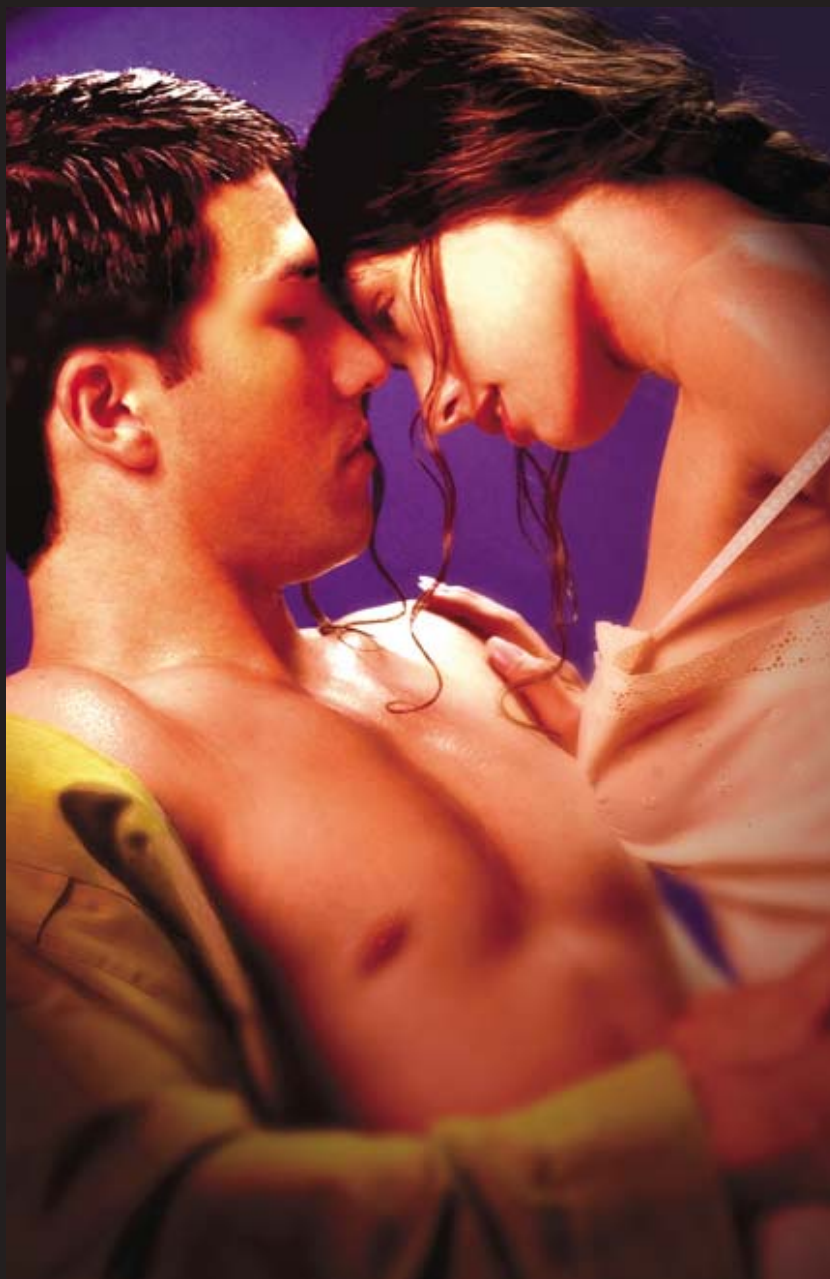


Anna In The Tropics

By Nilo Cruz



Arizona Theatre Company

THE STATE THEATRE

Play Guide

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It is Arizona Theatre Company’s goal to share the enriching experience of live theatre. This play guide is intended to help you prepare for your visit to Arizona Theatre Company. Should you have comments or suggestions regarding the play guide, or if you need more information about scheduling trips to see an ATC production, please feel free to contact us:

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ARIZONA THEATRE COMPANY: WHO WE ARE

Thousands of people make our work at ATC possible!

Arizona Theatre Company is a fully professional, not-for-profit theatre company. This means all of our artists, administrators and production staff are paid professionals, and the income we receive from ticket sales and contributions goes right back into our budget to create our work, rather than to any particular person as a profit.

Each season, ATC employs hundreds of actors, directors and designers from all over the country to create the work you see on stage. In addition,

ATC currently employs about 100 staff members in our production shops and administrative offices in Tucson and Phoenix during our season. Among these people are carpenters, painters, marketing professionals, fundraisers, stage directors, computer specialists, sound and light board operators, tailors, costume designers, box office agents, stage crew – the list is endless – representing an amazing range of talents and skills.

We are also supported by a Board of Trustees, a group of business and community leaders who volunteer their time and expertise to assist the theatre in financial and legal matters, advise in marketing and fundraising, and help represent the theatre in our community.

Roughly 150,000 people attend our shows every year, and several thousand of those people support us with charitable contributions in addition to purchasing their tickets. Businesses large and small, private foundations and the city and state governments also support our work financially.



Herberger Theatre in Phoenix, Arizona



Temple of Music and Art in Tucson, Arizona

All of this is in support of our mission: to create professional theatre that continually strives to reach new levels of artistic excellence and that resonates locally, in the state of Arizona and throughout the nation. In order to fulfill its mission, the theatre produces a broad repertoire ranging from classics to new works, engages artists of the highest caliber, and is committed to assuring access to the broadest spectrum of citizens.

Anna In The Tropics

By Nilo Cruz

INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

The heat and steam of Florida collides with the passion of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* in this provocative and exciting story from first time Latino Pulitzer Prize winner Nilo Cruz. The lives of a group of Cuban and Cuban-American cigar rollers are touched and changed by the arrival of a passionate and handsome lector. Through his influence, the characters learn things about themselves and the world around them. ANNA IN THE TROPICS opened on Broadway November 16, 2003. It closed February 22, 2004. Directed by Emily Mann (Lily Tomlin's *Search for Signs of Intelligent Life...*), the play starred Jimmy Smits (*L.A. Law* and *N.Y.P.D. Blue*), and Daphne Rubin-Vega (Tony, Best Actress in *Rent*), with Priscilla Lopez, Victor Argo, Vanessa Aspillaga, and John Ortiz.



A cigar cartoon



Approximately 1,150 cigar makers filled this room at the Ybor factory in 1925



Actor Javi Mulero plays Cheche



Actor Adriana Gaviria plays Marela



Actor Tim Perez plays Palomo and Eliades

THE CHARACTERS

Santiago

The owner of a cigar factory in Ybor City. Santiago is a good man who loves his wife and daughters very much, but suffers from a gambling addiction.

Cheché

Santiago's "lost-long" half-brother who has ambitions to own a portion of the factory. He can be violent and dangerous when he does not get his way and has an intense dislike of lectors.

Ofelia

Santiago's wife – she is a reliable and strong woman, accustomed to helping lead the family.

Marela

The younger of Santiago and Ofelia's two daughters – she is young and naïve.

Conchita

The older daughter of Santiago and Ofelia – caught in a marriage where she is virtually ignored and, therefore, finds passion with the lector.

Palomo

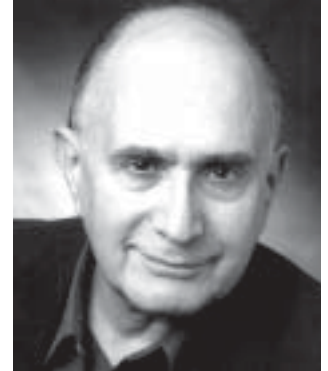
Conchita's husband, a decent and kind man – whose focus has shifted away from his wife and caused him to neglect her.

Juan Julian

The passionate, attractive and articulate lector who enters all of the above characters lives and sparks great change.

Eliades

A minor character (played in this production by the same actor who plays Palomo) who organizes gambling.



Actor Apollo Dukakis plays Santiago



Actor Karmin Murcelo plays Ofelia



Actor Jacqueline Duprey plays Conchita

SYNOPSIS

The year is 1929, and the place is a cigar factory in Ybor City (a section of Tampa). Life's pace is slower than today, and cigars are still rolled by hand by specialists, rather than created in mass by machines. As the play begins, the characters are awaiting the arrival of the new *lector*, the man who reads to them while they roll. As the lector begins reading them the story of *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy, the events in the story begin to be mirrored in the lives of the people listening. Conchita begins an affair with the lector, though Marela is infatuated with him. Palomo learns what it is to be jealous, and Santiago and

Ofelia work to make sure that Cheche does not replace all of the workers with cigar rolling machines. The situation turns volatile when Cheche makes advances on Marela and is rejected, fueling his hatred of Juan Julian whom Marela finds attractive. All of the characters' lives will be forever changed by the combination of *Anna Karenina* and the tropics.

THE CREATOR

Nilo Cruz

Nilo Cruz was born in Matanzas, Cuba in 1961. He immigrated to the “Little Havana” area of Miami in 1970, and eventually became a U.S. citizen. His interest in theatre began as an actor and director in the early 1980s. Cruz earned a Master’s degree in fine arts from Brown University in 1994, and has taught drama at Brown and Yale. In 2001, he served as the playwright-in-residence for the New Theatre in Coral Gables, Florida. He currently resides in New York.

ANNA IN THE TROPICS was commissioned by the New Theatre in Coral Gables, Florida, and opened in 2002. It won the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 2003. Cruz has also received grants from the National Endowment of the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Theatre Communications Group. His other plays include *A Park in Our House*, *Night Train to Bolina*, *A Bicycle Country*, and *Dancing on her Knees*. He won the W. Alton Jones Award for *Night Train to Bolina*, the Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays Award for *Two Sisters and a Piano*, and the American Theatre Critics/Steinberg New Play Award for ANNA IN THE TROPICS. Some of the theatres that have developed and performed his works include New York’s Public Theatre, New York Theatre Workshop, McCarter Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare, Florida Stage, The Alliance, The Studio Theatre, New Theatre, Coconut Grove Playhouse and the Children’s Theatre of Minneapolis.

<http://www.hcc.cc.fl.us/campusreads/biography.html>



Playwright Nilo Cruz



Author Leo Tolstoy

TOLSTOY AND ANNA KARENINA

The Life of Leo Tolstoy

A writer, moralist, and mystic, Leo Tolstoy was born in Yasnaya Polyana, SE Russia. Educated privately and at Kazan, he joined the army in 1851, and began a literary career, becoming known for his short stories. After fighting in the Crimean War (1853-1856), he left the army, traveled abroad, and in 1862 married Sophie Andreyevna Behrs, who bore him 13 children. He settled on his Volga estate, where he wrote his epic story of Russia during the Napoleonic Wars, *Voyna i mir* (1865-9, *War and Peace*), followed by *Anna Karenina* (1875-7). He then experienced a spiritual crisis which culminated in such works as *Ispoved* (written 1879, *A Confession*) and *V chyom moya vera* (1883, *What I Believe*). He turned over his fortune to his wife and lived poorly as a peasant under her roof. Leaving home secretly, he died of pneumonia some days later at Astopovo railway station. His doctrines founded a sect, and Yasnaya Polyana became a place of pilgrimage. His writings on pacifism and his striving towards self-sufficiency and love of others have attracted adherents (including Gandhi) beyond Russia itself, and he remained a formative influence on pacifist movements in the twentieth century.

-www.biography.com

Anna Karenina

Anna Karenina was written between 1875 and 1877 and is considered one of the greatest novels of all time. The theme of morality and social responsibility pervades the novel, but it is the passionate and tragic love story of Anna Karenina, a married woman in high society, and Vronsky, a handsome army officer, for which it is most famous and enduring. After the publication, Tolstoy renounced all his earlier works. "I wrote everything into *Anna Karenina*," he later confessed, "and nothing was left over."

- Claudia Zelevansky, Associate Director, Dallas Theater Center

The Story of Anna Karenina

Oblonsky has had a stupid affair with his children's former French teacher and appeals to his sister, Anna Karenina, to try to patch things up between him and

his wife. Anna, who is grace, sweetness and integrity personified, manages to reconcile the couple. She herself is married to Karenin, an important government official in St. Petersburg, twenty years her senior, a dry, self-satisfied man and a slave to etiquette. At her brother's house she meets a swashbuckling officer, Count Vronsky, with whom Kitty, Mrs. Oblonsky's sister, is infatuated. Levin, a sober, introspective young man who is deeply in love with Kitty, goes off in despair to live on his estate when he sees that the girl has eyes for no one but the dashing soldier. Vronsky, however, pays scant attention to Kitty; it is Anna who attracts him. And she, despite her steadfast heart, cannot resist.

After the deed is done, she confesses to her husband. His first thought is to save appearances at all costs, and when his wife falls ill, he is even ready to forgive her. But she recovers and leaves the country with her lover. Then, when the novelty has worn off, her sufferings begin. Vronsky misses his military career, which he had to abandon to follow her. And she is miserable at having left her son in Karenin's care. She returns to see the boy in secret. Far from pacifying her, their meeting only sharpens her despair. She goes from disillusionment to disillusionment and in the end her life becomes intolerable and she throws herself under a train. Vronsky is consumed with remorse and enlists to fight the Turks.

In counterpoint to this dark, violent story, there is the light-flooded relationship of Kitty and Levin. After rejecting her suitor Kitty returns to him, won over by his integrity and strength. They marry, settle down in the country and enjoy the perfect happiness of simple souls, in accordance with Tolstoy's golden rule.

- http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/anna/ei_troyat.html

YBOR CITY

He who passes along Seventh Avenue or Fourteenth Street would not believe that he is in the United States, for such is the large number of Cubans that one meets and the many business establishments of all kinds that one sees in which all signs are only in Spanish.

- Carlos Trelles, 1897



A map showing the geographic relationship between Florida and Cuba

The history of Ybor City really begins in Cuba with a period of extreme social and political unrest. From 1868-1878, the Ten Years War was taking place in

Cuba, in which Cubans were fighting for their independence from the Spanish Colonial regime. Many separatist exiles fled Cuba, looking for a safe place to settle down, begin businesses and have families; although they remained very close to Cuba in heart and spirit. In 1885, a man named Vicente Martinez Ybor, purchased forty acres of land east of Tampa,



A cigar label celebrating Vicente Martinez Ybor

Florida. He went into the cigar business, as did other manufacturers; Ybor City was quickly the home to many hand rolled-cigar factories due to its proximity to Cuba and the availability of Cuban grown tobacco. Almost the entire population of Ybor City spoke Spanish, much to the consternation of the Anglo residents of Tampa. In 1887, Ybor City was annexed into Tampa so that the Anglo community could maintain political control over the immigrant population that was pouring into Ybor City.



Houses such as these were the homes to most cigar workers; they had neither electricity nor plumbing

The cigar industry in Tampa drew immigrants from Italy as well. Many of the Italians assimilated into the Cuban culture and learned to speak Spanish. Thousands of businesses such as retail shops, banks, shoe stores, barber-shops and pharmacies all sprouted up as a predominantly Latin community was formed. Along with the Cubans immigrants came their sympathies and

their concerns for the country they had left. Many of the Cuban cigar workers joined organizations committed to political independence from Spain. One such organization was called the Cuban Revolutionary Party (PRC). Many workers donated time and money to the cause of Cuban independence. When the war ended in 1898, many Cubans who lived in Florida felt conflicted; they did not know whether to return to the home they had so long ago fled, or remain where their life was currently. Conditions in Cuba and a lack of job opportunities convinced most exiles to stay in Florida permanently.

During the war in Cuba, Tampa cigar workers had deferred the need for striking on labor issues through a “patriotic injunction against strikes.” When the war ended, almost immediately workers began focusing their attention on working conditions. The corporations that had taken over most of the cigar producing factories were beginning to pay more attention to output and less to workers’ concerns. The relationship between corporations and workers was tentative at best and many



A meeting of striking cigar workers (1920)

strikes took place in order to try to resolve the conflicts. Workers in Cuba and in Florida, no longer cut off from each other because of war, could feel like a cohesive unit. By 1910, Tampa had a population of about 50,000 people: 14,000 of whom were Cubans, 7,500 of whom were Spaniards, and 1,500 of whom were Italians. Almost all of them depended on the cigar industry for employment in some way or another. At the time, “Tampa’s cigar industry encompassed 150 factories, representing an aggregate value of \$17 million, employing a labor force of 10,000 workers, generating an average weekly wage of \$200,000, and representing 75 percent of the city’s total pay-roll.”

During the 1930s, the **Great Depression** hit the United States, and as a result, there was a death sentence for Ybor City and the cigar industry that had flourished there. “Just as the growth of cigar manufacturing in Tampa had originally attracted Latin immigrants to Ybor City and West Tampa, so too the industry’s economic decline brought the breakup of these communities. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, demand for luxury handmade cigars plummeted as smokers turned to inexpensive cigars and cigarettes. Hard-hit manufacturers looked increasingly to cigar-making machines to cut

costs and reduce their workforces. Because one machine could replace from ten to twenty cigar makers, desperate workers fought valiantly against the spread of automation, but their rear-guard action did little more than slow the process, as Tampa factories went out of business, relocated, or automated. After the downturn of the 1930s, Tampa's production of cigars steadily increased through the 1950s, but the number of cigar workers declined as machines replaced them and flooded the market with cheap cigars. In 1929, 13,000 cigar workers produced over 500 million cigars in Tampa. This number dropped to less than 300 million in 1933, then rose to 700 million in 1955, when the local industry employed 5,500 people – only 2,500 of whom still practiced the old craft of making cigars by hand” (11-12).



A photographic detailing the destruction done during urban renewal of Ybor City

In the 1960s, Urban Renewal took place in Ybor City, which meant that “bulldozers destroyed over 600 buildings, displacing over a thousand families and leaving only a wasteland of deserted, weed-covered lots” (13). Ybor City still exists, but mainly people think of it with a nostalgic look back at the way life used to be.

- All excerpts from Tampa Cigar Workers by Robert P. Ingalls and Louis A. Pérez, Jr.

THE LECTOR The Tradition of the Lector

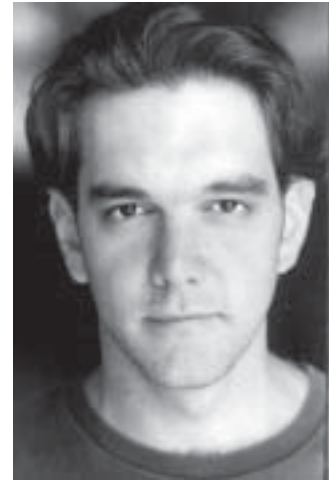
Part of the Cuban tradition of cigar rolling from about 1881-1929 involved the employment of the lectores. **Lectores** were well dressed men who had clear and loud voices who read to the workers while they rolled cigars. This was before the invention of microphones and loudspeaker systems, so the lector would sit on an elevated platform and read loudly enough for several hundred workers to hear and understand him. The rollers would pay the lector out of their own salary; the better the lector the more money people would be willing to pay him.



A lector reading (1930)

The day was divided into four sections in Cuban cigar rolling factories. The first part of the day, the lector would read from newspapers so the people would know about current events. The second section of the day the lector would read them news from the labor unions. The third and fourth parts of the day were dedicated to entertainment reading – and the lector (with the aid of the workers) would select great novels and literature from all over the world to read. Though most cigar rollers were illiterate, they knew and could quote works from great authors such as Shakespeare, Voltaire, Zola and Dumas. The lector provided accessibility to worlds otherwise unreachable to the workers.

When the Depression hit in the early 1930s, the first people in factories to lose their jobs were the lectores. When people were making little money, they could not afford to pay the lectores money that instead went to feeding and clothing their families. Also, the owners of the factories became increasingly disenchanted with the lectores, as they saw them as being the ones to encourage the workers' membership and participation in unions. "In November 1931, after thousands of cigar workers joined a union affiliated with the Communist party, manufacturers suddenly announced their decision to abolish the lectura: 'Heretofore the manufacturers have, through agreement with workers, permitted the reading of matters of general news value, educational or instructive, but the abuse of this privilege through the reading of anarchistic propaganda has caused the manufacturers



Actor Al Espinosa who plays Juan Julian (the lector) in ATC's Anna in the Tropics

to immediately withdraw the privilege of reading any matter whatsoever.'"

The tradition of the lectores ended completely with the introduction of machinery that replaced individual workers. The machines were so noisy that even the loudest lector would have been unable to compete. In 1931, thousands of cigar rollers went on strike, asking that the lectores be returned to the factories. Almost every business in Ybor City closed in support of the protest, but eventually the cigar workers went back to the factories without the lectores.

- All excerpts from Tampa Cigar Workers by Robert P. Ingalls and Louis A. Pérez, Jr.



Machines such as these were the end of the tradition of lectores in factories

The Power of the Spoken Word

In 1903 the *Tampa Tribune* told of a fascinating turn of events. Two cigar makers worked side by side in a factory for years and were fast friends. One was a Mexican, the other a Spaniard...

When the time came for the lector to announce his selection for the month's reading, the workers stopped their work to listen. He announced that he would be reading Emile Zola's *Germinal*.



Painting entitled Literary Disagreement by Ferdie Pacheco, 1995

The Mexican objected immediately. He would not have filth read to his wife, who would have to sit in mixed company and bear the obscenities of that French novel. (Zola's novels were known to go into the kind of graphic detail that should not be heard in public.)

The Spaniard disagreed. Why should the men be deprived of hearing the work of a great novelist because he described the acts that each adult there performed? The other married men present reacted violently, and an argument started which sputtered and flickered during the tense week.

"Tell the women to leave the room when the lector reads the Zola novel," the bachelors said with what they felt was reason.

"What, and miss an hour of work?" the married men answered.

The Spaniard and the Mexican had eaten supper together at the Fourth of July Café since they were bachelors, and they continued to do so after the Mexican took his bride. But on this night, both men appeared at the café in an agitated state, and both were armed. The argument at the factory reached a climax. Harsh words had been exchanged.

According to the *Tampa Tribune*, violence broke out as soon as the two men spotted each other. The Spaniard was armed with two revolvers, and the Mexican carried one six-shooter Colt.

When the smoke cleared, the Mexican lay on the floor with four holes in his chest. The Spaniard was down with one bullet in his.

- Ferdie Pacheco, *Pacheco's Art of Ybor City*, University Press of Florida, 1997.

MAGICAL REALISM

I prefer to exclude my work from the school of Magical Realism, because I always like to start from a raw, tangible reality and then have the characters of my plays transform their reality into something magical. I believe in the power of creativity and imagination, not in an existing magical reality.

– Nilo Cruz, *Out of the Fringe*

What is Magical Realism?

A literary mode rather than a distinguishable genre, **magical realism** aims to seize the paradox of the union of opposites. For instance, it challenges polar opposites like life and death and the pre-colonial past versus the post-industrial present. Magical realism is characterized by two conflicting perspectives, one based on a rational view of reality and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as prosaic reality. Magical realism differs from pure fantasy primarily because it is set in a normal, modern world with authentic descriptions of humans and society.



Cigar makers (1920s)

According to essayist Angel Flores, magical realism involves the fusion of the real and the fantastic, or as he claims, “an amalgamation of realism and fantasy.” The presence of the supernatural in magical realism is often connected to the primeval or “magical Indian mentality, which exists in conjunction with European rationality. According to Ray Verzasconi, as well as other critics, magical realism is “an expression of the New World reality which at once combines the rational elements of the European super-civilization, and the irrational elements of a primitive America.” Editor Gonzalez Echchevarria believes that magical realism offers a world view that is not based on natural or physical laws nor objective reality. However, the fictional world is not separated from reality either.

– <http://www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/Bahri/MagicalRealism.html>

Nilo Cruz and Magical Realism

Much to playwright Nilo Cruz’s consternation, his plays tend to be lumped into the category of **magical realism**. This categorization is not necessarily correct, but seems to have stuck in many critics’ minds. For example, *Night Train to*

Bolina and *Two Sisters and a Piano* exist very much in the real, sometimes harsh world. According to some critics, while the lives of the characters in these plays are not described as magical realism, there is an overriding sense of magical realism in the way the play flows. People often describe Cruz's work as "dreamlike." In ANNA IN THE TROPICS, the lector tells the workers that he is the "distant relative of the Cacique, the Chief Indian, who used to translate the sacred words of the deities. The workers are oidores. The ones who listen quietly, the same way the Taino Indians used to listen." The lector is describing himself as a supernatural connection with another world, though the majority of the play takes place in a more concrete world. This leads many critics to site parts of ANNA IN THE TROPICS as magical realism, including one Pulitzer Prize judge who claims, "Nilo blends a distinctively Latin sensibility—magical realism that reads like a dream—with realism, which has its feet on the ground."

ANNA IN THE TROPICS: The Southwest Premier of *Anna In The Tropics*

Winner of the 2003 Pulitzer Prize, ANNA IN THE TROPICS by Nilo Cruz marks the first time the prestigious prize was awarded to a Latino playwright. Mr. Cruz took time out of his busy writing schedule to give an exclusive interview to ATC's Playwright-in Residence, Elaine Romero.

Elaine Romero: First, I must say congratulations on winning the Pulitzer Prize. I'm curious how your life has changed since winning?

Nilo Cruz: I haven't been able to write in a year. It's been crazy. I haven't stopped. Between going to see various productions of ANNA and making public appearances where I've done readings of my work, I haven't had a moment to myself. Usually when I travel I can't write. It breaks my routine.

R: ANNA IN THE TROPICS is such a lovely play. I've seen the play previously as a reading and in production on Broadway, but there's something about sitting down and reading it. It's a purely sensual experience. How many productions are happening?



Elaine Romero, ATC's Playwright-in-Residence

C: I know my agent is dealing with a good dozen. Isn't it amazing? I am extremely grateful. This year, I won't have to teach and I can spend time concentrating on my work.

R: Can you talk about the genesis of the play and your development process?

C: The good thing about it is the play started through the Theatre Communications Group grant; part of it was for me to be in residence at New Theatre in Coral Gables. What was wonderful is that the theatre is close to the University of Miami. I was able to do an enormous amount of research there, using the Florida archives. I was writing about a subject matter I didn't know



Cigar label

anything about. I mean, I knew of the beautiful tradition of the “lectores” (a reader who read novels to the cigar workers as they rolled cigars) that was brought from Cuba to the United States. But I needed to immerse myself in that world of the 1920's in order to write the play. Another part of the grant was for me to travel to Tampa. But I found out that Ybor City had become a drinking place, so I thought it was better to travel there through my mind and imagine the place.



This advertisement shows four different cigar labels

Last year, the public library in Tampa chose ANNA IN THE TROPICS as the book of the month. This is a program that is called One Community, One-Book. Apparently ANNA was the play that the whole city was supposed to read. Imagine what an honor! The library flew me down to Ybor City and ...I read at this society club that was built by the cigar workers. A lot of their ancestors came to the reading. After

my presentation, I did a book signing. Some of the people who purchased the play came up to me and told me, “Thank you so much for writing about us. You told the story of my family. My father was a lector. My mother worked for the cigar industry.’ It was a beautiful experience. I was quite touched.

All of a sudden it seemed that my characters weren't just characters, they had actually existed. This whole experience in Tampa made the play so real for me. Especially when I visited the factory where I imagined my characters had worked. These are some of the gifts one gets from writing. It seems like plays grow and take on their life, their own dimensions.

R: What strikes me in the play is the poetic expressiveness of the characters. I'd love to hear your thoughts on poetic language for the stage. What does it take to pull it off successfully?

C: My plays tend to go into the poetic because that is something that I consciously search for in the writing. The landscape of the cigar industry allowed for the kind of lyricism you find in my script. The cigar workers were surrounded by literature. The fact that there was a person who read novels to the workers is quite poetic. But I believe that poetry has

to be rooted in the emotional life and reality of the characters. You can't just write poetry for poetry's sake. When I'm writing, it could be that at the beginning the writing becomes poetic and I let it be. Nevertheless, I always try to go further and explore the moment-to-moment emotional life of the characters and see if that kind of language has been earned. I always question why the characters are speaking this way. I look at their behavior, even the climate that surrounds them. Weather can have a big impact on us. A rainy day can make us feel melancholy. A sunny day can make a gloomy character rise out of his misery. Still, it's difficult to arrest the poetic in our modern world. Nowadays it seems as if lyricism is a bad word and the kind of language devoid of human emotion seems to be more fitted for the stage. It's the sort of postmodernist mentality that has invaded all the arts. But I'm not interested in fashion or postmodernism. As a matter of fact, I don't like labels. There are moments in which Shakespeare's characters speak pure poetry and others in which the language becomes prosaic. We all know that when the language becomes poetic the heart is speaking, and when the writing changes into prose the intellect is speaking. I am not afraid of letting my characters speak from the heart.

R: In the play, a group of factory workers are listening to a lector (professional reader) read Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Can you address the intersection of your work and classical works?



This cigar label indicates that the cigars were made with Cuban tobacco

C: The cigar workers of that time were familiar with world literature; the novels of Emile Zola and Victor Hugo had been read at the cigar factories. I thought it was appropriate to include Tolstoy's masterpiece, because it is full of romance and a lot of cigar brands were named after love stories. One of the things that I loved about this group of cigar workers in Tampa is that they embraced the written word. They wanted it to be so much a part of their lives that they used to pay out of their own pockets to have a lector read to them. They were the ones who hired the lector and not the owners of the factory. Well, I mean there are a lot of people who think that literature belongs to the upper class, the rich and those who are educated. Imagine, in this case some of these cigar workers were illiterate.

When I was doing research on ANNA, I discovered that my characters probably didn't have a penny to their names, but they were dreamers. Those dreams seemed to be limitless. It doesn't cost anything to dream and possibly make connections with a fictional character like Anna Karenina. Anna might come from a luxurious and upper class world, but human emotions are basic. The character of Conchita in my play identifies immediately with Anna Karenina when the novel is being read aloud by the lector. The fact that she can project her life onto this fictional world, offers her endless possibilities. And I believe that is the function of art. Art can offer alternative ways of seeing life or at least offer a little ray of light in the void.

R: You were born in Cuba and came here when you were nine. How has Cuba shaped your work?

C: You know I wrote a play about Lorca that takes place in the south of Spain, *Lorca in a Green Dress*, and I also wrote a play about children in the midst of guerilla warfare in Latin America. My plays usually have to do with Latino characters. It's the world that I know best. Spanish is my first language. I pretty much think in Spanish. If you pay attention to how I speak, to how I construct sentences, it's very Spanish. I think I should stick to writing Latino characters. I am interested in the Americas more than anything because I think we need to document our people through the work. You should write about what you know. You always have to go into the personal. Even if you are writing about a killer, you have to find the killer in you.

R: Are you working on anything right now? What's next?

C: Oh my God, you know I'm sort of working on a play that has to do with a hurricane...how this hurricane displaces people: not only physically, but, also, emotionally and spiritually. I'm exploring that territory. I'm sort of intrigued. If you grow up in the Caribbean, you grow up with hurricanes all the time. I've always wanted to write about a hurricane, and finally, the time is right for it.

RELATED ASSIGNMENTS FOR POST PERFORMANCE

Based on the Language Arts State Standards

- ▶ Write a summary of ANNA IN THE TROPICS that presents information clearly and accurately and contains the most significant details.
- ▶ Write a personal letter to Nilo Cruz (the playwright of ANNA IN THE TROPICS), sharing with him your response to his play.
- ▶ Pretend you have just directed ANNA IN THE TROPICS. Write a business memo to the cast regarding something you saw done onstage during the opening night performance. This memo will be posted for the actors to see prior to their next performance.
- ▶ Write a persuasive essay arguing either for or against ANNA IN THE TROPICS belonging to the genre of magical realism.
- ▶ Write an expository essay in which you compare/contrast the characters and themes in ANNA IN THE TROPICS to the characters and themes in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.
- ▶ Pretend you are looking for work as a lector. Create a resume that you plan to give to possible future employers. What qualities do you think a great lector should possess?

Based on the Theatre Arts State Standards

- ▶ In groups of four, read the script of ANNA IN THE TROPICS. Then, research the historical context of the script, including pertinent cultural, social, and political conditions (You may also wish to research and explain different theatrical approaches to themes in ANNA IN THE TROPICS). Use this research as a basis for your own interpretation and design of ANNA IN THE TROPICS. Present your interpretations and designs to the class and make comparisons between your work and your classmates' work. After you see ATC's production, discuss the artistic choices that were made and compare these to your class' projects. You may wish to suggest and justify alternative artistic choices (such as your own) and predict their effects on the production.
- ▶ Playwright Nilo Cruz wrote ANNA IN THE TROPICS about a Cuban cultural experience. After discussing the cultural experiences of the characters in ANNA IN THE TROPICS, identify your own cultural experiences. Use your findings to draft a play concept that deals with these cultural experiences. (Teachers: Students could use these concepts as a springboard for their own original plays)
- ▶ Form five separate groups (the number of students in each group will vary depending on your class size). Based on what you have learned about production in your theatre class thus far, each group should evaluate an artistic choice made in ANNA IN THE TROPICS. There will only be one topic per group (dialogue, setting, lighting, costuming, acting style). Prepare a presentation in which you will share your

topic's evaluation of ANNA IN THE TROPICS with the rest of your classmates. Be prepared to solicit questions from your classmates and defend your evaluation of artistic choices.

► Prior to seeing ANNA IN THE TROPICS, develop your own personal criteria for artistic analysis and evaluation of script, acting, design, and direction. Share these criteria with your classmates and make amendments as you feel needed. After seeing the performance, use your personally developed criteria to evaluate the overall quality of ANNA IN THE TROPICS. Share these evaluations with your classmates and discuss similarities and differences.