



La Habana

Poems by

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I want to encourage the Cuban people out of the country as well as on the Island to continue fighting for freedom...Cuba will be free. I already am.

—Reinaldo Arenas

Acknowledgments

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“Boardwalk” was part of a group of poems that were awarded a Runner-Up Prize for the 2012 “Discovery”/ Boston Review Poetry Contest.

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“Boardwalk.” Bear River Review. 2011.

I would like to extend grateful acknowledgment to the judges and editors.

through the mud, he whips both the human and a horse.

Twenty more slaves are waiting their turn.

The sugarcane is sweet on the teeth and lip.

How sweet a crop can become over time.

Slaves push a wagon through the field.



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the sum total of a representation? Isn't a father's
voice distinct as a mother's nipple?

So...abstractly, this parametric,
is a set of definitions &

equations based solely on human science
& not national surface tension.

The science and policy of the ability to bend
like the inner tube stretches & folds.

The ability to inflate the way a tube does.
The ability to roll,

to float,
to save.

Painting

Castigos a los esclaros

(punishment of the slaves)

Luis Guaz Artiles

The plantation is lively this morning
with foot-stomp and rain beating on the roof

above cooling bread next to a wood fire. A station for working
in the fields and beating slaves' laundry on a line.

The smell of the chimney smoke burning through nostrils
makes me think of the taste of sugar in my coffee.

Two slaves are shackled by their necks to a piece of
wood on the ground, their white pants shade their legs

from the heat. A slave-master stands above the two
slaves like God. Another slave master is dragging a human

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Science of the

Torus

of an inner tube.

Begin with a parametric equation
defining relations.

Let Y stand for Cuba,

D = distance (X the number

of Cuban refugees)

already living in Little Havana.

So $Y+D(X) =$

“But the boy is ours!” Castro shouts

in a dream or no dream. The tone

of Castro’s voice, dry as a drought.

The position and velocity of his speech,

abstract communist theory. But isn’t this plea

From the

Boardwalk

in Havana.

You, the tourist, approach by air above the bay like a voyeuristic
angel & the Malecón & the buildings of El Centro

Havana establish where you are; the rubble & ruin—
could be a beat up Atlantic City but it is not.

You, the tourist, glide like a child’s

paper plane, one foot above the bay & notice the 1559

Spanish fortress Castillo de la Real Fuerza, built to protect
Spain's investment. This is where the reaping

of humans & gold was stored before heading back across
ocean. You smile as the waves lap

& crack shore-rock then turn

in-on-each-other & flip around like a graceful Olympic

swimmer. Cool, says the wind as it exits left,
over the Malecón's edge & into the water where rock formations

look like broken dock-piers that once held boats closer than a tourist
wallet. You settle in on a street corner in Centro Havana. Some

one just needs two pesos to buy diapers. A woman
wearing a light-blue wrap on her head crosses

your path from the right. You notice black & grey hair growing
on her chin, like miniature palm trees in the wind. One hair sways

& she smiles as she stares at something further than you can see.
You, the drained tourist, the babbling bleached body in the sun,

you go inside a corner store building.

It is a little store that wants to sell you some flowering pussy,

only, you don't want to buy any, so you tell the man no, but thank you
& in a really nice voice. He laughs when you tell him no.

The water must welcome the father

The water protected the son

The son lived in the water

The water lived in the son

Hallelujah

The moon will protect the child

The moon will rise with a thousand hallelujahs

Por supuesto

The dolphins sang hallelujahs—
all night and all day.

One tiger shark to another

Tiger Shark

after Elian was held in Miami.

The child belongs with the father

Por supuesto

But the father cannot have the child

Lo siento

The father loves the child

And the child loves the father

But the father is in Cuba

And the child is in Miami

The father must come to America

Por supuesto

The father must cross the ocean

Like the son

A group of young boys enter the store & ask you for money, you say no again. Their skin black & more beautiful than a shiny piece of tar heroin

that entombs ten years worse than a slammed gavel.

You, the converted socialist. You, the Che-Guevara-hat-wearing

chummy-chum-chum & these kids want something from you, want something more than you can give.

Don't be afraid to partake in the Santeria

chop-a-head-off-a-chicken dinner,

& the Rumba in the street goes boom, boom, boom. How about a nice heirloom for the kids? One boy asks for a peso;

two girls ask for two. The sky, bluer than the '63 Chevy that just passed outside as you shout no, no, no & the jack hammer

goes trr, trrr, trrrrr over the whistle of girls. Over the fifty-gallons of water for just one flush, over the collapse of the Soviet sickle crush

& just when you are about to give up on this place, a giant & long palm tree of a silhouetted boy takes up the whole left side

of the frame he entered from. He is taller than the Christ-by-the-bay Statue! He is blocking all of the sun & is darker than the asphalt

of the People's Communist Square! He winks as his watch falls off his wrist as he runs past you into the street, crossing lanes of traffic

like a kick-off return & you run after him, shouting, "Son, your watch, son, you dropped your watch." But you are too slow & the young man

is getting away like a launched shuttle, like someone about to leave this earth. All you can do is think of the children swimming on the other side of the

Malecón's edge this boy is running towards. The ones swimming in the dirty water below, the cement that looks like urban coral reefs

that will crush him. You can't see any way he is going to make it over the crumbling mock pier and not crack open his head right in front

April 22, 2000, Elian, inside his uncle's house in Miami

Hiding

in a closet

like something stolen. Outside the night sky lit by a small vigil of Cuban Americans and news reporters. The two countries' flags planted in the front yard of your uncle's house like two tropical trees reaching up to heaven.

Then the raid, white vans rolling over the fence, immigrants crossing a border. I.N.S. agents in full riot gear and they are looking for you, Elian, the lost miracle boy who survived the sharks and ocean and heat of the sun. Whose mother lies at the bottom of the Atlantic. And they are coming for you, Elian, with a hunger stronger than an ocean current, with a speed faster than the wind that brought you here.

Thanksgiving Day, 1999

Departing

the Atlantic.

In an inner tube, floating
the Straits of Florida fishermen snagged
you, alone, at sea, Elian. Just like the two
fishermen and a slave boy who found The
Statue of Virgin Mary drifting in 1608,
holding a Christ child figure. They delivered him
safely on a board across the water, The Virgin of Charity,
Cuba's patron saint. Then, almost four-hundred
years later, on the day of family,
food and celebration,
you, Elian, were pulled from the water.
Dolphins protected you, circling your inner tube,
and tiger sharks circling them. The news said
you were adrift for three days. But the doctors said
you had no signs of being submerged in water,
no signs of heat or exhaustion, no signs of the sea.

of your eyes. But this boy is running with the speed.

So fast the Pesos in his pocket start to spin & make

a Mario Brothers ching, ching, ching, ching sound as he leaps off the top
of the Malecón & out into the bay like a bomb exploding at the feet

of a little girl. Like an equation on the board sparking chalk
into dust & the boy does it, he clears the jump,

clears everyone lying on the rocks below

& the rocks themselves, staring up in awe as the boy Jesse Owens'd the leap.

The leap exploding beyond all of this heat & humidity,
beyond all of this fear, beyond everything Cold War & Revolutionary & you,

the pot-bellied tourist do the only thing that is right,
you open your wallet to him like a caught fish

split up the belly,
your heart & blood rushing out.

Installation

Possible Chances

Rafael Domenech Cariillo

There are eight red doors on the Malecón
in Havana—eight red doors on the boardwalk.
The Malecón is ninety miles away from Florida.
Florida is a state in the United States of America.

America is ninety miles away from Cuba.
Each door of the installation is a different size
than the others. Cuba and America are different sizes
than each other. A person of any size, or any country,

could find a door just right for their sized body and go through.
The installation is inclusive then—equal
for all. A possible chance for all of us, I suppose.
If a tourist were to walk through any of the doors,

heaps of family members the oars of the journey,
this boat and that boat. Today a small boat from

Haiti capsized in the Atlantic. The entire
crew died and the crew were welcomed by the ghosts

of all the slave brothers and sisters who
reside at the bottom of the Atlantic. Scattered

across the ocean with all the plastic and oil. A styrofoam
Cup of Noodles holding up the entire continent. Today

a boy has gone missing from Cuba,
adrift somewhere in the Straits of Florida.

This morning

A Young Boy

is missing

from the coast of Cardenas. The boy's mother, Elizabeth,
was said to have bought her way onto a raft

with her son, Elian. They were trying to reach Miami.
Birds hover above the bay of Havana and small cirrus

clouds make thin wisps in the sky. The wisps look like
coffee plantation chains that strung slaves tighter than

a stitched baseball glove in the eighteen hundreds—
two countries' pastime. This boat and that boat, but what about

all the trash-strung-together rafts that dared
the water from Cuba to Miami. The broken

back and forth, fast or slow, on a Sunday or Monday,
then that tourist could still leave Cuba, and the ocean
that is the landscape of this island would not be a prison sentence.
But for Nafal, a boy here on the Malecón, there is no chance

of ever leaving, so he just laughs as I try to figure out
the installation, going through the doors.

Nafal is twelve years old. He looks up at me
again and says, "The red on the doors

of the installation is the blood of the people of Cuba,
the blood of all the people who have lived and died
here on this island." I look hard at Nafal, his black
hair a silhouetted dot on the blue of ocean water and horizon sky.

Street

Baseball

on San Rafael

in Centro Havana.

Six boys play baseball in the shade.

The ball, a white bottle-top-cap. The bases,
three puddles in the chipped-out road, and home

plate, a banana peel. Even on run-down buildings
there is elegant steel work on the cement windows outside.

The spectators, the kids of the neighborhood.

There is a European influence on every doorframe.

Angels plastered above window frames
like clouds. The exterior of most buildings

crumbles out onto the curb—
a Cuban's life here.

The boys playing the baseball game
have hand-eye-speed quicker than a burning fuse;

they hit the cap like it was a beach ball, giant like this earth,
and the tiny Christmas lights draped across the balcony

look like stars above the faded sun. The baseball game
goes on for hours, well past eleven at night,

and there are cheers when someone
finally wins, a team that is, another metaphor.

I can still hear my fifth-grade baseball coach's mantra
in my head: "No I in team.

No I in team.

No I."



Xavier Cavazos received his MFA in 2013 from Iowa State University where he served as poetry editor for *Flyway: Journal of Creative Writing and the Environment* and is the author of *Barbarian at the Gate*, selected and introduced by Thomas Sayers Ellis as part of the Poetry Society of America's New American Poets Chapbook Series and *Diamond Grove Slave Tree*, the inaugural Prairie Seed Poetry Prize from Ice Cube Press. Cavazos has been a member of three national slam teams, and was the 1995 Grand Slam Champion of the Nuyorican Poets Café and has poetry forthcoming in the Best American Experimental Writing (BAX) 2015. Cavazos teaches in the Central Washington Writing Project, Africana and Black Studies and the Professional and Creative Writing Programs at Central Washington University.

Xavier Cavazos



LA HABANA

