Anna in the Tropics Study Guide

Anna in the Tropics by Nilo Cruz

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Introduction

Nilo Cruz first intended to set his play *Anna in the Tropics* in the 1800s, a time when lectors (readers) played an important role in cigar factories. Cruz, however, reconsidered and decided that a historical account would be "too complicated" to render dramatically, so he chose instead to focus on the role the lector played in the factories during a time when personal and financial independence were inextricably linked. Speaking in an article by Jennifer Kiger for the South Coast Repertory Playgoers Guide, Cruz states that "I decided to write about possibly the last lector in Tampa. The lectors were the first to be fired when the Depression began, so I set the play in 1929." Lectors read novels and news to the workers, who paid the lector directly from their own wages. Cruz also wanted to tell the story of Cubans who fled to the United States prior to the 1959 revolution. "These were not immigrants. They were exiles who wanted Cuba's independence, and they would have been killed if they stayed there. I thought it was important to document this part of our culture," says Cruz (also quoted in Kiger). *Anna in the Tropics* was written while Cruz was playwright-in-residence at the New Theatre in Coral Gables, Florida, which first staged a production of the play in 2002.

Anna in the Tropics portrays the lives of cigar factory workers in Ybor City, Tampa, Florida, when a new lector, perhaps the last to ply his trade, is hired. The men and women remain divided in their loyalties as economic hardship and the pressure to abandon old traditions force the owners of the cigar factory to adopt new, progressive manufacturing methods if they wish to stay in business. As the lector reads from *Anna Karenina*, a novel of adultery set in nineteenth-century Russia, he casts a spell over the workers, transforming their passions and desires through the affirming power of art. That the love they seek may result in a tragic end is ordained as much by the story of the Russian noblewoman as it is by the actions of the workers themselves.

Author Biography

Cruz, the son of Tina and Nilo Cruz, was born in Matanzas, Cuba, in 1961. A staunch opponent of the new communist government, Cruz's father, a shoe salesman, was incarcerated in 1962 for opposing the increased militarization that resulted from Cuba's ties with the Soviet Union. After his release from prison, the elder Cruz was subsequently caught onboard a ship in an attempt to flee to the United States, where he would prepare for his family's arrival at a later date. Cruz's parents remained steadfast in their opposition to the Castro regime; they bought food on the black market and withheld their son from a highly organized system of physical education classes by having a physician friend declare that Nilo had contracted hepatitis. Consequently, Nilo was forced to perpetuate the lie and could not play outdoors with his friends as he had previously. In 1970, the family took a Freedom Flight to the United States, but his parents later divorced. Cruz earned a master of fine arts degree from Brown University in 1994.

In 2000, Cruz was appointed playwright-in-residence at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey, while receiving a similar appointment at the New Theatre in Coral Gables, Florida, which commissioned and produced *Anna in the Tropics* in 2002. Cruz has received grants from the Theatre Communications Group, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. His play *Night Train to Bolina* won the W. Alton Jones Award; *Two Sisters and a Piano* received the Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays Award. Cruz won the American Theatre Critics/Steinberg New Play Award for *Anna in the Tropics* just two days before winning the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Upon learning that he had won the award, Cruz had this to say (quoted in an article in the *New Theatre*): "By honoring my play *Anna in the Tropics*, the first Latino play to earn the Pulitzer Prize in Drama, the Pulitzer Prize Board is not only embracing my work as an artist, but is actually acknowledging and securing a place for Latino plays in the North American theater." Another note of interest is that *Anna in the Tropics* was selected by the Pulitzer Prize jury before the play was performed in New York City.

Cruz has taught drama at Brown University, Yale University, and the University of Iowa. Cruz's previously produced plays were set to be published in book form in 2004 by Dramatist's Play Service. His *The Beauty of the Father* was also set to premiere at the New Theatre and at the Seattle Repertory Theatre during the 2003—2004 theater season.

Plot Summary

Act 1, Scene 1

Anna in the Tropics begins with Santiago and Cheché betting money at a cockfight. Eliades, the bookie and promoter of the contests, calls out the names of the combatants as Santiago and Cheché make their wagers. Santiago becomes engrossed in the action, raising his bets impulsively while Cheché takes a more cautious approach. When Cheché wins the first time, Santiago tells him, "You're a lucky man."

After losing his second wager, Santiago asks Cheché for a loan of two hundred dollars so that he, Santiago, can continue betting. Here Cheché demonstrates the acumen that makes him an astute businessman, for he tells Santiago, "I don't lend any money when I'm gambling, and I don't lend any money when I'm drinking." Santiago insists, however, declaring, "With your lucky money I'll show you what I can do."

Cheché finally relents, but when neither one of them can find a piece of paper upon which Santiago may write a promissory note, Santiago carves the amount he owes on the bottom of Cheché's shoe with a knife, signing his name with an *S* below the sum. Despite this assurance, Cheché remains doubtful about whether Santiago will repay the loan. "I'll pay you back," Santiago assures him. "I'm your brother, for God's sake!" When Santiago loses the second fight and asks Cheché to lend him two hundred dollars more, Cheché declines, saying that Santiago is "jinxed." Santiago convinces Cheché to loan him the money by promising to give him part of the cigar factory if he does not pay the loan. Once Santiago has finished carving the new total, he tries to persuade Cheché to wear his shoe, but Cheché refuses, knowing that his footsteps would erase the figures, thus relieving Santiago of his obligation.

Meanwhile, Marela, Conchita, and Ofelia stand by the seaport waiting for the cigar factory's new lector to arrive. They take turns admiring his photograph, commenting upon the qualities a good lector possesses. Ofelia confesses to her daughters that she has taken some of Santiago's money to pay for the lector's trip. She does not feel guilty about taking the money because she knows that Santiago would probably lose the money gambling. "I'll spend my money on the best lector we can get," Ofelia says.

The three women then provide a history of the cigar factory's previous lectors. Teodoro, an eighty-year-old man who died three months ago, should have, in Marela's opinion, given up his job years ago because his heart "couldn't take the love stories." The last novel he read was *Wuthering Heights*. Conchita then remarks that Teodoro's replacement didn't last long, for reasons that are explained later in the play. Because so many ships from Europe and South America stop in Cuba, Conchita expects the lector to bring new books with him.

As the ship pulls into port, Marela confesses that she has followed the palm reader's advice and put the lector's name in a glass of water filled with brown sugar and

cinnamon so that he would accept their offer of employment. Ofelia warns her daughter about playing with spells and altering another's destiny. Conchita adds that such simple spells are how witches learn their craft. She then tells a story about how one woman couldn't stop crying after she put a spell on her lover and he died. Marela admits to feeling "awful," albeit more from fear that the spell will not work than from regret for having cast it.

When the women can see no sign of the lector among the many men wearing hats, Ofelia blames Marela's spell for their misfortune. Marela is nervous with anticipation at the lector's arrival, a nervousness that grows with each passing minute. Ofelia hopes that the lector will be able to detect the gardenia she wears in her hat. Marela, believing that her spell has "ruined" the lector's arrival, vows to return home to remove his name from the glass of water. The lector, Juan Julian, having spied Ofelia's white gardenia from afar, approaches the three women just as Marela prepares to leave. As Juan Julian introduces himself to the women, Marela, suffering from nervousness, wets herself. Rather than embarrass the young woman further with his presence, Juan Julian leaves to find the steward.

Act 1, Scene 2

Juan Julian reports to work to perform his first reading. Cheché asks a few questions of him before figuring out that Juan Julian is a lector. "If you're looking for a job, we're not hiring . . . ," says Cheché. Juan Julian tries to convince Cheché that he is not looking for a job because he has already been hired. Ofelia arrives to clarify the situation.

Ofelia discusses with Juan Julian some of the other workers whom he has already met. All of these workers, who come from places such as Spain and Italy, share a desire for romance. When Juan Julian asks Marela about the man whom he has just met, she refers to Cheché by his American name, "Chester," and calls him a "clown." Ofelia, Marela's mother, quickly corrects her, explaining Cheché's relationship to the family and his arrival at the factory.

When Juan Julian suggests that Cheché does not like him, Ofelia dismisses this fear, saying that Cheché is intoxicated with the power her husband, Santiago, has given him. Conchita foreshadows the play's outcome when she says, "Cheché has a knack for turning the smallest incident into a loud and tragic event."

The women take turns explaining that Cheché's dislike of lectors is cultural: he does not understand the tradition of reading to the workers because he comes from New Jersey, so he dismisses the need for a lector completely. Furthermore, says Marela, Cheché believes that "lectors are the ones who cause trouble."

Marela offers that perhaps the real reason Cheché does not like lectors is because his wife, a "southern belle from Atlanta," ran away with the last lector the factory hired. Ofelia believes that all lectors have been unfairly blamed as a result of Cheché's experience. She tells Juan Julian to report any trouble to her husband.

Juan Julian announces that *Anna Karenina* (pronounced Ah-nah Kar-eh-neen-ah with a Cuban accent) will be his first selection. Juan Julian offers to read from another book when Marela learns that, in Juan Julian's opinion, the book is "Quite romantic." Marela believes that a love story will be good for Cheché, so she tells Juan Julian to continue.

Ofelia then engages Juan Julian in a conversation about how the landscape and climate in Tampa differs from that in Cuba. The sky seems bigger, and there is more light. "There doesn't seem to be a place where one could hide," continues Juan Julian. Juan Julian and Marela flirt and philosophize with each other as they discuss the many types of light that exist in the world. Marela concludes that the light reflected off the skin is "the most difficult one to escape."

In a comical scene, Cheché appears holding a shoe in his hand. He is trying to collect on the debt owed to him by his brother. Ofelia tells him that she cannot honor the debt because she has no money. However, Cheché does not want money; he wants his half of the factory.

Act 1, Scene 3

Juan Julian reads from *Anna Karenina* as he strolls among the workers, who are entranced by the sound of his voice as they handle the leaf tobacco. He reads a passage from the book, one told from the heroine's perspective, that speaks of the shame and humiliation Anna feels for betraying her husband, yet the passion she feels for her lover, a passion which is returned in kind, is worth the price she must pay. Like a good storyteller, especially one who wishes to keep his job, Juan Julian ends the story shortly thereafter to heighten the element of suspense. "That's all for today from *Anna Karenina*," he says, greeted by the sound of applause.

Overcome by the passionate story Juan Julian has just read to them, Marela, Conchita, and Ofelia romanticize about the lector, referring to him as "the Persian Canary" because "it's like hearing a bird sing when he reads." Cheché makes some insinuating comments about how the women have fallen under the spell of yet another love story, saying that "For some reason I never hear the story the same way that you do"; but they refuse to let him spoil the enchantment and enthusiasm they feel now that a professional lector is in their midst. Palomo, Conchita's husband, enters the discussion, suggesting that perhaps the reason why he and Cheché don't interpret the story the same way is because they are men. The men and women are divided in their opinions, but Ofelia, with the support of her two daughters, defends her decision to hire a lector. "Only a fool can fail to understand the importance of having a lector read to us while we work," she says.

Cheché argues that having a lector at the factory will create "another tragic love story." When Palomo admits to liking love stories, Cheché stands alone. Soon everyone talks about what type of stories they like and how Juan Julian's reading has made the characters in *Anna Karenina* come alive. Marela dreams of snow and the images are so vivid that she wants to borrow a fur coat for when she travels to Russia in her

imagination. "He chose the right book," says Ofelia. "There's nothing like reading a winter book in the middle of summer."

The men exit, and the women pore over some of the more passionate lines from the book. They discuss what it must be like to be part of a lover's triangle, though the irony is not lost upon Conchita, who is thinking about her own life. The women conjecture about the characters' actions, experiencing their problems vicariously. "When Juan Julian starts reading," says Marela, "the story enters my body and I become the second skin of the characters." Ofelia sees that her daughter is infatuated with the lector and chides her for letting her dreams run away from her. The women then discuss dreams and whether it is foolish to have them. "We have to remember to keep our feet on the ground and stay living inside our shoes and not have lofty illusions," concludes Ofelia.

Marela and Ofelia are discussing the importance of a man's cigar when Palomo enters. He and Conchita will be working late. Marela and Ofelia bid goodbye, and soon thereafter the couple discusses Santiago's gambling habit. Conchita changes the subject by asking Palomo if he likes the novel that Juan Julian is reading to them. Conchita, eager to test her husband's reaction, asks him if hearing about Anna's affair makes him "uncomfortable." Palomo responds by saying that he does not think about the love affairs so much because "It seems like in every novel there's always a love affair." Rather, he thinks about all the money the characters have. Conchita and Palomo get into an argument over his inability to appreciate literature. Palomo thinks that "Money can buy everything," but Conchita says that money can't buy the places she occupies within her imagination.

Their conversation turns toward their marriage. "I don't know why I married you," Palomo tells Conchita. She says he married her because she gave him a cigar, one she had rolled especially for him. Conchita continues to view the beginnings of their relationship romantically, but Palomo insists that he married her because of an unnamed obligation he owed to her father. Upon hearing this, Conchita realizes that Palomo never really cared for her. Seeking an outlet for her disappointment, she once again launches an attack against him for being unable to appreciate the finer points of literature. To drive home her point, she cites an episode from *Anna Karenina* in which Anna's husband becomes suspicious of an affair; Conchita tests Palomo's ability to comprehend the example. Palomo understands her implications completely. Conchita makes a direct comparison between their lives and those of the characters in *Anna Karenina* but with a twist of irony: "Anna and her husband remind me of us. Except I'm more like the husband."

Conchita chides Palomo about his "secret love," drawing the analogy between art and life even further. She wants to know more about her husband's mistress; she wants to know what she does to make him happy. Palomo responds by asking Conchita if she wants a divorce, but Conchita would prefer to take a lover instead. Palomo blames *Anna Karenina* for putting these ideas into his wife's head, saying, "This book will be the end of us." However, Conchita recognizes that her desires do not have to be absolute. She can learn to love her husband in a different manner than before. She quotes a line

from the book: "If there are as many minds as there are heads, then there are as many kinds of love as there are hearts."

Act 1, Scene 4

In this comical scene at the family house, Ofelia and Santiago, who are not on speaking terms, conduct a conversation by using their daughter Marela as an intermediary. Santiago has no money to buy cigarettes, but Ofelia refuses to give him any money, calling him "a drunk, a thief and a-good-for-nothing gambler." After a few exchanges, they speak to each other directly. Santiago threatens to pawn his wedding ring, but Ofelia, in a barbed reply loaded with double entendre that speaks volumes about the state of their marital relations, says that he might as well since "his finger got numb."

Unable to tolerate her parents' bickering anymore, Marela leaves. In an effort to mollify his wife's wounded sensibilities, Santiago comments on the new lector's performance, though he does not mention him by name. Reconciled temporarily by their interest in *Anna Karenina*, the couple discusses the qualities that make Levin "a dedicated man." Ofelia remarks that her husband was once like Levin. The topic shifts from a real estate transaction in the book to control of the cigar factory, with Santiago admitting that drink impairs his business decisions. Ofelia warns him about Cheché's attempts to mechanize production. "You need to go back to the factory," she says. Santiago agrees, saying, "To the factory I need to go back."

Ashamed of his actions, Santiago admits to having been a fool. He refuses to leave the family's house, however, until he is able to pay the debt he owes Cheché. Ofelia says that he's being silly, but Santiago insists that this is what he must do to restore his self-respect. Santiago turns the subject to Levin again, asking Ofelia about the woman whom he loves, Kitty. Ofelia explains the love triangle that prevents Levin from winning Kitty's love. Santiago, drawing inspiration from Levin's fidelity to one woman, "*swallows the gulp of love*" as he fails to tell Ofelia his true feelings for her. Thus reminded of his inadequacies, Santiago explains his poor luck at gambling as the result of his failure to perform some small ritual such as polishing his shoes or leaving the house in disarray. "Every time I lose, I feel that something has been taken from me. Something bigger than money," he says. Gambling has caused Santiago to lose self-respect, and he wonders if, perhaps, he hasn't lost Ofelia too? "If you had lost me, I wouldn't be here," she tells him. "If you had lost me, I wouldn't be by your side." What begins as a comical scene ends on a romantic note.

Act 1, Scene 5

Juan Julian, Marela, and Conchita are at the factory. Juan Julian says that he feels "asphyxiated" when he is in a city; he prefers to be in the country instead. He philosophizes on how people allow themselves to get away from Nature. He sees the "verdure of nature" as a restorative force. Conchita agrees, asking him why he chose to

read Tolstoy. Juan Julian responds by saying that "Tolstoy understands humanity like no other writer does."

Conchita asks Juan Julian how he became a lector. He explains that he discovered books one summer while he and his family were forced to remain inside their house in order to maintain the appearance that they had gone away on a trip. His mother would read to him and his siblings while his father worked abroad to earn money to repay his many creditors. That's when, says Juan Julian, "I became a listener and I learned to appreciate stories and the sound of words."

Juan Julian and Conchita discuss how people from the North, like Cheché, are different from others. Conchita tells a story of how she gave a braid to a boy from New London and told him to bury it under a tree in honor of the feast of Saint Candelaria, which celebrates fertility and the growth of the soil. The boy said that he would be too embarrassed to dig a hole in front of everyone in the park, so Conchita took her braid back from him and buried it herself. The two never spoke to each other again. That, she says, is the only person she ever met who was from New England.

Juan Julian asks Conchita if she still observes the ritual of cutting her hair on the second day of February, to which Conchita replies, "Yes. My father does me the honor of burying it." Juan Julian asks why her husband does not perform the ritual, for that would be "an honor for any man." Juan Julian continues making his overture, saying that he would find "an old, wise banyan tree" and bury Conchita's hair by the tree's roots, but she says that she will cut her hair short like the film star Clara Bow, thus ending the ritual. Juan Julian says that he will find a "strong-looking tree," although he reminds her that the ritual will not count if it is not performed on the appropriate date. "I believe that everything counts if you have faith," she replies, adding that he, as a lector, should believe in "rescuing things from oblivion." Juan Julian asks if there is a story in her hair. "There will be the day I cut it," she explains, "and that story will come to an end." If one may read the story of her hair as one reads a face or a book, then Juan Julian believes that Conchita's hair should be placed inside a book instead of beneath a tree. He chooses a passage from *Anna Karenina* in which Anna realizes that she is deceiving herself. Conchita hands Juan Julian a pair of scissors with which to cut her hair, but soon they are locked in a tender embrace.

Act 2, Scene 1

The second act begins with Juan Julian's recorded voice reciting a passage from *Anna Karenina* in which the narrator explores the "complexity" of Anna's feelings as she reflects upon "all that was in her soul." Meanwhile, Conchita and Juan Julian make love on one of the factory tables. Once they've finished and start to dress, Juan Julian tells Conchita that he would like to meet her someplace else, perhaps in a hotel. In an exchange in which both characters use strong metaphorical language to describe the other's condition, Juan Julian notes a sadness in Conchita's eyes after they make love; he recommends that she listen to a canary sing for five minutes a day to ease her sorrow. If she cannot find a canary, then he suggests that she listen to him sing while

he's in the shower. Their banter is interrupted when they hear the sound of Cheché arguing.

Cigar workers gather around Cheché as he tries to explain to Ofelia a piece of machinery he has ordered. Cheché insists that he be heard because he owns shares in the factory. Ofelia has someone fetch Santiago, with the hope that he will be able to put the matter to rest. Cheché persists, however, saying that all the other cigar companies have automated production. A debate ensues about the aesthetics of a hand-rolled cigar as compared to one rolled by machine. Cheché argues that progress is not only inevitable but a necessity, for the cigar factory is operating in the same manner it was decades ago. When Ofelia asks about the workers that machines have displaced, Cheché points out that machines need workers to operate them; therefore, very few jobs are lost. Palomo enters the discussion, but Cheché interrupts him when Palomo mentions a lector at a competing factory. "Ah, Leonardo is a lector!" says Cheché. "What does he know about machines?"

Palomo defends Leonardo, saying that his friend upholds many fine traditions that machines would otherwise destroy. Cheché observes that lectors are the first to be fired from the factories because no one can hear them recite above the noise of the machinery. Cheché adds insult to injury by saying that he can see no reason why someone would want to contribute part of his or her wages to someone who reads romantic novels.

Marela defends the need for a lector, insisting that "the words he reads are like a breeze that breaks the monotony of this factory." Juan Julian joins the discussion, citing the tradition of having a lector as going back to an ancient Taino custom, for the Taino Indians believed that tobacco leaves "whisper the language of the sky." As a descendent of the cacique, or chief Indian, the lector interprets the words of the gods and brings them to the "oidores," or listeners. Juan Julian concludes by suggesting that Cheché, whom he addresses as "Señor Chester," spend more money on advertising rather than machines. "Or are you working for the machine industry?" he asks.

Ofelia supports the lector's argument by saying that more advertising will help them sell more cigars. Juan Julian tells "Chester" that cigars have fallen out of favor with the public because people wish to emulate the many film stars who smoke cigarettes onscreen. "You can go to Hollywood and offer our cigars to producers," Juan Julian tells him. He continues, saying that machines now dictate the pace of life to such an extent that no one has time for leisurely pursuits, much less Nature. "So you see, Chester," says the lector, "you want modernity, and modernity is actually destroying our very own industry. The very act of smoking a cigar." All of the workers, except for Cheché and Palomo, applaud the lector's comments. Juan Julian offers to leave the room so that the workers may vote, but Ofelia tells him that it's obvious that they want him to stay. Juan Julian insists, however, upon deciding things "the democratic way."

Santiago arrives and is quickly apprised of the situation. He does not see the point of taking a vote if, in the minds of the workers, the matter has been settled. Ofelia says that taking a vote is "the American way," but Santiago fails to comprehend her logic. He

introduces himself to the lector, and shortly thereafter Santiago asks for a show of hands from those workers who wish to dispense with the lector's services. Palomo and Cheché are the only ones who raise their hands. Santiago declares that Juan Julian shall stay. He then announces that the factory will begin producing a new brand of cigar and that Marela will pose as Anna Karenina for the cigar's label. Santiago brings some clothes for her to wear, and she leaves to try them on.

Santiago demonstrates beyond question that he is in charge of the factory when he delivers a short speech telling the workers that much work and a brighter future lie ahead. The workers applaud and leave the factory. Santiago then hands Cheché an envelope filled with money, thereby settling his debt. Even though he no longer owns a share of the factory, Cheché objects to the production of a new cigar line, citing the exorbitant price of tobacco in Cuba. Santiago refuses to hear Cheché's arguments, ordering him to return the machine to the manufacturer. He asks his brother to fetch him a calendar, for Santiago must now calculate a schedule of payments for a loan that he needs to launch this new line of cigars. "This time I'm betting my money on the factory," he says.

Santiago does not understand Cheché's habit of crossing out days on the calendar before they have expired. He sees this as a sign of "apprehension, anxiety and even despair." Cheché confesses that he can no longer tolerate working at the factory because every attempt he makes at modernizing production is turned away. Santiago does not believe that this is the sole reason for his brother's discomfort, and Cheché responds by saying that he still thinks of his Mildred, his wife who ran away with the previous lector. He admits to Santiago that Juan Julian's presence reminds him of how he was cuckolded.

Marela enters, modeling the clothes her father gave her. "You'll make a great Anna," he tells her, and then he leaves to find a flower for her hair. Marela's beauty arouses Cheché's ardor. "You look beautiful," he tells her just before Juan Julian joins them. He also comments on her appearance, but he has forgotten his book and leaves to retrieve it, leaving Marela and Cheché alone.

Cheché, noticing that Marela seems to have been daydreaming more than ever lately, comments on the quality of her work. As always, Cheché blames the lector for problems at the factory. "You have to pay less attention to the reader and more attention to what you're doing," he says. Marela refuses to let Juan Julian become a scapegoat by pointing out that he reminds Cheché of his wife every time he reads from *Anna Karenina*. Cheché stands his ground, however. He accuses Marela of taking shortcuts, and he shows Marela some of the faulty cigars she has wrapped. Marela attempts to dismiss Cheché's accusations with laughter, but she stops short when she sees him looking at her with longing in his eyes. He caresses her hair, but she moves away from him. After admitting that the lector reminds him of his wife, Cheché tries to kiss Marela, but she pushes him away, warning him to never touch her again.

Act 2, Scene 2

While isolated from the scene's action, Juan Julian recites a passage from *Anna Karenina* that describes Anna's husband's naïveté. Meanwhile, Conchita is rolling cigars at her table when Palomo enters and asks her what time she meets her lover. Conchita does not deny the accusation. Palomo wants to know if her lover reads to her, and Conchita says that he does when she looks sad. She tells her husband that, in order for her to get used to her lover's body, she must make love to him repeatedly; her lover insists upon it. "He says things a woman likes to hear," she adds without malice. Palomo wants to know more about his wife's sex life, and she complies by providing him with salacious details that he seems to enjoy vicariously. Palomo attributes his curiosity to a change he's noticed in Conchita, and he begins his questioning again by asking if the lector ever asks about him. "Yes," replies Conchita. "He wanted to know why you stopped loving me."

Despite having taken a lover, Conchita still loves her husband. She describes what it was like making love to the lector as though he were her husband. "It was terrifying," she says, because "everything seemed so recognizable, as if he had known me all along." Palomo then asks Conchita to show him how the lector made love to her, and she responds by saying, "You would have to do as actors do"; that is to say, he would have to surrender. "You would have to let go of yourself and enter the life of another human being, and in this case it would be me," she tells her husband. Juan Julian closes the book as Conchita leads her husband to her trysting place within the factory.

Act 2, Scene 3

Santiago and Ofelia preside over the new cigar brand's inauguration as workers dressed in their finest clothes arrive at the factory. Bottles of rum and glasses are passed around. The couple shares a toast with Juan Julian, and then the three of them exit.

Palomo tells Cheché, another man whose wife has had an affair, that he can't stop thinking about Conchita and her lover. Cheché recommends that Palomo move to North Trenton to start a new life and work at one of the cigar factories there. "And there are no lectors and no good-for-nothing love stories," he adds.

Juan Julian asks Palomo to help him with the lanterns, and the two men soon engage in a conversation about love stories. Juan Julian accuses Palomo of trying to have him fired, but Palomo says that he's curious to know how the novel ends, so Juan Julian shouldn't take his actions personally. Cheché, knowing that Juan Julian is having an affair with Conchita, asks the lector if Anna's husband ever thought of killing his wife's lover. Juan Julian says that Anna's husband, being a man of power and influence, would rather avoid a scandal than resort to such desperate measures. When Palomo asks the lector which character in the novel he identifies with most, Juan Julian replies, "I like them all. I learn things from all of them." Palomo wants to know more about Anna's lover, especially about what made Vronsky become interested in her. Juan Julian is well

aware of Palomo's insinuations, and he explains that Anna came to Vronsky because "she thought that he could help her." Juan Julian adds that Vronsky could help her find love and to "recognize herself as a woman all over again." Through Vronsky, Anna learns "a new way of loving . . . that makes her go back to the lover over and over again."

Santiago and Ofelia enter, and they are joined by Conchita, who accepts their invitation to have a drink. The women have a playful argument about Conchita's paisley dress which, Ofelia says, makes her daughter look like an old woman. Palomo disagrees, saying that the dress makes Conchita look more "bohemian." When Juan Julian comments on Conchita's dress, Palomo becomes more possessive of his wife and puts his arm around her waist, pulling her closer to him.

Juan Julian wants to know why alcohol is prohibited in America. In an unintentional play on words, Santiago says it is because Americans "are not socialists when they drink." Palomo then compares alcohol to literature because "Literature brings out the best and the worst part of ourselves. If you're angry it brings out your anger. If you are sad, it brings out your sadness." Ofelia, slightly tipsy from the rum, says that alcohol is prohibited because "most Americans don't know how to dance."

Santiago proudly removes the new cigar from his shirt pocket and makes a short speech telling everyone about the product's specifications. Marela enters dressed in a long black gown like the one Anna wears on the night of the ball, and everyone comments on how beautiful Marela looks. Ofelia performs the honor of lighting the first cigar, and then a ritual is observed whereby the cigar is passed from one person to another through an intermediary so as to facilitate communication with the gods. Everyone gives the cigar high praise. When his turn to pass the cigar arrives, however, Palomo disregards the ritual by handing the cigar directly to Juan Julian□an obvious slight. Juan Julian, rising above the insult, smiles and makes a gesture of supplication to the gods before taking a puff.

"We do have a cigar, señores! We have a champion!" announces Santiago. Marela proposes that they hand out free cigars in the street, but, rather than go bankrupt, Santiago offers that they fire a gunshot instead because, according to him, "No inauguration is complete without the breaking of a bottle or a gunshot." They settle on three gunshots as the proper number, and soon everyone leaves to go outside." Palomo grabs Conchita by the arm before she can leave and, in a pique of jealousy, accuses his wife of falling in love with the lector. "Maybe just as much as you are," Conchita replies, for why else would Palomo want to know so much about him? "I don't like men," Palomo answers as the sound of a gunshot and laughter reverberate. Palomo explains his interest by saying that it stems from the "old habit" of listening, but Conchita does not accept this explanation. "You're right there's something else," admits Palomo. "And it's terrible sometimes." Conchita, aware that her suspicion about her husband's sexual orientation may indeed be correct, says, "Then nothing makes sense to me anymore." The couple hears another gunshot and more laughter as Palomo insists that his wife tell her lover that she wants to "make love like a knife." Conchita wants to know why Palomo would choose a knife for a symbol, and he says it is because "everything has to

be killed." Another gunshot goes off before Juan Julian and the rest of Conchita's family reenter the factory.

Ofelia, who has had much to drink, then tells a story of how when she was seventeen she was forced to model for a guava marmalade label rather than offend her mother by posing for a cigar label and causing a scandal. Everyone has a good laugh at Ofelia's expense, herself included.

Ofelia and Santiago exit, as do Conchita and Palomo, but Marela remains behind to speak to Juan Julian. Marela, full of joy, confesses that she does not want the night to end. At first Juan Julian believes that she has had too much to drink, but then he realizes that Marela is truly happy. Meanwhile, Cheché watches them from afar. Marela and Juan Julian flirt with each other, using poetical, metaphorical language. Alluding to the affection she feels for Juan Julian, Marela tells him, "But we are all blind in the eyes of those who can't see." The two share nothing more than a caress before they say goodnight. As she is preparing to leave, Marela asks Juan Julian to lend her the book. He has forgotten that he is carrying the book in his hand and does not hand it over until she promises not to read ahead.

As Marela reads a passage out loud, Cheché emerges from his hiding place, full of lust and desire for Marela. She closes the book before he grabs her by the arm. The lights fade, leaving what happens next to speculation.

Act 2, Scene 4

Conchita and Palomo are at the factory the day after the celebration. Cheché is nowhere to be found, and a delivery boy is waiting to be paid. Palomo is about to take inventory, but Conchita says that she must first clean up the mess from the party before she can help him. Ofelia and Santiago arrive, and Santiago too wonders where his brother is. Santiago thinks that Cheché is late for work because he suffers from a hangover, as Santiago does. Marela arrives for work wearing a coat, her pockets "full of December, January and February." Ofelia worries that something is wrong with her daughter, but Marela assures her that she is fine.

Marela returns Juan Julian's copy of *Anna Karenina* to him when he arrives. Juan Julian notices her coat but does not comment on it. Palomo wonders if Cheché has come in, but still there is no sign of him. Juan Julian begins by reading a passage about a duel. As the lector reads to the workers, Cheché enters without a sound, his head "heavy with dark thoughts." The passage the lector is reading explores the thoughts of Anna Karenina's husband as he prepares himself for a duel. Meanwhile, Cheché, lurking in the background, pulls out a gun. Cheché shoots Juan Julian, firing twice, the gunshots echoing throughout the factory. The lector falls to the floor as the shocked workers look to see where the shots came from. Marela touches Juan Julian as he lies dying.

Act 2, Scene 5

Three days after the shooting, the workers are back at their tables rolling cigars. As a gesture of mourning, Marela still wears her coat. Ofelia cannot bear the silence that has resulted from the lector's absence. "It's as if a metal blanket has fallen on us," she says. Palomo compares the silence to the one that followed the death of Teodoro, but Ofelia says that this silence is louder "because Juan Julian died before his time, and the shadows of the young are heavier and they linger over the earth like a cloud." Marela suggests that she once again write his name on a piece of paper and put it in a glass of sugar water so that Juan Julian's spirit will know that it is welcome at the factory. Tears falling from her eyes, Marela insists that this would not be a wrong thing for her to do. She awaits a response from her mother, but Ofelia remains silent. Marela insists that it is the responsibility of the living to look after the dead "so they can feel part of the world. So they don't forget us and we could count on them when we cross to the other side."

Conchita suggests that they should continue reading, but she does not know if she has the courage to do so herself. Ofelia extends an invitation for someone to read, and Palomo accepts. Ofelia wishes to get rid of "this silence and this heat." Santiago, however, suggests that they read something other than *Anna Karenina*, but Marela insists that the book should be finished. Conchita adds, "Stories should be finished or they suffer the same fate as those who die before their time."

Palomo opens the book and looks at Conchita as he prepares to read a passage about Anna Karenina's husband and an important decision he has reached. Palomo looks up from the book and stares at Conchita as he reads the following line: "In his letter he was going to write everything he'd been meaning to tell her."

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

Act 1, Scene 1 alternates between a cockfight and the arrival of a ship at the harbor. Half-brothers Santiago and Chechy, at the cockfight, have been drinking but have not grown drunk. Eliades runs the betting at a steady rate. Santiago runs out of cash after several matches and carves an "S" into the sole of Chechy's shoe as a promissory note for $100, which he later raises to $300. Meanwhile, as the ship arrives at the harbor, Ofelia and her daughters Marela and Conchita eagerly await the arrival of a new lector to replace old Teodoro, who outlived his usefulness in this crucial job long before he died, three months before the play begins. Marela has used a spell to make sure the lector arrives. Juan Julian Rios is one of the last passengers to disembark.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

The audience learns in the first scene the differences between the half-brothers. Santiago, the elder and more successful, is a chronic gambler. Chechy is concerned about Santiago's addiction but careful to look after his own interests. The audience does not yet know what the lector's role is, but it is clearly important to the women. The late Teodoro wasn't very good at the task towards the end, but he read significant works, including *Wuthering Heights*. A disappointing successor has already come and gone. The women are hopeful that Juan Julian will bring many new books with him, since he was recommended as one of the best lectors in Havana.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

Scene 2 is set in the aging cigar factory. Chechy clashes with the newly arrived Juan Julian, and Ofelia steps in to make it clear that this new lector is here to stay. They talk about the workers' interest in hearing novels read aloud. Ofelia explains to Juan Julian who Chechy is and why he resents lectors; his wife ran away with a lector years before. Juan Julian describes the differences between Tampa and Cuba, which he boils down to a matter of light. The women are nervous, but Juan Julian is confident and polite. Chechy informs Ofelia about her husband's gambling debt, which is documented on his shoe. She dismisses him.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

Scene 2 begins to clarify the lector's role in a Cuban cigar factory, to educate and inform the workers as they perform their intricate, repetitive tasks. The scene hints that this process troubles some factory owners. The audience learns in a few brief words that Tampa is a city on the build, set in a geography very different from the characters' mountainous homeland, Cuba. There are both male and female workers, including a Spaniard and an Italian, apparently living in harmony with the Cuban majority.

Chechy's past - having lost a wife to a lector - causes Juan Julian to reconsider his choice of *Anna Karenina* as the first novel he will read. Knowing Tolstoy's theme of a woman abandoning her elderly husband for a dashing young soldier, Juan Julian realizes it can only deepen Chechy's torment. Ofelia, however, is clearly resentful of her brother-in-law's presumptions in the factory and wants to hear this romantic story. Her daughter Marela first worries that it will go to the poor man's heart, but then she suggests it might help Chechy move on and find another woman.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

With passion and fervor, Juan Julian reads a passage from *Anna Karenina,* closes the book and is rewarded with applause. The workers begin discussing the novel as their workday winds to a close. Once the grumpy Chechy leaves, Ofelia and her daughters discuss why this is such a fitting novel to hear and mull over the relationships among Anna, her husband and her lover. They snipe about how well each listens and what they take in. Ofelia and Marela leave for the night, leaving Conchita and her husband Palomo to work late. They discuss the trouble Santiago's new gambling debt has gotten him into with Ofelia, and then they turn to the problems in their own marriage. Conchita digs into Tolstoy's depiction of upper class Russian life, in which affairs are commonplace, and longs for a life beyond the factory. Palomo wants only material success. They playfully debate how and why they got together, but they conflict over Palomo's inability to open his feelings to Conchita, much like the novel's cuckolded husband. Conchita knows that Palomo keeps a mistress, and she wants to take a lover of her own, justifying herself with a quotation from the novel.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

Ofelia continues to develop the importance of the lector in the cigar industry, and the audience tastes some of the aura that surrounds the cigar in Cuban culture. The band is a symbol of marriage, and the rising blue smoke is a source of passion.

Fortunately for the reader, *Anna in the Tropics* includes a list of the citations from *Anna Karenina.* The first excerpt the audience hears read is taken from well into Tolstoy's long novel. Anna Karenina and Count Vronsky have been lovers for a year. She has confronted her aged husband with the truth, and he has stubbornly refused to grant her a divorce. The effects on her family are growing oppressive. Vronsky is complacent, but emotional Anna has grown wracked with guilt. Cruz uses his own characters effectively to situate the passage read in context, bringing out the theme Tolstoy has been concentrating on in Part 2 of his novel: the effect of adultery on the three persons involved. This gains poignancy as Conchita and Palomo reflect on lost communication and affection within their own failing marriage. For the Russian Orthodox couple in Tolstoy's novel, divorce is allowable, albeit discouraged. Only Anna's husband's stubbornness stands in the lovers' way. For Conchita and Palomo as Roman Catholics, however, divorce is unthinkable, and Conchita suggests they must resign themselves to doing whatever it takes for each to achieve happiness.

Act 1, Scene 4

Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

Scene 4 is set in the Alcalar home. Santiago and Ofelia are not speaking to one another, but they use the hapless Marela to deliver barbs to each other. When Marela leaves in frustration, the spouses begin communicating directly. Santiago reveals that he has been enjoying listening to the novel in secret, not wanting to face Chechy until he has gotten the money to repay his loan. He identifies with the character Levin, particularly in the mistake he made giving Chechy too big a role in the factory. He is ashamed at his behavior. Ofelia wants to go to bed, but she agrees to talk about the book some more. The couple realizes that they still love one another.

Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

Cruz again uses his characters to help the reader get a feeling for Tolstoy's novel. Santiago's identification with Vronsky helps define both men. The audience learns of Vronsky's fierce dedication to the land, something the Russian author takes hundreds of pages to depict, and the dedication Santiago once felt. Through Levin's efforts to dissuade Anna's brother from selling off his ancestral land, Santiago realizes the errors he has made with his half-brother, and the audience sees him resolve to correct the situation. Leaving the topic of the novel, Santiago talks about his gambling habit and confesses that superstition about the one time he won big is what keeps him taking chances and losing.

Act 1, Scene 5

Act 1, Scene 5 Summary

Scene 5 begins with Juan Julian's soliloquy to Conchita and Marela about cities. Cities asphyxiate him, while parks enliven him. Conchita asks why he chose to read *Anna Karenina,* and he responds that "Tolstoy understands humanity like no other writer does." They discuss the author a bit, and Marela excuses herself. Conchita asks why Juan Julian became a lector, and he tells how he discovered books one summer while the family was hiding out from a creditor. He says that he would like to learn what New Englanders are like. Conchita tells about the only one she has ever met, a very shy boy who refused to help her carry out an annual Cuban ritual. The lector asks about the ritual, which entails girls cutting their hair once a year on February 2nd, the Feast of Saint Candelaria, and burying the cutting beneath a tree to guarantee springtime fecundity. Palomo enters at this point and silently listens as Conchita relates that she keeps up the tradition and that her father performs the burial. She plans to cut her hair short, and the lector first offers to bury it and then suggests pressing it into a book as Victorian women did. Conchita suggests returning to *Anna Karenina* and picks a page at random. Act 1 ends with Juan Julian stroking Conchita's hair and kissing first her shoulder then her lips.

Act 1, Scene 5 Analysis

Nature figures prominently in this final scene of Act 1. Parks are a place of refuge in the urban setting. Trees are the sites where semi-pagan rituals are carried out. The willingness to perform this ritual divides people. The New England lad finds it degrading, while Juan Julian sees it as a great honor. Conchita does not explain why her father rather than her husband does the honors for her. The passage from *Anna Karenina,* which the lector reads after Conchita has selected a page at random, deals with Anna's sadness at not finding the brash, annoying Vronsky at a gala ball. She has, prudently, resented and resisted Vronsky's earlier advances, but she realizes now that she wants him. In the novel, old Karenin learns of his wife's infidelity by her own admission. Here, on stage, Palomo witnesses directly his wife's first intimacies with Juan Julian.

Neither Conchita nor Juan Julian seems aware that *La Candelaria* is the Catholic feast of Candlemas, celebrating the purification of the Virgin Mary forty days after childbirth and the dedication of the baby Jesus in the temple. Candelaria sounds more like a personal name, reinforcing the importance of Santerna in the Cuban-American experience, a cultural element introduced by Marela's spell in Scene 1.

Cruz includes a brief reference to the American actress Clara Bow (1905-1965), then at the apex of her career, to establish Conchita as a progressive spirit. Bow, one of the movies' first sex symbols, became an icon of sexual freedom for women everywhere. After winning the 1921 Fame and Fortune Contest, she starred in a series of films

through 1929, often cast as a waitress, manicurist or salesgirl, using her feminine wiles to win the man of her dreams. Male audiences desired her voluptuous body, and women imitated her plucked eyebrows, clothing and hats. She was proclaimed "the IT girl," "it" being a euphemism for sex. Bow's career began to plummet in 1930, the year after Conchita seeks to emulate her hairstyle in the play, following scandals involving gambling and sexual affairs. Bow suffered a nervous breakdown, and her studio dropped her. She retired from films in 1932. It is easy to recognize similarities with Conchita beyond the clipped hair.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

Act 2 opens as Juan Julian and Conchita conclude making love on a factory table before work. Juan Julian has recorded a selection from *Anna Karenina* that continues the reading heard in Act 1, Scene 3. As they dress, the lector says he would prefer to meet in his room or in a hotel. They hear the workers approaching and hurriedly part. Chechy and Ofelia are arguing about management of the factory. Chechy has purchased a rolling machine and argues the need for modernity. Ofelia asserts her right as factory owner to make such decisions and calls for someone to fetch Santiago to end the debate. The economic liability of lectors is brought up, and the value of literature is debated. The lector suggests that the workers put it to a democratic vote and offers to step outside.

Santiago appears and introduces himself amiably to Juan Julian. He forces the vote, and only Chechy and Palomo want to dismiss the lector. The half-brothers confront one another. Santiago pays off his debt and orders the new machine returned to its manufacturer. He announces that the factory will introduce a new brand, the "Anna Karenina." He asks Marela to model for the ring, wearing a fur coat in order to look Russian. Chechy finally admits to hating Juan Julian because of the memories he brings up of his ex-wife.

Santiago exits, leaving Chechy and the Russian-dressed Marela alone. He accuses her of being so distracted by the Russian novel and its reader that her job performance is suffering. She objects. He makes unwanted advances towards her, and she pushes him away.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

Act 2 confronts the cultural and economic price of progress. Hand rolling is less profitable than mechanization, but the factory is still making money. They have not had to lay off workers on the scale that modernizing factories are. The pace of modern life has made cigarettes more attractive than cigars, which require leisurely smoking. Advertising might overcome this. Hollywood stars are again mentioned as icons of the age.

Juan Julian sketches the history of cigar rolling back to the Tannos, a subgroup of the Arawakan Indians who inhabited the Greater Antilles, including Cuba, at the time Columbus reached the New World. The Tannos were led by chiefs, called caciques. Juan Julian says that the tradition of reading to the workers goes back to these leaders' translating the sacred words of their deities to the common folk, just as their rising cigar smoke communicated with the deities. The Tannos rebelled against the Spaniards and their new religion, but they were brutally put down by Juan Ponce de Leun.

In the dialogue between Chechy and Marela, the audience learns many details about the hand rolling of cigars, including the steps involved and the quality expected. The argument between Chechy and Santiago raises the question of how time is perceived and used by different people.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Act 2, Scene 2 shows Juan Julian reading from *Anna Karenina,* sitting apart from Conchita and Palomo as they converse. The now-jealous husband demands to know when and where she meets her lover and what they do together. She describes it candidly, confessing shame and confusion but not repentance. He asks her to show on his body what the lector does to her. The lights dim as she fondles Palomo's neck and shoulders, and Juan Julian closes his book.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

Following a long, dynamic scene of strife in Act 2, Scene 1, Scene 2 is brief and dedicated to a single topic: an open examination of erotic love. The estranged spouses wonder together how they drifted apart. Conchita chides Palomo over how lovers ought to behave and reveals the terror with which she realized that sex with a man other than her husband could seem natural and right. Like characters on the stage, she and Juan Julian exchange roles and experience lovemaking in the other person's being. She tells Palomo that he will not be able to understand this unless he lets go of himself and becomes her.

Note that the passage Juan Julian reads from *Anna Karenina* (Part 2, Chapter 8) is out of sequence in the novel, but it fits Cruz's intention of discussing the necessary confrontation between estranged spouses. Tolstoy's novel is a flexible tool in the playwright's hands.

Act 2, Scene 3

Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

In Act 2, Scene 3, the factory workers celebrate the introduction of their new brand, the "Anna Karenina." Ofelia, Santiago and Juan Julian drink a toast before the party begins. Chechy and Palomo replace them on stage, bringing in palm leaves to decorate the factory. Palomo complains about not being able to sleep, imagining his wife with Juan Julian and smelling him on her. Chechy suggests that he move up north with her, since he had wanted to do that with Mildred. Juan Julian enters with lanterns to be strung. Chechy and Palomo question him about why Karenin would not have murdered Vronsky. The lector offers his opinion that Anna fell in with Vronsky because she needed to rediscover herself as a woman. He declines to say with which of Tolstoy's characters he personally identifies.

The discussion is interrupted by Santiago and Ofelia's entrance. They are still drinking. Conchita joins them, and she avoids contact with her husband, who tries to manifest his ownership of her before the lector. Juan Julian asks why Americans prohibit alcohol. Santiago feels it is because Americans become socialists when they drink. Palomo likens alcohol to literature, saying that it brings out the best and worst in people. Ofelia is certain that prohibition stems from the fact that white Americans cannot dance. Laughter accompanies each exclamation.

Santiago solemnly draws from his pocket the first Anna Karenina cigar, and Ofelia ceremoniously lights it. It is passed among them characters to sample, and each offers poetic praise. The last to receive it is Juan Julian. Marela wants to go out into the streets and pass out samples. Santiago objects that that will bankrupt them and instead proposes the firing of celebratory gunshots. Three are fired to punctuate an argument between Conchita and Palomo over what she should do with her lover. As everyone piles back into the factory, Ofelia talks about once sitting for the label of a jar of guava jelly. Santiago takes his tipsy wife off to bed.

Marela stays behind, alone with Juan Julian. He tells her that she is beautiful. She borrows *Anna Karenina* to read a bit. Chechy emerges from the shadows and approaches her, but she runs away.

Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

Prohibition began in the U.S. in 1920, when the eighteenth amendment to the Constitution took effect, and it remained in effect until 1933, when the twenty-first amendment repealed it. It was never effective in achieving the goal of the temperance movement, to end the morally and economically harmful practice of drinking. Cruz depicts the cast debating an Anglo policy that they find ridiculous.

A lengthy stage direction points out that Palomo deliberately offends Juan Julian by breaking the established etiquette of sampling cigars, but Juan Julian refuses to take the bait. The characters voice the attributes of cigars that aficionados laud, much as wine connoisseurs discuss their favorite vintages. The "Anna Karenina" is six and one-eighth inches long, with a "ring gauge" of fifty-two. This is a very thick cigar (with a 0.8125-inch diameter), which would allow the smoker to draw heavily without causing it to be harsh. The youngest smoker, Marela, coughs when she takes her puff. Having learned about the labor that goes into making cigars, the audience now sees how they are properly savored. The circle of information on cigars is complete. Interestingly, there are reports of theatergoers being offended by the smoke wafting from the stage.

Gunfire as a means of celebration is commonplace in the Mediterranean world, and the practice was exported to the New World colonies. Weddings and births rate a few rounds. Today, because this practice is often seen in the Arab world, in political settings, and it has gained an aura of notoriety. The practice is also seen among Hispanic populations in the U.S., and authorities actively discourage it because of the potential for injury or death. Modern connotations make properly appreciating Cruz's scene difficult.

The selection from *Anna Karenina* that Marela reads at the end of the scene is again out of context. It is taken from Part 1, Chapter 29, as Anna prepares for the fateful train ride from St. Petersburg to Moscow, where she hopes to bring peace to her philandering brother and his distraught wife. In Moscow, she will witness a suicide that prefigures her own grisly end, and she will also first meet Vronsky. For anyone familiar with the Tolstoy novel, this suggests that something tragic lies ahead in the last two scenes of the play.

Act 2, Scene 4

Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

Palomo and Conchita are in the factory alone. He needs the keys to the safe in order to pay a delivery boy, and they wonder where Chechy and Santiago are. Conchita reckons that her father has a hangover. Santiago enters, rubbing his head. Ofelia says she left the keys in the office. Santiago complains that Ofelia's slippers, "louder than a running train," awoke him as usual; they banter. Marela enters, wearing her Russian coat. Juan Julian enters and begins reading from Part 3, Chapter 13 of *Anna Karenina*. As he reads, the stage directions specify that Chechy enters unnoticed, pulls a gun and shoots the lector twice. Marela reaches out to touch the dying man.

Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

The reading from *Anna Karenina* depicts Alexei Karenin's inner dialogue about challenging Vronsky to a duel, an idea that has intrigued him from his youth, since he has always been a physical coward. The stage directions synchronize the assassination with the reading, ending with the words, "What would be the sense of killing a man in order to define one's own relations with a woman..." Karenin decides that this would be senseless. Chechy does not.

Act 2, Scene 5

Act 2, Scene 5 Summary

Three days after the tragedy, the factory workers sit at their tables. Marela still wears her coat. Ofelia complains about the silence, saying that it is much louder than after their last lector died. Marela proposes to write Juan Julian's name on a piece of paper and place it in a glass of water and brown sugar as a sign that his spirit is welcome in the factory. She anticipates her mother's objection to this superstition, and she counters that the living must look after the dead in order to be able to count on their help when the living, in turn, cross to the other side. Conchita says that someone must continue the reading. She would do it, but she knows it would make her cry. Marela says that crying would be wrong because tears concentrate attention on the killer. Surprisingly, Palomo offers to read. Marela insists that he finish *Anna Karenina*. Palomo opens the book, looks at Conchita, and continues from Part 3, Chapter 14, Karenin's decision to write a letter to his errant wife: "In his letter he was going to write everything he'd been meaning to tell her."

Act 2, Scene 5 Analysis

In the final scene of the play, Cruz shows the sworn enemy of lectors turn into a lector.

Characters

Anna's Husband

Anna's husband, whose name is Karenin, is a man of wealth, influence, and good social standing who is at first naïve about the true nature of his wife's relationship with Vronsky. When he finally realizes that his wife is having an affair, he struggles with how he should comport himself, for he wishes to avoid a scandal at all costs. He decides to write Anna a letter.

Boy from New London

The boy from New London is the only person from New England whom Conchita has met. According to her, he was so shy that "when he expressed any sort of feeling, he would excuse himself." One year, on the second day of February, she gave him a braid of her hair to bury under a tree, as is the custom performed on the feast of Saint Candelaria. However, the boy was too embarrassed to dig a hole in the park where everyone could see, so Conchita took her braid back from him, dug a hole to shame him, and buried the braid herself. The boy from New London never spoke to her again.

Carmela

Carmela is the palm reader who tells Marela that Juan Julian, a professional lector from Cuba, will come to their factory to read for them if she sweetens his name with sugar water.

Cheché

Cheché is Santiago's half brother from "up North" who claims partial ownership in the factory as the result of winning a wager. Ever since Cheché's wife Mildred left him for a lector, he has expressed nothing but disdain for the love stories the lector reads because he believes that these tales of romance influenced his wife's decision. Despite strong opposition from his family and the rest of the factory workers, Cheché wants to modernize the cigar factory's operations with machinery that will perform production tasks more efficiently.

Chester

See Cheché

Conchita

Conchita is Ofelia and Santiago's oldest daughter. She, like her sister Marela and husband Palomo, rolls cigars at the factory. Conchita has an affair with Juan Julian shortly after he arrives; however, she makes no effort to hide the affair from her husband. Conchita takes delight in telling her husband details of her love affair because she believes that Palomo still has a mistress. Conchita defends the need for a lector at the factory because, in her opinion, money can't buy the places and things that occupy her dreams. Furthermore, she understands that "anybody who dedicates his life to reading books believes in rescuing things from oblivion"; that is to say, without a lector, the factory would be a lifeless place to work. For her, literature offers a way of learning about the world.

Eliades

Eliades is a gamester who takes wagers on the local cockfights he runs.

Juan Julian

Juan Julian, "the best lector west of Havana," arrives at the cigar factory at Ofelia's behest. Known to Ofelia and her daughters as the "Persian Canary" because "it's like hearing a bird sing when he reads," Juan Julian is a man who believes in the restorative power of Nature. He warns of how machines are destroying the stillness and quiet that people need to contemplate their lives to such an extent that machines, and the so-called "modernity" they introduce, are destroying "[t]he very act of smoking a cigar." As a lector, Juan Julian sees himself as a descendent of the cacique, a Taino Indian chief, who translated the "sacred words of the deities." He is a man who believes in the eternal verities. For this reason he chooses to read *Anna Karenina* because "Tolstoy understands humanity like no other writer does." Juan Julian becomes involved in an adulterous affair with Conchita even though he knows that Palomo is aware of his wife's infidelity.

Anna Karenina

Anna Karenina is the eponymous heroine of a novel by Leo Tolstoy. She forms one of two love triangles in the novel, for she is married to Karenin but has an affair with Vronsky.

Kitty

Kitty forms part of the second love triangle in *Anna Karenina*. She is the object of Levin's desire.

Levin

Levin is a character in *Anna Karenina* who owns a farm in the countryside. He is Santiago's favorite character because Levin is a "dedicated man" who reminds Santiago of himself when he was young and took over control of the cigar factory from his father. Levin is a wise and judicious man who makes sound business decisions. He is in love with Kitty.

Manola

Manola does the stuffing at the cigar factory. A true romantic, she keeps a picture of Rudolph Valentino on her work table. Ironically, she is exactly the type of person whom Juan Julian refers to when he says that people are switching from cigars to cigarettes to emulate the stars they see on screen. Manola takes such delight in hearing romantic tales that sometimes she becomes "a sea of tears" when listening to them.

Marela

Marela is Ofelia and Santiago's youngest daughter. She casts a spell to bring the lector to the factory, but then wets herself when she discovers that the spell has worked all too well. Like the other women in her family, she believes that Juan Julian should continue reading at the factory because "the words he reads are like a breeze that breaks the monotony of [the] factory." Marela is so entranced by the story of Anna Karenina and her lover Vronsky that she begins to dream of snow. When her father announces the production of a new cigar inspired by the pages of *Anna Karenina*, Marela models for the label that bears the Russian heroine's name. She is the victim of Cheché's violent advances, though Cruz doesn't mention rape specifically. Dazed from the attack, Marela is further devastated when she learns of Juan Julian's death. She appears for work three days after Juan Julian's death wearing a heavy fur coat, as if to perpetuate the dream of Russia, snow, and romance.

Peppino Mellini

Peppino Mellini is the "best buncher" at the cigar factory. According to Ofelia, he has a "soft spot for love stories." A native of Napoli, Italy, Peppino sings Neapolitan songs at the end of the workday.

Mildred

A "southern belle from Atlanta," Mildred is Cheché's wife who ran away with the cigar factory's previous lector.

Ofelia

Ofelia is Santiago's wife and Marela and Conchita's mother. She plays Kitty to Santiago's Levin, telling him, "If you had lost me, I wouldn't be here. If you had lost me, I wouldn't be by your side." Ofelia is responsible for bringing Juan Julian to Ybor City from Cuba, having paid for his fare with money she took from her husband. She believes that having a lector at the factory is an absolute necessity and thus strongly opposes Cheché's efforts to modernize the factory. Because Ofelia once had the opportunity to model for a cigar label but had to settle for a marmalade label instead to avoid causing a scandal for her mother, Ofelia consents to Marela posing for the new Anna Karenina label.

Palomo

Palomo, a cigar roller, is Conchita's husband. His sexual orientation remains ambiguous, yet he seems possessive of Conchita whenever they are among other workers, especially Juan Julian. Palomo sides with Cheché when he tries to have the lector fired even though he, Palomo, enjoys the story of *Anna Karenina*. Palomo is angry when he discovers his wife's affair with the lector, but, rather than insist that she end it, he asks her probing questions about her lover, living vicariously through his wife's sexual exploits.

Persian Canary

See Juan Julian

Previous Lector

The previous lector succeeded Teodoro as lector upon the latter's death. He is from Guanabacoa, Cuba, and is described as having skin "the color of saffron." He seduces Cheché's wife Mildred with love stories and runs away with her.

Rosario

Rosario is a woman who put a spell on her lover, who died as a result. "And not only did she lose her man," warns Conchita, "she's gone to hell herself." She cried so much after her lover's death that her face became "an ocean of tears." Rosario was so distraught that her father had to take her back to Cuba. At night a fever would overtake her, and she would run to the sea naked to meet her dead lover. Conchita tells the story of Rosario's spell to warn Marela from practicing witchcraft.

Cookie Salazar

Cookie Salazar is the friend who lends Marela a fur coat which she wears in imitation of Anna Karenina.

Santiago

Santiago is the owner of the cigar factory and the half brother of Cheché, to whom he owes a large debt. The debt causes Santiago so much shame that he refuses to return to the factory until the debt is paid. His marriage to Ofelia remains playful and loving despite the couple's frequent squabbles about money. Though Santiago has been secluded in the family home, he can see the positive effect the lector's reading has had on the workers. Therefore, he demands that Cheché return the machinery he wants to introduce. Inspired by Juan Julian's reading of *Anna Karenina*, Santiago launches a new line of cigars at the factory.

Teodoro

Teodoro was the factory's lector until he died three months ago at age eighty. Marela complains that Teodoro would spit when he read, as though "sprinkles of rain were coming out of his mouth." In Marela's opinion, Teodoro didn't have the emotional fortitude to be a lector, for he "couldn't take the love stories . . . the poetry and tragedy in the novels." Often he would have to sit down and collect himself after reading a profoundly moving passage. Furthermore, Marela says that he took too long to finish reading *Wuthering Heights*. This, says Conchita, is because he read to them "with his heart."

Pascual Torino

Pascual Torino wears a handkerchief around his neck as he wraps cigars at the factory. He is a native of Spain, which once colonized and governed Cuba. According to Ofelia, Pascual is "A nostalgic at heart . . . [who] wants to go back to his country and die in Grenada."

Vronsky

Vronsky is the dashing officer with whom Anna Karenina has an affair.

Themes

Violence versus Reason

The opening scene of the play contrasts two approaches toward life, one violent and the other reasoned. Violence, as depicted by the savage game of cockfighting, suggests that skill, cunning, and might will always win. Although Cheché is a cautious man when it comes to gambling, he embodies the idea that physical power will triumph if reason should fail to persuade. For example, Cheché takes Marela by force when she ignores his lurid glances and innuendo. In the end, the young woman is rendered senseless from the shock of Cheché's assault. Moreover, when Cheché's attempts to mechanize the factory prove unsuccessful, he takes his revenge by killing the lector, whom he blames for upholding a tradition that, in Cheché's view, has no practical application in a modern age.

On the other hand, Santiago and Ofelia do not want to automate the factory because the machines would displace workers. They employ reason and sound judgment when making their decisions even though they know that their decision goes against the current trend. Rather than spend money on machinery, they decide to produce a new line of cigars, which they intend to advertise widely. Furthermore, both Ofelia and Juan Julian insist upon taking a vote to decide whether Cheché's machine will be installed at the factory. They choose a democratic process to decide an argument, and they would certainly have abided by the decision if the outcome had been different.

Culture

Ofelia and her daughters (and, later, Santiago) understand that the best way to improve the work environment at the factory is to hire a lector who will educate and inform them as he maintains a tradition rich with cultural history. Though many of the workers cannot read or write, they can quote lines from classics such as *Don Quixote* or *Jane Eyre*. Some know Shakespeare by heart. As Ofelia says, "Only a fool can fail to understand the importance of having a lector read to us while we work," for the workers are educated as a result. In an interview, Cruz explains the redemptive power of culture in *Anna in the Tropics* when he says that the play is about "the need for culture, the need for literature. Art should be dangerous."

One of Conchita's complaints about Palomo is that she cannot conduct a "civilized conversation" with him because he is unable to comprehend the lessons that may be learned from great works of literature. Instead of contemplating the actions of Anna's husband from an emotional, psychological point of view, as Conchita does, Palomo focuses on the man's wealth. Here Cruz sends up the idea that relations between the sexes would be vastly improved if they thought alike, but the point is that Palomo does not see how much his marriage resembles that of Anna and her husband. This exchange also emphasizes the transformative power of art, for Conchita now sees

everything through "new eyes." As a result, Conchita experiences Anna's confusion and suffering. The broader the range of cultural knowledge, Cruz suggests, the more profound becomes the experience of human emotion.

Nature versus Machines

One of the first observations Juan Julian makes upon arriving at the factory is that there are no hills or mountains near Ybor City; the landscape is flat, creating a sky that "seems so much bigger . . . and infinite" than the one he knew in Cuba. Juan Julian is a man who appreciates the revitalizing power of Nature, and he contemplates it at every opportunity. "I don't really like cities," he says. "In the country one has freedom." He says that he feels "asphyxiated" when he is in the city, where buildings rob him of precious oxygen. He prefers to live in the country, where he can celebrate the "verdure of nature." Juan Julian lives his life in accord with the environment surrounding him, as evidenced in a discussion with Marela, in which Juan Julian acknowledges that there are many different types of light that bring the world into focus. Later in the play, when Juan Julian enters the discussion about whether machines should be introduced at the factory, he warns against them because, he says, "The truth is that machines, cars, are keeping us from taking walks and sitting on park benches"; that is to say, machines□and the fast pace of living they promote□prevent people from relaxing so that they may better understand their place in Nature. Ironically, machines may, in the lector's words, prevent "[t]he very act of smoking a cigar."

Tradition

Traditions maintain a way of life that is beneficial for those who practice them and this is especially true of an expatriate community such as the one depicted in the play. Ofelia and her daughters do everything within their power to hire a lector for the factory because they know that the workers depend upon the lector as a source of information about the world. "When I lived in Havana I don't remember ever seeing a tobacco factory without a lector," says Ofelia. Therefore, hearing a lector read while the workers toil has become for her a way of connecting the present to the past. She understands the importance of having a lector preserve a way of life that is threatened in the midst of a foreign culture.

Another tradition described in the play is the one observed when an inaugural cigar is lit and shared among smokers. This ritual involves passing the cigar through an intermediary, who facilitates communication with the gods, instead of directly to the person who is supposed to smoke. Palomo, however, deliberately insults Juan Julian by passing the cigar directly to him. The lector, as a descendent of the cacique, or chief Indian of the Tainos, performs a similar intermediary function when he reads aloud to the workers, for, explains Juan Julian, the cacique would "translate the sacred words of the deities." The workers, for their part, listen quietly, receiving information.

Style

Language

Though the language Cruz uses in *Anna in the Tropics* is more like common speech compared to that of his other works, it is nevertheless charged with poetry that creates what Randy Gener calls "a living image of the exile's experience." The rhythms of speech remain strong from beginning to end as Cruz occasionally presents his characters' beliefs and interior states of mind through vivid metaphorical passages, such as the one in which Marela describes her dream of snow or when Marela and Juan Julian discuss the many different shades of light that exist and how, according to Marela, "There's always a hiding place to be found, and if not, one can always hide behind light." The exchange between Conchita and Juan Julian in which they refer to their need for sanctuary is yet another example of metaphorical language in the play, for the characters alternately describe their trysting place as being "cold and impersonal" like a hotel or a hospital, neither place offering "temporary relief from the world or a temporary rest from life." Furthermore, Juan Julian alludes to the restorative power of Nature, of which sex plays a vital part, when he tells Conchita, "I detect sad trees in your eyes after we make love."

Triangle Structure

The playwright, using the relationship of Anna Karenina, her husband, and Vronsky as a model for developing character relationships within *Anna in the Tropics*, presents his characters in triangular relationships to one another so as to better underscore the shifts in power and control that exist between them. For example, when Santiago loses a bet to Cheché and stays away from the factory out of shame, Ofelia must then intercede and defend the family's interests□and the tradition of the lector□against Cheché's proposed automation of the factory. Because Palomo is torn between wanting to hear the lector read from *Anna Karenina* and wanting to be rid of him for conducting an affair with his wife, Palomo alternately supports and undermines Cheché's proposal, thus forming one side of a triangle in the battle for control of the factory. Another, more comical example of how a triangular structure develops character relationships occurs when Marela intervenes in an argument between her mother and father, serving as an interpreter, or intermediary, until they are able to speak to each other directly. Finally, Palomo's passing of the inaugural cigar directly to Juan Julian breaks a triangular relationship that is intended to maintain communication with the gods.

Cruz employs the love triangle to great dramatic effect within the play. The first and most provocative example exists in the relationship between Cheché, his wife Mildred, and the previous lector, a triangle that is broken when Mildred and the lector run off together. This triangle is supplanted by yet another one involving Cheché, for he soon becomes attracted to Marela, who, in turn, yearns for Juan Julian's affectionate embrace. Perhaps the play's most romantic example of a triangular character

relationship, and the one that re-creates Tolstoy's example faithfully, both in terms of its ardor and tragic outcome, is that of the love triangle between Conchita, her husband Palomo, and Juan Julian.

Foreshadowing

The foreshadowing used in the play heightens an element of suspense that is not fully realized until after the denouement. Early in the play, after Ofelia and Conchita have provided Juan Julian with the backgrounds of some of the workers whom he has met, they explain Cheché's opposition to having a lector at the factory, saying that this opposition stems in part from Cheché being from the North and having lived outside their culture. They go on to say that Cheché holds something of a grudge against all lectors because his wife ran away with the last one the factory hired because she became so enamored with the romantic tales he told. Conchita dismisses Cheché's cynical view as yet another one of his idiosyncrasies, for she says that "Cheché has a knack for turning the smallest incident into a loud and tragic event." Little does she know how portentous these words are. Later, Cheché, unaware of the growing capacity for violence within himself, complains once more about the need for a lector at the factory, saying rather matter-of-factly that hiring Juan Julian will create "another tragic love story." In retrospect, the audience comprehends the full weight of these words after the three celebratory gunshots are followed by two fired in revenge and Juan Julian lies dying on the factory floor.

Cruz also uses foreshadowing to add an element of mystery to the play. In the opening act, when Ofelia and her daughters stand at the docks waiting for the lector to arrive, Marela informs her mother that she has written the lector's name on a piece of paper and placed it in a glass of sugar water to increase the chances that he will accept Ofelia's offer of employment. Conchita then warns her sister against casting spells. She relates the story of Rosario and how her lover died as a result of her casting a spell on him. Rosario was so distraught that her father had to take her home to Cuba, where she would wander naked by the shore at night in hope of meeting her dead lover. Rosario remains alive in body but not in spirit. Marela, wearing a heavy fur coat in the heat of the Florida summer, experiences a similar fate after she is attacked by Cheché and Juan Julian has been murdered. Wearing the coat seems inexplicable to those who assemble for the final reading, yet to Marela's devastated mind and spirit this act makes perfect sense.

Historical Context

Taino Indians

When Christopher Columbus first arrived on the island of Cuba he and his men were met by the indigenous Taino Indians. The word *Taino* meant "men of the good," for the Taino were a gentle race of people whose lives where inextricably linked with their natural surroundings. The Tainos were a seafaring people who lived on the verge of dense jungle, but they also developed sophisticated agricultural practices that produced cassava, corn, squash, and peanuts. The Tainos wandered about naked, their bodies decorated with colorful dyes made from earth, and they lived in homes constructed of thatch and Royal Palm. They greeted Columbus and his men with the kindness and generosity that were honored Taino values. However, the Taino population decreased rapidly as a result of exposure to disease brought by the Europeans and forced labor.

Ybor City

Ybor City, a district within metropolitan Tampa, Florida, was once known as "the cigar capital of the world" because so many cigar factories were located there in the period from 1885 to 1940. The city was named after Vicente Martinez Ybor, a Spaniard who, like his business partners Gavino Gutierrez and Ignacio Haya, immigrated to Cuba in the nineteenth century. Ybor operated a cigar factory in Havana in 1853, but soon labor disputes, a high tariff levied on cigars by the Cuban government, and the beginning of the Cuban revolution against Spain in 1868 forced Ybor to relocate his factory to Key West, Florida. However, lack of a fresh water supply and an adequate distribution system for his cigars cemented Ybor's decision to move his base of operations to the Tampa, Florida, area, which had an established rail network and a recently improved port facility.

Ybor began developing a small community around the factory "with the hope of providing a good living and working environment so that cigar workers would have fewer grievances against owners." The community grew in size until, by 1890, it had reached a population of 5,500 and was incorporated into the municipality of Tampa as Ybor City. The community consisted of workers from all ethnic backgrounds, though Cuban exiles comprised the largest group, with Sicilians, Germans, Romanian Jews, Spaniards, and even a few Chinese composing the remainder of the population. Spanish and Italian were the two languages most often spoken in the factory.

Eventually, Ybor City rivaled Havana as a center for cigar production. In 1895, Ybor City had ten independent cigar factories, and the city continued to grow and prosper for the next two decades until the combined effects of increased cigarette consumption, automation, and the Great Depression forced many of the factories to choose between mechanizing their operations and going out of business. Many of the displaced workers either returned to their homeland or sought employment in the Tampa bay area.

Critical Overview

Linda Winer (quoted in Anders), a drama critic at *Newsday* who chaired the committee that awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama to Cruz, notes that *Anna in the Tropics* is "such a luscious play, with rich imagery and a sense of myth and labor history. It takes us to a world we don't know." Misha Berson (quoted in Anders), another Pulitzer juror and a theater critic for the *Seattle Times*, describes *Anna in the Tropics* as "lovely and kind of fragile, with archetypal, universal characters." Kathryn Osenlund, writing for *CurtainUp* when *Anna in the Tropics* appeared at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey, describes the play thusly: "Romantic, yet not hackneyed, richly infused with tradition, Cruz's play quietly glows as it speaks of longings, family, jealousy, and love."

Elyse Sommer, writing a follow-up review for the same publication when *Anna in the Tropics* opened at the Royale Theater on Broadway, notes the play's "predictability and tendency towards historical romance plotting," but, nonetheless, she believes that the play "succeeds in conveying the sense of loss that inevitably accompanies the march of time and progress□and the ability of great literature to reach out to even the simplest readers (and listeners)." Not all critics view the play favorably, however. Clive Barnes, writing for the *New York Post*, questions whether *Anna in the Tropics* should have won the Pulitzer Prize, observing that "[t]here have been worse winners□and better ones." Jonathan Abarbanel, in a review for *Theater News*, declares that "Cruz is not subtle. He states and repeats his themes in obvious strokes, and there is much heavy foreshadowing in the play."

Perhaps the most constructive criticism comes from Chris Anstey, who, in an article surveying the state of contemporary American theatre, cites what he considers to be the play's most obvious flaw: Cheché is not the main character. According to Anstey, Cheché should be because he, not Juan Julian, acts as the strongest catalyst within *Anna in the Tropics*. In Anstey's view, "Cruz keeps Cheché's story obscure, a shadowy, internal affair, perhaps because his struggle is primarily with memory□his wife's infidelity; and so Juan Julian is merely a reminder, a symbol that must be killed not for itself but for what it represents."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Remy is a freelance writer in Warrington, Florida. In this essay, Remy considers the ways in which Cruz uses a triangular structure to develop character relationships within the play.

The play *Anna in the Tropics* harkens back to a time long since forgotten, when the cigar factories of Ybor City were bustling with activity and immigrants held hopes of a better future. As Nilo Cruz convincingly demonstrates, life in a cigar factory was hard because it was subjected to so much uncertainty and doubt, but that is not to say that it was without its pleasures. In re-creating an atmosphere of strife, conflict, and division within the factory, Cruz, borrowing a page, figuratively speaking, from Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, uses the relationship of Anna, her husband, and Vronsky as a model for developing character relationships within *Anna in the Tropics*. By presenting his characters in triangular relationships to one another, the playwright underscores the visceral struggle waged by those who hope to survive. He creates scenes filled with drama and suspense. Moreover, communication, power struggles, and the yearning for romantic love in the play are brought into sharper focus as a result of Cruz employing this technique.

The role of an intermediary appears in key scenes throughout the play, and it fulfills the purpose of facilitating communication between men and women who are often too stubborn to speak directly to each other, as is the case with Santiago and Ofelia, the owners of the factory. Act 1, scene 4, opens with Marela quoting words and phrases verbatim as her parents use her to wage an escalating argument about money. The irony of the situation□one whose comic effect is not lost upon Cruz as a dramatist□is that, without Marela's presence, the couple would be at a complete stalemate. Each person would not utter a word directly to the other, and so, instead of resolving their conflict about finances, as they do once Marela leaves and silence fills the room, they might have failed to realize how beloved they really are to each other. Had Marela not intervened, Santiago and Ofelia would never have reconciled their differences and moved on to a discussion of *Anna Karenina*, realizing, by the end of the scene, how much their lives mirror those of Levin and Kitty in the novel. Forming the third side of a character triangle, Marela thus enables her parents to embark upon what is at first a heated discussion but which later evolves into a tender recognition filled with romantic yearning and a strong resolve to face the future together.

Another scene in which an intermediary facilitates communication occurs in act 2, scene 3, when a cigar is lit and passed around to inaugurate the new line of Anna Karenina cigars Santiago has decided to produce. According to custom, the cigar must not be passed directly to the smoker but through an intermediary, so as to "*facilitate communication with the gods*" (Cruz's italics). Different characters take turns forming a triad as the new cigar is passed around and met with enthusiastic praise; that is, until Palomo receives the cigar and hands it directly to Juan Julian. This single gesture not only disrupts the triangular relationship among characters but forces the two men to confront each other as rivals. The lector responds quickly to the insult□one made

against him *and* the gods—by making an act of supplication. A scene that begins as a celebration ends in yet another standoff as Palomo and Juan Julian vie once more for Conchita's affection.

Perhaps the most important role of intermediary is performed by the lector. As a descendent of the cacique, or chief Indian, who "used to translate the words of the deities," the lector reads these words aloud from literary classics such as *Anna Karenina*, educating and informing the *oidores*, or listeners," who toil in the factory. Without him, many of the workers would have no knowledge of the outside world. Dramatically speaking, Cruz realizes the importance of the lector as a catalyst for change within the cigar factory. Juan Julian's readings permit Marela and Conchita greater freedom of imagination with which to lead their lives and fulfill their dreams, and Ofelia, among others, feels a strong connection to the past as she moves forward into the future.

In describing the struggle for control of the cigar factory, Cruz employs a triangular structure to delineate the shifting relationships between characters as they wield power and influence. With Santiago absent, Ofelia must assume control of operations immediately, especially if she wants to halt Cheché's attempts at mechanization. Thus, she forms a barrier between the two brothers though her allegiance remains quite clear. Palomo, on the other hand, shifts his loyalty as the mood suits him. He enjoys hearing Juan Julian read, paying rapt attention to the tale of Anna's illicit affair, yet he sides with Cheché when a vote is taken to determine whether the lector should stay.

The love triangle, modeled after the example of Anna and her two lovers, is employed to great effect within the play, for characters involved in such a relationship embody the romantic stereotype of tragic lovers seeking escape and eternal union. The first and most provocative example—that is to say, the one triangular relationship that acts as an underlying stimulus in the play—is that of the relationship between Cheché, his wife Mildred, and the previous lector, a triangle that dissolves when Mildred and the lector run away. Because it was a lector who cuckolded him (one, moreover, from Cuba), Cheché distrusts anyone arriving at the factory to fulfill that role, even if that someone should happen to be a professional like Juan Julian. Thus, Cheché's personal animus against lectors reveals in part his motivation for wanting to modernize the factory.

Cheché is involved in yet another love triangle that ends in an unrequited manner. Throughout the play, he seems tortured by the memory of his wife until, that is, he sees Marela dressed as a Russian lady when she models for the new cigar's label. He awkwardly tries to woo Marela, though his efforts often end in a leer. Marela, however, has eyes only for Juan Julian, the man who inspired her transformation by reading from the pages of *Anna Karenina*. A lover's triangle is set in motion as Marela longs for Juan Julian, who conducts an affair with her older sister even though she is married to Palomo, another roller at the factory. Cruz links triangles within triangles as the play approaches its denouement, bringing character's motivations into bold relief. Cheché, seeking fulfillment of his sexual desire, takes Marela by force, a violent act that foreshadows his eventual murder of the lector. By placing one of his characters in

opposition to two others who meet tragic fates, Cruz presents a love triangle that surpasses Tolstoy's model in terms of sheer melodrama.

The play's most idealized example of a love triangle, and the one that re-creates Tolstoy's example faithfully, both in terms of its ardor and tragic outcome, is the one between Conchita, her husband Palomo, and Juan Julian. Cruz, however, modifies Tolstoy's classic love triangle by adding an element of sexual ambiguity that creates a psychological frisson between husband and wife. Palomo, aroused by Conchita's descriptions of her encounters with the lector, wants to learn more about how Juan Julian possesses her physically, prompting Conchita to remark, "You're falling in love with this man." Palomo denies this, saying that his need for additional information is merely the result of habit after having been an *oidore* for so long. When Conchita presses him, he admits that something else is bothering him. "And it's terrible sometimes," he adds. What was a heterosexual love triangle now adds a homosexual component to it, revealing more of the characters' psychological complexities. These personal motivations take yet another dramatic turn when Palomo, wanting to seize control of his wife's affair, suggests that Conchita tell her lover "to make love like a knife" because, he says, "everything has to be killed." The love triangle becomes too painful to maintain, creating a metaphorical death for at least one of the participants.

By placing his characters in triangular relationships, Cruz achieves a dramatic tension within *Anna in the Tropics* that draws upon the struggles for power and survival that mark life in the cigar factory. His homage to the Russian master confirms once again the redeeming power of art.

Source: David Remy, Critical Essay on *Anna in the Tropics*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

Still photographs of the cast that performed *Anna in the Tropics* at the Royal Theatre in New York may be downloaded by opening a Web browser to http://www.playbill.com/multimedia/search/3239.html and clicking on the thumbnail images.

Anna Karenina was first made into a film in 1915, though the 1935 version, starring Greta Garbo as Anna and Fredric March as Vronsky, is perhaps the most well known. Many versions of the Tolstoy classic have appeared on both the silver screen and television in the years since, with a miniseries directed by Sergei Solovyov scheduled for broadcast in 2005.

Topics for Further Study

Read the passages of *Anna Karenina* that are mentioned or read in the play. How do the events and characters described in *Anna Karenina* parallel those in the play?

Describe the role ritual plays in the daily life of the cigar factory workers. How much of this ritual is based on superstition, and how much is associated with organized religion?

Who were the Taino Indians, and how was their influence felt on the island of Cuba during the early part of the last century? Is their influence felt today? If so, describe how.

What does it mean to be an *oidore*, or listener, while working at the cigar factory? How does Cruz impart symbolic value to what might otherwise be called a passive role?

Who was José Martí? Trace the tradition of poets and novelists becoming statesmen in Latin America. Is this tradition restricted solely to Latin America? Cite examples.

Research the history of several cigar brands, identifying any literary associations that may exist.

What Do I Read Next?

Cruz's play *Two Sisters and a Piano* (Theatre Communications Group, 2004) is set in 1991 as the fall of the Soviet Union further isolates Cuba politically and culturally. The two sisters of the play's title - one is a writer and the other is a musician - are placed under house arrest after spending time in prison for signing a manifesto against the current regime (though Cruz's characters never mention Castro by name). The sisters realize that, if they are to endure their sentence, they must redeem themselves through art.

Many critics and lay readers alike consider *Anna Karenina* (first published in parts from 1875 to 1877) to be one of the best novels ever written. In describing the life of his troubled heroine, Leo Tolstoy also provides the reader with a sweeping portrait of nineteenth-century Russian society as it moves from a feudal economy to a modern state. For years, the Constance Garnett translation has been the standard English version, though a recent translation of *Anna Karenina* by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (Penguin, 2001) faithfully re-creates the power and grace of the Russian original.

Gustav Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) is another classic of western literature that explores contemporary mores through the life of an adulterous woman. Married to a country physician who is devoted to her, Emma Bovary nevertheless seeks escape from boredom through an affair with a wealthy landowner, Rodolphe Boulanger, then another with Leon Dupuis, a notary clerk who eventually abandons her. Though there are romantic overtones within the novel, Flaubert takes an anti-romantic approach toward his heroine as she falls into disgrace and, eventually, ruin.

Marguerite Duras's *The Lover* (1984) is a romantic novel that, like *Anna in the Tropics*, captures a moment in time - specifically, French Indochina (now Vietnam) in the 1930s. As Duras follows her fifteen-year-old protagonist through a passionate affair with a rich Chinese gentleman, she combines themes of erotic initiation with death to create a work of sensuous beauty. Partly autobiographical, *The Lover* eschews most of the narrative conventions of the traditional novel, thus allowing characters to reveal themselves by their words and actions, much as they would in a theatrical performance.

Tampa Cigar Workers: A Pictorial History (2003), by Robert P. Ingalls and Louis A. Perez Jr., tells the story of how cigar workers came from Italy, Spain, and Cuba to make a life in Tampa while maintaining their ideals and culture in the face of economic hardship. Illustrated with over 200 photographs, the book documents the multi-ethnic communities that developed in the Ybor City area from the late 1800s through the years following World War II when Tampa became home to a large Latin population. Through oral histories and archived documents, *Tampa Cigar Workers: A Pictorial History* records the social customs and leisurely pursuits that preserved a former way of life as these immigrants adapted to a new one in the United States.

Further Study

Del Todesco, Charles, *The Havana Cigar: Cuba's Finest*, translated by John O'Toole, with photography by Patrick Jantet, Abbeville Press, 1997.

The author traces the history of tobacco in Cuba from Columbus's arrival to the modern day. Richly illustrated with photographs, many taken within cigar factories, this book describes in detail the processes of tobacco cultivation, curing, and, finally, the rolling of the cigar by hand.

Sontag, Susan, Preface, in *Plays: Mud, The Danube, The Conduct of Life, Sarita*, by Maria Irene Fornes, PAJ Publications, 1986.

Nilo Cruz acknowledges Maria Irene Fornes, a native of Cuba, as an important influence on his development as a playwright. Fornes avoids ideological constructs when composing her plays, focusing instead on the needs of her characters. Fornes' avant-garde plays, stark and often lyrical, revolve around characters who search for meaning in their lives in the face of psychological tyranny.

Stout, Nancy, *Habanos: The Story of the Havana Cigar*, Rizzoli International Publications, 1997.

For years the *habano* has been considered the epitome of what a good cigar should be. Stout offers a unique perspective on Cuba's growth and development as a nation, progress that has been inextricably linked to the cultivation of this valuable export. Dozens of cigar labels and art are reproduced within the volume, recreating a historical record of a bygone era.

Stubbs, Jean, *Tobacco on the Periphery: A Case Study in Cuban Labour History, 1860—1958*, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Stubbs provides a socio-political study of the working class that developed as a result of Cuba's tobacco industry, a class that includes peasant growers, salaried workers, and slave and indentured labor. Exploring the agricultural and industrial development of the tobacco industry from its beginnings in the nineteenth century to the advent of the Castro regime, Stubbs' book offers insights into why so many Cubans sought a more prosperous life in Tampa's cigar factories.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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