



# *Journal of Arts & Humanities*

## The Tragedy of Becoming: Hegel in Cruz's *Anna in the Tropics*

Stephen Emilio Aiello<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Winner of the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for drama, Nilo Cruz's *Anna in the Tropics* has garnered critical acclaim for the poetic beauty of its dialogue as well as its strong emotional content. The intensity of its drama in many ways reflects the play's use of traditional dramatic motifs, such as the family drama and the romantic triangle, to reveal its plot and the passions of its characters. An area, however, that criticism has neglected is what *Anna in the Tropics* says about the immigrant experience and cultural change both of which underscore its more obvious dramatic moments and are central to the historicity of the play and its themes. This paper through close analysis reveals the relationship between the form of the play—a dialectal tragedy—and these deeper social and cultural meanings. Dialectical tragedy as a way of realizing the movement of history and changes in culture in a drama begins with G.W.F.'s Hegel's theory of tragedy; as a result, this paper will superimpose the basic elements of Hegel's theory upon *Anna in the Tropics* in an effort to see what lies beneath the play's poetry and dramatic power and how the play speaks in larger terms to its audiences.

Keywords: Nilo Cruz, G.W.F. Hegel, tragedy, dialectics.

Available Online: 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2016.

This is an open access article under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License, 2016.

### 1.0 Introduction: *Anna in the Tropics*

---

<sup>1</sup> College of Arts and Sciences, Lynn University, Boca Raton, Florida, Email: [saiello@lynn.edu](mailto:saiello@lynn.edu).

A jury awarded Nilo Cruz's *Anna in the Tropics* a Pulitzer Prize based only a reading as opposed to a viewing of an actual stage production of the play. It is only the second time this has happened in the history of the Pulitzer for Drama. Accordingly critics have lauded the playwright for his lyrical sense of dialogue and described *Anna in the Tropics* as an "unrushed play in which language is savored" (Abarbenel, 2003, para. 6). *Anna in the Tropics* possesses, as director Emily Mann explained "a kind of poetry of the theater that Tennessee Williams had, a language that spins a beautiful atmosphere" (as cited in Gussow, 2003, p. 4). Linda Winer, who chaired the Pulitzer drama jury that selected *Anna in the Tropics*, cited the play's "rich imagery and a sense of myth", while another juror described Cruz's drama as "lovely and kind of fragile, with archetypal, universal characters" (as cited in Anders, 2003, p. 3). Robert Brustein claimed that "It is a truly sweet play... a refreshingly old-fashioned play about the power of love" (2006, pp. 111-112).

Yet for all accolades the play has received, the critical emphasis has been on its formalist aesthetics with only passing reference to the play's historicity or cultural meanings. This focus, plus the relative paucity of critical work on the play, seem to marginalize the play's significance despite its receiving the Pulitzer.

A single quote by Cuban poet Octavio Armand in an article by Randy Gener (2006) in *American Theatre* on the career of playwright Nilo Cruz speaks to this dissonance in the play's reception. Having twice fled his homeland himself, Armand explained that " people in exile...always carry along their homes: their languages, customs, traditions of their countries. They transpose and translate: they live between two shores" (para.4).

The two shores: this is the landscape of Cruz's *Anna in the Tropics* that is examined through the lives of a family of cigar rollers in a "tabaqueria," a small factory in Tampa, Florida at the beginning of the Great Depression. Before drawing any comparisons between Octavio Armand's experience to that of the characters in *Anna in the Tropics*, this paper notes that Cruz's characters are seemingly not all exiles, although the playwright stressed in an interview that indeed many of the cigar rollers who left Cuba during its fight for independence from Spain during the same time period were (as cited in Mann, 2004, p. 3). However, what connects exiles to immigrants in the play is that "to transpose and translate" - living between the polarities of cultural experience - is not a matter of quiescent absorption but in truth rather a collision between larger historical and cultural forces personified in *Anna in the Tropics*' singular transitional moment. Much of its great appeal to audiences is that *Anna in the Tropics* is in many ways a family drama; however, it is this transitional moment, the end of the cycle for a way of life represented by those in the tabaqueria, as noted by the playwright's note prefacing the play, that reverberates both tension and meaning for modern audiences.

A collision between two of the play's central characters in *Anna in the Tropics* effects questions that hover over the play's final tragic tableaux as to what this drama signifies. In a postmodern world an effort to explore tragedy as a way of resolving such questions in a contemporary drama is most certainly working against the grain, yet for a historical work of fiction, such as *Anna in the Tropics*, which looks to the past to explore present meaning, to do so critically as well seems justified. The conflict of the play's two main characters, each fighting for his own seemingly justifiable position, frames *Anna in the Tropics* as a dialectical drama that is redolent in many ways to G.W.F Hegel's view of tragedy that is " attuned to historical conflicts, crises and transitions " (Roche, 2009, p. 58). Thus, a Hegelian analysis of the two shores embodied in what could be argued as the play's two heroes seems theoretically appropriate and suited to a tragedy such as *Anna in the Tropics*.

A Hegelian analysis also seeks to find synthesis or at least a sense of resolution, something that is very unexpected for a modern tragedy. A deconstruction of *Anna in the Tropics*, although certainly a more contemporary critical method to disclose what seems to be conflicting ideas in the play, may risk lapsing into a concatenation of oppositions that seems to counter what Randy Gener (2006) suggested as the playwright's desire in *Anna in the Tropics* to work thematically in a path through "a window and out of the four walls of estrangement...[and the] flight from separation, displacement and cultural fragmentation " (para.4). Although tragedy as a form may seem contradictory to that purpose,

dialectics is not. As William Desmond (1985) explained, "dialectics is inherently a process of structuring, a self-structuring" (p. 253). Thus, the dialectical form of *Anna in the Tropics* discloses that what it means to "transpose and translate" is to enter a world of becoming. Towards that meaning, this paper will examine *Anna in the Tropics* in light of Hegel's views on tragedy.

Considered the second most influential theory of tragedy next to Aristotle's *Poetics* (Roche, 2003, p. 51), Hegel's theory as expressed in his *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* relates his general views on theology and historical change to the form and content of tragedy. Hegel shifts the emphasis in tragedy away from the moral struggles of a single heroic character as in Aristotle's *Poetics* to an examination of characters as world-historical representatives of ethical issues manifest in the world of the drama. His analysis is based on classical Greek tragedy, specifically Sophocles' *Antigone*; however, Hegel examines modern tragic drama as well. Modern tragedy for Hegel (1975) subordinates its characters' dialectical conflicts within the external world's "religious, political and social spheres" (II: p.1223) for those of the subjectivity and the exigencies of the individual will. Lastly, Hegel differs from the classical view that the tragic conflict is left unresolved within the action of the play itself; instead he favors a synthesis or sublation of tragedy's opposing forces within the consciousness of the audience itself.

This paper represents an effort to realize deeper meanings to *Anna in the Tropics* than those critics have expressed previously. The paper concludes that *Anna in the Tropics* accommodates both of Hegel's descriptions of classical and modern tragedy. The collision of the play's two central characters and their steadfast contesting of opposing historical trends and cultural shifts pitting the past against the future aligns with his analysis of tragedy as expression of the essential nature of change. This same collision and tension internalized into the individual lives of characters show the play to possess the more psychological characteristics of modern tragedy as Hegel described them. This analysis concludes by revealing how the play's dialectical structure itself affords audiences a pathway to resolving this collision in their own lives, either as legacies of the immigrant experience or even more broadly as members of an ever-changing modern world.

"The Tragedy of Becoming" bifurcates Hegel's theory into sections on his views of classical and modern tragedy. Each section begins with a brief overview of the essential characteristics of Hegel's description of tragedy supported by critical commentary. A close analysis of *Anna in the Tropics* in light of Hegel's ideas follows theory in each section.

## 2.0 Hegel's theory of tragedy

Using Sophocles' *Antigone* as his model, Hegel (1975) viewed tragedy as an aesthetic representation of social anomie caused by "collisions of circumstances," (II: p. 1159) in which, as in the case of *Antigone*, there is a paradigm shift as "one norm is pushed aside and another comes into being" (Roche, 2009, p. 58). In Hegel's view these clashes are manifest dialectically throughout the process of history. As William Desmond (1966) described, tragedy dramatizes those points "where conflicting forces must, by their inner nature, take actions and carry conflict through to a transformation" (p.35).

Hegel (1975) argued in *Aesthetics* that the content of tragedy must at once be "universal in its interests and passions..." yet immediate, drawn seemingly from "actual interests and circumstances," and therefore recognizable to audiences (II: p.1194). As in *Antigone* there is a tear in the social fabric, the "substance of ethical life," of, "family love between husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sister; or political life, the patriotism of the citizens, the will of the ruler and religion existent..." (II: p.1194). Opposing characters represent this dichotomy. However, what brings characters into conflict is not their desires or intentions in themselves but their singularity of purpose. In *Aesthetics* "each of the opposed sides if taken by itself, has justification... each can establish the true and positive nature of its own aim and character only by denying and infringing upon the equally justified power of the other" (II: p.1196). As a result these characters are at once heroic and tragic: the justified nature of their ethical claim and their obdurate one-sidedness of purpose become at once their greatness and fatal flaw.

For Hegel both a classical and a modern tragedy, such as *Anna in the Tropics*, demanded a "resolution of conflict and discord," for "however justified the tragic character and his aim, however necessary the tragic collision...eternal justice is required to restore the substance and unity of ethical life with the downfall of the individual who has disturbed its peace " (II: 1197). The death of the hero is therefore rational as " the tragic adherence to a partial position is stripped away, [and] succumbs to the greater process in which it is submerged and yields to a larger process of historical development" (Roche, 2009, p. 57). The proleptic function of the tragic collision is catharsis, "which takes place in the consciousness of the audience, as it recognizes the supremacy of the whole of ethical life and sees it purged of its one-sidedness "and "leads to an ever-greater realization of reason, self, consciousness, and freedom" (p. 52).

### 3.0 Hegel and Anna in the Tropics

The transitional historical moment exists in *Anna in the Tropics* in the conflicting aims brought into dialectical juxtaposition through the worldviews of its two central characters, Juan Julian and Cheché. In ways they are reminiscent of the romantic and impractical Madame Ranevskaya and the prosaic, pragmatic businessman, Yermolay Lophakin in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, a similar transitional historical drama although some critics suggested it is reductive to see them as a single ethical claim. (Senelick, 1985, p.120). In this moment the richness and elegance of the Madame Ranevskaya's Arcadian past are threatened by economic realities of Russia in the emerging the 20th century as foreseen by Lophakin. Reality triumphs over romanticism in the end of the drama as the cherry orchard is cut down in order to sell it as tracts of land to pay the debt of Ranevskaya's family. Thus, taken in the same light, the valorization of the traditions of the tabaqueria and the Cuban culture from which it sprang is the power of Juan Julian, while the "modernizing instrumental reason" (Grady, 2009, p.138) of Cheché, the man from North America, represents the realities of the Great Depression and the advancement of technology in the tobacco industry. From that perspective it is possible to recognize the two characters heroically as emblematic of a Hegelian collision or what Roche (2009) called the tragedy of "two goods" (p. 53).

Admittedly it is difficult to view Cheché in a heroic light given his contrast to the demiurgical Juan Julian and the play's ending. However, as part owner of the tabaqueria that supports the lives of all the workers, Cheché's view is that the sustainability and growth of the tabaqueria are being impeded by his co-workers' refusal to accept the reality of their present and future situations - the advent of cigar rolling machines to replace their use of manual skills to produce cigars and the obsolescence of the traditional ways of cigar rolling, including the need for a lector, like Juan Julian. "We are stuck in time," he explains to his co-workers who, according to Cheché, deny "modernity, progress and advancement" <sup>2</sup> (p. 50) and as such the tabaqueria will be not be able to compete with other factories that have modernized. In a debate with Juan Julian, Cheché pits the past, which he describes pejoratively, against the future's efficiency: "We are still rolling cigars the same way that Indians rolled them hundreds of years ago. I mean, we might as well wear feathers and walk half naked. " "The workers run the machines...[they] do tobacco stuffing at the speed of light" (p. 56).

A reality foreshadowed by a playwright's note that prefaces the play supports Cheché's claim that what was looming on the horizon for the society of cigar workers was "the end of a tradition." In two years following the time of the play, "the lectors were removed from the factories and what remained of the cigar rollers consisted of low-paid American workers who operated machines" (p. 12). In this way Cheché's one-sided exhortation to heed the inevitable, to abandon the ways of the past and accept change at the risk of isolating himself within his community could be considered heroic and a Hegelian "good."

<sup>2</sup> All references to *Anna in the Tropics* are to the following edition: Cruz, Nilo. (2003.) *Anna in the Tropics*. [Apple iBook version]. Available from <http://www.apple.com/ibooks>

Juan Julian's argument is the obverse. It is American culture that threatens both the factory and tradition. America has popularized smoking in moving pictures that depict a "fast mode of living with machines and moving cars...a quick smoke, the kind you get from a cigarette...that are keeping us from taking walks and sitting on a park bench [and] smoking a cigar slowly and calmly...modernity is actually destroying our very own industry" (p. 58). The cultural transformation from cigars to cigarettes reveals in Juan Julian's view the deleterious effects of "'modernity, progress and advancement'" and is echoed in a conversation Juan Julian has with Conchita:

As my father used to say, living in the city is like living inside the mouth of a crocodile, buildings all around you like teeth. The teeth of culture, the mouth and tongue of civilization. It is a silly comparison but it makes sense to me. Every time I go to a park, I'm reminded of how we always go back to nature. We build streets and buildings. We work five to six days a week, building and cementing our paths and down come our trees. And all for what? (p. 48).

This clash between the traditional ways of the past versus the realities of the future as expressed by both men achieves another dimension other than just a socioeconomic one. It is a spiritual value attributed to art as a necessary part of cultural life that is symbolized by the lyrical nature of Juan Julian and his role as lector. Juan Julian's appeal to the workers reflects a structure of feeling in which their craft is comparable to the relationship between art and labor from their ancient culture. The fruits of their labor had intrinsic meaning and much more than simply exchange value. Juan Julian poetically explains to Cheché, the "tradition of having readers in the factories goes back to the Taíno Indians," who believed that "tobacco leaves whisper the language of the sky" and that they were able to "communicate with the gods...through the language of cigar smoke" (p. 57). Cacique, the chief Indian, who translated "the sacred words of the deities" for his "oidores"<sup>3</sup> is mirrored in the role of the lector as reader and the cigar workers as his listeners. "And this is the tradition that you are trying to destroy with your machine" (p.58). Juan Julian sees culture as being crushed by the materialist economic determinism of Cheché or as Grady (2009) described, "mythos gives way to logos" (p. 139). Cheché avers a more "formally rationalized world...[in which] objects become detached, fungible, and ordered things...[they] are empty of any transcendent meaning beyond perhaps their exchange value meaning" (Vieta, 2006, p. 2). Cheché's push to replace aesthetics - the cigar rollers saw themselves as artists (Pittsburgh Public Theater, 2004, p. 6) - and the tabaqueria's pre-industrial technology to conform to the mass production and consumer economics of America underscores Cheché's confusion with the workers' unwillingness to sacrifice culture, art, and tradition for greater wealth. The cigar rollers' ancient culture had intrinsic meaning that meant much more than simply exchange value.

Thus, in this view we can logically consider *Anna in the Tropics* a tragedy on two levels: one in which antinomic characters in Hegelian terms are representative of a collision of world historical forces. Juan Julian and Cheché together present the possibility of a Manichean world in which the future is at war with the past, technology gains dominion over spirit, and the material rules over the mind - dichotomies that echo the fears of those in England of the 1930's who lamented the passing of what Raymond Williams called the "organic society" of the 18th century" (as cited in Eagleton, 2003, p. 36). This drama is also tragic in its particularization of the exile / immigrant experience of the tabaqueria family. Ultimately Juan Julian, while never relinquishing his grip on the justification of his "ethical substance," the cultural traditions and values he represents, dies the death of the classical tragic hero. The past only in part dies, however, since we see him come alive in the productions of the modern tragedy *Anna in the Tropics*. Even though Cheché appears to evince at least in part the singularity in pathos of the classical tragic hero in his collision with Juan Julian, his tragic conflict is truly one of "self-division" (Williams, 1966, p. 34) which Hegel described as more attuned to a modern tragic figure in particular and to modern tragedy as a whole. Such self-division is Cheché's internalization of the "two shores" mentioned at the beginning of this paper. We then divide our interest in *Anna in the Tropics* between the classically drawn tragic hero, Juan Julian, and the modern tragic figure of Cheché, whose apparent

---

<sup>3</sup> "hearer" or judge

concerns for the future of the tabaqueria family are in truth sublated to his subjective psychological circumstances.

#### 4.0 Hegel and modern tragedy

A.C. Bradley (2001) commented that Hegel saw great range of such collisions in modern tragedies from those that border on the substantial or objective to those delimited by more purely individual matters and personality. The nexus for conflicts in modern tragedies, according to Hegel (1975), was that their form "adopts into its own sphere from the start the principle of subjectivity...the relationship between the tragic figure and the external world are subordinated to the exigencies of the individual will, and therefore, the "substantial element" of the "religious, political and social spheres" only "glimmer[s] through" the subjective focus in a "dim way" (II: p.1223). The relationships between the tragic figure and these external spheres can only be seen as a background in front of which the action of one individual can be played. In this light Cheché's external conflict with Juan Julian, although central to the action of *Anna in the Tropics*, exists in the penumbra created by his confrontation with self, an inner struggle comparable to the one faced by the heroine of Tolstoy's tragic novel *Anna Karenina*, for whom Nilo Cruz's play is not only eponymously titled but also contextualized with segments from the novel itself woven into the action of the play.

An initial response to *Anna in the Tropics* is to link the stories of Conchita, the daughter of the owner of the tabaqueria and the character of Anna Karenina by their obvious connection as women unfulfilled in marriage; however, an examination of Raymond Williams' (1996) analysis of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* in *Modern Tragedy*, reveals an unlikely but close tie in the subjective collisions of Anna Karenina and Cheché as well. Williams sees Anna Karenina as woman who cannot mediate between her personal and social identities - a division of experience, according to Williams, that has created a crisis in modern literature as a whole. As an unawakened woman who never was the girl in love before marriage, Anna has become trapped in her role as wife to her rather ministerial husband, Karenin. Unsatisfied by an institutional marriage of limited commitment, Anna decides that she must live her feelings through to find passion, which she does in her affair with the romantic military officer, Vronsky. Her collision stems from the guilt surrounding that decision, her unwillingness to lead the "half-life" of a secret affair as with her friends in St. Petersburg society and her insistence to "give herself fully without regard for her safety." Anna's tragic mistake, however, is that she tries to resolve this conflict by leaving "one inadequate man for another." Since neither her husband nor Vronsky was able to provide the passion "continually at the center of her life" to sustain her, Anna commits suicide in a last desperate "revengeful move to make Vronsky love her more," for as Raymond Williams explained, that tragically she is "at the point where there is neither fulfillment nor resignation... (pp.129-131).

Caught within his own personal / social dialectic, Cheché tragically realizes himself at that same point and similarly fails to find reconciliation. To the family of the tabaqueria, he is Chester, his persona from the North, an emigrant "from another culture," (Cruz, 2003, p.21) as Conchita describes him, who attempts to create a life for himself in Tampa as Cheché. At first a stranger who proves that he belongs to the family with the most tenuous of a connection - a birth certificate stating he is the half-brother to Santiago - Cheché is at once a member of the family yet never really a part of it, which is only exacerbated by the presence of Juan Julian, who is accepted immediately. Ofelia labels Cheché a fool for his resistance to hiring a new lector. Cheché's personal life is similarly riven. Divorced from his northern wife, who in terms similar to Anna Karenina left the more "institutional" Cheché, for a lector from the exotic Guanabacoa, he describes his separation from her as a metaphorical disembodiment:

Ever since she left me I am not the same. Have you ever seen the tail of the lizard when it's been cut off? The tails twist from side to side like a worm that has been removed from the soil. The thing moves on its own, like a nerve that still has life looking for the rest of the body that has been slashed away (p. 62).

Like Anna Karenina, what Cheché seeks is to palliate the alienation from self at the center of his life. It is a heroic quest he cannot complete. His attempts to take control of the tabaqueria and move it forward to lead the workers into modernity are thwarted by the community vote to reject his ideas in favor of Juan Julian's. Cheché's romantic advances toward Santiago's daughter, Marela - to meliorate his loss of his wife Mildred - are likewise rebuffed, as Marela then proceeds to bond platonically with Juan Julian. What is effected for Cheché is a retreat into further isolation - "to a world of his own," as Juan Julian says to Conchita (p. 49). Unable to find Williams' "fulfillment nor resignation", Cheché exists in the same fashion that he keeps his calendar: he crosses out the days before he even lives them. Cheché's "death", therefore, is in contrast with Juan Julian's. The events that take place at the tabaqueria only distance Cheché farther and farther away from the external spheres, and in reaction he retreats inwardly into the uncontrollable passions of his mind. Whereas Juan Julian's conflict is resolved historically - the past is subsumed by the future - Cheché's psychic death is particularized into the present action of the play as his act of violence removes whom he projects as the source of his conflict, the lector, from the family and the community.

## 5.0 Hegel and Desire

Hegel posited drama's unique ability as an art form to determine the general from the particular. Drama forces the substance of ethical life into the "objective and real world" through a mimetic depiction of reality; and by doing so, drama disrupts the "harmony" of ethical life by "actualizing" (I: 1196) the "ethical substance" into the particularity of opposing forces. The ethical substance of "desire" actualized in *Anna in the Tropics* is apparent in the dynamics of the two central characters of the play. Any notional description of desire is polysemous in *Anna in the Tropics*. It is particularized into the different ways in which Juan Julian and Cheché use desire to relate to the world of the tabaqueria. Jeffrey O'Casey (2008) reminded us that for Hegel desire is defined dialectically:

Desire should not be understood in the psychological sense as a craving for something that satisfies physiological needs. Desire for Hegel simply means the original attitude of the "I" toward self-consciousness. In other words, desire is the necessary tendency of the knowing "I" to make itself actual....The satisfaction of this desire is precisely the fulfillment of the actual Being of the "I," but this can only be attained through a dialectical interaction with another conscious self. (pp.57-58).

Therefore, for Hegel the dialectic of desire is the means through which the self is constituted through negation of the original identity by its respective other, leading to synthesis; or as Herbert Marcuse interpreted Hegel: "all things are incessantly in the act of becoming, and negativity is the underlying principle...all being is a having become . . . and a becoming . . . of another being [author's ellipses]" (as cited in O'Casey, 2008, p.54).

In this light, the function of the lector is as a symbol of art's ability to release desire to effect transformation within those who are receptive to it, as well as to a culture that places such a high value on investing art into everyday life. The cigar rollers, for example, sacrificed salary to maintain literature in their lives, a fact Ofelia confirms at the beginning of *Anna in the Tropics*. As Nilo Cruz described him as the "embodiment of literature, of art," (as cited in Mann, 2004, p. 16), Juan Julian particularizes desire outwardly in the drama, and through him the characters feel desire's push and pull as the mundane and quotidian in their lives surrender to the transformational and poetic.

Within the opening scenes of the play, the influence of the lector is felt as he awakens the family members. Marela, the younger of Santiago and Ofelia's daughters, yearns for another more romantic life beyond the tabaqueria, which as she confesses to her mother and sister, she has been able to experience through the power that *Anna Karenina* has had on her: "When Juan Julian starts to read, the story enters my body and I become the second skin of the characters " (Cruz, 2003, p.35). Despite

Ofelia's attempts to ground her daughter's reveries over the novel, Marela defends her need for fantasy poetically:

"No, everything in life dreams. A bicycle dreams of becoming a boy, an umbrella dreams of becoming the rain, a pearl dreams of becoming a woman, and a chair dreams of becoming a gazelle and running back to the forest" (p. 35).

Desire awakened through art is similarly redolent for Conchita's father, Santiago. Fearing his house is in "a state of disorder," Santiago drinks and gambles excessively to alleviate the "fog" in his life that has created distance in his relationship to his wife Ofelia and in his role as owner of the tabaqueria. The voice of Juan Julian and *Anna Karenina* draws Santiago in as he listens from his room above the tabaqueria. Specifically his identification to the character of Levin meliorates Santiago's alienation. In Levin, Santiago realizes not only his distance from his wife, but also from his past life. As dedicated as Levin is to his farm, so Santiago sees that his commitment to the factory, a position once entrusted to him by his father, has waned, as has his sense of pride and self-respect. "He is a dedicated man," Ofelia describes Levin. "I used to be like him," replies Santiago and resolves: "to the factory I need to go back" (p.44).

In *Anna in the Tropics* Cheché's desire to return "home," at least in a cultural sense, should point him in the same direction - towards becoming and towards the lector and *Anna Karenina*. His journey, however, is the reverse of the exile / immigrant experience in which it is possible, as the playwright explained, "to identify some of the things you lose in order to integrate yourself in this society, in the North American landscape" (as cited in Mann, 2004, p.8). The tragic irony is that Cubania, as Cheché experiences it - leads him to gain nothing. Desire that Cheché brings with him to the tabaqueria is desire as constituted by the world of the North that he left - the one-dimensional society, as Marcuse describes it, in which desire translates into a conformist consumer consciousness in which "the eroticization of the original non-erotic objects such as cars, houses, gadgets and the like" is satisfied only through possession (Oca, 2009, p. 20). It is this sense of desire that Cheché carries with him back to his other "shore" in Tampa and as such reifies in his mind the tradition of tabaqueria and relationships there in terms of their material value to advance personally.

Therefore, Cheché's agenda is not the rational desire for technological progress and wealth that he expresses to the others for their gain and future but in truth Cheché is similar to Shakespeare's Iago whose motive is "erotically charged aggression motivated by a generalized, largely irrational sense of envy and jealousy," (Grady, 2009, p.137). From the very first scene of *Anna in the Tropics*, Cheché works to possess the tabaqueria at the expense of any connection to the family who accepted him as one of their own. As his half brother, the benighted Santiago, drinks and gambles to excess, the abstemious Cheché exchanges familial trust and responsibility for indemnification by insisting that Santiago make good in writing of his promise to pay back his loans or yield another share of the factory to Cheché:

(Cheché looks at the sole of his shoe and gives Santiago more money.)

Cheché: Here. Let's go.

Santiago: Well, put on your shoe, hombre!

Cheché: No, I am not putting it on.

Santiago: Why not?

Cheché: Because this here is our contract, and I don't want it erased.

Santiago: And you're going to walk with just one shoe.

Cheché: Yes!

Santiago: You bastard! (p.16)

As an undercurrent to their many differences, desire is actually a nodal point for Cheché and Juan Julian in that their relationships to Marela lead to tragedy. While Juan Julian sees Marela's intrinsic beauty poetically as "clear and fresh as water," (p.77) seeking only to be collected by Marela in some of her "jars" that contain their "little moments as small as violet petals" (p.76), Cheché's "blindness," as Juan



Julian described it (p. 80), is of the body. Cheché's observation that Marela's licking of the last leaf of a cigar, as opposed to pasting it, is a sexual act, as if she were "playing with some man" (p. 65). Thus, this is justification for Cheché to "steal" her from his rival Juan Julian and to own her, as evidenced in his rape of Marela, an act which is also mirrored in his murder of Juan Julian. Lastly, Cheché's choice to marry Mildred, a woman from another culture than that of the family of the tabaqueria, has similar resonance. A "southern belle from Atlanta...with skin that was "pale like a lily, " (p. 27) Mildred's appearance as a "trophy wife" from another society has seemingly greater value as a possession to her husband than a woman would from his own culture. Apparently for Cheché, his only mistake in losing Mildred was not a lack of emotional commitment but rather one of control or ownership. He rationalizes Mildred's leaving him for another lector with regret for not taking Mildred "up North to Trenton and start a new life [where] the two of us could work together in a cigar factory...and there are no "lectors and no good-for nothing love stories, which put ideas and women's head's and ants inside their pants" (p.72).

Cheché's derisive comment on the effect the lector had on his wife speaks dialectically: whereas desire does not lead Cheché to a collision with self that enables synthesis for him, for Conchita desire, activated through her affair with Juan Julian, activates the tragedy of becoming for her. Conchita seeks sexual fulfillment, which she does not find in her marriage anymore. Poetry is linked to passion, as Conchita reminds her husband, Palomo, what initially attracted her to him that is now lost:

Conchita: You married me because the day you met me, I gave you a cigar I had rolled especially for you and when you smoked it, you told me I had slipped into your mouth like a pearl diver.

Palomo: I told you that?

Conchita: Yes, you did. After blowing a blue ring of smoke out of your mouth. And the words lingered in the air like a zeppelin and I thought to myself, I could fall in love with that mouth.

Palomo: As far as I can remember, I married you because I couldn't untie your father's hands from around my neck.

Conchita: Ah, the truth comes out. That explains everything. You never really cared for me (p. 38).

Like Anna Karenina, Conchita risks losing her marriage for desire. She accepts that the cost of an affair with Juan Julian that is expressed metaphorically in excerpt from *Anna Karenina* as the body "deprived of life," (p. 32) - is her social body or marriage that would be murdered by the shame of an affair. "She has no choice," Ofelia explains to Marela. It is something she [Anna Karenina] cannot escape" (p.35). Later in the play Conchita tells Juan Julian that the story of her former self will be complete with the cutting of her hair for the feast of Saint Candelaria. This fertility festival in Cuba is in celebration of the pruning of plants for new growth. The tradition is that a woman's hair is an act done by her father or husband to then be buried under a tree. Instead she asks the lector to do this, for "anybody who dedicates his life to reading books believes in rescuing things from "oblivion:"

Juan Julian: "And how does one read the story of your hair?"

Conchita: The same way one reads a face or a book.

Juan Julian: Then we shouldn't bury your hair under a tree... We should place it inside a manuscript.

Conchita: My hair will be in good company with *Anna Karenina*. (p. 50).

The romantic triangular relationship he shares with Juan Julian and Conchita is equally transformative for Palomo. His desire is to assume the persona of the lector: "Show me . . . Show me what he did to you and how he did it," (p. 60), he asks Conchita. She responds with a warning that to enter the world of Juan Julian, to enter the world of art and passion, which he had forgotten in his own marriage, Palomo must surrender the self the way actors do: "they stop playing themselves and they give in. You would have to let go of yourself and enter the life of another human being..." Teach me then," (p.70) he says. Palomo's tragedy is once again that of internal collision. He is at once attracted to the lector and his influence on his wife, yet he is jealous of Juan Julian's intrusion into his marriage. In seeking an

analogous comparison from Juan Julian as to why Anna Karenina's lover came to her and why she had the affair, Conchita explains that it was to "help her to love again. Help her to recognize herself as a woman all over again." Thus, for Palomo a catharsis of pity and fear is evoked by the affair of his wife and Juan Julian. His sense of the loss of his wife is echoed in his inquiry:

Palomo: Do you ever talk to him about me?

Conchita: Yes. He wanted to know why you stopped loving me.

Palomo: And what did you tell him?

Conchita: I told him that it just happened one day, like everything else in life.

Palomo: And what was his response?

Conchita: He wanted to know what I felt and I told him the truth. I told him that I desire and love you just the same (p.69).

Conchita invokes fear in her husband as she suggests an equal recognition through homoerotic attraction Palomo has for the lector:

Palomo: You've been looking at him the whole night. You're still in love with this man.

Conchita: Maybe just as much as you are.

Palomo: I don't like men.

(Sound of a celebratory gunshot. Laughter.)

Conchita: Then why do you always want me to tell you what I do with him?

Palomo: Because it's part of the old habit we have of listening. We are listeners.

Conchita: No, there's something else.

Palomo: You're right there's something else. And it's terrible sometimes (p.78).

It is admission that Palomo then rejects violently to the possibly of "the other" within him:

Palomo: (Grabbing her arm): I want you to go back to him and tell him you want to make love like a knife.

Conchita: Why a knife?

Palomo: Because everything has to be killed (p.72).

It is this one act of Palomo's that reveals his becoming – his ability to meliorate his conflicting desire that is in stark contrast to Cheché's. Through the shock and paralysis at the tragic death of Juan Julian, Palomo takes action and achieves synthesis. He speaks to the family and workers not only as the lector but as himself as well. He picks up the novel and reads:

Palomo: *Anna Karenina*. Part 3, Chapter 14: By the time he arrived in Petersburg, Anna Karenina's husband was not only completely determined to carry out his decision, but he had composed in his head a letter he would write to his wife.

(He looks up from the book and stares at Conchita.)

In his letter he was going to write everything he'd been meaning to tell her (p.87).

## 6.0 Conclusion

This paper puts forth the idea that criticism of *Anna in the Tropics* has neglected the role of history and culture in the play. Critics praised the playwright for being the first Latino to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, for the literariness of the play, for its traditional form, its poetic dialogue and its "hothouse theatricality," (Gener, 2003, para.3). The effect of this perspective according to my view is to reify *Anna in the Tropics* into a cultural artifact, an "old-fashioned," (Brustein, 2006, p. 112) Hispanic play. The implication of this critical view is that it detaches the play from its audiences by ignoring its reception.

In an interview with director Emily Mann (2004), Nilo Cruz spoke of an article he wrote for a Jewish literary magazine which discussed what *Anna in the Tropics* had to do with Cubans fleeing their homeland in life rafts, and how Jewish readers responded by relating their experiences to the play. Cruz quoted Lillian Hellman's book of memoirs, *Pentimento*, in which Hellman explains how when a painter paints over an original piece of art in a way to change or improve it, how after years "that initial image starts to appear in the painting as the other image starts to fade: the original one starts to seep in" (p.10). And so in the painting both images are together superimposed but inseparable. In other words there is a synthesis of the two since one image cannot be seen without the other. This pentimento effect is what audiences of *Anna* experience at the end of the tragedy. Of course this perspective of the play may be particularly telling for Latino audiences; however, it is as well to all whose heritage involves a migration from an original homeland and culture to a newer one. Clearly this is what connected Cruz's Jewish readers to the *Anna in the Tropics*.

In dialectical thinking Hegel defined "aufhebung" or sublation (Spencer & Krauze, 2102) in this way: "the whole is an overcoming which preserves what it overcomes" (p.646). Hegel spoke of a similar perspective that occurs in dialectical tragedy. In the classical version of tragedy the audience is left with the resolution of the drama in the death of the hero – hence the tragedy. Mark Roche (2009) posited, however, that Hegel saw the resolution of tragedy differently. Instead of the resolution of the tragic conflict occurring on stage within the tragedy itself" as in classical tragedy, for Hegel the resolution takes place within the consciousness of the audience. According to Roche, Hegel created a "neighboring genre" for tragedy: the drama of reconciliation (pp.62-63). And so in the Hegelian view the richness of *Anna in the Tropics* for audiences of the play exists in a reconciliation that exists in its pentimento effect. In other words, what it means to "translate and transpose" between two shores in the drama is nothing less than a reconciliation between the future and the past into a tragedy of becoming - to reveal, as Nilo Cruz explained and quoted previously in this paper, "what you lose in order to integrate yourself in this society, in the North American landscape" (as cited in Mann, 2004, p.8).

All modern Americans are in one sense the children of Cheché. We are always looking to the machines of the future to make our lives more efficient and more profitable. Yet, like Cheché, a self-divided man, whose psyche is at war with itself, we are drawn to the past: to the unity of traditions and culture of Juan Julian that lies in a layer beneath the layers of paint that *Anna in the Tropics* illuminates – a world where art transforms, where tradition is alive, where sensuality is expression and not possession, and where there is spirit in the most humble of labor.

## References

- Arbanel, J. (2003, September 25). *Anna in the Tropics*. *Theatermania*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatermania.com>
- Anders, G. (2003, June). All work and no play: Nilo Cruz's play wins Pulitzer Prize despite great odds. *Hispanic Magazine*. 3.
- Bradley, A.C. (2001). In Paolucci, A. & H. In Appendix of *Hegel on tragedy*. Smyrna, DE: Griffon House Publications.
- Brustein, R. (2006). *Millennial Stages: Essays and reviews: 2001-2005*. [Kindle eBook version]. New Haven & London: Yale University Press. Available from <http://www.amazon.com>
- Cruz, N. (2003.) *Anna in the Tropics*. [Apple iBook version]. Available from <http://www.apple.com/ibooks>
- Desmond, W. (1985). Hegel, dialectic and deconstruction. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 18 (4), 244-263. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40237454>
- Eagleton, T. (2003). *Sweet violence: The idea of the tragic*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing.
- Gener, R. (2006). Dreamer from Cuba. *American Theater*. Retrieved from <https://www.tcg.org/publications/at/2003/cuba.cfm>
- Grady, H. (2009). Tragedy and materialist thought. . In Rebecca Bushnell. (Ed.), *A Companion to tragedy*. (pp.127-144). West Sussex, United Kingdom: John Wiley and Sons.

- Gussow, M. (2003, September 14). Nilo Cruz's *Anna in the Tropics* lights the Cubans' cigars. *New York Times*. Retrieved [file://localhost/from http://www.nytimes.com:2003:09:14:theater:theater-nilo-cruz-s-anna-karenina-lights-the-cubans-cigars.html](http://localhost/from http://www.nytimes.com:2003:09:14:theater:theater-nilo-cruz-s-anna-karenina-lights-the-cubans-cigars.html)He
- Hegel, G.W. F. (1975). *Aesthetics: Lectures on fine art*. (Vols. I, II). [T.M. Knox, trans.]. Oxford, Great Britain: Oxford University Press.
- Mann, E. (2004). Nilo Cruz. *Bomb-Artists in conversation*. Winter. Retrieved from <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2626/nilo-cruz>
- Ocay, J. (2008). Heidegger, Hegel, Marx: Marcuse and the theory of historicity. *Kritik*, 2. Retrieved from [http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue\\_4/ocay\\_december2008](http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_4/ocay_december2008).
- Ocay, J. (2009). Eroticizing Marx, Revolutionizing Freud: Marcuse's Psychoanalytic Turn. *Kritik*, 3. Retrieved from [http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue\\_5/ocay\\_june2009](http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_5/ocay_june2009).
- Pittsburgh Public Theater Study Guide to Anna in the Tropics*. (2004). Retrieved from <http://www.ppt.org/>
- Roche, M. (2009). The greatness and limitations of Hegel's theory of tragedy. In Rebecca Bushnell. (Ed.), *A Companion to tragedy*. (pp.51-67). West Sussex, United Kingdom: John Wiley and Sons.
- Senelick, L. (1985). *Anton Chekhov*. New York, NY: Grove Press.
- Spencer & Krauze. (2102). *Introducing Hegel: A graphic guide*. [Kindle version]. Available from <http://www.amazon.com>.
- Vieta, M. (2006). Herbert Marcuse's critique of technological rationality: An exegetical reading. Retrieved from <http://www.academia.edu>.
- Williams, R. (1966). *Modern Tragedy*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.