

Michael Cantor

Havana

From the photographs of Robert Polidori

This door may once have been a shade of blue,
imbued with green, perhaps, to match the sea;
the shattered walls show hints of apricot,
on swaths of plaster of some unknown hue.
Mistress of these heat-and-salt-air-sodden rooms
where paint has lost the will to cling to paint,
Senora Luisa Faxas sits
in front of her piano and bookshelves and art;
where drunken chandeliers and mirrors dangle,
irriguous and decadent and lush,
angled in the ruins of beams and laths,

Who is Senora Faxas, who was she
with her fifteen foot ceilings and marble floors,
and ballrooms flowing endlessly to other rooms?
Has she read the piles and piles of books
stacked on floors and desks, eroded, melted,
recongealed into blocks of ink and pulp?
Did she bring back the gilded frames and massive
canvases of nudes from trips to Paris and Milan?

And what of the Condessa de Buenavista?
Is she accomodating boarders now?
Antonio Machado Ponce de Leon,
white-haired, handsome, with a dueler's scar,
has a daybed in her tortured drawing room,
walled off by hanging cotton sheets.
And Jose Ortiz Arabella lounges
shirtless, cautious, on a mold-stained couch.

Or are these lovers, cousins, serving men?
There are no answers, only photographs.
A fifties Chevrolet has gone to ground;
two-tone-hard-top-blistered-red-white beast,
the mouth and trunk agape, propped up on crates;
it decorates a side street, soundlessly.
All clocks have stopped, the clouds of birds are gone,
the walkers on the empty Boulevards,
the watchers leaning on their windowsills
are blank and motionless, figures on a scrim
that will no longer roll. A gray sea pounds
unceasingly against the Malecon.