

## ALMA ABIERTA CHOREOGRAPHIC CREATION Inclusion of Women

JOSÉ MANUEL BUZÓN RUIZ<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, España

---

### KEYWORDS

*Women  
inclusion  
Poem  
Flamenco  
Plurality*

---

### ABSTRACT

*A choreographic creation that symbolises the reflection of many women in situations of social exclusion or discrimination, based on class or normative archetypes, where access to education represents a significant disadvantage or obstacle, questioning women even in their human condition. This article will provide details about the choreographic creation Alma Abierta, a piece rooted in the language of Spanish Dance and Flamenco with a clear purpose: to give visibility to women with different ideas, women who do not conform to the systematic stereotypes of the heteropatriarchy, and women who lack access to education due to economic, social, or geographical reasons. It is a solo performed by a dancer who embodies the word through dance, delivering an action filled with profound drama and emotion, characterised by corporal expression and the sensitivity emanating from the poem Romance de la Niña Mala by Raúl Ferrer Pérez, denouncing historical discrimination.*

---

Received: 15 / 05 / 2025

Accepted: 18 / 09 / 2025

## 1. Introduction

**W**e believe that inspiration is the fundamental axis for any creation or creative process, but how does one find it? Where does one look for it? At times, it is an arduous task, but on other occasions, it only requires a vision, and the ideas and concepts begin to fit together and develop as if they were pieces of a puzzle. For Aleksandr Pushkin

Inspiration is characterised by the complete concentration of all the spiritual forces of a person on the object of creation, by an increase in emotional tone (the joy of the creative act, creative longing), which makes the work extraordinarily productive. (Rosental Moisevich y Iudin Fedorovich, 1968, p. 242)

On this occasion, inspiration found us. The Rodolfo Benito Samaniego Foundation<sup>1</sup> commissioned us, on the occasion of the gala *Toma mi mano 2022 Encuentro de convivencia*, an event aimed at strengthening the Foundation's relationships with civil society and, in particular, with the groups and entities it regularly works with, to create a choreographic piece. During this gala, the album *11 Letras para Rodolfo* (11 Letters for Rodolfo) was officially presented in homage to the victims of terrorism and other vulnerable groups (children, the elderly, immigrants, people in poverty, or those suffering from homophobia, among others). This album includes a piece entitled "*Romance de la Niña Mala*" (Romance of the Bad Girl), which the Foundation commissioned us to use as the basis for the creative process of *Alma Abierta* (Open Soul), a choreography that dances the words of the poem "Romance de la Niña Mala" by Raúl Ferrer Pérez<sup>2</sup> (1915-1993), a Cuban educator in the late 1930s. He was tasked with the challenging role of teaching in the Batey of the Narcisa sugar mill in the former province of Las Villas, encountering the precarious conditions of rural Cuba in the neocolonial era. From these experiences and reflections, the poem was born.

Raúl Ferrer's contributions to Cuba's revolutionary educational history are significant, especially his work in rural and urban primary education, where he demonstrated a model that was advanced for its time and is still relevant today. In adult education, too, he became one of the most important figures nationally and internationally due to his practical contribution and theoretical depth. For this reason, his political and pedagogical legacy is a model for Cuban teachers of today and tomorrow, requiring careful analysis and research into his theoretical and practical work (Águila Ayala, 2001).

For many centuries, women have been considered inferior beings. In classical Greece, the norm was that women were subordinate to the authority of a father, husband, or guardian. They were regarded as weak, and for this reason, they required absolute protection. Their capacity to act was primarily influenced by the power of a man. "The wife must not have feelings of her own but must accompany the husband in his moods, whether serious or cheerful, thoughtful or playful" (Plutarco 1995, p. 184).

The Greeks based their initial assessment on the intellectual plane, establishing everything related to logos<sup>3</sup>, considering women as inferior beings and minors as requiring guardianship. According to some of their main authors, such as Plato, who states that women must be subordinate to men (Platón, 2002, p. 132), Aristotle, based on the passivity of women in

---

<sup>1</sup> Foundation named after the 27-year-old industrial engineer victim who was one of the 192 people who died in the brutal attack on the Renfe train stations in Madrid on 11 March 2004 (<https://www.fundacionrbs.org/la-fundacion/nosotros>, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Subversive Cuban pedagogue who used innovative methods in the field of teaching and worked intensely in the National Commission for Illiteracy, among other occupations, helping to declare territories free of illiteracy in different municipalities and provinces of the country.

<sup>3</sup> Reason, rational principle of the universe (Rae, 2022)

reproduction, justifies their social and legal subjugation, stating that “the male is more suited to command than the female,” concluding that she must be under guardianship (Aristóteles, 2007, pp.37-41). The Old Testament also reflects this subjugation of women to men (Genesis 3:16–19): “To the woman, God said: I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth; with pain you shall bring forth children, and your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Jeske, 1995, p. 51).

We understand that the feminist movement is incompatible with religion and must be a secular concept, which has led to constant conflicts with Catholic Christianity<sup>4</sup>, It can be said, therefore, that feminism emerged in opposition to Christianity.

[...] in the context of Enlightenment Europe, which began to recognise human rights while simultaneously defining the “human being” exclusively as a white, Western, Christian, military, and bourgeois man, in a flagrant schizophrenic contradiction of exclusion of women. Feminism, therefore, was born in a specific Euro-North American and Christian context and was shaped in response to specific needs: the right to vote, divorce, abortion, economic independence, among others. Intimately related to the constraints imposed by the Catholic Church and the processes of secularisation and industrialisation in Europe, it is radically different from other historical, epistemological, and sociopolitical trajectories in general [...]. (Adlbi Sibai ,2012, p. 61)

Women have always been questioned, even regarding their own human condition as women. Many researchers claim that at the Synod of Macon in the 4th century AD, it was debated whether women had a soul, with the issue resolved by a narrow majority (Waters, 1977, p. 87), while others argue it was a linguistic misrepresentation. The theologian and feminist Uta Ranke-Heinemann (2005) argues that, although the Catholic Church and its medieval theologians committed many atrocities, doubting whether women have a soul or are human beings was not one of them

Allow us to make a passing observation: while acknowledging the harmful nature of this denigration of women by the Church, it must be said that it is not true that the Church ever doubted whether women have a soul or are human. It is often heard and read that at a council, specifically the Second Synod of Macon (585), the question of whether women have a soul was discussed. This is not accurate. The council did not discuss the soul. Gregory of Tours, who attended the synod, recounts that a bishop raised the question of “whether a woman can be designated as *homo*.” This was, therefore, a philological issue, which, in truth, arose from the higher value men had attributed to themselves: *homo* means both human and male. This is still the case today in all Romance languages and in English, where the term for man and male are identical. If men appropriate the term human for themselves, what is left for women? Is she also a human-male, a male-human? Clearly, she cannot be designated as male. Gregory of Tours reports that the other bishops referred the questioner to the creation narrative, according to which God created the human (*homo*) as male and female, as well as to the designation of Jesus as the Son of Man (*filius hominis*), despite being, undoubtedly, the “Son of the Virgin,” that is, the son of a woman. Through these clarifications, the question was resolved: the term *homo* must also apply to women. It signifies, alongside the concept of male, also that of human being (Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum* 8, 20). (Ranke-Heinemann, 2005, pp. 169–182)

Although the Church recognised the human condition of women, it considered them defective, as their soul was believed to be prone to evil in relation to original sin.

---

<sup>4</sup> In this article we will only contextualise data from the Catholic Christian religion, we will not go into details of other religions or beliefs, unless it is to provide absolutely essential data.

Women's rights and education have always been shaped by the patriarchy, distinguishing between the public sphere (market, state, and civil society) as the domain of men and the private sphere (family, marriage, domestic life) as the domain of women, assigning social expectations and tasks derived from a narrative that attributes social characteristics to physical and biological facts (Sepúlveda Hales y Pinto Troncoso, 2021).

The earliest texts critiquing women's rights appear between the 17th and 18th centuries. In the early Enlightenment context, we find in the preface to *The Equality of the Sexes* (1673) by Poulain de la Barre: "Nothing is more delicate than reflecting on women" (Poulain, 1673, p. 12). This philosopher and priest use Descartes' methods of doubt and reasoning to reject prejudices about women's inferiority.

Thus, in a very schematic way, it could be argued that in Cartesianism and the Enlightenment, feminist critique was configured as a critique of prejudice. The work of Poulain de la Barre, *De l'Égalité des deux sexes*, to which we have already referred, significantly bears the subtitle *Discourse physique et moral où l'on voit l'importance de se défaire des préjugés*. It seeks to derive the implications of the Cartesian critique of prejudice, tradition, custom, and the argument of authority in favour of women's rights to equality. As a radicalised form of critique of prejudice, feminist critique systematically irrationalises the bases of legitimacy of patriarchal power through the re-signification of Enlightenment themes themselves. (Amorós Puente, 2000a, p.102)

Mary Wollstonecraft's manifesto and her passionate declaration of independence in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) were written after reading the 1791 report by Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord to the French National Constituent Assembly, which argued that women should only receive education related to the domestic sphere. Olympe de Gouges drafted in 1791, in response to the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* of 26 August 1789—a foundational text of the French Revolution—the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Citizen*, whose first article states: "Woman is born free and remains equal to man in rights. Social distinctions can only be based on common utility." It was grounded in the Rousseauian idea that "the law must be the expression of the general will; only, in the constitution of this will, there can be no discrimination based on sex" (Amorós Puente, 2000b, p.173). J.J. Rousseau is fundamental in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, as, in Mary Wollstonecraft's view, the philosopher and ideologue Rousseau denies women a public role, urging them to be active and strong in their own sphere: the private domain. This point is well reflected in the *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1775): "Be, therefore, always what you are, the chaste guardians of morals and the sweet bonds of peace, and continue to assert, on every occasion, the rights of the heart and of nature for the benefit of duty and virtue" (Rousseau, 1986, p. 181).

A fundamental historical event in relation to feminism and religion was the *Seneca Falls Declaration* (1848), also known as the *Declaration of Sentiments*, resulting from a meeting held in a Methodist chapel in Seneca Falls, a town in New York State, where demands for women's rights, particularly the right to vote<sup>5</sup>, were raised, as well as the denouncement of unjust social conditions in religion, laws, or customs that prevented their development as citizens equal to men.

[...] the date of 1848 must be established as a chronological milestone in the history of feminism. *The Seneca Falls Manifesto or Declaration of Sentiments*, as it was titled, rightfully marks the beginning of a new stage in the history of the struggle for women's equality. (Pérez Garzón, 2011, p. 88)

This convention was held on 19 and 20 July 1848. The document was based on the United States Declaration of Independence of 1776 and denounced the restrictions, mostly political, to which women were subjected. The text was signed by 68 women and 32 men, which is why it was

---

<sup>5</sup> We can consider this meeting as the starting point of suffragism.

called the Declaration of Sentiments, as it was not subversive in the eyes of their fellow citizens but rather demonstrated continuity with the content and forms of the young American nation (Pérez, 2011). The convention was led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton<sup>6</sup> and Lucretia Mott. “[...] the manifesto began by declaring that ‘all laws that conflict in any way with the true and substantial happiness of women are contrary to the great precept of nature and therefore have no validity,’ as this precept takes precedence over any other” (Pérez Garzón, 2011, p. 94).

The declaration consisted of 12 resolutions, of which the most representative for our choreographic creation were the following:

Resolved: That all laws that prevent women from occupying the position in society dictated by their conscience, or that place them in a position inferior to men, are contrary to the great precept of nature and, therefore, have neither force nor authority. (Cited in Miyares Fernández, 1999, p. 141)

“Resolved: That since man claims intellectual superiority and admits that woman is morally superior, it is his preeminent duty to encourage her to speak and preach at all religious gatherings” (Cited in Miyares Fernández, 1999, p. 145).

For the vast majority of countries, the demand for education prevails over all other feminist claims. Established feminism advocated for legislative changes that would allow women access to education and higher education.

Women’s education did not extend beyond the level of instruction necessary for household and child-rearing duties. In some way, what women were expected to learn is reflected in the verses of the poem *The Princess* (1847) by Alfred Tennyson:

“Man for the field and woman for the hearth; man for the sword and she for the needle; man with the head and woman with the heart; man for the world and woman for obedience; all else is confusion” (Berbel Sánchez, 2004, p. 48).

Although the vote was the emblem of suffragism, suffragists fought for equality in all areas of public and private life and, of course, developed the concept of citizenship by demanding the universalisation of rights. Alongside the right to vote, they demanded educational rights, including access to higher education. Ultimately, they advocated for a truly universal suffrage, a means to participate equally in the public sphere. This is why they are known as suffragists (Pérez Garzón, 2011).

The Seneca Falls Declaration launched the suffragist movement, which was immense. Suffragism, the second wave of feminism, achieved everything we have and transformed our societies. We exist within its agenda: civil rights, educational rights, and political rights. Political rights are more recent. Educational rights were the earliest and the foundation for those that followed. (Valcárcel Bernardo de Quirós, 2019, p. 55)

The suffragist movement gradually expanded—with, of course, economic and personal repercussions. By the early decades of the 20th century, suffragism had become a global movement, creating important international networks such as the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA)<sup>7</sup>.

The arduous path of the feminist struggle continues to this day, with the 1960s standing out due to the works of Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, which encompassed radical feminism

<sup>6</sup> She was the author of what she called the *Declaration of Sentiments*, undoubtedly the founding text of feminism, also known as the *Seneca Falls Manifesto*. She was the architect of the convocation of some one hundred people who, thanks to the support of Lucretia Mott, grew to more than 300 (Pérez, 2011, p.94).

<sup>7</sup> The Alliance was formally constituted during the second conference in Berlin in 1904 as the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) and was based in London for much of its history. Its founders included Carrie Chapman Catt, Millicent Fawcett, Helene Lange, Susan B. Anthony, Anita Augspurg, Rachel Foster Avery and Käthe Schirmacher (Liddington, 1989, p.56).

and liberation movements, breaking patriarchal patterns and the dominant androcentric hierarchy in many spheres of social life. This stage can be summarised with the slogan “The personal is political,” as they challenged the boundaries between the public and private spheres and moved beyond the Marxist analysis that reduced oppression to economic class struggle, placing gender and sexuality at the core of politics (Pérez Garzón, 2011). We highlight 1975 as a highly representative date in the process of change for the history of women’s equality.

That 1975 was proclaimed the International Women’s Year by a decision of the United Nations General Assembly indicates that feminist movements had gained such weight and impact that they succeeded in placing women’s issues on the agenda of all governments. (Pérez, 2011, p. 206)

The history of feminism remains alive —although some claim it is in decline— as victories for equality in the path toward parity democracy are only being achieved in a third of the world, and not through a firm resolution of inequality, as deeply rooted cultural, social, or familial habits continue to enforce segregation by sex. Thus, feminism as a social and cultural movement remains active. As a complementary strategy to equality of opportunity, positive action emerges. Among positive action measures<sup>8</sup>, empowerment stands out. This is the Spanish version of the English word “empowerment”, which can also be interpreted as “reinforcement” to express the need to increase or expand new strengths, to highlight the act of strengthening, encouraging, and motivating women to conquer their own spaces of identity, rights, and expectations. It translates, perhaps most literally, from Latin American Spanish, meaning the process by which women become aware of their situation in both private and public spheres, assuming positions of power in their personal lives, particularly by rejecting impositions, prejudices, and supposed natural obligations (Pérez Garzón, 2011). The first official movement toward the empowerment method was found at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, which established a series of formulas and measures for the advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality that were effective in practice. Among these objectives, they set “Measures to eliminate obstacles to women’s full participation in public life and decision-making at all levels, including in the family” (United Nations, 1996, p. 223). As Amelia Valcárcel notes in her prologue, “feminism has not, to date, lost any of the battles it has undertaken” (Valcárcel Bernardo de Quirós,, 1997). The goal of contemporary feminism today is to bring gender equality to all parts of the world.

## 2. Background in Spanish Dance

The empowerment of women and feminist demands have been expressed throughout history, including in the repertoire of Spanish Dance and Flamenco. Since the original version of *El Amor Brujo. Gitanería en dos cuadros* (Bewitching Love. Gypsy-Lore in Two Acts) by Manuel de Falla (1876–1946) premiered on 15 April 1915 at the Teatro Lara in Madrid, it became an essential feminist manifesto, from its creator and leading figure Pastora Imperio<sup>9</sup> as a representative of women on stage, to the libretto by María Lejárraga<sup>10</sup>, an activist author who worked in the

---

<sup>8</sup> Since women are not equal at the starting point, they do not have the same possibilities in practice and this disadvantage must be corrected with measures that counteract this discrimination of origin (Pérez, 2011, p.247).

<sup>9</sup> Pastora Rojas Monje "Pastora Imperio" (Seville 1889- Madrid 1979), daughter of the dancer la Mejorana, her name has its origin in a phrase of the writer Jacinto Benavente ("this Pastora is worth an empire"), she contacted Manuel de Falla and the result of this contact was the genesis of *El amor brujo*, which Falla composed with her in mind (Navarro García, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> María de la O Lejárraga (1874-1974), writer, teacher, pedagogue, novelist, playwright, MP and pioneer of feminism, was one of the most important figures in the Spanish literary scene in general, and in theatre in particular.

shadow of her husband Gregorio Martínez Sierra (1881–1947). *El Amor Brujo* was the triumph of María's dedication and altruistic spirit. As she recalled, the initial project was to create a piece titled *Gitanerías*, in which a famous artist like Pastora Imperio would sing and dance to a backdrop of coplas written by María and music by Falla (Rodrigo García, 1994). As was customary, the authorship of her works was attributed to her husband; this was no exception, but it can be said that the entire manuscript of the libretto is in María's handwriting, and there is no doubt that its authorship belongs solely to her. "The originals of *El Amor Brujo* are handwritten by the writer" (Rodrigo, 1994, p. 164). The premiere of *El Amor Brujo* marked a paradigm shift for flamenco dance, with a female choreographer bringing to the stage what could be considered the first flamenco ballet in the history of the repertoire. "Flamenco ballet was born. Thus began an era for deep flamenco dance [...]" (Navarro García, 2010, p. 22). After its absolute premiere, versions were created by Antonia Mercè "La Argentina," Encarnación López "La Argentinista," Vicente Escudero, and Antonio Ruiz, among others.

For the creative process of *Alma Abierta*, women like Lejárraga have been a source of support and inspiration for our intrinsic dramaturgy, as María drew on the avant-garde ideas of the Free Institution of Education, convinced that education was a means of progress and regeneration. In 1982, she participated in the Hispano-American Pedagogical Congress at the Ateneo de Madrid, supporting the most advanced and feminist educational arguments of Emilia Pardo Bazán. In her presentation, *The Education of Men and Women*, María called for the integration of women at all educational levels, the right to pursue all professional activities, and coeducation from primary school. From this presentation comes the phrase: "Strictly speaking, the general education of women cannot be called education but rather taming, as its aim is obedience, passivity, and submission" (cited in Matilla Quiza, 2002, p. 84).

In the art of Spanish Dance and Flamenco, the contribution of women has been notable, both in its innovation, enrichment, and dissemination, as well as in acting and thinking from a feminist perspective. Among these figures in dance, we would like to highlight Carmen Dauset "La Carmencita," an international dancer from Almería who became the first woman filmed by Thomas Alva Edison. "The first woman to appear in moving images in the history of humanity is the flamenco dancer Carmencita Dauset" (Vergillos Gómez, 2021, p. 212). It could be said that she was the first media flamenco dancer. Or the iconic Carmen Amaya, whose dance and attire clearly denounced the patriarchy of flamenco, breaking the stereotyped moulds of imposed clothing. However, it must be clarified that, although Amaya popularised men's attire in her dance, the first dancer to dress as a man and break with archetypes was Trinidad Huertas "La Cuenca" (1855–1890). "The dancer Trinidad Huertas 'La Cuenca' was truly ahead of her time (...) and was also the first to perform a dance dressed as a man" (Picón, 2016).

We would also like to highlight from this repertoire the choreography *Rango* by choreographer Rafael Aguilar (1929–1995), a personal ballet inspired by the tragedy *La casa de Bernarda Alba*<sup>11</sup> (The House of Bernarda Alba) by Federico García Lorca. Its harrowing adaptation led Antonio Gades himself to want to embody the role of the oppressive and despotic mother.

The ballet *Rango*, with an estimated duration of 33 minutes, premiered in Paris in 1963 but is a "very current" work. Gades considered it a masterpiece and incorporated it into the repertoire of the National Ballet and, later, his own company, occasionally performing the role of the mother, Bernarda, himself (Echevarría, 2013).

The ballet refers to what matters most to Bernarda: maintaining the social status of her late husband in that deeply traditional Spanish village. Her daughters, destined for celibacy, live repressed in their desires and needs, except for the youngest (Adela), who rebels against everything, with a tragic outcome. As Frazier (1973) stated, Adela embodies the poeticisation of

<sup>11</sup> Written in 1936, it was first published in 1945 on the initiative of Margarita Xirgu. The play is part of her trilogy of rural tragedies (*Bodas de Sangre* and *Yerma*).

Lorca's ideas about love and the dreams that every human being must pursue above any form of authority. The drama that many women lived in Spanish villages is staged, as narrated by Lorca in this work—a patriarchy exercised by a woman, thus denouncing the lack of feminism in that Spain. This drama seeks the purest realism and is the most symbolic and open work of the rural trilogy (Bardem Muñoz, 1998).

We believe that the work *13 Rosas* by Arrieritos company is essential in this repertoire, a choreography awarded the Max Award for the Performing Arts 2007 for best dance show and best choreography, paying homage to one of the most traumatic events of Francoist repression, which inspired the company to tell the story<sup>12</sup>. Historian Hernández Holgado (2011) recounts the following;

All, or at least the vast majority, shared their affiliation with the Unified Socialist Youth (Juventud Socialista Unificada. JSU), whose structure in Madrid they were attempting to clandestinely rebuild after the end of the war. The specific crime for which they were convicted was “adhesion to the rebellion”, punishable by death. (p. 308)

The struggle for freedom and democracy was represented by the company. Arrieritos collaborated with thirteen female creators who helped “navigate the emotions, fears, uncertainties, deprivations, and affections with which the protagonists of this terrible story lived” (Balbona, 2007).

We must also mention what is perhaps the most popular feminist reference within the Performing Arts and Spanish Dance in particular, the myth of *Carmen*, written in 1845 by Prosper Mérimée (1803–1870) and published in 1847. Notable versions that pay tribute to this icon include those by choreographers such as Antonio Gades with his *Carmen* (1983). “Gades was a lover of women, and in *Carmen*, he wanted to highlight a woman who seeks freedom in a time when it was not her place” (Tapias, 2021). Or Rafael Aguilar's *Carmen* (1992), which explores the protagonist's condition as a free soul, seeking her own identity and rejecting the ideological and social precepts of her time, or José Antonio's *Carmen* (1999), created for the National Ballet of Spain.

Carmen was born in the 19th century. She fascinated and seduced in the 20th century. All peoples and cultures have loved and reviled her for being what she is: free. She loves when she wants, without being bound by any rules imposed by society. (Ruiz De La Cruz, 1999, p.6)

For Alma Abierta, all these references to female creators, performers, activists, or choreographies of stories or myths have been a source of reflection and research for creating our creative process.

## 2.1. Choreographic Contextualisation

We can affirm that the need for general literacy arose in Western culture to enable the reading of the Bible. The reformer Luther advocated for every believer to read the quintessential book for a Christian, seeking and knowing the truth without dogmas or mythifications (Pérez Garzón, 2011). Since 1946, UNESCO has worked to realise a vision of literacy based on the conviction that acquiring and improving literacy skills throughout life is part of the right to education and brings immense empowerment and numerous benefits. Literacy drives sustainable development,

---

<sup>12</sup> On 5 August 1939, the thirteen young Republican women - seven of them minors because they had not yet reached the age of 21 at the time - were shot along with 43 men in the cemetery of La Almudena. Two days earlier they had been convicted of “joining the rebellion” by a court martial in a summary trial with no guarantees, according to the sentence of case 30.426 consulted by TVE (RTVE, 2023).

enables greater participation in the labour market, improves child and family health and nutrition, reduces poverty, and expands life opportunities (UNESCO, 2023). Education makes us free—free to decide, think, and develop—and is a universal right that every human being should have access to, based on values of equality and principles of non-discrimination regarding gender, race, sex, or religion, with the role of the teacher being essential in instilling these values and principles.

After the birth of the Republic of Cuba in 1902, the First School Law of the Republic of Cuba was signed in 1909, with revolutionary and inclusive reforms in both private and public spheres. However, inclusion in rural and suburban education did not receive the necessary technical, methodological, or political support (Rodríguez Ben, 2020). Supposedly, other reforms and structures were promoted to regulate the education system until the creation of the Ministry of Education in 1944. In practice, however, neglect persisted toward children from poor families, resulting in inattention to education (cited in Guerra Sánchez 2021). The Cuban education system of the first half of the 20th century was characterised by general neglect and the inattention of governing authorities, who delegated the fulfilment of educational and training objectives to municipal governments and school administrations (García-Puente Rodríguez, 1988). The demand for the eradication of illiteracy and the improvement of the education system was denounced through institutions and societies formed by the Cuban social upheaval of the 1920s, such as the First National Women's Congress (1923), the Manifesto to Cubans by the "Cuban National Renewal Board" (1923), and the First National Student Congress (1923) (Pichardo Viñals, 1978).

The educator and creator of the poem *Romance de la Niña Mala*, Raúl Ferrer Pérez, became an exemplary figure of inclusion and pedagogy. His pedagogical work began at Rural School No. 273 of the "Narcisa" sugar mill in Yaguajay (Cuba, 1937), where he established important guidelines for his educational action, with an insightful interpretation of the Martí's pedagogical ideology<sup>13</sup>, becoming an essential representative of rural primary education (Hernández, Fleites, and Delgado, 2020). Ferrer's figure became a symbol of literacy; he was the national vice-coordinator of the Literacy Campaign carried out in 1961<sup>14</sup>, where he launched the educator's slogan QTATA squared, meaning "Let every illiterate have their literacy teacher, and every literacy teacher have their illiterate" (Hart Dávalos, 1961, p.12). The teacher achieved unity of thought and action to influence minds and shape consciences, not only in the school but also within his sphere of action. Thus, he ensured that Black, White, and mixed-race individuals shared the same seat, an approach that linked the school with the community and community work (Hernández Padrón, et al., 2020).

From all these experiences, reflections, and pedagogical methods, the myth of the teacher-poet Raúl Ferrer was born, who in 1941 wrote his famous poem *Romance de la Niña Mala*, which tells the story of Dorita, the main character of our choreographic creation *Alma Abierta*.

### 3. Methodology

The methodology employed is qualitative, using documentary analysis, choreographic analysis, and primarily bibliographic, hemerographic, and audiovisual documents as research methods. To complement the information, relevant choreographic sources from Spanish Dance and/or Flamenco will be considered. The study will not focus on providing in-depth choreographic data

---

<sup>13</sup> Regarding José Martí (1853/1895), Cuban poet, writer, ideologist and revolutionary, he is considered one of the most outstanding intellectuals in Latin America and his ideas and writings continue to be very influential. he was the founder of the Cuban revolutionary party and is considered the precursor of literary modernism in Latin America (Martí Pérez, 2023).

<sup>14</sup> On 22 December of the same year, the country was declared the first territory free of illiteracy in Latin America. Unprecedented in the history of the Caribbean nation and a starting point for further progress in education. It made it possible to eradicate illiteracy and facilitate universal access to different levels of education free of charge, values promoted by UNESCO to fulfil the 2030 Education Agenda (UNESCO, 2023).

from movement analysis but will centre on documenting and describing the creation process, interrelated with social aspects, philosophical thoughts, and poetic objects.

#### 4. Objectives

One of the fundamental objectives for the creative process of *Alma Abierta* was to give visibility and prominence to the female figure, with the main goal of promoting women's inclusion in education and their feminist thought, denouncing the historical discrimination of patriarchal societal logic, all based on our essential tool of inspiration, the poem created by Raúl Ferrer Pérez.

#### 5. Analysis

*Alma Abierta* is a piece created in the language of Spanish Dance and Flamenco with a strong dramatic charge, characterised by the use of corporal expression. It is a solo created for a female dancer with a duration of approximately six minutes. The original idea was proposed by the Rodolfo Benito Samaniego Foundation, which tasked us with creating a choreography based on the poem *Romance de la Niña Mala*. From this premise, we began creating *Alma Abierta*. The poem was composed in 1941 by the teacher-poet Raúl Ferrer Pérez and dedicated to his students. Years later, Pedro Luis Ferrer, a Cuban singer-songwriter and the poet's nephew, performed it. The version used in this process is from the album *11 Letras para Rodolfo*, with the voice of Arahí Martínez and the piano of Iván "Melón" Lewis. The poem tells the story of Dorita, who is the main character of the poem and, consequently, of our choreographic creation.

For a detailed choreographic description, we have structured the poem in five parts (see in the poem translation)

##### Lyrics of the *Romance de la Niña Mala*

A neighbour from the mill  
says that Dorita is bad  
to prove it, he tells me  
she is wild and ill-mannered  
and that a hundred times a day  
the whole batey scolds her.  
That she threw a stone yesterday  
at a settler's daughter  
and made the foreman's daughter's face red,  
who knows for what reasons by us unknown. (Part I)  
If they dress her in clean clothes,  
soon her dress is dirty or torn, that she is always dishevelled  
she doesn't study her lesson  
and never knows her times tables.  
On Saturdays and Sundays, she gets lost in the guardarrayas chasing tomtits or picking guavas.  
And I ask, neighbour  
neighbour of bad faith  
who can say my girl is bad because of this? (Part II)  
If you had seen the intimacy of her life and her soul. As the teacher has seen it how differently  
you would think.  
It's true she is often absent  
but when she comes, she never fails  
to bring in her small hands  
a bouquet of white roses  
to place at the Martí I have in the middle of the classroom. (Part III)  
With those who have no snack she gladly shares her orange, when we sing on the way out her  
voice is the loudest.  
Her voice that is clean and joyful like the arpeggio of a guitar.

And when I explain arithmetic, it seems so abstract to her  
that she fills the page with flowers and flags.  
And she prefers during breaks when they play house to play with Luisa, the only Black girl in my  
classroom.  
Sometimes she calls her Luisa, sometimes she calls her sister.  
And those who saw her say that on that bitter afternoon when the teacher didn't come, she was  
the one who cried the most. (Part IV)  
When affection is rewarded and the rebelliousness of the soul.  
When laughter is understood and grace is sung.  
When justice breaks through in my people's march and the tender bud of a child is a flower in  
hope.  
A medal will have to be placed on my girl's chest.  
Though the malicious batey gives her such a bad reputation.  
And you, my poor neighbour,  
understand not a word. (Part V)

Part I: This situates the dancer in an environment of negative criticism from her neighbour and surroundings, as she does not fit the stipulated stereotype but lives her autonomy from her own perspective and knowledge, which provokes rejection from subjugated mindsets. From the words in this first part of the poem, it is understood that she also rebels against social classes and economic and political statuses. For these reasons, we align the first part of the poem with the foundational liberal thinker John Locke (1632–1704) from an empirical perspective, that knowledge is created through experience, the succession of events, and impressions produced by external objects on our senses, forming the simple data of perception. “All the operations of the soul are consequences of these impressions. And these operations are the only source of all our ideas and all our knowledge” (Chateau, 2003, p. 126). For Locke, expressions such as “an empty mind” or a “blank slate” are the fundamental basis of empiricism; the intellect is like a *tabula rasa*<sup>15</sup> on which nothing is yet written.

Part II: Our protagonist continues to gather experiences instead of conforming to the expected manners or behaviour of a girl. She is more interested in playing with birds and is unconcerned about the state of her clothes or hair. However, the social gaze of men continues to criticise her actions for being a woman. From an androcentric perspective of being, we place our Dorita without awareness that the world around her is dictated by the masculine, and she does not feel inferior to men, a stance confronted by the writer, philosopher, and feminist activist Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986), who did not perceive the androcentrism of patriarchal culture. As an intellectual woman who questioned everything, she stated that until the age of forty, she had not experienced discrimination. When she initially considered what it meant to her to be a woman, she saw no problem. Simone argues that “I had never felt inferior for being a woman; no one had told me: you think this way because you are a woman. Femininity had never been a burden for me. For me, being a woman has meant nothing, I told Sartre.” But Sartre encouraged her to analyse it more deeply, and she says, “I began to analyse it, and suddenly it was revealed to me: this world was a masculine world; my childhood had been nourished by myths forged by men. And I had not reacted the same way as if I were a boy. The issue interested me so much that I abandoned the initial project of writing a kind of personal narrative and decided to address the female condition in general.” We know that the conclusion of this reflection was her book *The Second Sex*. Let us recall her initial words: “For me, being a woman has meant nothing” (cited in De Miguel Álvarez, 2009, pp. 121–136).

---

<sup>15</sup> The term that the English philosopher Locke used to characterise the original state of man's consciousness, of the child's soul. Locke claimed against Descartes and Leibnitz, that man has no innate ideas or principles. All his ideas and concepts he acquires from life and experience (Marxist Philosophical Dictionary, 1946:294).

Part III: During this part, our protagonist symbolises through actions, choreographic movements, and expressions the importance offered by the text, narrating the intimacy and generosity of her heart and the spiritual greatness she possesses, personifying a crucial moment in the piece where Dorita gathers a handful of white rose petals and throws them into the air while performing continuous turns, dancing the phrase of the poem “in her small hands a bouquet of white roses to place at the Martí I have in the middle of the classroom”. After throwing the petals, she moves toward the supposed statue and makes the gesture of crossing herself, as a sign of admiration Martí’s thought<sup>16</sup>, where “Greatness lies in truth, and truth in virtue” (Martí Pérez 2010, p.196).

Part IV: In this fragment, the dancer continues to perform choreographic languages, expressing values through the words of Ferrer’s poem, values such as sharing with those who have less or addressing racial prejudices, ideals of Ferrer himself.

An example of this was his tenacious struggle in the political and practical sphere against the racial prejudices that burdened Cuban society at the time. The teacher achieved unity of thought and action to influence minds and shape consciences, not only in the school but also within his sphere of action. Thus, he ensured that Black, White, and mixed-race individuals shared the same seat (Hernández Padrón et al.,2020, op. cit.p.7).

Ferrer focused on fostering students’ vocations with high motivation and, through this, achieving psychopedagogical and didactic capacity. The perfect setting for this was recess and Dorita’s behaviour during it, where she reflects her free and egalitarian spirit, enjoying herself as she understands it.

Persuading through the body the recreation of the spirit. Since children like freedom, it is necessary to lead them to do things that are appropriate without feeling any pressure. Undoubtedly, it is necessary to give their spirit, as well as their body, strength, flexibility, and vigour, accustoming them to master their desires, toughening their body through deprivations; but all this must be done without letting them see any ill will, without them even suspecting it. (Locke, 1986, p. 143)

Part V: this is, for us, the final part of the poem, where the movements intensify, and the dancer’s emotional charge increases, expressing the rebellion and nonconformity with how one is expected to be according to stipulated social archetypes of women. The scenic and choreographic movements aim to break barriers to intolerance and build from plural educational tolerance. In the final sequence of the piece, we can observe the dancer moving toward a spotlight on the stage, coinciding with the poem’s last phrase, “And you, my poor neighbour, understand not a word.” She brings her hands from her stomach to her throat to perform a silent scream, alluding to the exhaustion she feels in the face of all the criticisms of the social heteropatriarchy, symbolised by the neighbour in the poem.

María Lejárraga states that supporting the idea that a woman should live her life as happily as possible, doing the greatest amount of good possible, being as useful as possible to humanity, and enjoying, with the same perfect right as a man, the fullness of her human rights, is enough to have been born a “human being” and, additionally, a woman (Martínez Sierra, 1915, p. 41).

## 6. Results

We used dance as a narrative tool within the performing arts, as narrative dance emerges as a powerful means of expression, capable of transcending language barriers and connecting with the audience on a profoundly emotional level. This is why the choice of Spanish Dance and Flamenco, with their special characteristics of expression and emotional liberation, makes them particularly effective, as they are considered among the most expressive disciplines, possessing a racial

---

<sup>16</sup> important guidelines for his educational action and a complete interpretation of Martí’s pedagogical ideology were drawn up, which give a peculiar stamp to his teaching work in rural primary education. (Hernández Padrón et al.,2020, op. cit.p.)

element with high emotional and communicative potential, where the required character is strong and temperamental.

As a poetic symbol, the dancer performs barefoot, representing the Solomonic gesture Raúl Ferrer Pérez made at the beginning of the school year at the Narcisa school. On the first day, Raúl's optimism wavered when he noticed that many children were not attending school due to a lack of shoes. He came up with the solution: everyone barefoot! This gesture ensured that the children attended classes but also reduced the inequalities that extreme poverty always generates, telling them all, "The riches of the earth penetrate through the feet and help to solidify knowledge" (Ojito Linares, 2015).

A deep understanding of the creation process involved understanding the movements and exploring how they interweave with social, philosophical, and poetic aspects. This understanding has had significant social impact and has been disseminated in theatres and auditoriums such as the Cervantes Theatre Hall in Alcalá de Henares, the Salamanca Congress Palace, the EDP Gran Vía Theatre in Madrid, or the Pilar Miró Cultural Centre in Vallecas.

The results reveal how stylised Spanish Dance and Flamenco reflect and respond to their cultural context, as well as the ideas and emotions that the choreographer and dancer wish to convey, offering a richer and more nuanced vision of dance as an art form deeply connected with the society and history it seeks to narrate.

## 7. Conclusions

Through the masterful pedagogical work of our teacher-poet Raúl Ferrer Pérez, reflected in his poem "Romance de la Niña Mala", we have given visibility with our artistic creation *Alma Abierta* to our main objective: to give prominence to the female figure with the inclusion of women in education and their feminist thought, denouncing the historical discrimination of the public sphere (market, state, and civil society) as the domain of men and the private sphere (family, marriage, domestic life) as the domain of women, without questioning her from her own human condition.

With *Alma Abierta*, we have not aimed to create something new or innovative but simply to give form to our story with our own language within Spanish Dance and Flamenco, appealing to the right to conscience and opinion, the true and substantial freedom of women. The creative process has been complex but highly enriching, aspiring to contribute to the performing arts from a reflection on women and rejecting prejudices of inferiority, with a firm purpose for achieving our objectives: a free and feminist woman.

## 8. Acknowledgements

The research process stems from a joint project between the Rodolfo Benito Samaniego Foundation and the Alicia Alonso Dance Foundation of the Alicia Alonso University Dance Institute of the Rey Juan Carlos University.

## References

- Adlbi Sibai, S. (2012). Colonialidad, feminismo e islam. *Viento Sur*, 122, 57-67
- Águila Ayala, A. D. (2001). *La obra educativa del maestro Raúl Ferrer Pérez y su trascendencia como educador social* [Tesis en opción al Grado Científico de Doctora en Ciencias Pedagógicas]. Universidad de Sancti Spíritus "José Martí Pérez".
- Amorós Puente, C. (2000a). *Feminismo y filosofía*. Editorial síntesis.
- Amorós Puente, C. (2000b). *Tiempos de feminismos. Sobre feminismo, proyecto ilustrado y postmodernidad*. Cátedra.
- Aristóteles, (1998). *La Política*. Alianza
- Aristóteles, (2007) *Política*. Espasa.
- Balbona, G. (2007). Las "13 Rosas" de Arrieritos, Premio Max, abren la XVIII Muestra de Teatro. *Diario Montañés*. <https://www.eldiariomontanes.es/20071014/cultura/escena/rosas-arrieritos-premio-abren-20071014.html#:~:text=Premio%20Max%20de%20las%20Artes,es%20aniquilado%20sin%20justificaci%C3%B3n%20alguna>
- Bardem Muñoz, J. A., & Sánchez Trigueros, A. (1999). *De Las diversas formas de morir. La casa de Bernarda Alba: de Margarita Xirgu a Calixto Bieito (Crónica incompleta de un itinerario escénico)*. Universidad de Málaga y Universidad de Cantabria: Aula de teatro-Cuadernos de estudios teatrales.
- Berbel Sánchez, S. (2004). *Sin cadenas. Nuevas formas de libertad en el siglo XXI*. Narcea.
- Chateau, J. (1956). *Los grandes pedagogos*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- De Miguel Álvarez, A. (2009). El legado de Simone de Beauvoir en la genealogía feminista: la fuerza de los proyectos frente a "La fuerza de las cosas". *Investigaciones feministas*, 0, 121-136. <https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/INFE/article/view/INFE0909110121A>
- Echevarría, P. (2013). La danza de Gades y las coreografías de Rafael Aguilar se funden en "Rango". *Noticias de Navarra*. <https://www.noticiasdenavarra.com/cultura/2013/04/13/danza-gades-coreografias-rafael-aguilar-3123269.html>
- Fernández, T., & Tamaro, E. (2004). *Biografía de José Martí*. Biografías y Vidas. <https://www.biografiasyvidas.com/biografia/m/marti.htm>
- Frazier, B. (1973). *La mujer en el teatro de Federico García Lorca*. Playor
- Fundación Rodolfo Benito Samaniego (s.f.). La Fundación. <https://www.fundacionrbs.org/la-fundacion/nosotros>
- García-Puente Rodríguez, L. (1988). "La educación en Cuba": estudio comparativo sobre el estado de la educación en Cuba durante el período del presidente Batista y el período revolucionario de Fidel Castro. *Ensayos: Revista de la Facultad de Educación de Albacete*, 2, 171-184.
- Hart Dávalos, A. (1961). Sobre el Año de la Educación. En A. Hart Dávalos (Ed.) *Educación y Revolución*. (p. 12). Universidad Popular.
- Hernández Holgado, F. (2011). *La prisión militante: las cárceles franquistas de mujeres de Barcelona y Madrid (1939-1945)*. [Tesis doctoral Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid].
- Hernández Padrón, M. E., Fleites Suárez, L. & Delgado Rodríguez, M. (2020). La orientación profesional pedagógica a través de la personalidad de Raúl Ferrer desde un enfoque CTS. *Revista Observatorio de las Ciencias Sociales en Iberoamérica*, 1(5).
- Jeske C, J. (1995). *La biblia popular. Génesis*. Editorial Northwestern.
- Liddington, J. (1989). *El camino hacia Greenham Common: feminismo y antimilitarismo en Gran Bretaña desde 1820*. Prensa de la Universidad de Syracuse.
- Locke, (1693) J. *Pensamientos sobre la educación*. Akal.
- Martí Pérez, J. J. (2010). La cadena de Hierro. Drama de Agustín Cuenca. En *Obras Completas* (Tomo III). Crítica.

- Martínez Sierra, G. (15 de febrero de 1915). Los Clubs de Mujeres, dentro de la sección "La Mujer Moderna", *Blanco y Negro*.
- Matilla Quiza, M.J. (2002). María Lejárraga y el asociacionismo femenino: 1900-1936. En J. Aguilero Sastre (Coord.) *María Martínez Sierra y la República. Ilusión y compromiso: II Jornadas sobre María Lejárraga* (pp. 83-101).
- Miyares Fernández, A. (1999). 1848: El manifiesto de Seneca Falls. *Revista Leviatán*, 75, pp. 135-158
- Naciones Unidas (1996). *Informe de la Cuarta Conferencia Mundial sobre la Mujer*. Nueva York.
- Navarro García, J.L. (2010). *Historia del Baile Flamenco, Volumen III*. Signatura.
- Ojito Linares, E. S. (2015). *Raúl Ferrer: Un sinsonte con espuelas*. Escambray. <http://www.escambray.cu/2015/raul-ferrer-un-sinsonte-con-espuelas/>
- Pereira Castellón, A. F. (2021). Por una educación rural inclusiva: apreciaciones de Ramiro Guerra Sánchez. *Revista Historia de la Educación Latinoamericana*, 23(37), 161-183. <https://doi.org/10.19053/01227238.12341>
- Pérez Garzón, J.S. (2011), *Historia del feminismo*. Catarata.
- Pichardo Viñals, H. (1978). Un grupo de cubanos de representación social y económica señalan las vergonzosas características de la vida pública cubana. Manifiesto a los cubanos por la "Junta Cubana de Renovación Nacional". In L. M. Traviesas (Ed.) *Documentos para la Historia de Cuba Vol. III*. La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales.
- Picón, J.L. (2016). Ortiz Nuevo indaga en la biografía de La Cuenca, una pionera del flamenco. *El Mundo*. <https://www.elmundo.es/andalucia/malaga/2016/04/10/570a9e37e2704e36448b462e.html>
- Platón. (2002). *Las Leyes*. Alianza.
- Plutarco. (1995). *Obras Morales y de Costumbres: Moralia*. Gredos.
- Poulain De La Barre, F. (1673). *La igualdad de los sexos. Discurso físico y moral*.
- RAE (n.d.). *Logos*. <https://dle.rae.es/logos>
- Ranke-Heinemann, U. (2005). La mujer según Tomás de Aquino. In U. Ranke-Heinemann (Ed.) *Eunucos por el reino de los cielos: Iglesia católica y sexualidad* (pp. 169-182). Trotta. <http://www.vallenajerilla.com/berceo/utaranke/mujer.htm>
- Rodrigo García, A. (1994). *María Lejárraga: una mujer en la sombra*. Ediciones Vosa.
- Rodríguez Ben, J. A. (2020). La enseñanza oficial de la Historia de Cuba durante la conformación y el desarrollo de la República neocolonial (1899-1958). In J. A. Rodríguez Ben (Ed.) *Historia y educación: escritos* (Tomo I, p. 36).
- Rosental Moisevich, M. y Iudin Fedorovich, P. (1946). *Montevideo: Diccionario filosófico marxista*. Ediciones pueblos unidos.
- Rosental, M., e Iudin, P. (1968). *Diccionario Filosófico*. Ediciones Universo
- Rousseau, J. J. (1955) Discurso sobre el origen y los fundamentos de la desigualdad entre los hombres. In M. Fernández Alonso de Armiño (Trad.) *Del Contrato Social. Discursos* (p. 181). Alianza.
- RTVE. (2023). *Por qué fusilaron a las "Trece Rosas"*. <http://www.rtve.es/las-claves/quienes-fueron-las-13-rosas-y-por-qu-las-fusilaron-2019-10-04/#:~:text=El%205%20de%20agosto%20de,con%20las%20Juventudes%20Socialistas%20Unificadas>
- Ruiz De La Cruz, J. A. (1999). Ballet Nacional de España. Madrid: Extracto del programa de mano. Teatro de la Zarzuela
- Sepúlveda Hales, B. & Pinto Troncoso, F. (2021). *La constitución feminista*. LOM CEdiciones
- Tapias, I. (2021). "Carmen", una mujer en busca de su libertad que el flamenco de Gades ensalza. *Cope*. [https://www.cope.es/actualidad/cultura/noticias/carmen-una-mujer-busca-libertad-que-flamenco-gades-ensalza-20210318\\_1196072.html](https://www.cope.es/actualidad/cultura/noticias/carmen-una-mujer-busca-libertad-que-flamenco-gades-ensalza-20210318_1196072.html)
- Unesco (2023). *Cuba celebra el Día Internacional de la Alfabetización*. <https://www.unesco.org/es/articles/cuba-celebra-el-dia-internacional-de-la-alfabetizacion>
- Unesco (2023). <https://www.unesco.org/es/education/literacy>

- Valcárcel Bernaldo De Quirós, A. (1997). *La política de las mujeres*. Madrid: Cátedra
- Valcárcel Bernaldo De Quirós, A. (2019). *Ahora feminismo. Cuestiones candentes y frentes abiertos*. Cátedra.
- Vergillos Gómez, J. (2021). *Nueva Historia del Flamenco*. Editorial Almuzara
- Waters, M.A. (1977). *Marxismo y feminismo*. Fontamara.