



# Ana en el trópico

(Anna in the Tropics)

By Nilo Cruz

Directed by René Buch



## Study Guide

Written and Compiled  
by Ileana Fuentes

All production photos  
by Michael Palma

"Ana en el tropico" is sponsored by

**JPMorganChase** 

©REPERTORIO ESPAÑOL 2008  
Layout by Miguel Sierra



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Author's Profile .....	3
I. Directors's Profile .....	4
II. Synopsis .....	5
III. Suggested Readings .....	12
<b>III.a</b> Tobacco Lectors: The Cuban Origenes of the Profession .....	12
<b>III.b</b> The Tobacco Industry in Florida .....	16
IV. Questions to Consider .....	21
V. In Class Activities.....	22



## AUTHOR'S PROFILE

**N**ilo Cruz S. is a young Cuban-American playwright whose work has been produced widely around the United States including the Public Theater (New York, NY), South Coast Repertory (Costa Mesa, CA), Magic Theatre (San Francisco, CA), Oregon Shakespeare Festival, McCarter Theater (Princeton, NJ) and New Theatre (Coral Gables, FL). Cruz was the first Hispanic ever to receive a Pulitzer Prize in the category of Drama. His other plays include “Night Train to Bolina,” “Two Sisters and a Piano,” “Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams,” among others. “Anna in the Tropics” also won the Steinberg Award for Best New Play. Mr. Cruz teaches playwriting at Yale University and lives in New York City. Cruz recently commented via phone that, “this is the first time that one of my works is being presented or translated in Spanish. I’ve always admired Repertorio’s work and I feel honored that one of my plays is being produced by this legendary institution.”

## DIRECTORS'S PROFILE

**B**orn in Cuba, René Buch was founder and Director of Pro Arte de Oriente's Theatre Department, as well as founder of Havana's Acción Teatral de Autores. Through the ATA, he staged of plays by aspiring Cuban playwrights. He holds a degree in Law from Havana University. Mr. Buch came to the United States and enrolled at the Yale Drama School. While completing his MFA degree, he taught both Spanish and Spanish literature at Yale.

Mr. Buch directed *La Dama Duende* at the Greenwich Mews Theatre in 1968, produced by Las Artes – Frances Drucker and Gilberto Zaldívar. The success of the production gave birth to a new company – Repertorio Español. As Artistic Director of Repertorio Español, Mr. Buch has directed many plays from Spanish classics to contemporary Latin American plays and plays written by Hispanic American authors in the United States. His work with a specially chosen company of actors has developed an outstanding ensemble, which has won critical acclaim throughout the United States, and on its tours to Latin America and Spain. Under Mr. Buch's direction, Repertorio Español has presented Operas, Zarzuelas (Spanish operettas) and anthologies of classical and popular Hispanic music to enthusiastic audiences.

In addition to his work at Repertorio Español, Mr. Buch has staged other

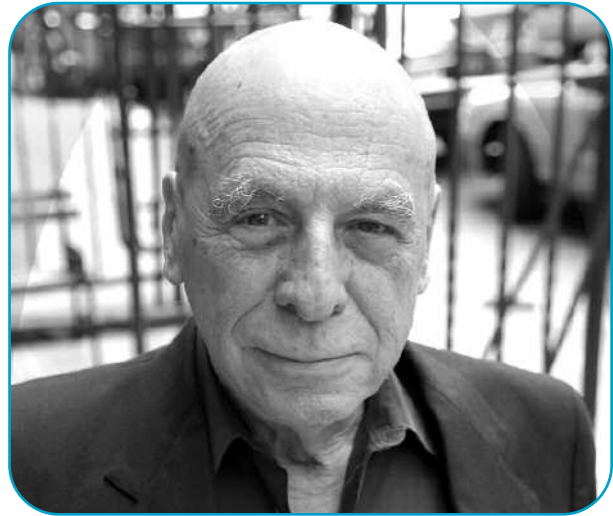


Photo by Michael Palma

operas and directed productions of Shakespeare, Pirandello, Cocteau, Ionesco, Beckett, Calderón and Lorca at regional theatres, including the Milwaukee Rep.; La Compañía de Albuquerque; Washington's Folger Theatre; The Old Globe in San Diego, California and Ashland Oregon Shakespeare Festival as well as theaters in New York such as Albany's Capital Rep.; Classic Stage Company; the Julliard Drama Center; New York University's Tisch School of The Arts Graduate Acting Program and The Pearl Theatre.

Mr. Buch has served as a panel member for the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts, The Village Voice OBIE Awards Committee and the Independent Committee on Arts Policy, and as a board member of the Theatre Communications Group. In 2007 the Arts & Bussines Council awarded founders Gilberto Zaldívar, Robert Federico and René Buch the Encore Award for Excellence in Arts Management

# SYNOPSIS OF ANNA IN THE TROPICS

Written by Nilo Cruz - Directed by René Buch



Anna In The Tropics premiered on October 12, 2002 at the New Theatre in Coral Gables, Florida. Soon after it was performed at the McCarter Theater Center, in Princeton, New Jersey on September 19, 2003. Two months later on November 16, 2003 the play transferred to the Royale Theatre on Broadway.

The play takes place in an old tobacco factory in the Ybor City district in Tampa, Florida in 1929. The piece consists of 2 Acts and each Act contains 5 scenes. The play develops around Juan Julian "el lector" (the reader) hired by the the tobacco factory to read for the workers. This position disappeared from factories by 1931, as a result of the introduction of automated machines.

## Characters

*Santiago*: Owner of the tobacco factory; 60 years old.  
*Ofelia*: Wife of Santiago about 50 years old.  
*Marela*: Daughter of Ofelia and Santiago, 22 years.  
*Conchita*: Sister of Marela, 32 years.  
*Palomo*: Husband of Conchita, 41 years.  
*Cheche*: Half-brother of Santiago, 40 years old, half Cuban and half North American.  
*Juan Julian*: The lector, about 40 years old.  
*Eliades*: Local gamester who runs local cockfights, 40's.

---

## **ACT 1** **Scene 1**

The half-brothers, Cheché and Santiago are at a cockfight, betting money. Santiago loses a lot of money and ends up owing a large sum to Cheché. Meanwhile, the three women - Ofelia, the mother and her two daughters, Conchita and Marela wait in the port for the arrival of a steamship coming in from Havana that is bringing Juan Julian, the new tobacco factory lector, to replace the previous one who had died. Ofelia had paid for Juan Julian's voyage personally; because for the workers in the factory, it was enchanting to have novels read to them, especially love novels. Marela had made a "spell" with witchcraft so that the new lector would have a safe journey.

**ACT 1**  
**Scene 2**

Cheché meets Juan Julian, the new lector for the factory and tells him they're not hiring. Ofelia assures Juan Julian that Cheché is not the owner, her husband, Santiago, is in fact the owner of the factory. Ofelia explains to Juan Julian that Cheché hates readers and the love stories they read, because his wife, a white woman, had run off with a lector. Ofelia introduces Juan Julian to the workers in the factory, and he announces the first novel that will be read to them will be Anna Karenina, by the Russian writer Leon Tolstoy. Ofelia explains to him that Ybor City is a small, growing city mostly made of Cuban emigrants who developed the tobacco industry in Florida. Cheché appears and tells Ofelia that her husband, Santiago, lost money to him in the cockfight. Cheché shows Ofelia the sole of his shoe that says how much Santiago owes him and where Santiago signed it.



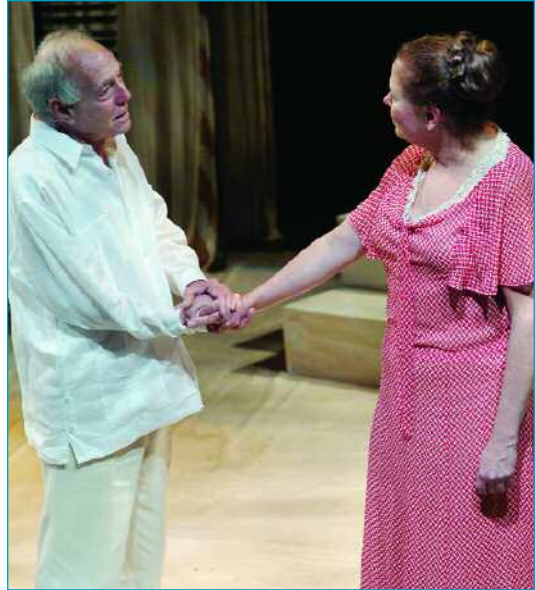
**ACT 1**  
**Scene 3.**

Juan Julian begins reading the novel Anna Karenina in Santiago's tobacco factory. The three women, Conchita, Marela and Ofelia, comment on how wonderful Juan Julian's reading is. Cheché arrives, interrupts the conversation and criticizes them for being taken in by the novel. Ofelia tells him that all the tobacco factories in Cuba have readers who are a part of their culture.

Everyone except Cheché agrees on enjoying love stories. Cheché prefers detective stories. Young Marela dreams about Vronsky, the central character of the novel and tries to imagine Russia. For Ofelia, to have a lover as Anna Karenina did is a mistake, yet Marela argues this point, since she feels carried away to another world when Juan Julian reads.

Palomo and Conchita talk about the money that Santiago lost betting on the roosters. Conchita comments on her admiration for Juan Julian and in the course of the conversation tells him that their marriage is not as it was in the beginning. Conchita asks Palomo how he would feel about a forbidden love affair like the one Anna Karenina had. Conchita tells him that she feels like the deceived husband of Anna and says to

Palomo that he is more like Anna because he is the one who had an affair during their marriage. Palomo proposes to Conchita the possibility of divorcing, but she says no, that she wants to take on a lover of her own. Frustrated, Palomo tells his wife that this novel is ruining their marriage.



## **ACT 1**

### **Scene 4**

Marela's parents, Santiago and Ofelia, are arguing about Santiago's debt from the cockfight, and use Marela as an intermediary to talk to the other. Finally, Marela tires of the bickering and quits her job as their mediator. This forces her parents to speak to each other directly. Santiago tells Ofelia that he is pleased with the new lector, Juan Julian who has a good voice. Santiago also mentions that he likes the Levin character in the novel, a rich farmer. Ofelia tells him that he must go to the factory so that the employees can see him, because after all, he is the owner. But Santiago prefers to remain in the house and has Ofelia describe the novel to him.

## **ACT 1**

### **Scene 5**

Juan Julian speaks with Conchita and Marela, the two sisters. He explains to them how he prefers to be in open fields and nature because the crowded city suffocates him. Conchita remarks on how much she enjoys going for walks in the park. Marela retires and Conchita asks Juan Julian about his life. He narrates on how he discovered



reading when he was a small boy. Conchita tells a story about how when she was younger she gave a braid of hair to the boy she liked to take and go bury under the trees as an offering to the Earth.

Juan Julian asks her if she still cuts her hair and she says yes that her father is the one who buries it. Juan Julian says to her that if he was her husband he would bury her hair, and he offers to do it, and she accepts. But then Juan Julian decides that instead of burying the hair, to keep it in a book. Conchita suggests placing it between the pages of Anna Karenina. Conchita gives him the scissors, loosening her long hair; Juan Julian combs it with his fingers, he kisses her shoulder and she turns around to return the kiss.

## ACT 2

### Scene 1

After another reading of *Anna Karenina*, Juan Julian makes love to Conchita. She says to him that she prefers that they continue to meet in the factory because hotels are impersonal. Cheché speaks to the workers about his decision to introduce machines in the factory. Ofelia interrupts to point out that he is not the owner of the factory, and demands somebody call her husband. Cheché argues that other factories have already gotten machines and are leaving them behind.



Ofelia argues that the quality of the product is what's important, not how fast they're made. Cheché counters back saying that the sales have not been good and the factory has been forced to dismiss employees. Palomo complains that machines will end the era of hand-made products. Cheché says that it is not possible to continue making tobacco the same way the Indians did and adds that lectors are not necessary. Palomo praises the virtues of the artisan process, but soon changes his mind when he sees Conchita, now Juan Julian's lover, defending literature.

Juan Julian joins the argument and tells the history behind the tradition of the lector that began with the Indians. The other workers cheer him as he attacks the modern way to live so fast that it prevents, for example, the delight of smoking a calm cigar. The proposal to introduce machines to make cigars, the North American style, and to maintain the lector is put to vote. All vote to keep the lector. Only Cheché and Palomo raise their hands against it.

Santiago, the owner of the factory arrives to take control back from Cheché and to announce a new cigar brand they will be making called "Anna Karenina". Santiago appoints his daughter, Marela, as the model for the image of Anna and gives her a costume to put on. He pays off the debt he owed to his half-brother, so Cheché no longer has any say in factory matters. Cheché laments of having lost his wife to a tobacco factory lector. Santiago leaves, assuring Cheché that they will speak later, leaving Marela and Cheché alone to work late in the factory. Marela shows off her costume and her uncle admires her beauty. He begins to scold her for not making top-quality cigars, and blames Juan Julian for distracting her. Cheché makes Marela uncomfortable and when he reaches out for her she yells at him not to touch her and runs away.



## **ACT 2**

### **Scene 2**

Juan Julian is reading a chapter of Anna Karenina. Conchita, his lover, enters and goes to her worktable. Her husband, Palomo, enters visibly very sad. Palomo asks her what time she meets her lover. She describes the intimate conversations she shares with Juan Julian. Palomo asks her every detail. When his wife asks why he is so curious, Palomo says that he sees she has changed. Conchita confesses that Juan Julian roleplays with her sometimes. Palomo wants Conchita to teach him how Juan Julian makes love to her.

## **ACT 2**

### **Scene 3**

There is a celebration in the tobacco factory because of the launching of the new "Anna Karenina" cigar. Santiago, Ofelia and Juan Julian are drinking rum and enjoying themselves. To the side, Cheché and Palomo speak. Palomo admits he is obsessed thinking about his wife and Juan Julian and can even smell her lover in her hair. Cheché advises Palomo to leave with her and go North to the tobacco factories in Trenton where there are no lectors to put ideas into women's minds.



Juan Julian comes by, preparing for the party. Trying to start a fight, Cheché comments about the novel Anna Karenina to him and says that Anna's husband is a coward and he should have killed the lover. Palomo asks Juan Julian about the character of the lover in the novel and what his motives are. Juan Julian reasons that the lover wants to help the woman to recognize something in her and learn another way to love.



In another area of the factory Ofelia notices a good change in Conchita. Everyone has arrived for the party. Santiago asks Marela to enter dressed up as Anna so they can take her picture for the cigar label. Ofelia smokes the first "Anna Karenina" cigar and praises it, passing it to Marela. Young Marela savors the cigar and it finds it divine; for Cheché, the tobacco has a pleasant scent, for Conchita its aroma resembles forests and orchids, for Palomo it is as sweet as mangoes. Juan Julian smells the tobacco and he finds candy like the cacao and the cedar. Santiago leaves to shoot gunshots into the air to celebrate the new product.

After celebrating, everyone has left except Juan Julian and Marela. Marela tells him how happy she is, especially because she is speaking with him. She hints at her crush on him and Juan Julian speaks sweetly to her. Marela holds his hand and Juan Julian caresses her face tenderly to him. Before separating, Juan Julian lends the novel Anna Karenina to her so she can read the chapter. While this happens, Cheché is hidden observing and listening to their conversations. He waits for Juan Julian to leave before he goes to Marela as the lights go to black.

## ACT 2

### Scene 4

Palomo enters the factory with two heavy boxes. Conchita is cleaning up the mess from the previous night. Palomo asks for Cheché, but he has not arrived and Conchita goes off to look for the keys. Santiago and Ofelia enter hungover, and Palomo requests the keys. Ofelia says to him that the keys are in the office. When Palomo asks about Cheché again, Santiago jokes that he's probably sleeping still drunk. Marela enters wearing the Anna fur coat and she is visibly upset. Something happened last night when everyone left the party, but she won't say. Juan Julian enters and begins to read the new chapter when Cheché enters, removes a pistol and shoots Juan Julian dead.

**ACT 2**  
**Scene 5**

Three days later, the factory is in the middle of production and Marela comes in still wearing the fur coat. Ofelia complains of the silence and concludes that it must be because they all are listeners. Palomo compares this silence with the silence of the death of the reader before Juan Julian. But for Ofelia this silence is much stronger. Marela wants to write Juan Julain's name on a piece of paper with the purpose of putting it in a glass of sugar water so that the dead can visit this world. Conchita proposes to finish the reading of Anna Karenina and Marela agrees. Palomo offers to read. Ofelia approves wanting to break the silence to prove that they are still alive. Santiago wants another story read, but Marela and Conchita agree that all stories must be finished. Palomo opens the book, looks at Conchita and begins to read.



## SUGGESTED READINGS

### Tobacco Lectors The Cuban Origins of the Profession

The history of lectures in cigar-making factories is a very interesting one. The working class in Cuba and South Florida was a rich culture because a very unique element was introduced: the reader of the *tabaquería*. Lectors were usually male, the workers in the tobacco factories began to make cigars while they heard the reader read to them in a loud voice.

This practice of reading aloud is an old Cuban cultural tradition. The lector of tobacco factories entertained - and educated generations of workers while they select, cut and coil tobacco leaves to produce habanos. It is interesting to note that the workers of *tabaquerías* included both men and women. In an article reproduced by the National Geographic Magazine, the position of the reader of *tabaquería* is described as a long ago proud tradition.

The tradition originated in certain orders of monks who had one of its members read aloud to the community during meals in the refectory. In 1839 the Spanish traveller Jacinto de Salas arrived in Cuba and Quiroga. Salas narrates the impression

that coffee plantations in the region of Artemisa (in western Cuba) gave him. *"The different grain classes were chosen in a great room in which a deep silence reigned."* The scene inspired the idea for him to take advantage of those hours for their education: reading aloud books.

This practice was so useful that it was used in some prison institutions in Cuba for example, in (the Arsenal of the Post Station in Havana) with the objective to rehabilitate and educate the criminals. It was in the galleries of the

Arsenal where the direct relationship with the

tabaqueros was established. At that time, great amounts of cigarettes were made in other jails, asylums and porterhouses. Many criminals were cigarette makers, and by that work they received a wage that the

administration of the penitentiary retained and eventually gave to the prisoner when their sentence was fulfilled. That money also served as a "fund for the acquisition of books" for the readings. Many of the visitors to the prison were tobacco workers themselves at the Tobacco Factory of Havana, and the news of the readings in the galleries spread.

The idea to establish reading in the factories was actively promoted by the tobacco worker Saturnino Martínez, a poet and fan of Literature.

**What was read to the *tabaqueros*?**

**They were read the newspaper press as well as the best of world literature.**

Martínez worked by night as librarian in the Library of the Economic Society of Friends of the Country. There he conceived the idea to have the readings in the Partagás factories. He considered that the activity would contribute to the union and raise the morale and intellect of the tobacco workers.

In 1865 the Association of Tabaqueros of Havana was established. It was the first union, and managed to officially create the position of "lector de tabaquería". The custom became common and, soon other factories hurried to introduce a reader. On February 3, 1866, the first tribune with a lector was inaugurated in the Partagás factory. Soon the read-a-louds in other cigar factories were introduced: Prieto, Acosta, La Intimidación, La flor de Arriguanaga, La Flor de San Juan y Martínez, La Pilarcito, H.Upmann, Coronas, El Moro Muza, La Meridiana, La Africana, El Rico Habano, and Rabell.

In some tobacco factories there was a certain amount of censorship; in others, however, nobody took part in choosing the materials. Initially, different people alternated reading aloud themselves, but this form did not prevail. The lector position was secured, and a person equipped with a clear voice and correct pronunciation could occupy it.

The new tradition attracted the public who would sit next to the windows and listen attentively to the powerful voice

of the Lector. William H. Steward, U.S. Secretary of State, visited the factory of Partagás the 22 of January of 1866, receiving the attention of the workers, "... colocado in the middle of an ocean of deeply shut away individuals, the reader let them hear the euphoria of his accent, that transmitted smoothly to the heart of the listeners the evangelical dawn of which one of best works of Fernandez and González is given life" (the Aurora, February 28, 1866).

Jose Martí, the Apostle of the independence of Cuba described tobacco factories to the reader as "tribune outpost of freedom". The power of this activity was recognized and feared by some industrialists who triggered a ferocious campaign against lectors, prohibiting first it in some factories, and then finally in the entire island, due to a decree from the Captain-General on May 14, 1866. The Spanish authorities claimed that the readings threatened the moral and public order. The prohibition extended to the prisons. Nevertheless, in spite of those prohibitions, the readings continued, and it extended to the tobacco factories of Key West, New York and Tampa.

The interior of a tobacco factory is a place full of rich aromas; of constant movement and interminable task. One

**"The idea to implant the reading was actively promoted by the tobacco worker Saturnino Martínez, poet and fan of literature."**

would be mistaken to think that the cigar makers work tirelessly without enjoyment. They all take a moment to enjoy the cigars and the smoke that flows from their mouths. They wait for the arrival of the lector. As of that moment, it is the reader, who is without a doubt, the central figure.

**“The tobacco workers gained a lot of knowledge from the readings”**

Even today in Cuba (because in the U.S.A. they no longer exist) a lector's day in the tobacco factory begins in the mornings with the newspaper, national and foreign, that he reads in two 45-minute blocks. Once in a while articles related to history, the arts, science and the technology are read. In the afternoons, for 45 minutes, titles of universal and national literature are read aloud. Soon important novels of the most famous authors of the world were narrated. In novels the reader "imitates" the voice of each personage and he puts much use of his dramatic skills for "engaging the reader". In a novel about the military, the workers help make the noise of the airplanes, the tanks battle and the whistle of the bullets. What he says to us that this one was a work with audience participation.

The tobacco workers gained a lot of knowledge from the readings throughout the labor day and the lector was considered to be a very educated and well-respected person. One of the most beautiful experiences a lector can have is to be applauded

with the pins, the sharp-edged manual instruments that the workers use to cut a leaf and twist a habano. If they do not like the book or they are not in agreement with what is in the news, they throw the pins and make a jingle noise, but if they applaud the lector with their pins, that is success!

Here is the account of someone who was there. Ramiro de Maeztu lived in Cuba between 1891 and 1894 and was a lector in a cigarette factory in Havana. Maeztu remembers that in 1893, while the workers twisted the cigarettes in a suffocating hall atmosphere, he read to them for four hours daily, sometimes books of social propaganda, sometimes dramas, sometimes novels, sometimes works of philosophy and scientific spreading. Books that were read were chosen by a Reading Committee made up of the tobacco workers themselves who personally paid the lector when they received their wages on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Another important element to consider about the Cuban tobacco workers was the culture. The women were usually the ones who suggested novels. Maeztu describes that one day he noticed that in the two hours that his reading lasted he had not heard one sound nor one cough: the four hundred workers had paid strict attention the entire time holding their breaths while he read to them Hedda

Gabler, the wonderful work of the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen. Proof that Ibsen had never enjoyed a more devoted public.

In spite of the diversity between the working groups, the group readings remained as a working institution of the tobacco laborers, and continued contributing to the culture in an effective manner. Readings served as an excellent vehicle for revolutionary propaganda and eventually culminated with the independence of Cuba. Mainly lecturers contributed towards the propagation of the culture between the labor masses. The influence of the tobacco factory lecturers always had evidence in the tobacco mark of the Montecristo, the most well known, appreciated and best-selling cigar in the world. Its name originates from the character in the novel *Count de Montecristo* by Alexander Dumas, who was read to the workers in the Factory of H. Upmann in Havana, where the mark was based in 1935. So it was the acceptance of this novel, that the new mark was given the name of the protagonist.



## The Tobacco Industry in Florida

It is important to emphasize the connection between the *torcedores* (workers that are in charge of putting the tobacco sleeves together to give form to the cigar) of Cuba and the *tabaqueros* who immigrated to the United States. Key West, New York and Tampa were centers of independent party activity and ideas for the anarchists during the Independence War that freed Cuba from Spain. The Cuban emigration in the southern of the United States constituted a center of perpetual revolt and an authentic threat for the colonial authorities of the island, during the last third of the 19th century.

**“The manufacturing tobacco industry, with raw material coming from Cuba, begin in Key West in 1831”**

By the end of the 19th century, Cuban exiles already begin to arrive in the United States. They populate a section within Tampa, thus at the heart of Ybor City, is the tobacco industry.

The manufacturing tobacco industry, with raw material coming from Cuba; it came, with the help of skilled Cuban labor, in 1831, the year in which the

establishment of William H. Wall (destroyed by a fire in 1859), originated with fifty workers. Soon Wall followed that opening with many more, like Globe factory, and the tobacco of the German Samuel Seidenberg, who got to have two hundred workers, the majority being Cuban.

The year 1869 marked the beginning of one of the most transcendental periods of the population movement from Cuba towards the United States, with focus in Key West. The transfer of hundreds of tie workers and industrialists to tobacco manufacturing takes place, mainly the famous mark Prince of Wales, property of Vicente Martínez Ybor, followed as well by others more: Cuban Eduardo Hidalgo Cat transferred his great factory from New York to Tampa.

The reasons for this emigration are diverse: the introduction of more modern techniques to roll the tobacco; the most direct access to its main market, the United States; the insecure future in respect to the island, that came from undergoing years of economic, political and social crisis, and the beginning of the Ten War in 1869 against the Spanish Dominion. This emigration is in fact an exodus of specialized workers, originating from the social and labor class that on the island had managed to establish a sector of free work sector in the middle of a bad economy.

The manufacturing of tobacco by the Cuban work force became the most important source of income for the inhabitants of Key West between 1869 and 1900. In 1870 the population of Key West was about 5,657 inhabitants, a big percentage of that population were basically Cubans dedicated to the tobacco industry. Tens of millions of tobacco were produced in a year.

In the year 1875 the production of cigars had already reached 25 million. In 1880 the city counted 44 factories.

In 1890 the tobacco production in Florida for the North American market reached the number of 100,000,000 cigars produced in 130 tobacco factories. After that date production began to go down; factory owners and workers left Key West for Tampa, another city with a large population of Cuban immigrants. In 1875, Ybor had managed to produce more than ten million tobaccos. In 1880 Key West was the first city of Florida with 9,890 inhabitants, greater than Pensacola, the majority working for the tobacco industry in 57 factories that used 2,295 workers. In 1890, Key West had a population of 18,080 inhabitants, 12,000 of them of Cuban origin. This emigration of Cubans in Key West gave the locals a

vigorous and multifaceted Hispanic-Cuban culture that was also afro cubano.

As of 1885, tobacco production in Florida reached impressive numbers: 18,000 Cubans twisted and packed tobacco and more than 20 million cigars. Ten years later, the Cuban labor in Florida produced 100 million pounds. The tobacco workers of Key West were an inexhaustible spring of resources in the fight for independence in Cuba.



PHOTOGRAPHS OF OLD TOBACCO FACTORIES

The character of those that arrived from Cuba could be measured by the amount of influence that they had reached in the local political discussions and other labor conflicts in Key West. Concerned with preserving their roots and offering education to the collective, exiles and immigrants founded the famous Institute San Carlos in 1871, which today still stands as a museum and center of cultural activities in Key West. The Cuban population grew from 720 in 1880 to 5,532 by 1890.

The Spanish industrialist Vicente Martínez Ybor, who had developed the tobacco factory production in Cuba, and was involved with the industry in Key West, decided to invest in the area of Tampa. The manual

labor was Cuban. Thus a small town was born and called Ybor City and was considered one of the main Cuban settlements in the United States. The first factory that Martínez Ybor constructed was the Prince of Wales. By end of 1886 there were already 1,200 people in Tampa, the majority of whom were Cuban. The work was a six-day work week with long hours between 10 and 12 hours daily.

The first tobacco factory lector that worked in Ybor City was Nicholas de Armas. Another one of the first Cubans that, in 1886, went to work as a tobacco workers in Ybor City was Manuel Deulofeu Leonart, who published a book titled *Remembranzas de un proscrito* that details the Cuban emigration in Key West.

For that reason places like the Museum of Ybor City exist, that pays tribute to the tycoon of cigarettes Don Martínez Ybor and to the men and women who made this vicinity the worldwide capital of the cigarette. The museum emphasizes the efforts of those immigrants through photos, tools and other samples. In its golden age, Ybor counted 70 tobacco factories that used 30,000 people and produced about 250 million cigarettes per year.

After Ybor City, and separated by a bridge, the town of West Tampa was beginning to develop and in 1895, it already counted 10 tobacco factories and by 1896 it produced more than half of all the tobacco in Florida. Tampa was the US city that welcomed the most Cuban immigrants of black ancestry (13% of the total); they came as workers for the tobacco industry. The racial problems between the

Cubans resulted in the creation of two different clubs in Tampa, *El Circulo Cubano* (for white Cubans) and *Unión Martí Maceo* (for blacks and mulatos).

In numerous cigar factories in the United States (Florida, New York, New Orleans) the workers complained frequently about the material, of the workdays and, in particular, about the wages. A tobacco worker in Florida earned about \$18 per thousand of pounds; the factory

workers in New York earned \$22. Some Cuban companies and also North Americans and foreigners, established branches in Key West, Tampa and other points, with the goal of benefit from the low wages. By end of 1894 the workers of Tampa, Cuba City and Ybor City were forming different assemblies. In January of 1895, one of the companies of Martínez Ybor



PHOTOGRAPHS OF OLD TOBACCO FACTORIES

initiated the reduction of prices. At the same time, a strike in different factories from New York united, and the Tampa workers also began to strike. March 7, 1895 the main agitators of the strike were arrested.

The first books read in tobacco factories reveal the political and social preoccupations of the moment: *Las luchas del siglo* (The Fights of the Century), *Historia de la Revolución Francesa* (History of the French Revolution), *Historia de los girondinos* (History of the Girondinos), by Alphonse de Lamartine; novels like *el Rey del mundo* (The King of the World), by Fernandez and González; and *Maria, la hija del jornalero* (Maria, The Daughter of the Day Laborer). There was no lack of serious studies like the *Economía política* (Political Economy) by the Spaniard Estrada Flowers. The newspapers were reviewed eagerly. These lecturers also read the novels by Emile Zola, Leon Tolstoy, Víctor Hugo, Honore Balzac, Alexander Dumas and others. In these tobacco factories, while one worked it was possible to listen to the news, to know history and have knowledge of literature, through the tobacco factory lector. At the start of the 20th century, North American corporations that imposed their own means of production acquired many factories. Also the unions were beginning to rise.

**“The first books read in tobacco factories reveal the political and social preoccupations of the moment: *Las luchas del siglo*”**

By 1910 the Cuban tobacco workers in Tampa represented 42.7 % of all the labor force in that sector. Although the tobacco industry in Tampa was declining around 1930, the Cubans did not leave the city. Simply, they transferred towards other. As industries such as service workers, carpenters, bricklayers, employees, cooks, salesmen or storekeepers. Many developed small businesses like warehouses, restaurants, bakeries, cafeterias and small clothing stores. Others evolved as teachers, nurses and midwives.

In her investigation on the communities of Ybor City and West Tampa, in the center of Florida, during that time, Kenya Dworkin Méndez, of Carnegie Mellon University discovered "a more Cuban city than the Miami of today, with integrated districts and spaces of non-segregated work and housing and in which 'cubanidad' was breathed". But in 1899 this reality begins to change when the whites expel the blacks of el Club Cubano. As a consequence, the Cuban blacks created their own society, la Unión Martí-Maceo. In the beginning of the 20th century, according to Dworkin, an identity problem existed in Tampa whether to be Cuban or to be Black. Susan Greenbaum, of the University of South Florida, has studied the relations of the afrocubanos with the African-Americans in Ybor

City where initially strong territorial separation existed.

The Cuban identity maintained defined traditional roles: the woman in the house, the man in the street. Between the African-Americans things were different: the woman could work outside the home, and she did not need a chaperone to leave. Meaning the African-American alternative was more liberating. Therefore, African-American men looked for the afro cubana woman, who saw in the relationship with an African American the possibility of more freedom and prosperity. On the other hand, the afro cubano man saw African-American women as liberated and available. Between 1940 and 1970 many marriages between the two groups occurred creating a new community in Ybor City.

The lecteros disappeared from the Florida tobacco industry in 1931... years after the time in which the plot of *Anna in the Tropics* written by Nilo Cruz is set. In Cuba things did not change like in Florida. Today there are still 230 lecteros on the Island, reading calls of *Tabaquerías*, *Despalillos* and *Escogidas*. They are the vehicles of communication that connects daily with 24,554 workers. Of these lecteros, 137 are women and 97 are men, with an average age of 33 years old. The Lecteros hold the position for an average of 5 years.



## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is a tobacco factory lector? What are the history and the origins of this position?
2. How did the cities of Key West and Tampa develop during the second half of the 19th century?
3. How did the tobacco factory workers benefit from the lector's services?
4. Why did the lector position disappear in the tobacco factories in the United States?
5. According to Cheché, what is the most serious problem in the tobacco factory where the work is developed?
6. For what reason does Juan Julian decide to read the novel *Anna Karenina*, by Leon Tolstoy?
7. In the novel *Anna Karenina*, Anna, the husband and the lover all coexist together... Why in the play does this same "triangle" becomes a nightmare?
8. The women and men, in the factory, all have different attitudes about the lector position, and the novel that is being read. Explain why.
9. Why is Palomo not able to divorce his wife, Conchita, although she has an affair with Juan Julian?
10. Ofelia believes that only a stupid idiot is incapable of understanding the importance of having a lector, while working. What evidence does she present in the play about the advantages of having a reader?
11. During the party that is thrown in the factory by the launching of a new tobacco mark, a conversation occurs between Palomo and his wife Conchita... According to that conversation, can it be said that Palomo accepts the fact that his woman has a lover?
12. How does the extramarital relationship between Palomo's wife and Juan Julian benefit his own marriage with her?
13. Why did Cheché assassinate Juan Julian?
14. After the death of Juan Julian, it is decided to finish reading *Anna Karenina*. What are the reasons for this decision?

# IN CLASS ACTIVITIES

## Activity 1

Create a simulation of a tobacco factory in the classroom. Plastic leaves, and plastic knives can be used from the cafeteria as instrument to strip the leaves; and the type of thread coil used in kitchens to tie meat can be given to each student. With this they can tie the small piles of leaves. It is sufficient to allow them to work for one hour of work. Choose two or three students (of both sexes) to play the role of Lector.

1. Distribute the leaves, plastic thread coils, and plastic knives.
2. Present a "Reader".
3. From local newspapers, and some book from the class reading booklist, the "Reader" will give the "workers" the choice on what text they want read to them while they "work".
4. "Workers" will begin to strip and to pile up the leaves, while the "Reader" reads the material to them that they chose.
5. Repeat with each one of the "Readers".
6. After finishing the session, the teacher has to hold a discussion in class on the exercise, about the working student's experience as well as that of the lectors.

## Activity 2

In the north New Jersey area - specifically in Union City and West New York, there are several tobacco factories that still produce cigars in the traditional artisan form. Organize a field trip to one of those tobacco factories, so that the students can appreciate the skill and discipline that this type of work requires.