

A NOISE WITHIN'S THEATRE SEASON

AUDIENCE **GUIDE**



# ANNA IN THE TROPICS

By **NILO CRUZ**

Directed by **JONATHAN MUÑOZ-PROULX**

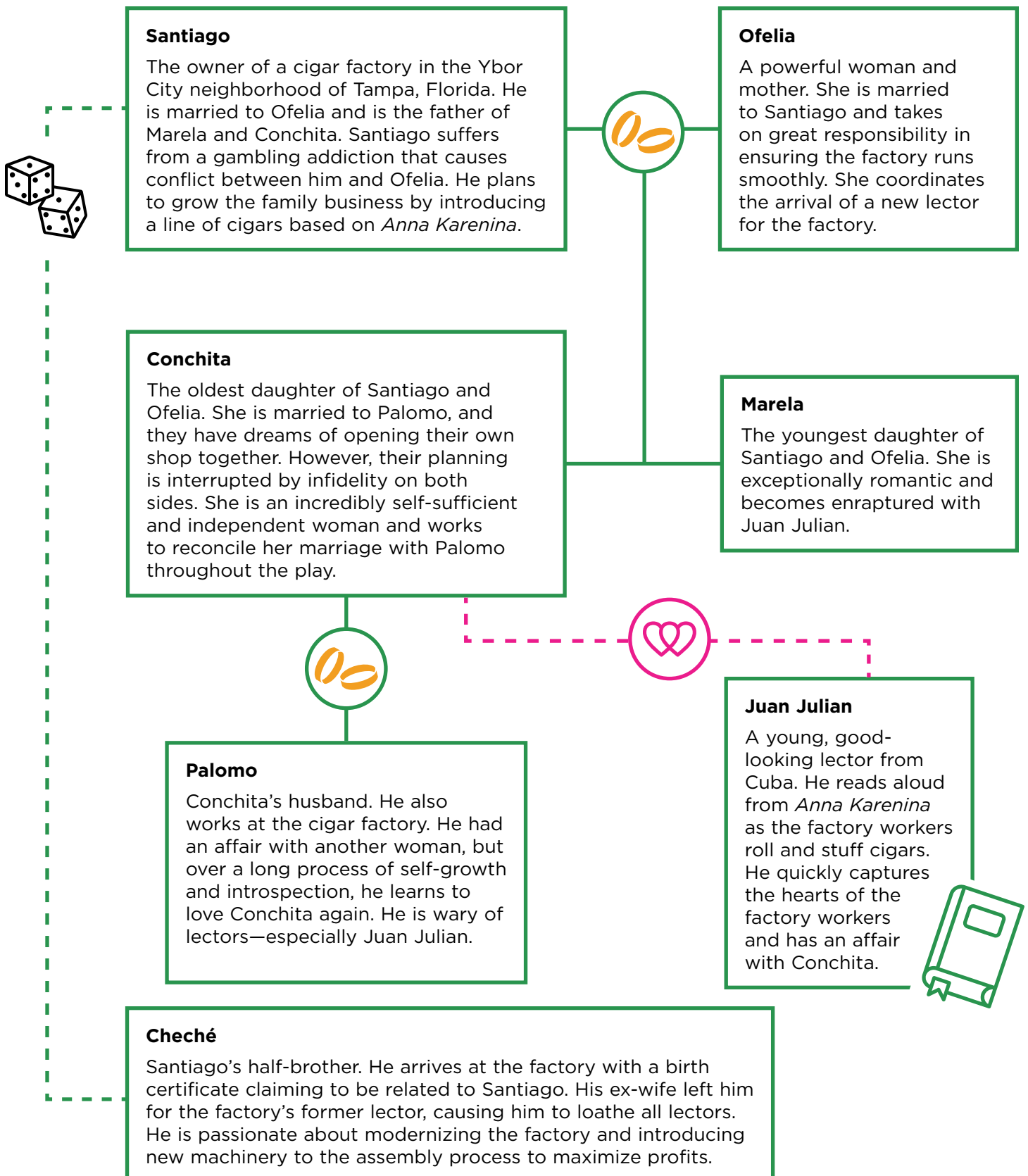
**MARCH 20 - APRIL 17, 2022**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Character Map .....	3
Synopsis .....	4
About the Playwright: Nilo Cruz.....	6
About the Author of <i>Anna Karenina</i> : Leo Tolstoy.....	7
Timeline of the History of <i>Anna Karenina</i> and Cigar Factories .....	8
Tampa in 1929: The Historical Context of <i>Anna in the Tropics</i> .....	9
Cuban Cigar Factory History .....	11
The Role of Lectors in Cuban Cigar Factories.....	13
<i>Anna Karenina</i> Characters and Plot.....	14
Themes.....	16
Swept Up in the Smoke: The Role of Escapism in <i>Anna in the Tropics</i> .....	18
Interview with the Director: Jonathan Muñoz-Proulx .....	19
Additional Resources .....	20

## CHARACTER MAP *ANNA IN THE TROPICS*



## SYNOPSIS

**It is 1929 in Tampa, Florida.** Santiago, the owner of a cigar factory in Tampa's Ybor City neighborhood, and his half-brother, Cheché, are betting on the outcomes of a cockfight. Santiago hits an unlucky streak and loses all of the money he brought to the fight. Interested in placing more bets, Santiago implores Cheché to lend him some cash—Santiago even promises to give Cheché more shares of the cigar factory as collateral for the loan. While Santiago and Cheché continue to gamble, Ofelia, Santiago's wife, and their two daughters, Conchita and Marela, are at the harbor, anxiously waiting to greet Juan Julian, the new lector for the factory. Not everyone who works at the factory is on board with the idea of bringing in another lector. Cheché, particularly, is adamantly against the idea—his wife ran away with the factory's most recent lector, and he has been wary of lectors and the love stories they read ever since. Nevertheless, Ofelia decided to hire Juan Julian, a lector from Cuba, without informing Santiago or Cheché.

The following morning, Juan Julian arrives at the factory for his first day of work with a copy of Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Santiago has not shown up to work. Cheché tells Ofelia about his bet with Santiago at the cockfight. Cheché now wants to either collect the money he is owed or be given more shares of the factory. Ofelia tells Cheché that he needs to work that deal out with Santiago—she is staying out of the ordeal.

As the factory workers roll and stuff cigars, Juan Julian strolls around the factory floor while reading aloud from *Anna Karenina*. The factory workers are enthralled with the story. As the workday ends, Conchita and her husband, Palomo, continue to roll cigars. They are saving up to start a small business of their own and often stay late at the factory to earn some extra money. Conchita tells Palomo that *Anna Karenina* reminds her of what is happening in her life. However, she identifies more with the husband character (Alexei Karenin) rather than with Anna because Palomo is the one who has a secret love. Since Palomo has been unfaithful to her, Conchita concludes that it is only fair that she be allowed to be unfaithful to Palomo.

After work, in their home above the factory, Ofelia is upset with Santiago about the bet. Ofelia fears that Cheché will have enough power to start replacing workers with machines. Santiago concedes that he needs to stop drinking and gambling and assures



Ybor cigar rollers with lector on elevated chair background right, c. 1920, Ybor City, FL, Unknown Photographer

Ofelia that he will find the money to repay Cheché so that Cheché does not get access to more shares of the factory. While Santiago has been away from work, he has been up in their room over the factory floor listening to Juan Julian read *Anna Karenina* and enjoying the story.

Some time passes, and Santiago has not paid Cheché back yet, so Cheché purchases a machine for the factory against the wishes of every factory worker. Cheché advocates for the machine in the name of modernity and advancement. He believes that the factory's biggest problem is that it has not kept up with the times—they still roll cigars the same way they did fifty years ago. Amid the commotion Cheché's new machine has caused among the factory workers, Santiago appears with an exciting announcement: the factory will create a new cigar brand called *Anna Karenina* inspired by Juan Julian's reading of Tolstoy's novel. Marela will be the model for the cigar box label—Santiago has already purchased a costume for her to wear when she models and instructs her to try it on. In the excitement over the news, Santiago pays Cheché back the cash he borrowed and instructs Cheché to return the machine. Marela returns dressed as Anna in a long coat, and everyone is thrilled with how she looks. As the workers leave, Marela begins to decorate her workstation with magazine cutouts of Hollywood stars and street scenes of Moscow. Cheché stays behind tries to kiss Marela, but she protests and pushes him to the floor.



## SYNOPSIS CONTINUED...

After some time, Palomo presses Conchita for details about her affair with Juan Julian. He has noticed that Conchita has changed since they agreed that they both could have affairs. Despite their marital trouble, and although Palomo had an affair first, he reconfirms his love for Conchita, and the two reconnect with each other.

As the new *Anna Karenina*-inspired cigar brand makes its debut, the workers get ready for a party. For a moment, Juan Julian and Marela (dressed as Anna) are alone in the factory. Juan Julian lends Marela his copy of *Anna Karenina* before he leaves for the night. Once Marela is alone and reading the book, Cheché, who secretly watched Marela's interaction with Juan Julian, steps out into the open.

The day after the new cigar's debut, Cheché does not come into work. Marela arrives to work late, wearing a long coat and goes straight to work rolling cigars without speaking a word. Everyone notices that she seems a little out of sorts but gives her a little space. As Juan Julian begins to read from *Anna Karenina*, Cheché enters, unnoticed and carrying a gun. He shoots Juan Julian twice and kills him.

Three days later, the factory workers are rolling cigars, and Marela is still wearing the coat. Ofelia cannot stand the silence in the room and implores someone to read something. The group decides to continue to read *Anna Karenina* in Juan Julian's honor, and Palomo volunteers to be the reader. ♦

## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT: NILO CRUZ

**Nilo Cruz** was born to Tina and Nilo Cruz, Sr. in Cuba in 1960. During Cruz's early childhood, his father, a staunch opponent of Cuba's communist government, was imprisoned for trying to flee the country. When Cruz was 9 years old, his father was released from prison, and his family immigrated to the United States, where they lived in the Little Havana neighborhood of Miami, Florida. Cruz began to express an interest in theater in the early 1980s and started to explore acting and directing. After studying theater at Miami Dade College, Cruz moved to New York City, where he met Maria Irene Fornès, a prolific Cuban-American playwright and director known for her experimental, poetic, and avant-garde works. Cruz directed Fornès's play, *Mud*, in 1988, and after the production, Fornès invited Cruz to join her Intar Hispanics Playwright Laboratory; it was there that Cruz began writing plays in earnest. Fornès introduced Cruz to Paula Vogel, another prolific American playwright who was teaching at Brown University at the time. Cruz went on to attend Brown University, where he earned an MFA in 1994.

In 2001, Cruz returned to Florida, where he served as the playwright-in-residence for the New Theatre in Coral Gables, which commissioned Cruz to write *Anna in the Tropics*. Cruz finished the *Anna in the Tropics* script in 2002, and the work was a great success. In 2003, *Anna in the Tropics* became the first Latinx play to earn the Pulitzer Prize in Drama. After learning that he had won the award, Cruz said:

"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."

After the Pulitzer Prize win, *Anna in the Tropics* opened on Broadway in 2004, where it was nominated for the Tony Award® for Best New Play.

Cruz's plays such as *A Park in Our House* (a semi-autobiographical work), *A Bicycle Country*, and *Two Sisters and a Piano* have been consistently lauded for their poetic language. Christine Dolen, a theater critic for the *Miami Herald*, described Cruz's language: "The words of Nilo Cruz waft from a stage



Photograph of Playwright Nilo Cruz, 11 June 2016, Matt Pilsner.

like a scented breeze. They sparkle and prick and swirl, enveloping those who listen in both a specific place and time—and in timeless passions that touch us all." In addition to their poetic lyricism, Cruz's works are steeped in Cuban-American heritage. His plays are "imagistic dramatic poems," wrote John Williams of *American Theatre*, "rich in myth, symbol and metaphor." While Cruz's works tend to revolve around tensions between differing political, social, business, and moral ideologies, Cruz sees his plays as about individuals in relation to their community. Cruz described this in an interview with *The New York Times*: "Ultimately my plays are about being an individual. Belonging to a particular group, left or right, entails a political loss. When you embrace your whole being and all that you can be in this world, that's the strongest position."

Beyond writing plays, Cruz has taught drama at many universities, including Brown, Yale, and the University of Iowa. ♦

Edited from:

<https://faulknersociety.org/nilo-cruz/>

and <https://www.notablebiographies.com/newsmakers2/2004-A-Di/Cruz-Nilo.html>

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF *ANNA KARENINA*: **LEO TOLSTOY**

**Leo Tolstoy** was born on September 9, 1828, at his family's estate, Yasnaya Polyana, south of Moscow, Russia. He was the youngest of four boys born to Nikolay Tolstoy and Mariya Tolstaya. Tolstoy experienced tremendous loss during his early childhood. After Tolstoy's mother died in 1830, his father's cousin began to take care of Leo and his brothers. Tolstoy's father, Nikolay, passed away in 1837, and the children moved in with an aunt, who became their legal guardian. When that aunt died, Leo and his brothers went to live with another aunt in Kazan, Russia.

Tolstoy received his primary education from French and German tutors at home. In 1843, he enrolled at the University of Kazan to study Oriental Languages. However, Tolstoy did not excel in that area of study. After two years of receiving low grades, Tolstoy switched to studying law. More interested in social life than academia, Tolstoy left university in 1847 without a degree.

He then returned to his family's estate, Yasnaya Polyana, where he set out to be a farmer. While he learned that he was not quite cut out for farming—he spent too much time socializing in Tula and Moscow—Tolstoy began to keep a detailed and honest journal of his experiences and thoughts during this time. Journaling became a practice that he maintained until his death. Tolstoy's journal entries later provided a lot of material for his fiction writing.

In 1848, while Tolstoy struggled to maintain his farm, his elder brother, Nikolay, visited Leo while he was on military leave. During his visit, Nikolay convinced Tolstoy to join the army. When Nikolay's leave was up, the two traveled to a military post in the Caucasus Mountains, and Leo officially enlisted as a junker (also known as a gentleman-volunteer). During the long lulls at the outpost where Tolstoy was stationed, he began to write. In 1852, he sent his first work, an autobiographical story called *Childhood*, to *The Contemporary*, the leading Russian journal of the time. *The Contemporary* eagerly accepted the story—it became Tolstoy's first published work and was incredibly popular with *The Contemporary*'s readers.

Tolstoy continued to write while posted in the Caucasus mountains and garnered great literary renown with readers back in Russia. Tolstoy left the army in 1856 after the conclusion of the Crimean war and returned to Russia, where he received a warm welcome into high society and the literary scene.

In 1862, Tolstoy married Sofya Andreyevna Bers. The early years of this marriage were notably happy, and in 1863, Sofya gave birth to the first of their thirteen children.

From 1865 to 1869,

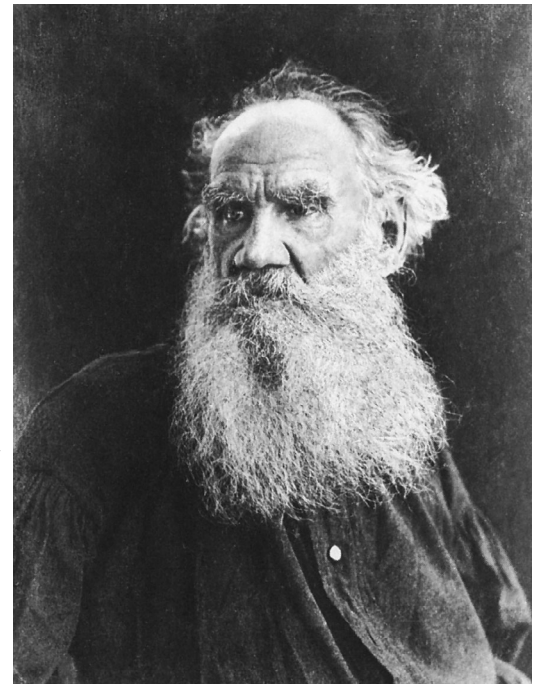
Tolstoy worked on his first masterwork, *War and Peace*. When crafting this work, he drew heavily from people he had met throughout his life as inspiration for characters. Tolstoy worked on his second masterwork, *Anna Karenina*, from 1873 to 1877. Both *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* were incredibly popular and critically renowned. The royalties Tolstoy began to receive for his works made him extremely rich.

With greater wealth came greater familial tensions. Tolstoy wanted to give his wealth away, and Sofya did not. What is more, Russia's secret police began to watch Tolstoy; they were weary of Tolstoy's ideas about non-violent resistance against oppressive social structures. Ultimately, Tolstoy struck a strained compromise with Sofya and signed over the copyrights of all his works to her by 1881.

Tolstoy struggled to reconcile his ethical and political beliefs with his worldwide renown and familial tension in his final years. In October 1910, Tolstoy set out on a religious pilgrimage with his youngest daughter, Alexandra, and his doctor. However, the trip proved to be too much for him at his age. Tolstoy died on November 9, 1910, at a small depot in Astapovo, Russia. Tolstoy is buried at his family's estate, Yasnaya Polyana. ♦

Edited from:

<https://www.biography.com/scholar/leo-tolstoy> and <https://www.notablebiographies.com/St-Tr/Tolstoy-Leo.html>



Leo Tolstoy author of *Anna Karenina*, c. 1900, Unknown Photographer.

# TIMELINE OF THE HISTORY OF **ANNA KARENINA AND CIGAR FACTORIES**

## 2000-3000 B.C.E.:

Tobacco starts being used in Cuba by the Taíno people. It's initially cultivated for medicinal and religious purposes and then begins being grown for more widespread use.

- 1492** Christopher Columbus “discovers” indigenous tobacco in Cuba and brings it back to Spain. Spain begins to colonize Cuba.
- 1511** Spain takes control over Cuba.
- 1542** Spain establishes the first cigar factory in Cuba.
- 1717** Spain imposes the Tobacco Monopoly over tobacco and cigar production in Cuba. This monopoly restricted tobacco trade, forcing all tobacco products to be traded through Spanish-owned ports.
- 1797** Francisco Cabañas opens *Cabañas*, the first independent cigar brand established in Cuba.
- 1817** The Tobacco Monopoly ends, and there is a boom in cigar production and sales.
- 1828** Tolstoy is born as Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy on September 9 at his family's estate. He is the youngest of Nikolay Tolstoy and Mariya Tolstaya's four children.
- 1831** Entrepreneur W.H. Hall establishes a cigar factory in Key West Florida. Key West's climate and proximity to Cuban tobacco fields make it an ideal location for the factory.
- 1843** Tolstoy enrolls at the University of Kazan to study Oriental languages.
- 1847** Tolstoy leaves the University of Kazan without a degree and returns to his family's estate to try his hand at farming. Tolstoy begins to keep a detailed diary during this time, a practice he maintained until his death.
- 1848** Tolstoy enlists in the army and is stationed at an outpost in the Caucasus Mountains. He begins to write in earnest.
- 1865** The role of a lector in a cigar factory is established at a factory in Havana, Cuba, and the tradition of reading aloud as factory workers roll and stuff cigars begins.
- 1868** Cuba's war for independence from Spain (The Ten Years' War) begins. This same year, Cuban cigar workers began to immigrate to Key West, Florida, and New York to set up factories out of the way of war.

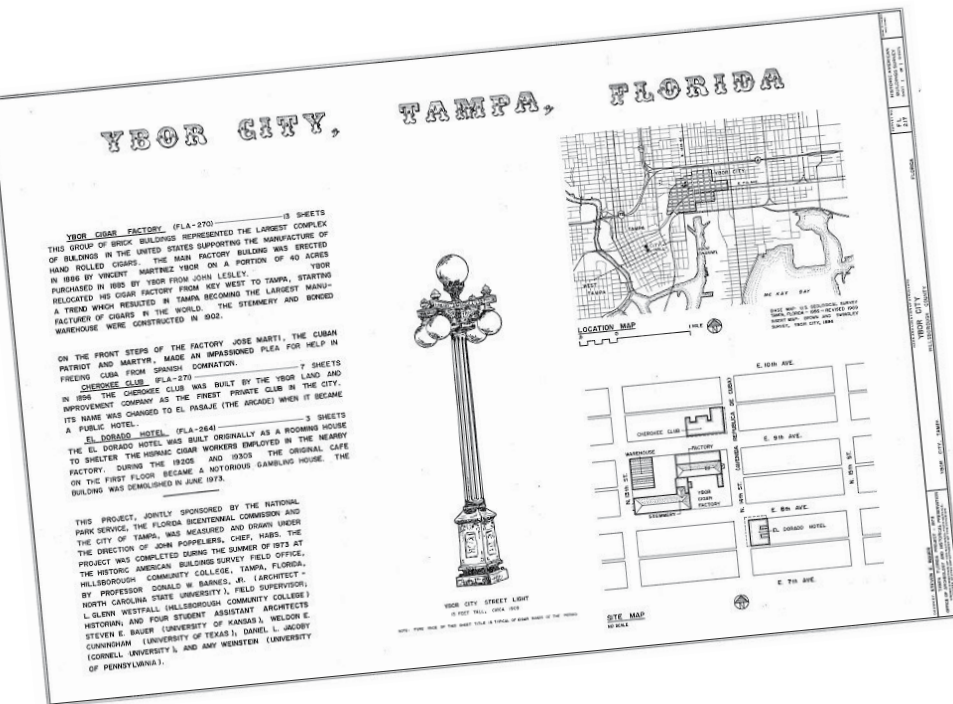
## 1873-77

Tolstoy writes *Anna Karenina*. The story is loosely based on an actual event that happened near Tolstoy's estate where a nobleman's wife threw herself on train tracks.

- 1875** Cuban cigar brand, *Romeo y Julieta*, is established.
- 1877** *Anna Karenina* is published. It becomes a popular sensation and receives great critical acclaim.
- 1885** Spanish entrepreneur Vincente Martínez Ybor transplants his cigar factory from Key West to Tampa and establishes what becomes Tampa's Ybor City neighborhood. Lectors begin to travel from Key West and Cuba to Ybor City to read in factories there.
- 1903** Cuba becomes an independent nation.
- 1920** Cigar-making machines are first introduced in Cuba. They begin to make their way to factories in the United States. The introduction of machines prohibited workers from being able to hear a lector's stories fully. Because of this, lectors start being removed from factories.
- 1931** Lectors in Tampa begin to be seen as a threat to factory owners because of the labor news they would read to workers. As a result, lectors are removed from most cigar factories in the United States.
- 1935** Greta Garbo stars in a film adaptation of *Anna Karenina*, directed by Clarence Brown.
- 1960** Nilo Cruz is born in Cuba.
- 1970** Cruz and his family are allowed to flee Cuba. They immigrate to the United States and settle in the Little Havana neighborhood of Miami, Florida.
- 1978** Scottish composer, Iain Hamilton, composes and writes the libretto for an operatic adaptation of *Anna Karenina*.
- 2002** Cruz writes *Anna in the Tropics* as a commission while working as the playwright-in-residence at the New Theatre in Coral Gables, Florida.
- 2003** Cruz wins the Pulitzer Prize in Drama for *Anna in the Tropics*.
- 2004** *Anna in the Tropics* opens on Broadway.
- 2012** The film adaptation of *Anna Karenina*, directed by Joe Wright, is released. It stars Keira Knightly and Jude Law.



# TAMPA IN 1929: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ANNA IN THE TROPICS



(LEFT) Ybor City Historic District, Bounded by Fourteenth Avenue South, Fifteenth Avenue North, Twenty-first Street East & Fourteenth Street West, Tampa, Hillsborough County, FL National Register of Historic Places NRIS Number: 74000641

(ABOVE) Cuban revolutionary José Martí with Ybor City cigar workers in 1893 University of South Florida Historical Photography Collections, Public Domain

## TAMPA HISTORY

Situated on a protected yet accessible bay, Tampa, Florida has played an integral role in shipping, trade, cigar production, and military strategy throughout American history.

Originally the traditional homeland and territory of groups such as the Tocobaga, Mocoso, and Calusa Peoples, the Tampa area was home to Indigenous tribes and nations for thousands of years before European settlers arrived. In 1513, Spanish explorer Ponce de León arrived in the Tampa Bay area and began to establish a settlement. By 1700, many of the Indigenous populations in the area had been greatly decimated in the wake of violent colonial raids perpetrated by Europeans and as a result of diseases for which they had no immunity. In 1821, Spain ceded Florida as a territory to the United States, and in 1842, the first American settlers began to arrive in the Tampa area. That same year, the United States Army established Fort Brooke in Tampa to protect the region's strategic bay. Florida gained statehood status shortly after, in 1845.

Throughout the 1850s, Tampa experienced an economic boom, and the city began to grow. Shipbuilding and shipping became staple industries for the town, and lucrative trade relations with Cuba brought cattle to the area. However, in the late 1860s, Tampa, like many southern cities, suffered from an economic downturn in the wake of the Civil War.

Tampa underwent an economic and cultural renaissance in the 1880s when entrepreneur Henry Bradley Plant established a railroad line linking Tampa to Jacksonville and Key West. This railway allowed new settlers to stream into Tampa in search of new business opportunities. One of the new settlers was Cuban cigar manufacturer Vincente Martínez Ybor, who traveled from Key West to Tampa to establish a cigar factory. Soon, cigars became Tampa's most significant industry.

## TAMPA IN THE 1920s

The Roaring '20s in the United States were a period of dramatic social and political change. For the first time in the country's history, more Americans lived in cities than on farms. The nation's overall wealth doubled from 1920 to 1929. As many Americans found themselves with extra money to spend, the country began to shift more toward a consumer society—that is, a society where buying and selling goods and services is at the heart of all social and economic activity. Advances in radio and film technology created new methods of mass communication and advertisement. Chain stores began to emerge, and people across the country became able to buy the same readymade clothing and appliances. Prohibition, which banned the production and sale of alcohol, was in full effect. Anti-immigration rhetoric spread throughout the country and led to the passing of the National Origins Act in 1924—a restrictive and racist law that

## TAMPA IN 1929: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF *ANNA IN THE TROPICS* CONTINUED...



Postcard courtesy of the Matheson History Museum collection.

established immigration quotas that excluded some groups from immigrating to the country in favor of others.

In Tampa, the invention of affordable and accessible automobile models like the Model-T was responsible for an influx of new residents from 1923-26. This population increase led to a building boom—Tampa expanded upward and outward to subdivisions accommodate the new residents. Like with the rest of the country, the speed of life in Tampa shifted during the 1920s. That is, people became increasingly interested in convenience and modernity.

Throughout the 1920s, Tampa's cigar industry continued to play a prominent role in the city's economy. However, new technology began to change the way factories produced cigars—machines started to replace workers.

When the stock market crashed in 1929, Tampa, like the rest of the country, suffered severe



Tampa Florida, Ybor City, Ybor Square Historic Taken circa 1996, photographer unknown.

economic setbacks that lasted throughout the Great Depression in the 1930s. Tampa's cigar industry particularly suffered. The demand for cigars decreased dramatically, and the city's factories never fully recovered.

*Anna in the Tropics* is set in Tampa in 1929 before the stock market crash, on the precipice of the Great Depression. In the play, we see characters struggle to reconcile tried-and-true business practices with modern ones, old-fashioned relationships with freedom and exploration, and classic stories with contemporary events. The friction between the past and the present creates an underlying tension throughout the play. ♦

Edited from:

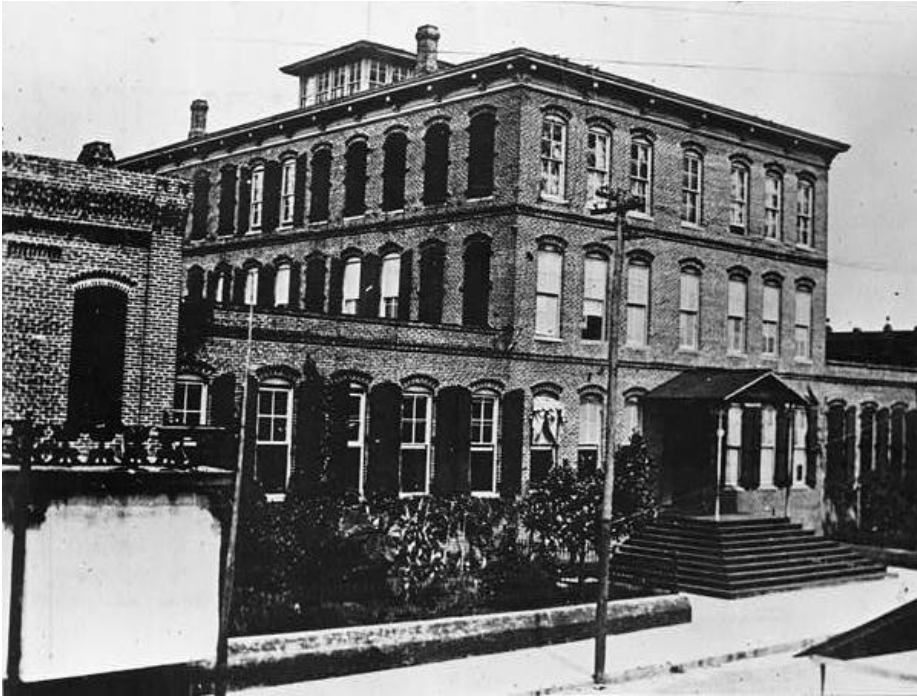
<https://www.history.com/topics/roaring-twenties/roaring-twenties-history>

<https://www.tampa.gov/info/tampa-history>

<https://www.city-data.com/us-cities/The-South/Tampa-History.html>



## CUBAN CIGAR FACTORY HISTORY



Vicente Martínez Ybor's First Cigar Factory, c. 1902, 1916 North Fourteenth Street, Ybor City, Tampa, Hillsborough County, Florida, Unknown Photographer

### HISTORY OF CUBAN CIGARS

For centuries before Europeans arrived in Cuba, the Indigenous Taíno Peoples harvested and smoked tobacco. For the Taíno Peoples, tobacco leaves were sacred and were smoked ceremoniously. They used tobacco as a conduit to communicate with their ancestors and the gods.

When Spanish colonizers began to explore the island in 1492, they began to smoke tobacco as well. Colonizers brought early forms of cigars back to Spain, and the idea of smoking tobacco began to spread throughout Europe and eventually the rest of the world. In 1511, Spain began its conquest of Cuba, and by 1542, smoking tobacco had become so popular that Spanish settlers established the first cigar factory in Cuba.

In an effort to further capitalize on Cuban-grown tobacco, King Felipe V enacted a royal monopoly on the island's tobacco production in 1717. This was known as the Tobacco Monopoly, and it made it illegal for Cuban tobacco producers to distribute tobacco leaves or seeds to any non-Spanish business or colony. Essentially, this monopoly funneled the significant profits from tobacco products directly to the Spanish crown.

One hundred years later, in 1817, King Ferdinand VII ended the Tobacco Monopoly and allowed for the free trade of Cuban tobacco to the rest of the world.

The end of the monopoly caused a boom in cigar production and marked the start of the modern Cuban cigar industry.

### CUBAN CIGAR FACTORY HISTORY

Before Spain began to establish cigar factories in Cuba, tobacco leaves were shipped from Cuba to Spain, where they were then rolled into cigars. This was still the dominant practice for over two hundred years after Spain established the first cigar factory in Cuba in 1542. It was not until the early 1800s when Spanish traders realized that rolling cigars before shipping them worldwide allowed them to last longer. After this discovery, factories began to pop up in Cuba in earnest. By the year 1859, over 1,300 cigar factories existed in Havana.

Throughout the mid-to-late 1800s, entrepreneurs began to establish cigar factories in the United States. Key West, Florida, was one of the first American territories to house a Cuban-inspired cigar factory. Key West's temperate climate and proximity to Cuba made it an ideal location for cigar factories. When Cuba started its fight for independence from Spain in the Ten Years' War (1868-1878), many Cuban cigar workers began to immigrate to Key West and later Tampa to continue their work out of the way of the war.

After establishing a cigar factory in Key West, former Cuban revolutionary Vicente Martínez

## CUBAN CIGAR FACTORY HISTORY CONTINUED...

Ybor set his sights on Tampa. In 1885, he moved to the Tampa Bay area and opened a cigar factory there to much success. Many cigar entrepreneurs followed in Ybor's footsteps and set up their own operations in Tampa as well. Soon, cigar production became Tampa's largest and most lucrative industry. As railroad lines began to connect Tampa to other cities in the United States, people began to move to the city specifically to work in the cigar industry. Ybor's influence on Tampa was profound, and a neighborhood in the city where many cigar factories were established was named Ybor City after him. The Ybor City neighborhood is home to Santiago's factory in *Anna in the Tropics*.

Historians believe the cigar industry in Ybor City reached its zenith in 1920. As the pace of American life began to change, cigarettes began to outsell cigars as the most popular way to smoke tobacco. Additionally, factories struggled with the decision to incorporate machinery into their production process. Factory workers were hesitant to do away with the traditional hand-rolling method of cigar production—especially since mechanical cigar presses meant that factories did not need as many workers. Workers staged large strikes in an attempt to advocate for their rights. However, the strikes were not successful. In fact, the strikes encouraged many factory owners to replace the workers with mechanical cigar presses as worker unions ran out of funds needed to continue their support of the strikes. The strikes also encouraged skilled workers to seek jobs outside of Tampa, which ultimately sparked the cigar industry's decline over the following decades.

Today, in Ybor City, a handful of cigar factories continue to operate—some still even utilizing the traditional hand-rolling technique. ♦

Edited from:

<https://locallysourcedcuba.com/history-of-cuban-cigars/>

and <https://www.havanahouse.co.uk/fascinating-history-behind-cubas-cigar-industry/>

<https://tampamagazines.com/100-years-of-tampa-history/>



A worker selecting tobacco leaves to be wrappers, Early 20th Century, Unknown photographer.



## THE ROLE OF LECTORS IN CUBAN CIGAR FACTORIES

**Until the 1920s**, Cuban cigars both in Cuban and American cigar factories were hand-rolled. As workers rolled and stuffed cigars, it was common for a lector to read newspaper articles and novels aloud on the factory floor. The factory workers hired lectors—rather than factory owners—to entertain and inform them as they performed the monotonous task of hand-rolling hundreds of cigars each day. The material that the lectors read was chosen democratically—the workers would vote for what stories they wanted to hear. In addition to entertaining the factory workers, lectors would offer daily lessons in history, politics, and current events.

Reading aloud in cigar factories occurred for the first time in 1865 at a factory in Havana. Historian Araceli Tinajero describes early lectors in his work, *El Lector: The History of the Cigar Factory Reader*:

“The first *lectores* were cigar workers who took turns reading aloud every half hour, and their coworkers compensated them for the time lost from their jobs.”

Reading aloud was a huge success, and the role of lector began to appear in factories all across Havana. When Cuban cigar workers began to immigrate to Key West and Tampa in the late 1800s, they brought the tradition of the lector with them.

Even as technology progressed and radios became widely available in the 1920s, cigar factory workers overwhelmingly opted to continue to listen to lectors rather than listen to the radio.

As educators and entertainers, lectors also became crucial to the spread of information that led workers in Cuba and the United States to seek out labor reform. Through their texts and lessons, lectors introduced workers across factories to radical political ideas and the prospect of a worker rebellion. Their readings encouraged labor radicalism and unionization. Historian George Pozetta describes this facet of the lectors' role in cigar factories:

“The readers in the role of the educator, disseminated ideas to the cigar workers. The lector became a lightning rod for an increasingly militant labor movement...in other words, the reader lights the candle.”



Ybor City Cigar Factory Series Sanchez & Haya 14th Ave and 17th Street, Tampa.

The social and political education that lectors offered cigar factory workers created an increasingly self-aware workforce.

Because they often introduced radical, pro-unionization information to factory workers, lectors were not always looked upon favorably by factory owners. In fact, in times of great political tension in Cuba and the United States, factories went through phases of banning and reinstating the role of the lector. However, the workers chose the material that the lector read—not the lector, necessarily. The workers' education from lectors coupled with the rise of socialist and communist ideologies in the early 1900s prompted workers to choose increasingly provocative reading material. This, in turn, sparked a wave of cigar factory worker strikes. Nevertheless, lectors became a focal point in two major cigar factory worker strikes—one in 1920 and one in 1931. Lectors are often credited as instigating these two strikes.

After the 1931 strike, the lectors began to be removed from cigar factories altogether. ♦

Edited from:

<https://tampahistorical.org/items/show/123>

Tinajero, Araceli. *El Lector: A History of the Cigar Factory Reader*. University of Texas Press, 2011.

## ANNA KARENINA CHARACTERS AND PLOT

As a new lector in Santiago's factory, Juan Julian decides to read aloud from *Anna Karenina* as the workers hand-roll cigars in *Anna in the Tropics*.

*Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy was initially published in serial installments between 1875 and 1877 in the periodical *The Russian Messenger*. As the installments were published, it was a hit among readers and critics alike, and today, it is considered one of the world's greatest works of literature.

### Anna Karenina KEY CHARACTERS

**Anna Karenina:** an aristocrat with a magnetic personality. At the start of the novel, she is at the center of aristocratic society. However, her extramarital affair with Count Vronsky ultimately turns her into a pariah. She is married to Alexei Karenin, and she begins to loathe him when she begins to see that he is more concerned with maintaining his reputation than following his passion. Anna consistently makes choices for love and becomes increasingly emotional in her actions as the novel progresses. Ultimately, she pays a tragic price in a final attempt to assert control over her life.

**Alexei Karenin:** Anna's husband. A high-ranking and wealthy government official, he is constantly concerned with his reputation in society. When he learns that Anna has had an affair, he would rather uphold the façade that he is in a happy marriage than risk the potential public scandal of getting a divorce.

**Count Vronsky:** a young military officer. He has a long-term affair with Anna. While Anna falls in love with him and uproots her life to be with him, Vronsky struggles to commit to her fully. He is more willing to make choices based on passion than Karenin; however, he remains somewhat aloof throughout the novel.

**Levin:** a landowner in a rural town who is passionate about agriculture. He grapples with taking a stance on incorporating Western ideas and technology into Russian society and agriculture or adhering to traditional practices. While he does not entirely want to give up on tradition, he values Western agricultural techniques' efficiency. He is in love with Kitty and dreams of having a family with her. However, his dream is complicated by his insecurity in social situations. Nevertheless, Levin ultimately marries Kitty. While their marriage is not entirely smooth, the two eventually find happiness with each other. Levin is often seen as a foil to Anna.

**Kitty:** a sensitive and romantic young princess. Initially, she is in love with Vronsky. However, when he rejects her for Anna, she has a realization that she needs to be true to herself. After turning down his first proposal, Kitty agrees to marry Levin when he proposes a second time. In their marriage, her levelheadedness and self-assurance balance out Levin's insecurities and temper.

**Seryozha:** Anna and Karenin's son. Seryozha is born before Anna meets Vronsky. He loves his mother despite feeling abandoned by her in the aftermath of her affair.

**Annie:** Anna and Vronsky's daughter. Anna almost dies giving birth to Annie, and Karenin adopts Annie as his legal child even though she is not his daughter.

### Anna Karenina PLOT SYNOPSIS

"All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."  
—*Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy

The narrative of *Anna Karenina* centers on the affair between Anna, who is married to Alexei Karenin, and Count Vronsky. When Karenin learns of Anna and Vronsky's affair, he is less concerned about Anna's unfaithfulness and more concerned with how the affair might affect his public image. Anna promises Karenin that she and Vronsky will keep

their affair discreet; however, she becomes pregnant with Vronsky's child. Karenin and Anna clash over whether they should divorce or not. Karenin initially refuses Anna's request for a divorce for two main reasons—first, it would potentially tarnish his reputation, and second, he wants to punish Anna for her infidelity. However, when Anna almost dies

## **ANNA KARENINA** CHARACTERS AND PLOT CONTINUED...

giving birth to her child with Vronsky, Karenin agrees to allow Anna to divorce him. Despite the odds, Anna lives through the birth of her daughter, Annie, and she and Vronsky run to Italy together while Karenin legally adopts Annie as his daughter.

In Italy, Vronsky begins to grow bored, and the two soon return to Moscow, where they live in an opulent countryside home. There, Vronsky presses Anna to take Vronsky up on his divorce offer so that if Vronsky and Anna have any more children, Vronsky can be their legal father instead of Karenin. Eventually, Anna agrees to divorce Karenin. However, Karenin goes back on his offer and refuses to divorce Anna. Meanwhile, Anna and Vronsky's relationship begins to deteriorate. They start to fight frequently. Anna starts to suspect that Vronsky has

been unfaithful to her, and she becomes increasingly paranoid. Ultimately, Anna resolves to leave Vronsky. She returns home one evening to find a note from Vronsky telling her that he will be home soon. Anna decides to meet him at the train station. There, swept up in misery and desperation, Anna kneels on the train tracks in front of an oncoming train.

Anna and Levin have opposite arcs in the novel. At the start of the story, Anna has a family that she ultimately gives up to pursue new love. Meanwhile, Levin, who begins the novel struggling to prove himself as an intellectual and struggling to express his love for Kitty, ultimately achieves his dream of having a family and has an epiphany that restores his faith in God.

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### **Anna Karenina in Anna in the Tropics**

While *Anna in the Tropics* is not a direct adaptation of Tolstoy's novel, there are distinct similarities between some of the characters in the two works.

- **Anna and Conchita:** both have extramarital affairs with men who are driven by passion more than their respective husbands. They both redefine their individual relationships to love and marriage throughout the two stories.
- **Karenin and Palomo:** both are pragmatic in their decisions. However, their pragmatism often overshadows their emotional availability. Both of their wives have affairs with other men, and the status quo of their respective marriages becomes increasingly complex.
- **Vronsky and Juan Julian:** both are young, intelligent, and attractive. They are more passionate than Karenin and Palomo and take action in pursuit of their passions.
- **Kitty and Marela:** both are sensitive and excitable. They get swept up in the idea of love and romance. Marela is initially enamored with Juan Julian, just like Kitty initially pines for Vronsky. Nevertheless, they are both grounded by a sense of pride and dignity.
- **Levin and Cheché:** both are outsiders in their social circles. They have tempers and struggle to express their emotions. What is more, they each are interested in modernization and increasing efficiency in their respective fields of work. ♦

## THEMES

### TRADITION AND PROGRESS

"If working with machines means being modern then we're not interested in the modern world"  
—Ofelia, Act 2, Scene 1

Throughout the play, Cheché consistently comes head-to-head with the other workers when it comes to the idea of introducing machinery into the factory's cigar production line. Cuban cigars have a long and rich history that centers on the tradition of hand-rolling tobacco leaves. The hand-rolling tradition dates back to the Taíno Peoples, who lived in Cuba for centuries before Spanish colonizers "discovered" the island.

The workers at Santiago's factory in Ybor City take great pride in honoring this tradition. Even in 1929, they hand-roll every cigar they sell.

Cheché, however, has his sights set on the future and sees the introduction of machinery into the production line as an opportunity for the factory to increase productivity and thereby increase sales potential. With greater sales, the factory's cigars would be more likely to stay relevant in a world that increasingly values speed and convenience.

However, the reality of introducing machinery into the cigar production line is more complex than Cheché believes. Technological progress and the incorporation of machines into production lines across industries and daily life alike sparked a faster pace of life and higher demand for convenient products in the 1920s. Speed and convenience are antithetical to the experience of consuming a cigar—a cigar is meant to be enjoyed slowly. In this sense, technological progress limits the long-term viability of cigar companies. Juan Julian explains the relationship between the widespread use of machinery and the decline of the cigar industry:

"This fast mode of living with machines and moving cars affects cigar consumption. And do you want to know why, Señor Chester? Because people prefer a quick smoke, the kind you get from a cigarette. The truth is that machines, cars, are keeping us from taking walks and sitting on the park benches, smoking a cigar slowly and calmly. The way they should be smoked. So you see, Chester, you want modernity, and modernity is actually destroying our very own industry."  
—Juan Julian, Act 2, Scene 1

Ultimately, the factory workers democratically vote to keep machines out of the business, and they continue to hand-roll the cigars.

### THE POWER OF LITERATURE

"[A]nybody who dedicates his life to reading books believes in rescuing things from oblivion."—Conchita, Act 1, Scene 5

Literature plays a central role in *Anna in the Tropics*. After their long-term lector passes away and their most recent lector runs away with Cheché's wife, the factory workers are thrilled at the prospect of hiring an established lector from Cuba. Marela, Conchita, and Ofelia, particularly, tend to get swept up in the novels the lectors read, and they have a soft spot for poetry and romantic tragedies.

Throughout the play, we see each character develop a relationship with literature and with the story of *Anna Karenina*. Santiago uses the novel Juan Julian reads as inspiration for a new cigar brand, while Ofelia enjoys the story primarily as entertainment. Marela uses listening to literature as a form of escapism:

"I let myself be taken. When Juan Julian starts reading, the story enters my body and I become the second skin of the characters."—Marela, Act 1, Scene 3

*Anna Karenina* inspires Conchita to reevaluate her ideas of love and marriage. After hearing how Anna took steps to find love and passion with Vronsky, Conchita resolves to take time to rediscover what love means to her. She describes how the novel is changing her perspective:

"[W]ith this book I'm seeing everything through new eyes."—Conchita, Act 1, Scene 3

Literature inspires Conchita to take more agency in finding happiness.

Conversely, Cheché and Palomo are wary of the sway that lectors and literature have over the factory workers. Since his wife ran away with the factory's last lector, Cheché does not trust lectors at all. Cheché's distrust of lectors extends to literature—he believes that his wife ran away in part because the romantic novels the previous lector read inspired her to. As Palomo watches Conchita change while she has an affair with Juan Julian, he too begins to distrust literature. He compares literature and its effect on people to alcohol:

"Alcohol is prohibited in this country because alcohol is like literature. 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."—Palomo, Act 2, Scene 3



## THEMES CONTINUED...

The novel Juan Julian reads heightens the other characters' emotions, inspires them to take action, and shapes the central conflict in the play.

### LOVE

"If there are as many minds as there are heads, then there are as many kinds of love as there are hearts.' I can try to love you in a different way. I can do that. And you should try to do the same."  
—Conchita, Act 1, Scene 3

In *Anna in the Tropics*, characters struggle to express and receive love. Conchita quotes *Anna Karenina* as she tells Palomo that she would like to reevaluate the terms of her marriage. Palomo has been unfaithful to her, and after hearing part of *Anna Karenina*, Conchita sees it as only fair for her to try to find fulfillment and passion extramaritally as well. While Palomo is unhappy with the idea of Conchita spending time with another man, the two never stop loving each other entirely. In fact, they discover a new way to love each other as they begin to redefine their relationship.

Ofelia and Santiago, on the other hand, express their love somewhat transactionally. Beyond being husband and wife, they are also business partners—and Ofelia holds Santiago accountable for decisions he makes that jeopardize the company. While they do bicker and disagree about some business decisions, there is ultimately a tenderness at the core of their kind of love.

Marela and Juan Julian are both idealistic romantics at heart. Inspired by the great works of literature they read and listen to, they have grand, albeit occasionally unrealistic, ideas of love.

Cheché's bitterness towards his ex-wife seeps into his notion of how love should look. This bitterness clouds his judgment, and he forces himself onto

Marela. The event understandably has a profound impact on Marela and how she chooses to present herself in the world. After her encounter with Cheché, she shuts down and begins to wear a long winter coat every day, despite the Florida heat.

### DIGNITY

The men in *Anna in the Tropics* constantly strive to maintain a sense of dignity.

Santiago's dignity is thrown into question when he gets too wrapped up in gambling at a cockfight and borrows more money from Cheché than he is able to repay immediately and bets on losing birds. Ashamed that he lost money, Santiago retreats from his family and the factory. In losing the money, he feels he has lost part of his dignity:

"Every time I lose, I feel that something has been taken from me. Something bigger than money. And I see a line of little ants carrying breadcrumbs on their backs. But the crumbs they are taking away are my pride and my self-respect. My dignity."—Santiago, Act 1, Scene 4

Without the money, Santiago questions why Ofelia has stayed with him. That Santiago would question Ofelia's loyalty when he feels undignified suggests that Santiago equates dignity with providing for his family—even further, he equates dignity with his masculinity.

Cheché and Palomo both struggle with their sense of dignity in their romantic relationships. That both men's wives have had affairs throws their struggle with maintaining dignity in a society that values patriarchal family structures into relief. Both begin to use their desire to re-establish a sense of dignity to fuel their actions. ♦

## SWEPT UP IN THE SMOKE: THE ROLE OF ESCAPISM IN *ANNA IN THE TROPICS*

**“Literary reveries are related to cigar smoke—both permit one to escape the weight of the world and defy the laws of gravity.”—Nilo Cruz**

Escapism is the tendency to seek out distraction and comfort from unpleasant moments of reality. Today, people turn to entertainment formats such as literature, television, film, video games, and music as ways to achieve a reprieve from stress.

In *Anna in the Tropics*, the factory workers turn to literature to escape the monotony of hand-rolling cigars. Marela, particularly, lets her imagination take flight as Juan Julian reads aloud from *Anna Karenina*. However, the relief escapism offers is not limited to literature and media. Escapism can be found in other activities as well. In his essay “The Alphabet of Smoke,” Nilo Cruz describes how cigars have always been linked to escapism for him. When he was a child, he was given a cigar box for his colored pencils. That cigar box sparked his imagination, offering him a window into another life:

“My association with cigars has always been related to escape [...] My cigar box, with its landscape label of palm trees and women draped in flowing *tulles*, became more than a pencil box. It became my box of dreams—my Houdini box—in which I was able to escape from everything happening around me.”

While he used his cigar box to house his colored pencils, Cruz’s parents used cigars themselves as a way to temporarily escape from Cuba’s tense political landscape:

“The early sixties in Cuba was a time of political unrest and uncertainty—it seemed like everyone in my house created their own circus act in order to escape reality. Cigar smoke offered my father escape from his disenchantment with the revolution. The smoke rings out of his mouth (seemed like circus rings to me) were more like smoke signals asking his friends in the States for political asylum. My mother had her own circus act. She used to find escape through prayer, and used cigar smoke as a celestial envelope to send her supplications to the Divine.”

Not only did the act of smoking a cigar allow his parents to escape the stresses of their environment, but the smoke emitted by the cigars also provided a physical barrier to the outside world. Smoke itself clouds a space, overwhelming the senses: sight, smell, and taste.

It was cigars and their boxes that provided the first entry point for Cruz into the world of *Anna in the Tropics*. From there, he began to examine how the literature lecturers would read to factory workers as their rolled cigars provided the workers with an opportunity to escape momentarily.

We have seen trends in escapism change over the past century. People begin to crave escape in times where social unrest and stress peak. We saw this recently, on a global scale. The importance of escapism was thrown into sharp relief in 2020 when stress and grief associated with the worldwide coronavirus pandemic skyrocketed. Physically and socially isolated from one another, people worldwide turned to media as a respite from current events. In the first month of the pandemic, Netflix gained almost 16 million new subscribers, suggesting an increased need for narrative media as a form of entertainment and escapism when other forms of escapism (such as traveling, attending concerts, and socializing) became impossible.

In providing temporary relief, escapism—especially narrative-based escapism—allows us to stretch our imagination, practice empathy, and experience catharsis as we cope with the stress of the world. ♦

## INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR: **JONATHAN MUÑOZ-PROULX**

**What attracted you to *Anna in the Tropics*?** I'm attracted to how visceral the play is. It engages the senses. There's the heat, the smoke, the smells, the action, the playfulness, an attraction, and the tension... The language is so poetic and decadent that the play is practically immersive, transporting us onto the factory floor and deep into the fantastic imaginations of the workers.

**What is your role as the director? What is your typical process when you begin a new project?** As director, I work to create cohesion between many artists' visions (designers, actors, playwright). I oversee the project and ensure that we're on track, but most importantly to me: I'm a surrogate for the audience. I have the privilege of responding to the play before anyone else sees it, and I'm able to share any reactions I'm having to the story with my team of actors and designers. There usually isn't a "wrong" choice. However, all artistic choices have a ripple effect—both benefits and consequences. I try to track the arc of each character, their relationships to each other, and the play as a whole to make sure we're headed in the direction we're hoping to.

I also think a lot about the musicality of a play. Similar to classical music, many plays have chapters or acts that crescendo or decrescendo. For example, if there's an incredibly joyous moment—like a celebration—many plays are structured so that a dramatic event occurs soon after. Part of my job is to make sure the musicality/momentum of the play hits those peaks and valleys. One thing you want to avoid on stage is neutrality. Everything is either positive or negative. Characters are either growing closer together or further apart. Actions are either pleasing or disappointing—and the director helps sculpt those shapes in the play.

**How did you first become interested in directing?** I was an actor in high school and college and continued acting for some time after college. I gravitated towards directing because I felt I had more agency to tell the stories I wanted to tell, and I felt empowered to build a community of artists around those stories. I'm also a very visual person, so I found directing to be incredibly rewarding—especially because I could help sculpt the "picture" of each scene.

While I never formally studied directing, when I was younger, I learned a lot about picture, composition, lines, and color by going to LA museums and galleries on days admission was free. I became very interested in how a viewer's focus was guided through a picture and how to use space in different ways. For me, visual

art connected so obviously to live theatre—both are in a frame—the main difference being that theatre incorporates many, many pictures into one production.

I started by directing at a local high school and at Fringe festivals. Then I began directing at small theatres, then universities, and now ten years later, I've been able to direct at much larger venues like The Theatre at Ace Hotel and the Walt Disney Concert Hall.

**Who is your favorite character in *Anna in the Tropics*, and why?** Oh gosh. This is such a hard question. My first thought is to say Cheché. He's such a fascinating character who is constantly up against conflict, and I'm incredibly intrigued by his complexity. My other answer would be Juan Julian because of his love for literature. I'm absolutely obsessed with books and can relate to how deeply he honors and uplifts the magic of language and storytelling.

I'm also really excited by the juxtaposition between these two characters—Cheché and Juan Julian. One is the honored guest; the other is the outcast. One is the dreamer; the other is the realist. One is rooted in tradition; the other in modernity. One navigates conflict with language, the other with violence. I'm so looking forward to seeing these two characters share the stage.

**Why this play right now?** First, the play is incredibly beautiful and powerful, making any time a welcome invitation to enter this world. In this moment, however, I can't ignore the fact that we're all surviving a devastating pandemic pause. *Anna in the Tropics*, though beautifully poetic, ends with a tragedy.

As I read and re-read this play, I think a lot about New Year's Eve 2019: there's a profound gift in Not Knowing. Because none of us could have imagined the extraordinary loss that was to come, we were able to experience such joy. *Anna in the Tropics* is a play filled with joy. None of these characters could possibly imagine the tragedy that is to come, let alone the worldwide economic devastation of the Great Depression—only one year in their future. The Gift of Not Knowing allows these characters (and us) to find peace and play and in our lives—even when the future is unknown.

**What part of the play are you most excited to see come to life?** The party! I'm so excited to see these characters transform the factory floor into a festive, warm, romantic celebration of new beginnings. I'm excited for the glow of the lanterns, the playfulness, the personalities, and the spirited optimism for the future.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### BOOKS:

Hernandez, Roger E., and Anton, Alex. *Cubans in America: A Vibrant History of a People in Exile*. United States, Kensington Books, 2003.

Tinajero, Araceli. *El Lector: A History of the Cigar Factory Reader*. University of Texas Press, 2011.

Tolstoy, Leo. *Anna Karenina*. United Kingdom, Penguin Books Limited, 2003.

### ARTICLES:

Aiello, Stephen Emilio. "The Tragedy of Becoming: Hegel in Cruz's *Anna in the Tropics*." *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2015, pp. 16-27.

Cruikshank, Stephen. "Inhaling the Nation: The Cultural Translation and Symbolic Performance of the Cigar in Cuba." *Transcultural (Edmonton)* 9.1 (2017): 145-156. Web.

Daniel, Evan Matthew. "Rolling for the Revolution: A Transnational History of Cuban Cigar Makers in Havana, Florida, and New York City, 1853-1895." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2010. Print.

Mann, Emily. "Nilo Cruz." *Bomb*, 2004.

Pollitt, Brian H. "The Cuban Sugar Economy and the Great Depression." *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1984, pp. 3-28. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/3338249](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3338249).

### FILMS:

*Anna Karenina* (1935), directed by Clarence Brown

*Anna Karenina* (2012), directed by Joe Wright

*Hand Rolled: A Film About Cigars* (2019), directed by Steve Gherebean and Jesse Mariut

*In the Heights* (2021), directed by Jon M. Chu

### ONLINE RESOURCES:

"Chronology of U.S.-Cuba Relations | Cuban Research Institute." Steven J. Green School of International & Public Affairs, [cri.fiu.edu/us-cuba/chronology-of-us-cuba-relations/](http://cri.fiu.edu/us-cuba/chronology-of-us-cuba-relations/).

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

### VIDEO CLIPS:

"La Lectora" short film by Yulia Piskuliyska (POV by PBS): <https://www.pbs.org/pov/watch/lalectora/>

"The Storytellers Reading to Cuba's Cigar Factory Workers" short film (Great Big Story): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkcy2nyPFDE>



## ABOUT A NOISE WITHIN

**A NOISE WITHIN** A Noise Within produces classic theatre as an essential means to enrich our community by embracing universal human experiences, expanding personal awareness, and challenging individual perspectives. Our company of resident and guest artists immerses student and general audiences in timeless, epic stories in an intimate setting.

Our most successful art asks our community to question beliefs, focus on relationships, and develop self-awareness. Southern California audiences of all ages and backgrounds build community together while engaging with this most visceral and primal of storytelling techniques. ANW's production of classic theatre includes all plays we believe will be part of our cultural legacy. We interpret these stories through the work of a professional resident company—a group of artists whose work is critical to their community—based on the belief that trust among artists and between artists and audience can only be built through an honest and continuing dialogue.

In its 30-year history, A Noise Within has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle's revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

More than 45,000 individuals attend productions at a Noise Within annually. In addition, the theatre draws over 18,000 student participants to its Education Program. Students benefit from in-classroom workshops, conservatory training, subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, post-performance discussions with artists, and free standards-based study guides.

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