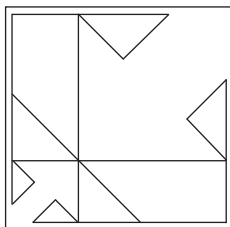


for social responsibilities,  
liberty, and dissent

Incorporating *Librarians at  
Liberty*

**COUNTER**

**POISE**



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# BOOK REVIEWS

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Sánchez Baute, Alonso. **Al diablo la maldita primavera (To hell with the damned spring)**. Colombia/US: Alfaguara: Sanitillana, dist. by Bilingual Publications Co. 2003. 226 p. ISBN 958-704-073-2. paper. \$24.95.



In this provocative debut novel, Colombian-native Sánchez Baute uncovers an underground and sometimes demented Bogotá as he reveals the internal conflicts and tribulations of his gay protagonist. This fascinating work received the Bogotá de Novela prize and has since topped national bestseller lists. Edwin

Rodríguez Buelvas moves from the coast of Colombia to Bogotá with the goal of becoming the best and most popular drag queen in the capital. In an intimate monolog about his life, he rambles on about his sexual escapades in theaters, bars, and parks, and his adventures with his drag queen friends—Assesinata, Wonder Woman, and Simplicity among the most famous.

The text is full of Colombian slang, references to both US and Colombian culture, and, most notably, clever, sarcastic commentaries on society that will keep all readers (not only Colombians) laughing. But behind Edwin's snide and humorous comments about others and about Bogotá society, there is a constant search for identity and love. In this aspect, Sánchez Baute's novel is heartbreaking. Edwin's endless solitude reflects a society that silently discriminates against homosexuals. Although the novel lacks a climax and some of Edwin's ramblings could have been left out, Sánchez Baute has created a novel that moves beyond sexuality and can appeal to readers of all sexual orientations. Latin American readers will understand most of the colloquialisms and Colombia-specific references. Highly recommended for bookstores, and public and college libraries interested in queer fiction—*Carmen Ospina (Críticas)*

16

Hart, Armando. **Aldabonazo: inside the Cuban revolutionary underground**. Pathfinder Press. 387 p. ISBN 0-87348-968-3. paper. \$25.

"I was happy because I was fighting, and there is no greater satisfaction than that of fighting and working for the future.

That is the nature of those who have decided to be revolutionaries. It is also true of peoples in revolution."- Armando Hart

In *Aldabonazo*, Armando Hart is the key to history, as he writes from the perspective of one who actually took part in the revolution. Rather than the strict overview offered by general historical accounts, *Aldabonazo* details the pre-revolutionary period in Cuba from 1952 to 1958. It is not simply a collection of Cuban documents but a historical display with vivid commentary to provide an insider's explanation. Hart asserts that the July 26 Movement and the Cuban Revolution, as a whole, brought what the starved Cuban society desired. It was as though Cuba was waking from an awful dream in which she was plundered repeatedly by imperial powers and internal parasites that reaped their spoils at her demise. However, this new mindset was explosive and could only be realized with appropriate leadership and strategic ingenuity. That virtuosity and resourcefulness would be personified in Fidel Castro in the eyes of Hart.

Hart's work is permeated with his optimistic and loyal view of the Cuban people. He truly believes that the approach taken by Fidel and the many people involved, was what was right for his compatriots. Cuba was in need of "ethical... human and social redemption," and the events that took place were in no way an accident. After the innumerable abuses they endured from the previous regime, it is easy to see why Hart and other Cubans craved a new government, a new face, and a new reality. "Aldabonazo" was actually one of the words shouted by a party leader, dedicated to ending corruption, who shot himself to send a message about the corruption in Cuban government. The word became a symbol of the movement and the name of the official journal of the July 26 Movement and has now become the title to a book that reveals its meaning.

Oftentimes, one finds that in works such as these information is repetitive and hackneyed. *Aldabonazo* fills in those spaces that previously were the "givens" in the revolutionary equations. For example, who received Fidel

and his compatriots on his legendary return from exile? Who were the people, other than Fidel and Che, who made the revolution possible? How did they meet under such uncertain circumstances, and with the threat of

Batista's henchmen ever-present? This account reminds us that the Cuban Revolution could not have been successful without some extreme level of support from the grassroots.

In its own sense, *Aldabonazo* is a work of propaganda. However, it is necessary to note here that there

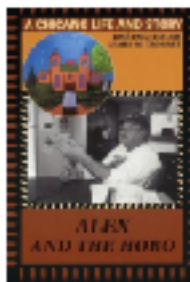
**It was as though Cuba was waking from an awful dream in which she was plundered repeatedly by imperial powers and internal parasites that reaped their spoils at her demise.**

is not one piece of completely objective literature that deals with the Cuban Revolution. Hart, by his book, hopes to add more reason to the unity behind the Cuban core. It is evident, from the start, that his feelings about the legitimacy of the beginning, the maintenance, and the existence of the Castro regime reflect a stance of solidarity.

—*Simone Grant*

17

Taylor, Jose Inez and James M. Taggart. **Alex and the hobo: a Chicano life and story.** Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press, 2003. 222 p. ISBN 0-292-78180-6. paper \$19.95. ISBN 0-292-78179-2. cloth. \$40.



Authors include Jose Inez Taylor, a farm worker, strike organizer, construction worker, Chicano activist, and writer among other titles, who live in Antonito, Colorado. Taylor wrote the fiction portion of this book based on experiences of his own life.

James M. Taggart analyzes the narrative and interviews

Taylor about his life and how it relates to the protagonist's life in the story. He is a Lewis Audenreid Professor of History and Archaeology at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

The central character is a 10-year old boy named Alex who loses his innocence by learning about man's inhumanity to man, corruption, and greed. Alex befriends a man he thinks is a hobo in his southern Colorado home. Straddling a world strapped by religion, corruption, honor, mysticism, class consciousness and racial division, Alex stands up for his friend and ends up saving his life.

The book is both fiction and non-fiction, an ethnography of sorts. The first section of the book is the fictitious story written by Taylor. The second half is a discussion of Taylor's life with excerpts of interviews with Taggart. Taggart divides up the discussion into chapters focusing on different aspects of Taylor's life such as his religion, his father, his experiences with unions, witchcraft, and the role of women in his life.

Taylor's writing is beautifully constructed, although simplistic in structure. The text is easy to follow and descriptive enough to keep even the broadest audiences interested in the content. Although the story is written in third person, it centers on Alex. The reader sympathizes with his dreams, fears, and beliefs. The reader watches as Alex becomes a man by conquering his fears and confronting social stratification. The story is authentically written in relation to Mexican-American history and culture. Although the story's ending is predictable, it keeps the reader's attention and teaches several lessons.

The book is unique because it couples fiction with a sociological study of the how the author's own experiences are reflected in the writing. The authors include maps of the town and actual photos of different locations

to complement the text. The authors are unafraid of confronting social issues head-on such as the Anglo-Chicano relationship in the 1940s, class structure, sexual violence, corruption, greed, and the role of Catholicism in Chicano culture and discrimination. The book is refreshingly honest and is recommended for libraries focusing on Latino culture or sociological topics.

—*Ashley Cisneros*

**The authors are unafraid of confronting social issues head-on such as the Anglo-Chicano relationship in the 1940s, class structure, sexual violence, corruption, greed, and the role of Catholicism in Chicano culture and discrimination.**

18

Boosahda, Elizabeth. **Arab-American faces and voices: the origins of an immigrant community.** Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003. 284 p. ISBN 0-292-70920-X. paper. \$24.95.



Elizabeth Boosahda spent more than ten years interviewing Arab Americans and confirming the stories she was told. She was an avocational archaeologist and traveled to many sites in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. As a member of many Arab-American communities, she has first

hand experience with much of the information presented.

Boosahda is able to humanize a group of people who have recently been misrepresented in much of today's media. By exploring the immigration of different groups of Arab peoples to the United States, Boosahda gives a much needed perspective of Arab heritage and culture. She not only discusses the immigrant struggle in the 19th century but also the great success of Arab Americans, particularly in the area of Worcester, MA.

After more than ten years of research, Boosahda is able to use anecdotes backed by factual references to help the reader understand what it was like to live as an Arab American at the turn of the 19th century. From stories of migration to arranged marriage, the voices of these people is clearly heard, and Boosahda shows that the Arab American struggle was not so different than that of other immigrants of the time. Of particular interest is the chapter on Americanization and how immigrants balanced the practice of their Arab cultural heritage while also trying to succeed in a society that became less tolerant of foreigners.

Though not a necessity in studies of the Middle East, the perspective that the book adds to our perception of Americans of Arab descent is imperative. If we see the Arab American experience in the area of Worcester as