

The final section of the book, "Planning and Responses," is about the application of urban planning processes, and the impact of that application on the meaning of the urban environment. The economic driven attitudes among most developers and planners is "if we build it (culture) they will come." Margaret Rodman rejects this idea, proposing that the urban is a product of human culture. She advocates experience-based approaches to constructing urbanism, designed according to the discourse of those involved.

The importance of this volume is not in the recitation of the statistics, facts, and figures of the various case studies, but in the realization of the complexities of urban design for those who construct the urban environment. This book should be used to educate against the creeping intolerance for situations or discourse that do not agree with "our own." It helps to broaden the discourse about what we can do to design contemporary environments that will be flexible and tolerant of differing points of view. It is only then that the designer of a city can change his or her attitudes about the single-minded design of the city and search for methods of urban development and design that can compliment the diverse groups that make up and give meaning to the urban environment.

Douglas D. Brimhall  
Arizona State University

**Juan Suarez. *Contra El Viento: Una Historia de Lucha y Amor.* (Orlando, FL: Edicionces Suagar, 1991) 470 pp., \$19.95.**

*Contra El Viento (Against the Wind)* is an autobiography that reads like a novel. This biographical narrative is divided into four parts. The novel itself uses the device of a writer-narrator who pieces together the history of his life from the moment of his birth to the most difficult times, now being faced by the Suarez family as they confront the most daily grueling demands and special attention from a beloved member of the family, who suffers from Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease.

This is a bold and enthralling story which grasps the interest of the reader from beginning to end. In the first two sections the writer-narrator chronicles all the important moments in the life of the protagonist, Juan Suarez, from the moment of his birth passing through his early childhood and early adolescence, and the very important moment in his life when he meets Carmen, the love of his life. The writer-narrator harps on all his strategies to make sure that he gets the approval and respect of Carmen's family. At the same time Juan works very hard to establish a reputation as a young, intelligent,

### ***Explorations in Sights and Sounds, No. 13 (1993)***

aggressive and smart businessman. After Juan married Carmen, he was very happy and worked even harder than before. His business became very prosperous, but all changed in 1959, when the Cuban Revolution began.

The third story of this book is entitled "Passion for Liberty." Here the gruesome days of the first year of the revolution is told in all details. In this part of the book the author makes the best use of the first-person narrative technique, allowing the story to become more profoundly meaningful. We can see how dangerous it was for the protagonist and all the people close to him to survive and not be caught in a web of tyranny and deceit and how finally they came out of this ordeal.

This might well be one of the first times that the point of view of the people who had been so deeply affected is so vividly and rightfully told in such an impassioned manner. The reader becomes so involved with the story, with the end of the narrative giving the impression that he/she is closer and has a better understanding of the official accounts of those important historical events in Cuban life and history.

The last part of the narrative is entitled, "Ella" ("She"), and is the tragic story of two lovers who have to face the most humiliating adversity that human beings could encounter when one of them suffers the devastating effects of both Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases.

*Contra El Viento* is not only the story of Juan Suarez and Carmen his wife, and all their struggles to survive, but is also the story of the most resilient, hard-working, and devoted people who had worked so hard, wherever they happened to be, to get back what was lost almost thirty-five years ago. The whole story is told with the economic, religious, cultural and historical account of the Cuban people in the background.

The historical references go back to the late nineteenth century in Spain, Europe and continue all the way through this century in Cuba and later on in the diaspora where the Cuban people are in the novel; direct references are made to the Cuban communities in Union City, Miami, Puerto Rico, and in other parts of the United States.

This narration is an x-ray picture of the whole macrocosm of Cuban life from the beginning of this century until Good Friday of 1991 when the last chapter of the novel also emphasizes the efforts and struggles of the Cuban people into an Americanized culture while maintaining together the pieces of their rich Cuban heritage.

Juan Suarez, the writer-narrator, is undoubtedly one of the authentic spokespersons for his Cuban American community. He has become an eloquent and promising voice of his generation. This is the first major work penned by him in this genre.

*Explorations in Sights and Sounds*, No. 13 (1993)

*Contra El Viento (Against the Wind)* is, as the editor Dr. Blanca Garcia has so rightfully pointed out, "a profound book which takes the reader in a journey through the peaks and valleys of life; and it presents a philosophy of life which was true yesterday and still is today. Hard work and the will to work hard is the necessary ingredient which permits the meaningful realization of all dreams and aspirations." This is one of the great lessons that we can teach to our present young generation and one of the most valuable legacies that we can leave for future generations. There is so much to be learned by all. *Contra El Viento* should be recommended as an example of what the strong desire to succeed, hard work and fortitude really mean.

Luis L. Pinto  
Bronx Community College

**Virgil Suarez. *Welcome to the Oasis and Other Stories*. (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1991) 124 pp., \$9.50 paper.**

If one is seeking a text to help expand the multicultural approach in a course on contemporary fiction or literature in general, a new collection of short stories by Virgil Suarez may be a successful addition. *Welcome to the Oasis and Other Stories* has the virtues of compactness in 124 pages and of variety in the length of the six works included, as well as a reasonable cost. An instructor would have the option of including the entire volume in her syllabus, which would provide an assignment easily encompassed in one or two class meetings. Or she could tuck in any one of the tales, ranging from fifty-four to eight large-print pages, wherever they might fit the design of the course.

Suarez's characters are Hispanic Americans of the Cuban variety, with the flavor of fried plantains, the rhythm of the marengue, and the fervent editorials of *La Opinion* as the background scene, whether the actual locale is Los Angeles, Miami, or somewhere in between. In his novels, such as *Latin Jazz* (1989), he has cogently analyzed the experience of the exiles from Castro's or Batista's Cuba as they struggle to integrate into the United States, often contrasting the attitudes of the earlier emigrés—such as the nineteenth-century cigar-makers in Key West and Tampa—to those of the newcomers who have moved in two or three generations later. Among his most poignant contrasts are those between the upper-class arrivals, who fled the leveling pressures of the Communist regime, and the Marielitos, who got out when Castro cynically (and pragmatically) responded to America's offer of asylum by sending off the inmates of his prisons and mental hospitals.