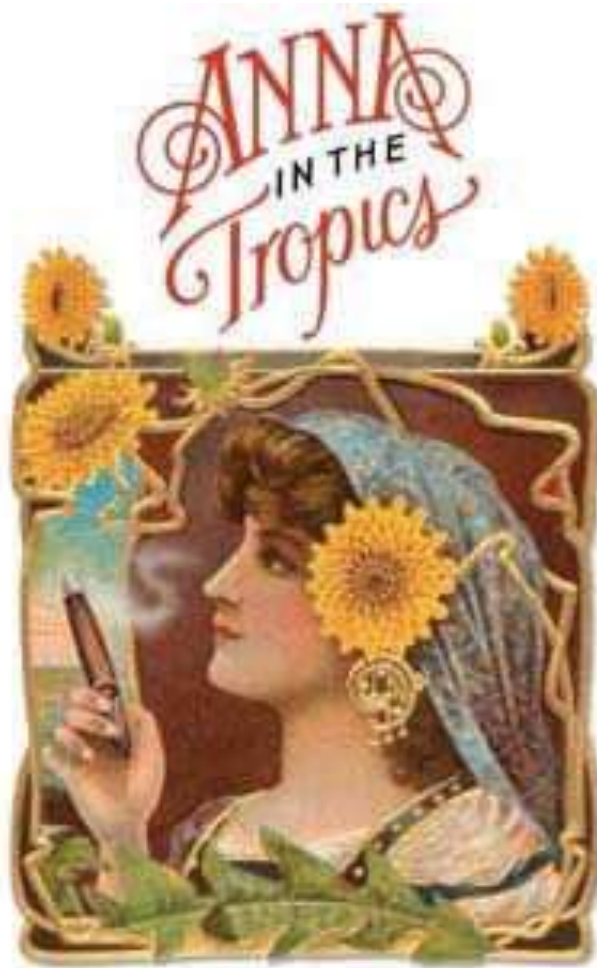


Anna in the Tropics
By Nilo Cruz



Prepared by
Claire Flanagan
Leah Gordenier
Ellie Swanson

Summary

Anna in the Tropics is set in Ybor City, Florida in 1929. The play focuses on the effects of mechanization, the Great Depression and the advent of cigarettes on the cigar industry in Ybor City — the cigar capital of the world. The economic threat that these three factors pose to the factory workers is interwoven with a story of love and betrayal exacerbated by “*el lector*” — the reader — who is hired to read to the factory workers.

When a new lector is hired to read at Santiago and Ofelia’s cigar factory in Ybor City, he changes the lives of the workers through his reading of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*. The lives of the workers begin to reflect the story of love and betrayal as Juan Julian, *el lector*, reads further into Tolstoy’s masterpiece. Marela is swept away with visions of aristocratic Russia. Conchita realizes her loveless marriage to Palomo and confronts him about his adulterous affair, as she enters into one of her own with Juan Julian. Cheché holds a personal and deep-rooted grudge against all lectors, and takes drastic measures against the Juan Julian. The personal lives of the workers are set against the economic downturn in the cigar manufacturing industry. Cheché wants to industrialize to cut costs. His half-brother, Santiago, who owns the factory, is too distracted by alcohol and his gambling debts to assert his authority, and the hand-rolling factory looks as if it is destined to descend into mechanization like so many others.

The Playwright



Nilo Cruz was born in Matanzas, Cuba in 1961. His mother, Tina, worked as a seamstress while his father, Nilo, worked as a salesman. His parents strongly opposed Cuba’s increased militarization, a result of Cuba’s connection with the Soviet Union. In 1962 his father was incarcerated for opposing the growing militancy of the Castro regime. Once his father was released, he made arrangements for he and his family to move to the United States. In 1970, his family was able to get on a Freedom Flight and settle in Miami, Florida.

In Miami, Cruz grew up in a close-knit Cuban community and became enraptured by the history of his homeland. It was here that he fell in love with poetry and was determined to become a writer. Supporting her son’s passion, Tina gave Nilo his first typewriter.

Nilo's interest in theater occurred later when he began taking classes at the Miami-Dade Community College. It was here that he was also guided by fellow Cuban writer, Maria Irene Fornes. In 1988 he was invited to join her writing workshop in New York. In 1994, he enrolled in the graduate playwriting program taught by Paula Vogel, a Pulitzer Prize winning playwright herself, at Brown University in Rhode Island. Upon completing graduate school, he moved back to New York where he has remained ever since.

In 2000, Cruz was appointed playwright-in-residence at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey. Additionally, he received a similar appointment at the New Theatre in Coral Gables, Florida. In 2002 it was The New Theatre which commissioned and produced *Anna in the Tropics*.

Aside from writing plays, Cruz has also taught drama at Brown University, Yale University and the University of Iowa. Still, it is the intermingling of poetry and theater that is his true passion which is why he is often referred to as "The Magic Realist." Cruz's thoughts on his appointed title are:

I used to shy away from the term...but I don't mind it if it helps people accept a combination of the domestic and the poetic. The Cuban people live and breathe, but there's also a poetic landscape that has to do with their hopes and dreams. A little bit of magic on the stage is important. I hope my plays lend themselves to that.

Since *Anna in the Tropics*, Cruz has written a number of other plays. His three most recent ones are *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* which is based on a Gabriel Garcia Marquez story and is his first venture into theater for family audiences. This play was produced by the Children's Theatre Company of Minneapolis. The second of his recent plays is *Lorca in a Green Dress* which premiered at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. The third is *The Beauty of the Father* which premiered at the New Theatre and at the Seattle Repertory Theatre during the 2003-2004 season.

This information was gathered from the following sources:

<http://www.mccarter.org/Education/anna/index.html>

http://www.novelguide.com/a/discover/dfs_0000_0021_0/dfs_0000_0021_0_00013.html#STYLE

<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-annatropics/copy.html>

<http://www.talkinbroadway.com/world/AnnaTropics.html>

<http://www.dtcinfo.org/PublicDocs/Anna%20Guide.pdf>

<http://www.answers.com/topic/anna-in-the-tropics>

Historical Context

Ybor City, a district of Tampa, Florida was founded by Don Ignacio Haya and Vincent Martinez Ybor in 1886, where they began the city's first cigar factories. The newly constructed railway system and port access made it a good place to build what would turn out to be the largest cigar

producing city in the world. After the first cigar factories had been built, it didn't take long for other cigar manufacturers to transplant their operations to the southern United States, especially Ybor city. Increased taxation in Cuba and encouragement from Florida land companies made the move to Florida very attractive to cigar manufactures. The city quickly filled with immigrants, especially Cubans, though Spaniards, Italians and other nationalities also settled in Ybor city. Many of the Cubans who settled in the United States at this time were sympathizers of Cuban independence who were fleeing from prosecution. In fact, Don Vincent Martinez Ybor was one such exile. These immigrants came to find stable jobs in the booming cigar factories.

By the 1920's—the decade in which “Anna in the Tropics” is set—there were over 200 cigar factories operating in Ybor City alone. These factories employed over 12,000 mostly Cuban workers. As the Cuban population grew along with the cigar industry, so too did Cuban culture. Residents built social clubs, which were integral to preserving and expanding Cuban culture in the United States. These clubs were the hub of activity for the Cuban people. They could eat, dance, watch a play, even receive healthcare paid for by club dues at the clubs. Coffee shops were another main cultural staple of Cuban social life. As Nilo Cruz indicates in “Anna in the Tropics” cultural traditions such as cock fights were also a part of the Cuban-American experience. During the booming cigar years, so much Cuban culture was transplanted to Ybor City that it was dubbed “little Havana.”



Cigar Factory in Ybor City

The booming cigar industry, however, began to wane in the late 1920's. In fact, cigar consumption dropped from a little over six and a half billion in 1929 to a little more than four billion in 1933. While overall cigar sales, including machine-manufactured cigars, fell during these years, the traditional hand-rolled cigars suffered the worst losses. This decline was due to three factors: the mechanization of cigar-making, the Great Depression and the popularity of the

cigarette. Cruz addresses the issue of machine-rolled cigars directly in *Anna in the Tropics* and alludes to the other two factors.

Machine-made cigars were not, at first, as popular as their hand-rolled counterparts because the hand-rolled cigars maintained such a good reputation. Therefore, in order to undercut their competition, makers of machine-made cigars launched a “spit campaign” in which they claimed that, in the hand-rolling process, saliva played a major role in production. This undermined the hand-rolling process in the public eye. From a managerial frame of mind, cigars could be produced more quickly with less cost of labor using machines; thus, the hand-rolling of cigars declined drastically with technological advances.

As the need for cigar workers declined and the use of machines rose, another Cuban cultural practice—the reader—was made unnecessary. The reader was introduced as a way for workers to entertain and educate themselves while working. The reader would read political news as well as poetry and novels to the factory hands as they worked. Thus, the reader functioned as a news source and entertainment. Workers looked for highly skilled readers who could bring literary characters alive, almost like an actor. Maria Rodriguez, daughter of two cigar factory workers, describes her father’s feelings toward the reader: “[m]y daddy loved the poetry and the stories, which were like soap operas.”

This information was gathered from the following sources:

<http://fcit.usf.edu/florida/lessons/yborcity/yborcity1.pdf>

http://www.cigaraficionado.com/Cigar/CA_Features/CA_Feature_Basic_Template/0,2344,2399,00.html

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9D0DEEDE1238E233A25752C3A9619C94639ED7CF>

<http://www.ybormuseum.org/research/ybor-city.html>

<http://www.tbo.com/life/reports/cigarfactory/>

<http://books.google.com/books?id=UCyubGAqBB4C&pg=PA109&lpg=PA109&dq=Cuban+history+%2B+cigar+factories>

Production History

Anna in the Tropics was originally commissioned and produced in 2002 by the New Theatre in Coral Gables, Florida. It received a residency grant from the Theatre Communications Groups and the National Endowment of the Arts. For the original production, Rafael del Acha was the Artistic Director and Eileen Suarez was the Managing Director.

It was because of these details that *Anna in the Tropics* received many awards. The first award it won was the American Theatre Critics/Steinberg New Play Award in 2003. Two days later it won the prestigious Pulitzer Prize Award in Drama. This play was not expected to win the Pulitzer Prize because it had not yet been performed in New York. Also the competition was high that year with Edward Albee’s *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* and Richard Greenberg’s *Take*

Me Out. Additionally gratifying was the fact that this was the first time a Latino playwright was honored with the Pulitzer Prize in Drama award.

After the performance at the New Theater, production at the Victory Gardens Theatre, the McCarter Theatre and the South Coast Repertory soon followed. Then a Broadway production in 2003 followed, where famous actor Jimmy Smits played *el lector*. This production was monumental because it was the first time a Latino play was performed with a full Latino cast.

This information was gathered from the following sources:

<http://www.mccarter.org/Education/anna/index.html>

http://www.novelguide.com/a/discover/dfs_0000_0021_0/dfs_0000_0021_0_00013.html#STYLE

<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-annatropics/copy.html>

<http://www.talkinbroadway.com/world/AnnaTropics.html>

<http://www.dtcinfo.org/PublicDocs/Anna%20Guide.pdf>

<http://www.answers.com/topic/anna-in-the-tropics>

Story Development

Anna in the Tropics takes place in 1929 in Ybor City, Florida. The setting is in an old warehouse, where the cigar rollers work. Despite the glum setting, the workers are always well dressed. They wear linen in the colors of white and beige, and their clothes are always well pressed and starched.

Initially, Nilo Cruz was going to write the play so that it took place in the 1800's since, at that time, lecturers were very instrumental in the cigar factories. So instrumental, in fact, that Cuba's leader, Jose Marti, traveled to Florida to read to the workers. This was so influential that many of the workers formed a brigade and went to Cuba to fight for its independence against Spain. However, after fully researching this history, Cruz felt as though the historical account would complicate the story too much. He wanted the main focus to be on *el lector*. Therefore, he chose to have the play set in 1929 because at this time many lecturers were being laid off due to the beginning of the depression.

Cruz felt that it was important to document the presence of these early Cuban-Americans. This is because most stories neglect this time period and focus only after 1959, when there was an influx of Cubans in America due to the revolution. He explains that these earlier settlers were very different than the immigrants who arrived later. For instance, these early settlers were not immigrants. They were exiles who desired independence and would have been killed if they remained in their homeland.

The time period Cruz chose had an effect on which story his *lector* read. Cruz chose a Russian novel because many lecturers were socialists in the 1920's. In fact, many chose to read *The Communist Manifesto* in their factories. Therefore, Cruz chose *Anna Karenina* because he also

wanted a romantic novel. He felt as though a romantic novel paralleled the aesthetics of cigar boxes, which often times pictured beautiful women in romantic settings.

This information was gathered from the following sources:

<http://www.mccarter.org/Education/anna/index.html>

http://www.novelguide.com/a/discover/dfs_0000_0021_0/dfs_0000_0021_0_00013.html#STYLE

<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-annatropics/copy.html>

<http://www.talkinbroadway.com/world/AnnaTropics.html>

<http://www.dtcinfo.org/PublicDocs/Anna%20Guide.pdf>

<http://www.answers.com/topic/anna-in-the-tropics>

Cigar History

The tobacco plant is originally from South America and is estimated to have arrived in Cuba between 3000 and 2000 BC. Tobacco was considered a miraculous medicine and was prominent in the religious, political and social aborigine gatherings.

Cigars were first introduced to Europe in 1492 after Christopher Columbus received it as a token of friendship from the Natives of Cuba. Columbus's sailors brought the leaves back to Europe and Spain. It spread throughout Europe, and was a trend by 1557.

Spain quickly became the largest cigar manufacturer by the 18th century. They used only Cuban tobacco. In April 1717, King Philip V of Spain established a royal monopoly on tobacco growing in Cuba—Cuba could only sell tobacco leaves to Spanish factories. The monopoly remained in effect until June of 1817. From there on, free trade was permitted between Cuba and the rest of the world as long as it was through Spanish ports.

By the late 1800's, many top cigar producers from Cuba moved to Florida and set up factories. The city of Ybor quickly became the Cigar capitol of the world, having almost seventy cigar factories (*Anna in the Tropics* takes place in 1929). By the end of the 19th century, Cuban cigars were considered a luxury item and a symbol of status in Britain and the United States. In fact, most of the cigar factories in the US used only 100% Havana leaves, which made them equal to Cuban-made cigars.

It was in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that machines started to replace factory workers. Today, handmade cigars are considered high-quality.

This information was gathered from the following sources:

<http://www.cigarone.com/cuban-cigar-culture/history.php>

<http://cigars.about.com/od/history/a/cigarhistory.htm>

http://www.casa-del-cigar.com/history_cuban_cigar.php

<http://www.altadisusa.com/connoisseur/history.asp>

Cigar Production

A cigar is made up of dried tobacco leaves. Three parts of the tobacco plant are used—the bottom leaves (the bottom cut) are used as the binder of the cigar, the second and third cuts are the filler, and the top part, which usually contains the most oil, is used for the wrapper.

The leaves are harvested in a process called curing. During curing, heat and shade are used as the primary growing elements—Cuba has the perfect climate for growing tobacco leaves. The duration of curing (between 25-80 days) depends on the type of tobacco and desired color of the leaves. Ultimately, the curing process determines the flavor, burning and aroma characteristics of the cigar.

Next, depending on their overall appearances, the leaves are sorted for use as either a filter or wrapper. During this process, the leaves are kept moist and handled with extreme care.

A roller constructs the cigar by hand, making the “recipe” of tobacco leaves. The filling is a combination of two to four different types of leaves, depending on the type and quality of cigar.

The buncher gives the leaves its cylinder shape, and the roller then applies the outer wrapper/tobacco leaf.

After rolling, the cigars are placed in the “marrying room” for at least three weeks. The marrying room is a room made of cedar wood where temperature and humidity are controlled. This gives the tobacco inside the cigar time to fuse their tastes and allows the moisture to equilibrate.

Cigars come in many different shapes and sizes. The length is measured in inches and the width is measured by a ring gauge. The ring gauge is the diameter of a cigar, which is measured in terms of 64^{ths} of an inch (a cigar with a 42-inch ring gauge is 42/64 inches thick). Thus, the names of cigars depend on their gauge. Some popular cigar names are: Corona, Robusto, Torpedo and Pantela.

This information was gathered from the following places:

<http://cigars.about.com/od/sizesshapes/a/0060703.htm>

<http://www.altadisusa.com/connoisseur/construction.asp>

Summary of Anna Karenina

Leo Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina, set in 19th century Russia, tells the story of Anna Karenina, a beautiful woman locked into an advantageous but loveless marriage. While visiting her brother in Moscow, Anna becomes acquainted with the dashing Alexei Vronsky. They soon fall into an adulterous, passionate relationship, and Anna has Vronsky’s child. After childbirth, Anna leaves her husband for Vronsky, and, shunned from society, she and Vronsky retreat to Italy and then to the Russian countryside. There, Anna becomes keenly jealous, afraid that she will not be able to

retain Vronsky's love. In utter despair at her situation, Anna throws herself under a train and is killed.

Index of Terms

Hombre: Man

Gardenia: Large, fragrant, white flower

Señora: Ma'am

Señor: Sir

Fedora: A soft felt hat with a rim that can be easily turned up or down

Napoli: Italian name for Naples

Guanabacoa: A city east of Havana with a population around 100,000

Cacique: Chief

Salud: "Cheers" or "drink to your health"

Neapolitan: A native of Naples

Purissima: Purest

Oidores: Hearers

Zeppelin: A rigid, cylindrical airship