

I, Carmelita Tropicana: Performing Between Cultures Study Guide

**I, Carmelita Tropicana: Performing Between Cultures
by Alina Troyano**

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Plot Summary

"I, Carmelita Tropicana," by Alina Troyano, is a compilation of the plays, essays, and scripts written by Alina Troyano's "alter-ego," Carmelita Tropicana. In her performance art persona, Alina Troyano appears as Carmelita Tropicana, a Latina singer, dancer, actress, and comedienne. Common themes run throughout many of these works include women's rights, prejudice against minorities, especially Hispanics, and struggles for non-traditional performers to be accepted. The strength and ability of women is also a common thread throughout the collection.

In the first play, "Memories of the Revolution," the scenes and characters serve to recount Carmelita's experiences during and after the revolution in Cuba. The play begins in the year 1955, when Carmelita and her cohorts are attempting to assassinate the evil Captain Maldito who tortures citizens he illegally arrests. When they fail at assassinating Maldito, Carmelita and her friends escape to Miami where they begin a new life in America. They are reunited with Maldito years later. He apparently fled from Cuba as well and was working as a janitor when they encountered him in New York City. Carmelita and her friends are heartened when Maldito is reduced to a non-threatening and powerless entity.

In the play, "Milk of Amnesia," Carmelita comes down with a serious case of amnesia and is unable to remember anything about her past in Cuba. She revisits her homeland in hopes of sparking some recollections. By visiting her childhood home, she finally recalls her past. Her memories are bittersweet, however, since she is unsure if her disappointment with her homeland is only because she is seeing it through the lens of America.

In the play, "Chicas 2000," Carmelita presents the difficulty that a Cuban and all Hispanics have in blending into American society. She portrays this struggle by creating an arm of the FBI who issues warrants for people who are not living up to the social expectations of American culture. Carmelita shows her defiance by proclaiming that through its food and music, Hispanic culture is taking a foothold in American society. She declares that Latinos by the year 2000 become the majority minority.

The mistreatment of women is the main thrust of "Sor Juana: The Nightmare." The play depicts the unfair life that a talented writer is expected to live as a nun. The only man in the play, the Prosecutor, represents the culture that has created the inequity between men and women. The Prosecutor punishes her forsaking her sacred vows to God. When Juana declares that God favors men, Juana impresses the Prosecutor with her intellect but he beats her so that she is strengthened in her devotion. In the screenplay, "Carmelita Tropicana: Your Kunst Is Your Waffen." the topics of feminism and racial bias are at the forefront. Sophia, Carmelita's sister, is concerned with losing her Hispanic accent and learning how to become a yuppie. The imprisonment of Carmelita and the other women is a metaphor for the limitations that society places on women.



Memories of the Revolution

Memories of the Revolution Summary and Analysis

The first section of "I Carmelita" is a reproduction of the script from Carmelita Tropicana's play. The play, "Memories of a Revolution," was written by Carmelita Tropicana and Uzi Parnes.

Act I opens with a projector displaying a tourist postcard on a large on-stage screen. It depicts Cuba circa 1940. So that the audience knows the main focus of the play, the word "Havana" is written prominently on the card. Carmelita enters, holding a rose in her hand. Carmelita talks to the audience in soliloquy in which she tells of her love of and her dreams for her homeland of Cuba. She laments about the damage that the 1955 revolution caused to her beloved country. She comments that her younger brother, Machito, should have been more concerned about the revolution during that time than on American female tourists. As the theater darkens, Carmelita throws her rose at the audience and exits.

Carmelita and Machito are revolutionaries who are plotting to assassinate an evil member of the Cuban military, Captain Maldito. Maldito is a cruel man who tortures people he unjustly arrests. He has a low character, buying a different prostitute every night. Machito and his associate Marichama are smuggling machine guns in music cases which they will use to murder Maldito at his residence. When they arrive, Maldito is not at his residence and the gunmen wind up on a bus and confront one of Maldito's minions, Pingalito, who is on board. Two American girls are passengers and look on as a masked Machito demands to know Pingalito's loyalties. Machito orders Pingalito to deliver a message to Carmelita at the Tropicana that the "banana was not sliced."

At the Tropicana, Carmelita is putting on a show with featuring song and dance. They are singing "Yes We Have No Bananas," which is a comic reference to the assassination attempt on Maldito. At the end of the performance, Pingalito delivers the bad news that the assassination attempt failed. Pingalito then delivers a lengthy monologue to the audience about the beauty and virtues of Cuba. Machito and Marichama decide to try a second attempt on Maldito's life, calling it Operation Fry the Banana. They are waiting in at the Tropicana for Carmelita to join them. The two American girls, Brenda and Brenda, enter as a flurry of gunshots is heard. Machito and Marichama duck under the table. As Machito introduces the girls to Marichama from under the table, more gunshots are heard. The girls think the sounds are fireworks.

Lota is a descendent of Mata Hari. Although she appears cold and uncaring, Lota begins to have sympathy for the Cuban people. Marimacha returns and tells Carmelita that Machito is at the police station and that Maldito has given orders to burn the Tropicana down.



As Act Two begins, Carmelita, Marimacha and Lota have escaped by boat and are heading to Key West. They have been rowing for hours and are starving. Marimacha and Lota fall asleep as the Virgin Mary and angels appear on the large on-stage screen. Mary tells Carmelita that they will be safe and that she will become a superstar. She tells Carmelita that Cuba will no longer be her home. She will someday have a showdown with Maldito and be reunited with her brother. Carmelita will ultimately learn to use her weapon, her art, to bring dignity to Latin and Third World women. Her reward will be eternal youth. Carmelita must remain a virgin which Carmelita comments will not be a problem. The Virgin Mary disappears. The boat arrives in Miami as the others wake up.

In Act Three, it is many years later and Maldito is working as a janitor at a school in New York City in 1967. He reads a letter aloud in which he is offered a position as an intelligence operative if he is able to supply information about subversive operations. Also in New York City, Machito and Rosita are setting up the main room of the Tropicana-a-Go-Go, which looks exactly like the Tropicana in Cuba. The two American girls and Marimacha are on the set as well. Brenda and Brenda are dressed in 1960s style clothing. The featured singer is Nota, a little orphan girl that Lota and Carmelita found in Germany. Lota taught her spying and Carmelita taught her singing. Nota sings "Eve of Destruction."

Maldito enters the stage but is not recognized at first. He reminds Rosita of their affair and tries to grab and kiss her but she fights him off, calling him repulsive. Maldito tells Rosita that he is trying to get something on Carmelita so that he can get a position with the CIA. Maldito spots some tablets and takes them as evidence of Carmelita's involvement in a drug ring. The tablets are harmless fizzles that are used in drinks. Rosita screams, warning Carmelita that Maldito is there. A fight breaks out between Carmelita, Marimacha, Rosita and Maldito. Nota, who calls Carmelita "mother," wants to take Maldito out with a karate chop.

Machito accuses Maldito of killing his father when Machito was only four years old. Maldito confesses to the murder but assures Machito that it was unintentional. Rosita angrily tells Maldito that the entire time they were involved in an affair he abused her. Carmelita says it's her turn and sings a taunting song to Maldito after which she sprinkles glitter on him which suddenly turns his clothing into chicken suit. The others get their revenge when they see Maldito acting like a chicken. Now everyone will be able to forget Maldito's evils and go back in their minds and hearts to a happier time in Cuba.

Machito realizes he is waiting for Carmelita at the wrong location. He departs as Captain Maldito enters with El Tuerto, a corrupt police officer who interrogates the girls, asking them silly questions to determine if they're really Americans. Marimacha is frightened of El Tuerto and caters to his every whim. Maldito yells for Rosita to come out and perform "their" song. She is reluctant to do so, but Maldito is insistent. Rosita and the Tropicantes enter and perform the song "Bésame Mucho." After the song, El Tuerto's men have found Machito and bring him in handcuffed. Maldito mocks him for being a poet and a revolutionary. Catching El Tuerto off-guard, Marimacha knocks him



over the head with a bottle, Maldito takes out a gun and starts shooting. Machito and Marichama flee.

Rosita is the only one who remains on the set when Carmelita enters. Rosita tells her what had just transpired. Carmelita meets with Lota Hari who is spy and mercenary who tells her she will provide



Milk of Amnesia

Milk of Amnesia Summary and Analysis

Carmelita's play, "Milk of Amnesia," is based on her trip from the United States back to Cuba in 1993. The play begins with the voice of the writer explaining the difficult adjustment she had from leaving Cuba and emigrating to the U.S. In America she had to forget a lot of things she had grown up with in Cuba including the difference in milk. She learned to drink the milk in America and forget the sweet milk of Cuba. Her milk of amnesia had thus begun very early in her new homeland.

Pingalito introduces himself as the host. He explains to the audience that he was the conductor of a bus in 1955 when he first met Carmelita. When he hears about her suffering from amnesia, he rushes right over to console her. He sees her in the hospital but he can't get through to her; she is in a semi-conscious state. He comes back the next day and recites a list of facts about Cuba, hoping to spark her memory. However, all his efforts are to no avail and Carmelita stays in her semi-unconscious state.

Sometime after Pingalito leaves, Carmelita stirs and laments about her condition. She is told that hypnosis may help her. But the hypnosis doesn't work because she is unable to count backwards as the hypnotists directs her to do. The doctors try to surround her with familiar things to help her remember. Since Pingalito told her she is Cuban, Carmelita thinks it may help to return there. Carmelita tells the audience about her trip. She flies to Miami but although she has difficulty with immigration authorities initially but finally gets through and takes a taxi to the Hotel Capri. After staying in Havana for three days, she still has no flashback memories. She goes to a cemetery to look for the names of dead relatives. Some old people who are visiting there tell her she looks familiar but that aren't familiar with her family name.

Carmelita goes sightseeing and strikes up conversations with people but is fearful of telling them where she is from. She finally decides to tell them that she is from Cuba but doesn't remember much about it. She takes her time looking around but nothing is familiar to her. An address suddenly comes to mind and when she locates it, she realizes it is the house of her childhood. Memories come rushing back to her about playing with her friends in the yard as a child. She goes inside and remembers that her bedroom is up a flight of stairs. She interrupts a meeting when she rushes into her old bedroom. She tries to explain that the room used to be her bedroom. She has flashes of memories from her childhood of her mother taking her to the doctor.

After visiting Cuba she has more questions than answers. Cuba is a land of contradictions. Everyone gets health care but there is no medicine; there are no homeless although all the homes are falling apart; there is food for the soul but none to eat. Is she looking at Cuba through the lens of America?

Chicas 2000

Chicas 2000 Summary and Analysis

The play, *Chicas 2000*, was first performed at Dixon Place in 1997. The play begins in a cable TV studio where Carmelita is taping a variety show. Dr. Igor is watching in the audience. The Announcer welcomes everyone and introduces the winner of a contest that was held on the show. Pingalito is the winner and he addresses the audience. He discusses his views of puritanism and its hypocrisy.

Carmelita addresses the audience. She tells them that she is looking forward to the year 2000 when Latinos will be the majority in the United States. Latino culture is being integrated into society through its music and its food. During her discussion, a man's voice is heard off stage. It is the FBI they are shutting down the studio for violating an anti-social penal code that was created to seek out those who are guilty of shameless, loud and tacky behavior. Dr. Igor, in the audience, stands and says he can help.

In the next scene, Carmelita is in Dr. Igor's lab. He is making sexual advances towards her but she rejects him. She tells him that she does not like men. Dr. Igor tells her that he enjoys her shows and has seen her perform many times. He tells Carmelita that he is involved in a genome project that involves experimental cloning. As he talks to her, he approaches her with a knife and she faints. While she is unconscious, he extracts some of her cells and creates two clones of her. Nine months later, he is rocking the babies in a bassinet as Carmelita approaches him with a gun demanding that he give the cloned babies to her. They argue and she accidentally shoots him. Soon, the building is surrounded by the police who order her to come out with the illegal clones.

The police take Carmelita to a testing area of the confinement facility known as the BMU or Behavior Modification Unit where she is asked several inane questions: like when to use "who" or "whom" and what detergent should be used to clean wood floors. Desiree who was also arrested in the raid enters the scene. She tells Carmelita that one of her clones went to Miami but couldn't remember where the other one was sent. Carmelita is re-indoctrinated in a course called Table Manners 101. Courses in Perfume Appreciation and Accent Reduction are also requirements. She becomes involved in a lesbian relationship with her cell-mate, Rodesia. Rodesia is afraid to get involved emotionally but sees a flicker of hope and promise in Carmelita's eyes. Carmelita tells Rodesia about her background. She tells Rodesia that she is a life time lowlife and had been arrested for anti-social behavior. She tells Rodesia of her dreams of being reunited with her clones once again. By this time, Carmelita had been in the BMU for thirteen years.

With their relationship growing, Carmelita and Rodesia plot to escape. Rodesia insists on fleeing to the wilds where they can be alone away from prying eyes. It is New Year's Eve; the two women plan to run out while everyone is distracted by noisemakers and fireworks. They escape and wind up in an area known as the Free Zone. They are



fatigued and hungry. An all points bulletin is issued for their recapture. In the next scene, appearing alone on the stage are Carmelita's two clones, Cluna and Clana who are now fourteen. They discuss the many ways in which they are alike. They lament that they are illegal clones whose bio-original was a low-life. They wonder why their bio-original created them knowing that they'd be illegal and have a difficult. They've heard that their bio-original is a performance artist but doesn't know exactly what such an artists does. Cluna and Clana decide to explore Lower Manhattan which, that had learned, is the home of their lowlife bio-original.

Carmelita stumbles upon Cluna and Clana but doesn't know who they are. They are starting to fight with each other and Carmelita steps in to break it up. The clones are hungry and Carmelita finds some food in her purse and splits it between them. Carmelita tells the clones that they remind her of herself when she was a teenager. Carmelita laments that she has lost her lover and her babies. She tells the clones to always be true to themselves. The clones are impressed with the stranger's wisdom.

A masked Carmelita auditions for a wrestling competition which Dr. Igor is producing at the Chusmatic Casino. She says she wants no prize money, only her papers. She does not recognize him because he is masked, too. Dr. Igor promises to find her a worthy opponent; he is secretly hoping to find someone who can beat Carmelita. Suddenly, his eyes widens as he clutches his chest and falls to the floor. Cluna and Clana have sneaked in backstage to watch the show. They spot Dr. Igor on the floor and inject him with a syringe that is lying near him. He comes to immediately to face the clones who want to compete in the wrestling match. If the clones win, they, like Carmelita, want no money only their identification papers. He recognizes them and tells them to call him Papi.

Carmelita enters the match wearing a wrestling outfit and a Mexican mask followed by Cluna and Clana who are also masked. Igor warns that if any of the contestants removes her mask, she will be disqualified. The clones get the best of Carmelita, overpowering her and swinging her around. Suddenly, the clones realize that their opponent is the nice lady who gave them food. After they remove their masks, Carmelita recognizes them as her clones and all three forfeit the match. Igor takes his mask off, too. He claims to be their father and that Carmelita never really wanted them. Carmelita explains that she didn't want them to have a life of struggle as illegal clones, but changed her mind the minute she held them. Igor tells them he will leave the Casino and all his money to them. Carmelita tells them she has nothing to offer them except being a family. The clones choose to go with Carmelita.



Sor Juana: The Nightmare

Sor Juana: The Nightmare Summary and Analysis

This play is based on the life of a 17th century Mexican nun who composed music and wrote poetry. It is set in a convent and the woods surrounding it. Juana is having a dream and her surroundings turn into a spider's web. The vicereine, Maria Luisa, visits Juana in her room and tells her to leave with her. Juana tells Maria Luisa she cannot leave the convent because she is a nun who has taken sacred vows. Maria Luisa tells her that she is a talented writer and should not stay isolated. Maria Luisa produces a costume that is similar to that of a musketeer. It was equipped with a sword. Juana changes into the costume and she is immediately energized and feels ready to face any challenge.

Juana's slave, Alba, sees that Juana is about to leave and tries to convince her not to. Juana shows Alba her sword which she tells Alba she will use to defend herself. Alba tells her she will need it to fight off the demons that will surely pursue her for breaking her vows. Maria Luisa re-names Juana, calling her Juan and demanding that she kiss her. They escape from the convent. It is the first time that Juana has smelled the ocean or the eucalyptus tree. Just when they're vowing their love to one another, Maria Luisa thinks she sees a stigmata on Juana's hands. The word "stigmata" causes the Prosecutor to suddenly appear in a spotlight. He declares that he is the head prosecutor for the Inquisition and specializes in beatific visions and virgin statues that cry human tears.

Maria Luisa tells Juana that they will be tortured and killed if they know that Juana left the convent and that she left her husband. Juana promises not to reveal who she is. Juana tells the prosecutor that she is Juan de los Palotes. The prosecutor must investigate any mention of stigmata but doubts if one has occurred since they mainly are seen on women. The prosecutor is suspicious and after more questioning, Juana confesses that she is the runaway nun, Juana. The Prosecutor admonishes her for leaving the church and breaking her vows. He notices that Juana had given her ring representing her marriage to Christ to Maria Luisa. She promises the Prosecutor she will do anything if, take any punishment, if he will let Maria Luisa go free.

The Prosecutor orders his aide to tie Juana up on a cross and to take Juana's sword and cut Maria Luisa's ring finger off. Both women cry in pain and agony. He releases Juana on the condition that she finds Christ again. Juana begins quoting the Bible and Greek mythology. The Prosecutor is amazed with her intellect. He proclaims that she will become a mystic. The Prosecutor has Juana beaten, telling her she will become more inspired when challenged by abuse. He tells Juana that he is a writer, a biographer, who makes the lives of nun's exemplary tales to inspire others. The nightmare ends.



Carmelita Tropicana: Your Kunst Is Your Waffen

Carmelita Tropicana: Your Kunst Is Your Waffen Summary and Analysis

Carmelita Tropicana is playing herself in this film. She introduces herself to the audience and relates to them some events about her past. In the opening scene, Carmelita is mugged as she walks to her home located on New York's lower east side just after she concluded a performance. A fight ensues in which Carmelita emerges as the victor. She suffered only a minor scratch on her arm. The next morning, Carmelita wakes to the sounds of sirens outside and those of her telephone ringing. The Dictator is on the phone; he tells Carmelita that she will be picked up shortly. The phone clicks indicating that she has another call. It is her father who tells her he has to go into the hospital for a prostrate condition. She clicks back to the Dictator who warns her not to put him on hold again. He tells her that ten million children will have AIDS over the next 10 years. He will see her at Tompkins Square Park that evening.

Orchidia arrives at Carmelita's building to pick her up. Carmelita is locked in the basement where she had gone to turn the boiler back on. She is banging on the door for someone to let her out. Finally, Orchidia figures out that it's Carmelita and lets her out of the basement. Carmelita tells Orchidia that she had been mugged the night before. Orchidia is not disturbed since it was the third time Carmelita had been mugged. They walk to Tompkins Square Park where the Dictator is waiting for them along with two lesbians, called the Twin Sisters, who are wearing S&M clothing. The Dictator gets a message on his walkie-talkie that he should split up his troops. He orders Orchidia and Carmelita to go to the mobilization site. He and the Twin Sisters will cover Times Square.

At a bus stop, Sophia, a Latina yuppie wannabe who is Carmelita's sister, is reading a magazine of "do's and don'ts." The list consists of tips of how to seem less Hispanic. At an abortion clinic, Carmelita, Sophia and Orchidia are linking arms with other women protestors of the Defense Task Force. The organization is defending the rights of women to have abortions. Pro-life protestors appear on the scene, calling them names and sneering at them. Annette Jackson, a TV reporter, files a report about the protest. A fight breaks out and Carmelita, Orchidia and Sophia are arrested and jailed. Sophia is upset with Carmelita, telling her she's lazy and gets nothing done. Carmelita defends herself by saying she is a performance artist and has a vision and a mission. Sophia doesn't buy it and threatens to punch her.

Another woman, Dee, is in the same cell as the others. Eventually, Carmelita recognizes her to be the mugger. Dee is bleeding from a wound she sustained during the failed mugging and scuffle with Carmelita. Dee, who who has been in the jail many times, tells the others about the horrible conditions in the jail. Carmelita tells Dee about



all her bad luck over the last several years: she crashed her car; her apartment burned down; and, she broke her pinky finger. Carmelita gives Dee \$5 so she will not mug her again. Sophia comments that Dee is a hardened criminal and will not change. Dee tells Carmelita that she is insane and that Sophia has a bad attitude. Sophia asks if Dee attacked Carmelita with a knife. When Carmelita tells her it was with a Bic pen, Sophia laughs and Dee is embarrassed.

Dee cannot imagine why this group of nutty women wound up in jail. Carmelita and Orchidia are ready to break into some of their protest chants so that Dee will understand why they were arrested. Dee is a hardened criminal and had been arrested for selling drugs. In the past, she was a member of a tough Puerto Rican girls gang. Carmelita comments that she used to think it was just Latinos who suffered from a violent history. She tells the story of her great aunt Cukita who was shot and killed in a tragic murder suicide incident. They all sing together about the tragedy of women in prison. Carmelita says they need the spirit of Rosa Parks who would not give her seat up to a white man. A lawyer sent by the Dictator springs them out of jail. The film ends with Carmelita giving another performance.



Short Performance Scripts and Essays

Short Performance Scripts and Essays Summary and Analysis

The Conquest of Mexico as Seen through the Eyes of Hernan Cortes' Horse

This essay tells the story of a horse named Arriero, from his point of view, who was shipped from Spain to Mexico. In the first section entitled, "My First Battle," Arriero and another horse, Thunder, are grazing and are being pestered by swarms of mosquitoes. In Spain, they never had such problems with the insects. Arriero's master receives word that advancing warriors have been sighted in the vicinity. The master and his men pray for God's help. The battle ensues and Arriero makes references to javelins and arrows whizzing by him. As the hours go by, the weight of his master on his back is beginning to wear on him. Finally, they are victorious. Arriero thinks of his mother in Spain as he surveys the battlefield full of dead bodies. In the episode entitled, "The Nightmare," the horse tells of staying close to his master's tent. Fear is all around—everyone waiting for the next attack. After days of stress, Arriero cannot tell if what happened was a dream or reality.

Performance Art Manifesto

Carmelita Tropicana discusses how she became a performance artist. In 1987, a filmmaker asked her to participate in a film project that was sponsored by a grant given to the New York Foundation for the Arts for performance art. She was paid \$5,000 for her participation. After that, her career took off and she enjoyed a successful career.

Radio Spot for WNYC

Carmelita Tropicana made a spot that was aired in between classical music selections on the New York radio station WNYC. In the brief PSA, she talks about the downside of living in the city such as her mugging; and the upside such as the vast cultural opportunities that are open to everyone.

El Ricibo Social/The Social Visit

Carmelita Tropicana discusses a visit she made to her elderly aunt who was gravely ill and in the hospital. Aunt Nina had been ill when she left Cuba twenty years before but outlasted the predictions of her impending demise. Carmelita reminisces about the social life that her family enjoyed in Cuba where relatives visited each other often. The whole family visited Aunt Nina during her last days in the hospital with each one giving reminiscing about their lives and recalling old times together.

Food for Thought



Carmelita's three passions in life are poetry, macrame, and cooking. Food elevates and inspires her. She discusses some of her favorite dishes which include dishes from many countries. She loves Indian food, bagels, and cream cheese as well as Japanese, Spanish, and Italian dishes. In this essay, Carmelita includes a Cuban recipe for Arroz con Pollo or chicken with rice.



Characters

Carmelita Tropicana (Alina Troyano)

Carmelita Tropicana is a performance artist and is the alter ego of author Alina Troyano. She is a comedienne, actress, singer, and dancer. She is a character that is featured throughout most of the plays that are contained in the collection of the works of author Alina Troyano. Carmelita is a Cuban national who began her show business career at the Tropicana club in Havana. Carmelita, who attempted to assassinate a corrupt Cuban official during the 1955 revolution, fled to the United States. Although she first landed in Miami, she eventually made her way to New York City where she opened the Tropicana-a-Go-Go, a replica of her night club in Havana.

Carmelita is a non-traditional performer and is openly gay. She strives for acceptance in the United States where she feels a bias against her heritage and her unconventional artistry and lifestyle. Although Carmelita makes a new life in America, her heart still belongs to Cuba. The years blurred memories of her homeland but her revisit to Cuba is bittersweet. The new Cuba that emerged after the revolution fell short of the promises that were made to the Cuban people and visions of a future that were portrayed to them. She muses if her disappointment is the result of the American filter she is seeing her homeland through so many years later.

Through her humor and talents, Carmelita takes on such serious subjects as women's equality, the maintenance of the racial identity of minorities and the acceptance in a culture of those with atypical values, cultures and lifestyles.

Pingalito Betancourt

Pingalito Betancourt is cigar-chomping Cuban man and a recurring character in several of Carmelita Tropicana's plays. The character plays a host or an announcer and is a character who provides relevant information and background to the audience in the forms of monologues and soliloquies. In "Memories of the Revolution," Pingalito is first introduced as a bus conductor who is accosted by Carmelita Tropicana's brother who is fleeing from a failed attempt in the assassination of a corrupt official of the Cuban government. Machito, the brother, forces Pingalito to deliver a message to Carmelita that the assassination did not come off.

When Pingalito appears at the Tropicana night club, where Carmelita performs, he conveys the bad news and delivers a monologue to the audience musing about how one's life can change overnight. He also goes into great detail about the virtues and beauty of Cuba. In Pingalito's second monologue, he updates the audience about Carmelita's escape from Cuba in 1955 to Miami and eventually to New York City where she created a duplicate of the Tropicana night club in the States in 1967.



Pingalito has similar roles in both "Milk of Amnesia" and "Chicas 2000." Pingalito provides information to the audience in "Milk of Amnesia" about Carmelita's amnesiac condition and how he tried to help her recover. The play, "Chicas 2000, opens with Pingalito discussing his philosophy about puritanism and its hypocrisy. It should be noted that the playbills for the aforementioned plays list Carmelita Tropicana playing herself and playing Pingalito as well.

Captain Maldit

Captain Maldito is a cruel official of the Cuban government who arrests innocent citizens and tortures them. Carmelita and her brother attempt to assassinate him but fail.

Machito

Machito is Carmelita's brother. He is a revolutionary and a poet. During the 1955 Cuban Revolution, he makes an attempt on the life of the evil Cuban official, Captain Maldito but fails.

Sophia

Sophia is Carmelita's sister who wants to be a yuppie. She disapproves of Carmelita's lifestyle and tries to fashion herself after Americans and intends to disown her Cuban heritage.

Juana

Juana is a nun who is also a talented writer and song composer. When she escapes from the convent, she is chastised and punished by the Prosecutor who forces her to return to the convent and abandon any hopes of a writing career.

Cluna and Clana

Cluna and Clana are the clones who were created from Carmelita's DNA. They were separated from Carmelita when they were just babies but were reunited again when they were fourteen.

Dr. Igor

Dr. Igor is the mad scientist who steals DNA from Carmelita when she is unconscious. He uses her DNA to create two clones who he tries to claim as his own. When they are



fourteen, they choose to go with the penniless Carmelita over the wealthy Dr. Igor because she is their bio-original.

Brendaa and Brendah

Brendaa and Brendah are two vapid American girls who are on vacation in Cuba during the 1955 revolution. They are so clueless that they don't know that there is a major conflict raging. They think that gunfire is fireworks.

Dee

Dee is a middle-aged woman who tries but fails to mug Carmelita. They meet up again in jail where Carmelita is confined because of her anti-social behavior and Dee was arrested on drug charges. Dee formerly was a member of a tough Puerto Rican girl gang.



Objects/Places

Cuba

The main character who is a performance artist, Carmelita Tropicana, was born and raised in Cuba. Although she emigrates to the US during the revolution, she continues to love and miss her homeland.

Havana

Many of the scenes that take place in Cuba are in its capital city, Havana. It is in Havana that Carmelita's nightclub, The Tropicana, is located.

Tropicana Night Club

The Tropicana Night Club is located in Havana and it is where she performs her acts. Carmelita and her friends flee Cuba when Captain Maldito threatens to burn them and the Tropicana down.

New York City

Carmelita and her friends flee Cuba by boat and arrive in Miami. It was not long before she and the others migrate north to New York City's lower east side.

Tropicana-a-Go-Go

When Carmelita winds up in New York City, she eventually opens the Tropicana-a-Go-Go which is an exact replica of her night club in Havana.

BMU

Carmelita is arrested for anti-social behavior and for having the dreaded lowlife gene. She is taken to the Behavior Modification Unit (BMU) where she is subjected to behavior adjustment so that she can be accepted into American society.

Convent

Sister Juana is a nun at a convent. When she is visited by a vicereine, she escapes from the convent so that she can pursue a career in writing.



Dr. Igor's Laboratory

After Carmelita passes out in Dr. Igor's laboratory, he extracts some of her DNA which he uses to make two illegal clones of her called Clana and Cluna.

The Free Zone

After 13 years in the BMU, Carmelita escapes and lands in a neutral area called the Free Zone. It is there that she encounters her clones from who were taken from her when they were babies.

The Wrestling Casino

In order to get her "papers" so she can be considered legal, Carmelita agrees to enter a wrestling competition. Her masked opponents are her two clones. After they realize their true identities, Carmelita and the clones reunite to become a family.



Themes

The Difficulties of Emigration

Although leaving Cuba during the 1955 revolution was a healthy move on Carmelita's part, it is obvious that the transition from the country where she was born and raised was not an easy one. In her play, "Milk of Amnesia," Carmelita is suffering from a severe case of amnesia. She can remember nothing about Cuba or her childhood.

In hopes of sparking her memory, Carmelita visits Cuba. When she discovers her childhood home, the wonderful memories of her childhood come rushing back to her. This episode is told metaphorically to represent how her indoctrination to American culture and society had blurred the vision of her homeland. There is disappointment when she observes the poor, hungry people of modern Cuba but she wonders if her perception and expectations had been distorted by her years in America.

Carmelita portrays an aspect of American culture in "Chicas 2000." In response to the growing number of Hispanics immigrating to the states, the FBI creates the Behavior Modification Unit where undesirables are taken so they can learn to behave like Americans. She was discovered by the FBI's process that is able to detect the lowlife DNA. In this parody, Carmelita points to the disdain toward Hispanic immigrants that she perceives Americans to have.

Although Carmelita's conclusions about bias against Hispanics may be somewhat distorted due to her natural sensitivities about the subject, the theme is prominent enough in her plays to believe that her feelings and opinions are genuine and heartfelt from her perspective. In many of her works, Carmelita refers to the virtues and beauty of her homeland. Her love of Cuba is both sincere and understandable.

Feminism

One of the main themes that emerges from the collection of plays and essays by author Alina Troyano is the subject of women's rights. Although most of the plays contain lowbrow humor, the message that it's not an equal world for women, comes through on more than several occasions. The unfinished play entitled, "Sor Juana: The Nightmare," is probably the most blatant example of author's view about the oppression of women. The protagonist, Juana, is a nun who is gifted with extraordinary writing and musical composition talents.

The author places Juana in isolation at a convent where her work will never see the light of day. Juana is encouraged to escape from the convent so she can spread her wings, which is a metaphor for a chance to realize her writing potential. The Prosecutor, the only male and the antagonist in the play, punishes Juana for breaking her sacred vows to God. The Prosecutor represents a society that demands loyalty and devotion from its



females and thereby places limitations of their potential. The Prosecutor also represents the authoritarian male.

In the play, "Chicas 2000," it is the women at an abortion clinic who are arrested for their defense of the facility while the pro-life protestors go free. In the screenplay, "Carmelita Tropicana: Your Kunst Is Your Waffen," women are arrested by the FBI due to their anti-social behavior. They are forced to undergo DNA replacement, a process which identifies and replaces the low life gene. As in the play about Juana, the women are isolated and forced into what is perceived to be appropriate behavior. Their imprisonment represents a society that is silencing their feelings and opinions about issues that they feel passionate about.

Bias Against Latinos

The issue of anti-Latino sentiment is a theme that emerges throughout the collection of Carmelita Tropicana's collection of plays, scripts and essays. Sophia, a character in "Carmelita Tropicana: Your Kunst Is Your Waffen" whose goal is to become a yuppie, is seen reading a Hispanic magazine that contains a list of "dos and don'ts" for Latina women to follow so they will be accepted into American society. The episode is obviously tongue-in-cheek and is mocking the wrong-headed attitude of some Americans who condescend to Latinos and disapprove of their culture and traditions. Some of the tips in the article that Sophia reads aloud include: Don't wear big earrings; don't wear fuchsia fingernail polish; and lose the accent. The article concludes that the key to success in corporate America for Latina women is improving their fashion.

In the the play, "Chicas 2000," Carmelita and some of her Latina female friends are arrested for their lack of taste and manners. They are placed in the BMU (Behavior Modification Unit) section of prison. The "problem" with the Hispanic culture is so pressing that the FBI created the BMU along with a unit that identifies and remodels the lowlife DNA of Latinas. Those who are taken in custody for anti-social behavior are forced to take remedial courses for such problem areas as "Perfume Appreciation," "Accent Reduction," "Table Manners" and "Conflict Resolution in Modulated Tones."

Although Carmelita pokes fun at the traditions of her fellow Hispanics, it is obvious that she is using humor and satire to make the point about the unjust way in which many Latinas are perceived and treated. She makes the prediction that Hispanics will someday be the "majority minority" in the United States and that they are seducing Americans with their music and food.



Style

Perspective

The compilation of plays and screenplays written by author Alina Troyano are presented in the format of a script wherein each character is ostensibly speaking for himself or herself. As with any live or filmed performance art, the author speaks through her characters. In these plays, there are obvious relationships between the various works after reading through the entire collection. Many of the same causes and themes are repeated throughout the collection. Some of Troyano's issues are women's rights, the nurturing of the self, the identity of minorities, and the acceptance of non-conventional performance artists and non-traditional lifestyles.

Just like beauty is in the eye of the beholder, humor is in her ear and sense of comedy. The ribald tone and bawdy humor that is featured throughout most of the works is undoubtedly designed for a target demographic. There is a repetitious mixture of sexual innuendo and low-brow humor that is showcased in most of the performance art that is presented. The material undoubtedly pleased Troyano's loyal audiences. However, this style of entertainment has a tendency to become tedious and too predictable and will not satisfy the more sophisticated audience who is seeking to be challenged intellectually. However, Troyano's works are what they are. There is a consistency and a sense that she is telling her viewers or readers "This is who I am. Like it or leave it."

Tone

The underlying messages of racial and gender bias are conveyed with humor and metaphor. A good portion of the humor falls flat on the one-dimensional venue of a page. However, one can envision that the comedy is much more effective when it is performed on stage as it was originally intended. The humor itself is often bawdy and ribald. This humor's subtlety is only recognized when the reader digs deeper and connects with the subtext of the words.

The messages of many of the works of Alina Troyano, AKA Carmelita Tropicana, are conveyed through metaphor. For example, in "Sor Juana: The Nightmare," Juana is a nun who is also a talented writer and composer. Her talents have been stifled by her confinement in a convent. When she dares to escape to spread her wings and breathe the fresh air, the Prosecutor, the only man in the tale, punishes her for breaking her sacred vows. When Juana impresses the Prosecutor with her intellect he is even the more inclined to punish her as she represents a threat to his superiority. This play metaphorically represents the limitations that society has placed on women. Rather than Juana's nightmare being her escape from the convent as the title might suggest, her nightmare is the isolated life she has been forced to live in which she has been denied from attaining her true potential.

Structure

"I, Carmelita Tropicana" is divided into three main sections. "Plays/Performance Script" contains the actual scripts of four plays which are: Memories of the Revolution; Milk of Amnesia; Chicas 2000; and, Sor Juana: The Nightmare. Sor Juana: The Nightmare is a work in progress and was not completed at the time of the publication of the book. The second section "Screenplay," consists of just one work, the screenplay entitled, "Carmelita Tropicana: Your Kunst Is Your Waffin." The third section, "Short Performance Scripts and Essays," contains the following works: "The Conquest of Mexico;" "Performance Art Manifesto;" "Radio Spot for WNYC;" "The Social Visit;" and, "Food For Thought."

The plays and scripts are presented in their entirety with no further descriptions or explanations than what the original material provides. Each play lists the characters and scenes that are contained in the performances. The essays touch upon many of the same themes that are presented in the plays and scripts.

Just prior to the beginning of the book, is the "Editor's Introduction" and the "Author's Introduction." In the "Editor's Introduction," the identity of author Alina Troyano's performance alter ego, Carmelita Tropicana, is explained. The editor makes a comparison of Troyano's works with other famous performance artists. In the "Author's Introduction," Troyano describes some aspects of her background and experiences that fueled her opinions about the struggles of Hispanics, women in general, and non-traditional performers.



Quotes

"Life is strange. One day you go to your job, you punch tickets, and the next day the tide of history has swept you out to sea and you have to sink or swim with the sharks" (Memories of the Revolution, pg. 11.)

"The name Cuba comes from the Indian word Cubanacan meaning "center place." Because we Cubans know we are the center of the universe" (Memories of the Revolution, pg. 13.)

"Machito Tropicana: bad poet, bad revolutionary. You look like your father Camacho, only more stupid" (Memories of the Revolution, pg. 23.)

"Oh, the revolution. Let it be your art. Your art is your weapon. To give dignity to Latin and Third World women: this is your struggle" (Memories of the Revolution, pg. 38.)

"No one is homeless in Cuba, although homes are falling apart. Everyone gets health care, but there is no medicine. There is only one newspaper, but everyone is educated. No conspicuous consumerism. The dollar is legal, but there's the US embargo" (Milk of Amnesia, pg. 70.)

"In the year 2000...Latinos will be the majority in the USA. The majority minority. So many Latinos, so much love" (Chicas 2000, pg. 75.)

"I've been here for thirteen miserable years, rottin' in this hellhole. My life has been snuffed out. I'm an artist. I got a couple of more swan songs left in me yet. I want to live, life" (Chicas 2000, pg. 96.)

"We have our dignity. We are proud of our bodies, our accents, our emotions" (Chicas 2000, pg. 120.)

"Look at that sky. The world looks so different. It smells of eucalyptus. And ocean brine. I've never seen or smelled the ocean" (Sor Juana: The Nightmare, pg. 127.)

"The define narcissus. God created man in his own image. Christ is both God and man. The divine narcissus represents Christ, and Echo is the Devil tempting Christ" (Sor Juana: The Nightmare, pg. 132.)

"The gods played a horrible trick—they gave you, my sister, a beautiful voice and me the desire to sing" (Your Kunst Is Your Waffen, pg. 157.)

"We need the spirit of Rosa - Rosa Parks. She don't get up for a white man on the bus" (Your Kunst Is Your Waffen, pg. 166.)



Topics for Discussion

Why are Carmelita and her brother plotting to assassinate Captain Maldito? Why are they not successful in their attempt? What crime does Machito accuse Captain Maldito of?

Where do Carmelita, Marimacha and Lota flee to and how do they get there? When does Carmelita and her cohorts meet up with Maldito again? What is Maldito's profession in New York City and what position does he aspire to?

In the play, "Milk of Amnesia," what has Carmelita forgotten? What events spark recollections of her childhood? What may have caused her condition? What possibly caused the view of her homeland changed?

In the play, "Chicas 2000," why is there an emphasis on "lowlives?" Why were Carmelita and the others arrested and sent to the Behavior Modification Unit? What does Carmelita infer may be causing non-Hispanics to fear the Latinos? According to Carmelita, in what ways were Latinos impacting the culture in the United States?

When Carmelita and the clones are in a wrestling match, what could be the reason they only want their "papers" instead of prize money? What is the reaction of the clones when they can chose between the wealthy Dr. Igor and their penniless bio-original? Why did they make the choice the did?

Why does Juana feel exhilarated when she leaves the convent? When the Prosecutor in "Sor Juana: The Nightmare," tells Juana that he rewrites the biographies of nuns, what message is the playwright sending the audience? What methods does the Prosecutor use to keep Juana "in line?"

In "Carmelita Tropicana: Your Kunst Is Your Waffen, why is Sophia, Carmelita's sister, seen reading a "dos and don'ts list?" What is the underlying message about women's rights in this play? Carmelita displays what act of forgiveness in this play?