A Visit to the Cigar Factory,
And Pin-Ups There Encountered

It has been suggested that Cuban troops returning from Angola
Introduced the AIDS virus into the Western Hemisphere.
--AP

Havana late in 1951.
The ground tobacco and the tan flat leaf
To be the panatela fill the table,
As a reader whom the workers hire,
Between the morning news and Don Quixote
Reads aloud to them from Blood and Sand.

Will Dona Sol seduce her matador?
(Did Rudolph Valentino slick his hair?)
Joan Collins, born to play the villainess,
Is eighteen, they who hire much older. “Menace”
Means for them not even Rita Hayworth.
It is Nita Naldi. In his chair--
High chair--at break becoming his own man,
The reader reads from Hemingway. His lips
Form silently ingles. To stick the leaf
And seal it, sweating Papa look-alikes
Are rolling sweepingly across bare chests
Each proto-smoke. Angola, AIDS, sweat, Joan
Now menace down the line. I think of all,
And how the end at Ketcham shadows too.
I bite the end and spit it. But I smoke.