing that a close connection with the local community was fundamental to the project of the group, this new theater group chose the region carefully, looking for a stable population, a region that was integral to the Revolutionary transformation, and one that also had a history with the movement (Petit 72). These three conditions were found in the Escambray region. This is a mountainous area that has had a consistent population mainly descended from the Spanish without much mixing from other peoples. The area had traditionally been isolated, thus, not encouraging many new ideas or peoples. While those in the region had supported the Revolution of 1959 and been integral to its triumph, the very nature (isolated, mountainous) of the area made it central to the resistance movements, while the local community’s skepticism of Havana helped them to be more sympathetic to insurgent movements. These aspects facilitated the Escambray’s distancing from Havana and made the area a prime region for the theater group’s objectives. The Teatro Escambray was established in the Escambray region of Cuba among the people that the group’s members viewed could benefit the most.<sup>4</sup> Aligning with the Revolution’s commitment to educate its people, the members of the Teatro Escambray moved to and worked in one of these pivotal areas, creating theater that would be important to the people living there and, it must be remembered, would educate them in the ways and the benefits of the Revolution.<sup>5</sup>

The integration with the local community was to be achieved through involving this community in the writing and performing of the theater. Sergio Corrieri emphasizes that the writing of the Group’s plays has always been a solitary experience: One person writes the script of the play and is named as the author, although many have a say in the understanding of the problem in question.<sup>6</sup> The collective experience for which Teatro Escambray is known for comes from the process before and after the writing. Teatro Escambray exercises “una creación colectiva para una comunicación colectiva [collective creation for collective communication]” (Corrieri 365).<sup>7</sup> Although this process has changed with the years that

Teatro Escambray has existed, in the early years—the ones that concern us here in the examination of El paraíso recobrao, the issues that the group would write on emerged from extensive interviews and discussions with the people of the region.<sup>8</sup> The transcription of these interviews allowed the group collectively to understand what were the particular problems or questions of most importance. After the individual writing of the play, the group would come together again to work on the play through readings and rehearsals, a common experience that all produced theater undergoes. The difference, however, emerges in the next step: Teatro Escambray's relationship with its audience.

The role of the audience in Teatro Escambray's theater is of fundamental importance. There was no tradition of theater in the Escambray region, making the experience something new for the local community. Their active participation during and after the performance—their collective communication—became central to the collective creation that Corrieri emphasizes in Teatro Escambray. This was seen with interventions during the rehearsals and performances, but most notably with their extensive feedback after a performance. This practice consists of a conversation or debate after a performance where the community comments on the topics presented onstage and the way that it is presented. This will be analyzed in-depth with El paraíso recobrao since we have transcripts of one of these conversations and notes from another. This is an absolutely fundamental experience for Teatro Escambray and an element that defines them, not simply an extra that could be cut out, as Sergio Corrieri explains (367).

The most salient quality of the Teatro Escambray is this level of interaction with the region, particularly in the first decade or so of its existence. This is of importance for this book since it is from here that the group's revising and rewriting originates, a process that was built into the writing of each play (as we will see in the text analyzed here). The group made theater not just for the people among whom they lived but also *with* them since collaboration was essential to the production of their theater. From 1969 they set up two bases in the region: one for the rainy season and another from which they would tour. Initially, the group set up in the area and conducted interviews for the people, while some members transcribed and analyzed these exchanges. In some cases, close relationships between the theater group and the community members emerged, as was seen in the connections with the region's children.<sup>9</sup> The theater that was produced was based on the research done in the area and was seen to connect closely with the reality of the audience for which it was staged. What's more, the

plays were adapted according to the critiques of this very community-audience. As Rafael González Rodríguez, a playwright and advisor of Teatro Escambray, explains the group's creative process and communication during the time period 1971–1981:

it responded objectively to a *certain type of public*, which, whether viewed in terms of its class differences or as discrete social groupings, constituted above all a *cultural community* made up of the different sectors of the Escambray region's population. The relationship between theatre group and public as essentially determined by this public's specific qualities as a cultural community, even when the meaning of the collective's work was directed toward promoting vigorous ethical-political discussion among the community. (98)

Inherent in the collectively written play is a strong emphasis on rewriting and revisions, to such an extent that there are multiple versions of some plays. *El paraíso recobrao* is an example of a play that was published in the collection *Teatro Escambray* with three different versions (reminding us of the idea of the palimpsest) and, for this reason, serves as an interesting starting point for a study of theater of revisions. We have already established that inherent in all writing is revising and that the collaboration central to theater makes it a genre that lends itself to rewriting. In this way, then, what happens to a play that has three published versions? How does revising change both the play and the purpose of theater in this instance and beyond? And what can this tell us about the theater of revisions in a wider perspective?

To answer these questions, *The Theater of Revisions in the Hispanic Caribbean* examines the play *El paraíso recobrao*, three different versions of which are included in the collection *Teatro Escambray*. *El paraíso recobrao* is part of a cycle of various plays that all benefitted from the same outlined process that responded to an identified need within the community (in this example, the role of Jehovah's Witnesses in the region) and attempted to address the issue from a Revolutionary perspective. Furthermore, what is central to the production of the Escambray plays is that the theater was intended to open a debate; the plays reflected this preference by leaving the ending open.<sup>10</sup> Just as the plays could be changed according to the community's reactions, the community would be urged to engage in a discussion of the play's topic and what it meant within the framework of the region. As González Rodríguez details, the theater produced by Teatro Escambray during this time period, then, can be seen to be

expressions of a common theatrical heritage communicating with a cultural community that not only supplied themes, but, as a culture expressing itself in specific historical circumstances, imprinted the form of this communication with particular characteristics and contributed a signifying system of cultural expression—from its behavioral models to its forms of artistic expression—which led to genuine transformations in the cultural forms brought by the group. (101–102)

Seen in this way, El paraíso recobrao attempts to respond to the community's needs within the framework offered by the Revolution. Teatro Escambray created a type of theater that returned to essential ideas of what it meant to create theater in the 1960s, and how that artistic production could revolutionize the community in which it found itself and beyond.

It is here that we see the role of revising and rewriting that will occupy our interest in this chapter and beyond. While a workshopped play will be altered and rewritten based on feedback from those involved in the acting and production of it, the centrality that community feedback has in Teatro Escambray and the way that this feedback is used to rewrite the final product allows the reader-spectator to examine what effect this has on theater more generally. Furthermore, the fact that this is not only an acknowledged element of the theater group but something that is highlighted through the publication of three versions of the same play along with a transcript of the community debates and notes on another meeting underlines the differences between these practices and other theater groups.

The Theater of Revisions in the Hispanic Caribbean, which considers how revisions and rewriting affect the production of theater and its place within its communities, directly benefits from an examination of the three different versions of this play in many ways. First, we see that this idea of theater as collaborative and rewritten defines it both for the specific audience for whom it is performed and for the wider one that reads and learns from Teatro Escambray's tactics (combining both the spectator and reader). Theater is defined by collaboration and rewriting. Furthermore, theater, according to Teatro Escambray, is judged by its commitment to its regional community and political ideals rather than the quality of text or production, an idea that can be seen in Augusto Boal's Teatro do oprimido and many of Brecht's theories, among others, but that conflicts with some classical ideas of theater.

Augusto Boal, along with many Latin American dramaturges, was a pivotal figure in theatrical innovation who urged theater to become a tool of liberation. Augusto Boal, using ideas developed first by Paolo Freire, aimed to transform the role of the spectator. He authored Theater of the Oppressed (1974), a manual for the community that outlines how the theater can be a link to the liberation of the oppressed. Boal's reference to Freire's work creates a dialogue between the two that helps to establish a framing for the later work and places it within the space of education for liberation. The theater, the physical space as well as the figurative, is where the community can reflect in order to learn about and debate fundamental topics for social growth and advancement; in this way, theater is where the community comes together to advance. Boal proposes that the liberating future of theater lies in the total collaboration of both sides of the stage: "the barrier between actors and spectators is destroyed: all must act" (x). In this way, theater is a tool that can liberate those who are involved in its production as well as those who participate as spectators. The implications of this are enormous: Attending a play supposes a level of complicity where the spectator will participate directly in the production of the play. For Boal, the differences in roles do not exist but are erased in order to create something new. This allows a type of theater that is in direct communication with the community surrounding it through its topics and messages. Theater, then, becomes an instrument made in collaboration where the audience and the actors, the students and teachers blend into one body, just as we see in the example of Teatro Escambray.

Bertolt Brecht, another important influence on Latin American theater of the twentieth century, proposes his epic theater as the ideal response to provoke the audience to action. Brecht believed that the traditional theater made the spectator identify with the action on-stage, thus experiencing the catharsis that Aristotle identifies. Brecht, as opposed to Aristotle, found that the cathartic experience lulled the audience into accepting the situation rather than provoking them to act against it, the primary purpose of theater. Brecht aimed to provoke his audience through distancing that would make the spectator understand that the play was theater and not reality. In the theories of both of these pillars of twentieth-century theater, the spectator became an actor—in fact, Boal called his spectators "spect-actors". Brecht emphasizes this role through provoking his audience to think and reason about the topic. These ideas would revolutionize the idea of what theater is and what it is capable of within a community, ideas that would bear fruit in the popular theater of Latin America, as we

see in Teatro Escambray. Teatro Escambray allowed for the emergence of a new type of spectator: One that would contribute to the final product through debate and that could benefit from this new world.

In Cuba, there were many attempts to bridge the gap between the promises of the Revolution and its actual delivery through the arts, as we see with Teatro Escambray. However, this gap also provoked difficulties as the Revolution became more and more entrenched. The contentious relationship between the government and the arts evolved over the course of the decade of the sixties and affected artistic production and its official reception. After the triumphant entrance of Fidel Castro and the other revolutionaries to Havana in 1959, the Revolution was initially receptive to the arts and helped to promote them both financially and politically, as can be seen in the creation of the Casa de las Américas and the Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas Cubanos (UNEAC). However, after the Revolution consolidated its power politically, it turned its view to the solidification of its definition socially, a task that required input and creation from the artistic community. In this way, the artistic opening that had emerged began to narrow as the Revolution tightened what could form a part of this definition. This control over artistic production was seen in various moves throughout the art world such as the decision from the Congreso de Educación y Cultura in 1971 that all works that would win prizes through the annual awards would need to be revolutionary in nature. And the consequences for those that published works that may not be strongly revolutionary were known throughout the community. The publication of José Lezama Lima's Paradiso—it was published but in such a small number that it was virtually not available—and Fuera de juego from Heberto Padilla, of the infamous *caso Padilla*, are two examples of works that were not deemed acceptable and authors who were consequently marginalized (and will be discussed in more detail in the conclusion). While there were, of course, artists willing to challenge these new boundaries of what was acceptable, there were others that saw the restrictions as necessary to build the new world that the Revolution was forming, one among them being the Grupo Escambray, which was formed in an effort to bring the Revolution's message to a marginalized, inaccessible, and vulnerable part of the country.

El paraíso recobrao, written by Albio Paz, is a play that uses collective creation and feedback from its intended audience to produce the final product (just like all the products of Teatro Escambray). The play was written by Albio Paz, but it was also a more collaborative process than that

simple phrase shows. The final product emerged from many people's interventions and many conversations both before and after Paz created his text. I say final product, though, in an interesting sense there is no—or perhaps many—“final” product since there are three versions that are published in the collection Teatro Escambray. This revising of the final text allows the reader-spectator to interrogate the role of rewriting in the creation of a theatrical play. El paraíso recobrao, like all of Teatro Escambray's theater, particularly in its first few years, confronts an issue of importance for the people of the Escambray region and of difficulty for the Revolution's aims in the area: the role of the Jehovah's Witnesses. As Graziella Pogolotti details in the Prologue to the collection, the Escambray region was an area that did not have strong ties to religion since the Catholic hierarchy had tended to stay more in urban settings. This reality made the mountainous region alluring for the Witnesses given that it was particularly suited to the small groups that would go into the area. The Revolution, suspicious of all religion, was at particular odds with the Jehovah's Witnesses given their resistance to several of the advances of the Revolutionary government such as military service, healthcare, and education campaigns.<sup>11</sup>

The play El paraíso recobrao<sup>12</sup> portrays a meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses where, in the first version, at the behest of Sarah, the leader of the group, the other members begin to recount their experiences of conversion to become a Witness. The telling of these experiences offers the other members a way to “analyze” the actions of their fellow Witnesses and it becomes obvious that their interpretations of the members' actions and of the scriptures themselves are in conflict with the “official” teachings of the religion. These interpretations cause countless arguments among the members finally culminating in a power struggle that brings about the end of the group. The first version of this play published in the collection Teatro Escambray is followed by three paragraphs entitled “Conclusiones del tercer seminario del Grupo Teatro Escambray [Conclusiones to the third seminar of the Theater Group Escambray],” which detail the Group's reactions to this version, including the idea that the first half of the text was good but the second less clear and more repetitive. This is, of course, a natural process where the play benefitted from the collective workshop that is inherent to theater. But its inclusion in this volume allows the reader-spectator to comprehend from the inside the construction of the spectacle and how revision plays a pivotal role in the final product.

In the second version of the play, the text is streamlined by omitting the character of Sarah and adding two singers who intervene between the actors' recounting of their experiences luring people into the ministry. The same experiences are retold but without the context of the meeting between Jehovah's Witnesses who then interpret the actions. In this way, the play becomes less realistic but also more direct in its purpose. The two singers offer their own evaluation of what has been and will be enacted in an attempt to guide the reader-spectator to specific themes and assessments of what has occurred and of those involved. The characters, though virtually the same as the first version (with the exception of Sarah and Babilonia, who are both excluded here), are presented here in a metatheatrical way in that, as the singers set up the scene to follow, the reader-spectator watches them put on the props and costuming of the characters they will portray, thus underlining the production of the spectacle (reminding us, of course, of Brecht's ideas that emphasize the theater as theater).

Another interesting aspect of this second version is that it ends with the two singers inviting discussion from the audience, followed by a transcript of the debate from July 24, 1974, where the spectators presented their opinions on the material in the play. Including the transcript of this debate allows the reader to understand more fully the atmosphere of the play and attempts to recreate the performance. Much of this conversation reconfirms the ideas offered by El paraíso recobrao, such as the way that the Jehovah's Witnesses infiltrate the area and prey on those in need and that they are launching a "contrarrevolución ideológica [ideological counter-revolution]" against the Revolution. For the purposes of The Theater of Revisions in the Hispanic Caribbean, this conversation highlights the construction of a theater of revisions from the inside, allowing us to understand the role of rewriting in the creation of theater and its message.

Despite the affirmation that the play was received in the way it was intended, there is a third version. This is explained in the collection for the following reasons: One, the use of the two "poets" was misunderstood by the audience and was not structurally sound; two, the suppression of various aspects of the first version was detrimental to the creation of good theater. Furthermore, the years that passed from the first version to the third resulted in the evolution of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the region into a decidedly counterrevolutionary group (189–190). This view that they were clearly counterrevolutionary obviously sets them up to be a clearer

threat to the Revolution and to the theater group itself, and thus makes the play all the more necessary within this atmosphere.

The third version of El paraíso recobrao returns to many of the elements of the first version by eliminating the role of the two singers and recuperating the characters of Sarah, the leader who comes in from outside to help consolidate the group's work, and Babilonia, the most skeptical member who often presents opinions that are in line with the Revolution. Furthermore, the presentation of the experiences (when the members convince others to join the ministry) is more streamlined to show the episodes without the infighting that characterized the first version. The most notable difference in this third version is the ending. Whereas the plot returns to the first version in some senses, the third makes the criticism more explicit. In the first, we saw Sarah get angry at the constant requests and bickering between the Witnesses. The third version returns to the Witnesses arguing over the location in paradise that they have been promised to such an extent that Sarah abandons them. Though Moises tries to convince her to stay, she leaves them, and he and Timoteo are quickly run off as well. The play ends with the former Witnesses celebrating the fact that they have thrown out the Jehovah's Witnesses in the region, ending with a celebration of their liberation, not infighting as we saw in the first version. The final words of the play belong to the characters from the region, not an extra-theatrical character that is meant to interpret the actions represented giving power back to the people meant to be empowered.

The ending of the final version of El paraíso recobrao is meant to clearly differentiate this one from the earlier two and point to the changes that have occurred over the course of the years in the region vis-à-vis the Jehovah's Witnesses. Furthermore, the characters that belong to the region gain an autonomy and wisdom here that allows them to recognize the faults of the Witnesses and reject the religion on their own, an action that will, in turn, incorporate the region into the official political and social projects. The role of self-awareness and autonomy is particularly important and points to the project of the Revolution to empower the people to make it more successful. It also shows the success of this empowerment campaign in that the region no longer needed to be guided in what they think but could be trusted to choose the Revolutionary option.<sup>13</sup> In this way, the revising of El paraíso recobrao gives evidence of the evolution of the people and their increased social and political consciousness. Through an examination of these three versions of the play, the reader-spectator can understand both the theater group's objective and the progression of the

region. Here, then, the theater of revisions provides a study of the area and of how theater can be used to influence a people. The rewriting highlighted in the published versions of the play underlines a type of theater that is not static but instead responds to its environment and contributes to the debate of the community in which it unfolds.

Throughout the three versions, the reader-spectator sees the questioning of the apolitical nature of the Witnesses, a central theme of El paraíso recobrao. This is refined throughout the versions, though it is important to underline in the first version the role of implicit commendation of the Revolution and what it has achieved in the area—an area underserved by virtually all of the previous governments. This praise is seen in part in the covert criticism of the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ aversion to politics. The most consistent way the play shows the Witnesses’ condemnation of the government can be seen in their admonition of the word “Revolution.” The Witnesses are meant to be apolitical, keeping themselves out of politics, a quality which would make them abhorrent to the Revolution that was endeavoring to bring more and more to their side, especially in this particular region.

However, the reality of their apolitical attitude was doubted even by their own as seen in the following exchange between Sarah and Moises, the recognized elder of the group:

SARAH: [...] Así frenamos su integración a los planes de la Revolución y...

MOISES: ¡Hermana Sarah, eso parece un discurso político!

SARAH: ¡Ay, hermano Moises, cuándo usted va a acabar de darse cuenta de la realidad! (*Descubre la actitud agresiva de Babilonia.*) Además, yo no he mencionado nada de política.

MOISES: ¿Usted dijo la palabra Revolución?

SARAH: ¡No mencione esa palabra en el templo! Yo dije frenar los planes de la tentación. ¡De la tentación de Satanás!

[SARAH: [...] That’s how we stop their integration into the Revolution’s plans and ...

MOISES: Sister Sarah, that sounds like a political speech!

SARAH: Oh, Brother Moises, when are you going to finally understand reality! (*She sees Babilonia’s aggressive stance.*) Besides, I haven’t mentioned anything political.

MOISES: You said the word Revolution?

SARAH: Don't say that word in the temple! I said stop the plans of temptation. The temptation of Satan!]. (115)

In this exchange, the reader-spectator sees the official skepticism of the aim of the Witnesses' apolitical words, seeing them instead as counterrevolutionary, a common accusation that the government leveled against those who did not toe the party line.<sup>14</sup> It is here that we see certain ties between Teatro Escambray and the official ideas put forth by the Revolution, connecting this theater group with the official interpretations of the Revolution. As seen in the quote above, the idea of remaining outside politics is impossible and the apolitical aspect of the Witnesses is, in fact, a front for their counterrevolutionary ideas in official terms. Furthermore, the role of the new government is lauded in the eyes of Babilonia, who sees it as a positive force and change for the people: "Hermano, es que yo creo que con toa esa cosa de que la gente no se meta en los planes y no hacer na de lo que el Gobierno quiere, lo que estamos haciendo la contra. ¡Al único Gobierno bueno que hemos tenido! [Brother, it's just that I think that all of this about people not being involved in plans and not doing anything that the Government wants, we're going against the tide. Against the only good Government that we've had!]" (116). These quotes from the play remind the reader-spectator of the origins of the Teatro Escambray and induce us to examine critically this particular issue in the two subsequent versions of El paraíso recobrao.

The insights of the second version on this topic are very interesting as Babilonia does not appear at all, and so cannot offer a positive interpretation of the Revolution or question the political neutrality of the Jehovah's Witnesses. This is, however, an essential role that is instead fulfilled by the two singers that the second version includes. These singers are to be seated among the audience, thus creating the illusion that they belong with the spectators in space and ideology (145). The singers frame the different episodes that detail how the Witnesses recruited another member to their religion. In this way, they serve to set up and reinforce a certain interpretation of the actions portrayed. In their first intervention, the two singers exchange words, culminating with their opinion of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The first one says that, though he is not one himself, the Witness is a good person, helping those in need, to which the second responds with a different interpretation of these actions: "*no piensas, inocente, /que es*

*situación aparente /para poderte captar [don't think, innocent, /that it is an apparent situation /to capture you]*" (147). With this admonishment of the Witnesses, the cantante 2 offers to show a representation where the Witness (in the first case Moisés) tries to capture someone unfortunate for the ministry.

The three episodes that make up the play portray people in difficult circumstances being "captured" by Jehovah's Witnesses. In between each episode, the singers again discuss the Witnesses, with the second reconfirming his negative views of the Witnesses and the first seeing them as not so calculating and malicious. Despite the first singer's repetition that he himself does not ascribe to their teachings, the second rejects this saying that his words confuse and ultimately defend them: "*Tu lugar está en el templo, /yo no te puedo admitir /que vengas a confundir /a este público presente, /trabajador y consciente; /vete allá con tus hermanos, /con los buenos, los humanos, /y déjame con mi gente [Your place is in the temple, /I can't let you /come to confuse /the present public, /hard-working and conscientious; go there with your brothers, /with the good ones, the humans, /and leave me with my people]*" (151–152). These words of condemnation for the first singer's half-hearted defense of the Jehovah's Witnesses are very interesting in that they do not allow for a middle ground: You are either a Witness or completely opposed to them—a common dichotomy set up by the revolutionary government during these years. Furthermore, they expose a radicalization that was not evident in the first version where everyone was a Witness and Babilonia's defense of the government was tepid.

This extremism that forces a choice between one side and the other is evident once again in the singers' intervention between the second and third experiences in an even stronger sense. Here, the first singer starts by emphasizing to the other that he would never be convinced by the Jehovah's Witnesses and that he would throw them out: "*Tranquilo puedes estar /no me van a convencer [...] les doy tremenda botá /y me río a carcajadas [You can be calm /they're not going to convince me [...] I'll give them a big kick /and I'll laugh my head off]*" (158). However, this personal rejection of those in the religion is not enough in that it does not combat against what the second singer sees as their attack on the Revolution, a criticism with which the first singer does not agree since the Witnesses profess their desire to remain outside of politics. It is this apolitical attitude that the second singer finds to criticize since, in his opinion

(an opinion that is upheld by the official Revolutionary government), this aids the counterrevolutionaries:

*Enseñar a no tomar  
las armas a sus hermanos,  
a que se crucen de manos  
si nos vienen a atacar.  
¿No es eso beneficiar  
al invasor extranjero?  
[Teaching our brothers  
to not take up arms,  
that they cross their arms  
if they come to attack us.  
Isn't that benefitting  
our foreign invader?]. (159)*

In these words, choosing not to fight is, without a doubt, a counterrevolutionary argument that not only complicitly supports the enemies (both internal and external) but is traitorous behavior. This scene (and others) draws a line between being *for* the Revolution and its projects and being *against* them, with no room in the middle for the undecided.

This extremism of forcing the people to choose sides is typical of this moment in the consolidation of the Cuban Revolution, and once again, exhibits the role of this theater group in promoting the official ideals of the government, though this close connection was not shared uniformly in the arts. In this way, when the second singer puts forth the belief that the Jehovah's Witnesses' supposed neutrality really makes them counterrevolutionaries, the play is proposing an argument that is being popularized by the official government and is illustrating to the regional spectators that they must not remain on the sidelines in this battle. As the play continues, the reader-spectators see that they will not be permitted to stay neutral and will be forced to fight for the Revolution or risk being perceived as against the Revolution, remembering Fidel Castro's famous words from the 1961 speech "Palabras a los intelectuales [Words to the Intellectuals]:" "dentro

de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución, nada [within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing].”<sup>15</sup>

After examining the exclusion of Sarah and Babilonia and the introduction of the singers in the second version, it is interesting to see that the third version again includes both Sarah and Babilonia, though their roles have evolved a bit since the first version. Sarah continues being the leader from outside (from Santa Clara) who aids the group in interpreting the experiences in the “correct” (read: Jehovah’s Witness) way. Again, she abandons the group but this time is run off by the people of the region who consequently reject all the Witnesses and the religion, thus, bringing the play to an end. Sarah continues to be the official face of the sect that praises questionable behavior and causes new recruits to be brought into the religion despite outlandish promises and manipulative practices. She is portrayed as an insensitive outsider who does not understand the people of the Escambray region and does not really want to. She finds them uneducated but for this very reason, easy to convince:

SARAH: [...] en estas zonas del campo las personas tienen poca cultura... Ustedes mismos saben lo que es eso...

BABILONIA: Que somos brutos, vaya.

SARAH: Eso mismo. Pues cuando uno les habla así, de una manera bonita, las convencemos más rápidamente

[SARAH: [...] in these country areas the people aren’t very cultured... You know what that’s like...]

BABILONIA: That we’re dumb.

SARAH: That’s it. When you speak to them like this, in a nice way, you convince them quickly]. (204)

She is an obvious allusion to the foreign forces that make their way into the region without understanding the people or the history of the area, one of the very interventions that the Grupo Escambray moved to the area to prevent.<sup>16</sup> Her abandonment of the people in the play represents the foreign desire to infiltrate what is seen to be a vulnerable region, while her distrust of the Revolution alludes to the foreign powers vying to bring down the official government.

Babilonia also returns to this third version of *El paraíso recobrao* but is not the comic relief or a simple dissenting voice. Here she gains a more

defined role as a critic of the Witnesses despite nominally being one herself. Many of Babilonia's interventions are asides to the audience that point out a contradiction or implied criticism of the local people, as can be seen in the exchange quoted above. While this may be seen as a simple way to gain a laugh from the audience, it does more. The laugh that her caustic observations provoke makes a connection between the character and the spectator, initiating a relationship between the two sides that may make the spectator more apt to have confidence in her perspective. What's more, Babilonia's sarcastic comments about Sarah or the Jehovah's Witnesses deride these two and rob them of authority in the spectator's eyes and, simultaneously, laud the opposing viewpoint. She becomes a stronger character that represents a local viewpoint that understands and states the achievements of the Revolution. This change in the third version strengthens the connection with the region and the region's autonomy in making their own decisions and evaluations.

The third version also reprises a group of musicians that, in the other versions, have been almost converted to the religious sect. These new musicians occupy a critical role in the actions of the Witnesses and Sarah through the spontaneous songs that they perform as a way to ostensibly praise the Witnesses' actions, though the words and tone of the lyrics point to something else. Here, they talk about the role of the group in the region and what their objective is while pointing out that Jehovah is always watching to see how his people are behaving.<sup>17</sup> However, the actual words of the songs show a less favorable view when examined closely since they begin to question the teachings that Sarah praises and puts forth in the name of the official religion. We see this in the *décimas* that the musicians Pepón and Joseíto produce after the telling of Juancho and Noemí's experience. These two Witnesses lost their son when he was attacked by a cow but were convinced to join the sect when they heard that their son would return, news that they received joyfully with the intention to sacrifice their animals one by one in preparation for his return. This celebratory act has left them with virtually no animals and, therefore, almost destitute. The musicians reassure the couple in their songs, but it is a comfort that is rather ironic since it points out the flaws in Sarah's arguments and signals the inherent lack of logic that is being used to manipulate the region's occupants: "*Pues Juancito volverá / olvidense de su luto / maten pollos, guarden frutos / porque Sarah con su ciencia / cuando explicó la experiencia / nos dijo que somos brutos* [Well, Juancito will return / forget

*your mourning /kill the chickens, save the fruit / because Sarah with her science / when she explained the experience / told us that we were dumb]”* (216).

In this version, then, the role of a skeptic is played by internal members of the community (rather than the singers of the second version that were outside the action and the region). Insiders are empowered to question the validity of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and their teachings within the Escambray region. This introduction of mistrust and doubt grows even stronger in Sarah’s reaction to the musicians’ songs in that she takes a more and more disapproving view of the suitability of the songs to the religion as the play progresses. This disapproval of both the music and dancing that ensues—two activities that are, of course, well regarded by the average Cuban—erodes her authority and allows the regional spectator and the character within the play to become skeptical of both Sarah and the religion she represents.

The idea of lauding the Revolution and its achievements continues when the focus turns to Edelmira and José’s story of joining the Witnesses. Edelmira wanted to move to the new towns that the government has been building, a story that we find in all three versions, as we see in this analysis of the episode from the first version. José has expressed interest in the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and she sees this as an obstacle to receiving approval to move to the town. José and the others see her desire as a rejection of their way of life and, what’s worse for the Jehovah’s Witnesses, an acceptance of the government:

EDELMIRA: (*De frente al público.*) ¡Yo lo único que quiero es que mis hijos se críen distinto, que tengan otro roce! ¡Que vayan a una escuela buena y aprendan! ¡Que sigan estudiando y se hagan gente importante!

NOEMÍ: (*A María.*) ¡Pa que los pobres angelitos tengan que cantar el himno y saludar la bandera!

MARÍA: (*A Noemí.*) ¡No, y seguro que cuando se hagan médico o algo de eso se tienen que meter en las cosas de la Revolución!

[EDELMIRA: (*Facing the audience.*) The only thing I want is for my children to grow up differently, that they go another way! Go to a good school and learn! That they keep studying and become something!

NOEMÍ: (*To María.*) So that the poor angels have to sing the anthem and salute the flag!

MARÍA: (*To Noemí.*) No, and surely when they become doctors or something like it, they have to get involved with the Revolution!]. (111)

Edelmira expresses the desire for any mother to give her children the best opportunities available, a laudable aspiration, but that would entail her family leaving the area. Noemí and María, rather than understanding, disparage her desire and see only the debt that would be created between Edelmira's family and the Revolution. This debt would demand that she and her children give back to the Revolution and not Jehovah, creating dependence in the eyes of the Witnesses that would be abhorrent, as José himself points out just a little further in this same scene: "¡Eso de depender de otra gente! [...] ¡Pero eso de que sea otra gente la que trabaje pa ti...! ¡Eso no me da confianza, Delmira, no me da confianza! [Depending on other people! [...] But having other people work for you! That doesn't work for me, Delmira, that doesn't work for me!]" (113). Here, the relationship that is created between the state and the individual is interpreted as undesirable by the Witnesses, although Edelmira's words linger in the minds of the reader-spectator ("¡Pero yo creo que es más bonito trabajar to el mundo y que to el mundo trabaje pa uno! [But I think it's nice to work for everyone and everyone works for you!]" (113)). By ending with Edelmira and José joining the Witnesses, we can see the ambivalence that marked this first version of the play and demanded a new clearer text.

Much of this ambivalence is gone when we consider the second version. Here, as analyzed above, the two singers directly engage in the debate on what the role of the Jehovah's Witnesses is in the contemporary push to consolidate the Revolution's gains and definitions. Singer 1, who throughout the play had been hesitant to condemn the sect, shows that he has been enlightened and agrees with the total condemnation of the religion: "*He bajado de la luna /donde yo estaba subido* [I've come down from the moon / where I had gone up to]" (167). With these words, the viewpoint that *El paraíso recobrao* is putting forth is clear: to draw definite lines around the Jehovah's Witnesses' activities as counterrevolutionary and something which all those who support the Revolution and its aims must fight against. If they do not, they would in effect be supporting those who would bring about the end of the Revolution. Nevertheless, in order to avoid any ambivalence that might still exist in the hearts or minds of the audience members, the singers encourage the spectators to speak about the play since this is the main goal of the spectacle and the point of the group's

theater more generally: “*Es bueno que discutamos, / tienen que colaborar* [*It’s good to discuss, / they have to collaborate*]” (169). These words are fundamental to the project of the play and the Grupo Escambray’s larger mission in creating both a dialogue and an outlet for the Revolution’s message with the people of the region in which they are located. While it is obvious that the group invites feedback here and changes the dynamic of a theater performance through the solicited dialogue, this is also an attempt to ensure that the spectators understand the central message that the Jehovah’s Witnesses are a corrupting influence on the region and are trying to cripple the Revolution’s objectives. By asking for the spectators’ interpretations, the theater group can see whether the play’s objective is clear or not.

The third version of El paraíso recobrao is even more straight forward in its presentation of the material and its objectives, having streamlined various characters to get the most impact. In the final incarnation of the play, the Jehovah’s Witnesses are expelled from the area by the residents themselves, thus taking for themselves the power to recognize their own best interests and the authority to act upon them. In this way, the play holds close to the objectives of the Teatro Escambray in bringing the Revolution’s aims to a pivotal region for the long-term consolidation of revolutionary goals. Here, then, the theater of revisions serves to consolidate the message and streamline what the reader-spectator will consume. The message becomes more and more direct through the suppression and addition of characters and their utterances. In this way, we see the role of the palimpsest in action in the theatrical context in that the earlier versions remain an important point of dialogue for the subsequent texts.

When thinking about the palimpsest in theater, El paraíso recobrao and Teatro Escambray give us the perfect opportunity to understand the process of the theater of revisions since the group published the three versions. In this way, they displayed for the world their own collective, creative process in El paraíso recobrao, a process that was indicative of their theater group (and also connects to many others’ from the time period) and responded to many calls for theater that engaged with its local community (reminding the reader-spectator of the ideas of Brecht and Boal). The additional inclusion of the notes that explain the changes and of the transcript of the encounter with the spectators turns the readers’ eyes definitively to the role of rewriting in El paraíso recobrao and the Grupo Escambray, more generally. While there is much to be analyzed in this

process, for the sake of this study, the role of revising and rewriting is of singular importance and allows us to understand how revising can refine a theatrical product into one that presents a definitive view for the present and for the future. Here, in El paraíso recobrao, both the message for and the image of the region and its people becomes more well defined in each progressive version, underlining the play's and the group's importance in the contemporary conversation. The consistency of the message similarly underlines the group's desire for a unified vision on the Jehovah's Witnesses. These points highlight the role of theatrical production in the consolidation of an official message and, thus, underscore theater's importance in the creation of the national archive and canon. The reader-spectator sees here that a study of the theater of revisions is essential to understand the development of a finely tuned message—just as an author rewrites in order to perfect his or her message, theater fine-tunes its idea through revisions. As we will see in the course of The Theater of Revisions in the Hispanic Caribbean, a theater of revisions sometimes serves to perfect a message (as here with Teatro Escambray); other times, it is a destabilizing force that dismantles these official messages. This dual nature of the theater of revisions is inherent to the dramatic genre, just as we see in the tension between the written text and the performed one.

El paraíso recobrao from Teatro Escambray shows how the use of rewriting affects a particular work and the general body of work from one particular theater group. We see that rewriting is an inherent step of theater, but its purposeful employment within the community of Teatro Escambray makes for a stronger, more effective product. Moreover, both the final product and the process itself highlight for the reader-spectator how revisions create the discussion around the issue. Just as we see that the process evident in El paraíso recobrao incorporates different opinions and voices, we can see that revisions in theater allow the space for alternate points of view to be integrated into the final product. The purpose of The Theater of Revisions in the Hispanic Caribbean is to understand in multiple perspectives how this integration happens and what is the result of this. In the chapters that follow, the authors borrow from other authors or contexts, rather than rewriting themselves, as we see in this example here. This revising others' words allows the plays to include different perspectives, as seen in the example from Teatro Escambray, but it also encourages the plays to challenge the earlier text or example, as we will see in Chap. 3 on the use of ancient Greek theater in the Spanish Caribbean.

## NOTES

1. This claim is made by, among many others, Graziella Pogolotti in her Prologue to the collection Teatro Escambray. Here, she says that theater before the Revolution was mainly defined by an urban, *petit bourgeois* audience, despite the increased number of spaces and types of theater that could be experienced (10).
2. “El triunfo de la Revolución imponía un total replanteo de la función del artista en la sociedad [The triumph of the Revolution imposes a total replanting of the function of the artista in society]” (Pogolotti 11).
3. This is one of the very points that Sergio Corrieri makes in his interview with Gerardo Luzuriaga. Here, Corrieri, a founder and early director of Teatro Escambray, was making the case for why he and other members of the theater community left Havana to form Teatro Escmabray (Luzuriaga 52).
4. “Sergio Corrieri ha dicho en más de una oportunidad que el grupo escogió el Escambray como campo de investigación porque se trataba de una zona que había sufrido de manera particularmente aguda en el pasado, y porque el enemigo quiso convertir ese territorio aislado en bastión contrarrevolucionario. Liquidadas las bandas contrarrevolucionarias, se hacía necesario impulsar el desarrollo económico. Al atraso heredado se sumaba ahora el estancamiento inevitable provocado por la larga lucha contra los forajidos [Sergio Corrieri has said on more than one occassion that the group chose the Escambray as a place of research because it was an area that had particularly suffered in the past, and because the enemy wanted to convert the isolated territory into a counterrevolutionary bastion. Liquidating the counterrevolutionary bands, they needed economic development. To the inherited problems they had added the inevitable stagnation provoked by the long fights]” (Pogolotti 18).
5. This commitment to education can be seen in the efforts to eradicate illiteracy and to promote access to education throughout the island that characterized the Revolution.
6. Luzuriaga 54.
7. This quote, found here in Corrieri’s article “El Grupo Teatro Escambray: Una experiencia de la Revolución”, which was a reprint of a 1973 article from the Cuban theater journal Conjunto, is later used again by Corrieri in his interview with Luzuriaga, emphasizing the phrase’s central importance for the group’s activity.
8. Many theater critics and practitioners have discussed Teatro Escambray’s early creative process. Sergio Corrieri, as one of those most familiar with the process from the inside, outlines this in his article “El Grupo Teatro Escambray: Una Experiencia de la Revolución.” This compares

interestingly to his interview with Gerardo Luzuriaga that dates from 10 years later. Rafael González Rodríguez and Judith Rudakoff similarly outline the historical process of the group from the early 1990s, allowing them to reflect briefly on the current process. For an interesting comparison between two Cuban popular theater groups, see Judith A. Weiss's "Traditional Popular Culture and the Cuban 'New Theatre': Teatro Escambray and the Cabildo de Santiago." Finally, since all of these articles are written much closer to the founding date of the Teatro Escambray, Patricia Tomé's "X Edición de Mayo Teatro en Cuba: Homenajeando 40 años del Teatro Escambray" from 2008 offers an interesting point of view on the theater group as an established and recognized institution in Cuba.

9. Antonio Orlando Rodríguez details in his article "Children's Theater: A Cuban Experience" how Teatro Escambray's focus on children's theater emerged from this close connection with the children in the region.
10. Pogolotti emphasizes in her prologue that the plays lack a conclusion since they were to "dejar abierto un debate [leave open the debate]" (24).
11. Graziella Pogolotti adeptly explains the role of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the region and their resistance to the Revolution in her prologue to the collection titled Teatro Escambray.
12. El paraíso recobrao (recobrado) is a reference to the restored paradise that will await the true believers.
13. One may also argue that this is a successful campaign in indoctrination.
14. This was a criticism used against Virgilio Piñera, Heberto Padilla, among others.
15. <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1961/esp/f300661e.html>.
16. One could argue that Teatro Escambray itself is one of these outside forces, a claim they attempt to prevent by integrating the group into the region and by seeking the input of the community.
17. "*Todos queremos cantar / a la gloria omnipotente / de aquel que no está presente / pero ve qué está pasando / porque siempre está mirando / cómo se porta su gente [We all want to sing /to the omnipotent glory / of that which is not present / but he sees that it is happening / because he's always watching / how his people behave]*" (198). This is an interesting reference since the Revolution, with the CDR among other groups, has been accused of the same never-tiring vigilance.



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