

## Latinidad - Summer 2017: Pablo Cartaya

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—Marc Avery, author of *Redemption Lost*, <https://iammarcavery.com>

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1. Saludos

Middle grade is when some boys—especially boys of color—stop reading. As such, books that are about boys of color (particularly if they are written by men of color) are a literary imperative. A terrific addition to every boy's personal library would be Pablo Cartaya's debut novel *The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora* which centers on the political and romantic awakening of a thirteen year old Cuban-American. To learn more, read Pablo's Q&A below.

Helping Latinos get published,

Marcela Landres

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2. Q&A

Pablo has always been a hopeless romantic. In middle school he secretly loved reading Shakespeare's sonnets (don't tell anyone), and he once spent his allowance on roses for a girl he liked. He also wrote her eight poems. Bad ones. He's been writing ever since. Pablo has worked in Cuban restaurants and the entertainment industry, and he graduated with an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts. All of these experiences have helped him write stories that reflect his family, culture, and love of words. Pablo lives in Miami with his wife and two kids, surrounded by tías, tíos, cousins, and people who he calls cousins (but aren't really his cousins). Learn more about Pablo at <http://www.pablocartaya.com>

Q: What inspired you to write *The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora*?

A: I wanted to tell a story that was unique to my own experience and yet had an access point for anyone who can claim family, community, and the pangs of first love. I wanted to take my own cultural experience and build a narrative from it. I ended up writing a scene where a kid named Arturo desperately tries to clean dishes at his family's restaurant while his older cousin yells at him for working too slowly. That's where I started.

Q: Your novel tackles serious subjects such as gentrification and the death of a loved one, yet retains a lovely sense of humor. Was this intentional or is juxtaposing shadow and light part of your sensibility?

A: Thank you! I find the combination of humor and heart brings a uniquely human quality to stories. I like to explore the way people can inhabit both of these spaces. There is shadow and light in all of us. I choose to write with an eye towards these elemental truths.

Q: Poetry plays an important role in Arturo's story. How has reading and/or writing poetry influenced your fiction?

A: Robert Frost said, "Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found its words." I find great inspiration in poetry. From my great-grandfather who was a poet and a physician in Cuba to the work of contemporary poets like Richard Blanco whose work strikes a chord with my cultural identity. Currently, I'm reading "Shoulda Been Jimi Savannah" by Patricia Smith. She has an amazing voice. Poetry is one of my great loves.

Q: Arturo writes his first poem in the wake of his beloved abuelita's death. When did you begin writing? Did heartbreak or loss play a role in your budding consciousness as a writer?

A: I began writing from a very early age, but didn't have that "budding consciousness" as a writer until later on. That awakening came when I was working as an actor in Los Angeles. I was told repeatedly that I should change my name because I didn't look Latino enough. I was told I should stop auditioning for Spanish-speaking roles because I was stealing jobs from "real" Latinos. It started to wear me down. I struggled with my identity for a long time. I was very connected to my Cuban heritage yet I felt outside of it in some ways. How could I claim an identity that was repeatedly denied? After many years, I finally did something about it—I wrote my unique experience into the story.

Q: You've had some pretty cool jobs, most notably as Ricky Martin's body double, appearing on Will & Grace, and being a catering chef. Has this experience proven helpful in writing and/or publishing your work?

A: Debra Messing gave me great advice once. She said an artist should have varied experiences. She said go to college. Study something interesting. All of it will make you a better artist. She was right. I have many experiences that are uniquely mine and serve my stories.

Q: I love that you include recipes at the end of the novel! What prompted you to do so?

A: Because I was hungry and wanted to cook something! Seriously, though, I love food and its capacity to speak a language that is universal. I recently got a note from a mother who read the novel and decided to cook the fricasé de pollo recipe at the back of the book. She told me it was the first time she'd cooked something like that and her daughters, husband, and even her mother participated in preparing the meal. It doesn't get much better than that.

Q: Who is your agent and how did you meet him/her? If you don't have an agent, how did you come to be published by Viking?

A: My agent is Jess Regel at Foundry Literary + Media. She's the greatest. So is Viking ☺. I always tell writers looking to get an agent or get published to start with the most important thing—focus on the writing. Everything else will follow.

Q: What advice do you have for writers—particularly Latinos—who aspire to be published?

A: Publishing needs Latin(x) creative minds! Not just writers, but editors, publicists, agents, marketers, publishers, and so on. There is a fantastic organization called Latin(x) in Publishing that creates community and is a resource for folks who are interested in publishing (<http://latinxinpublishing.tumblr.com>). Join groups, find mentors, go to readings, get connected! And to my writer gente out there: write yourselves into the narrative. Don't be afraid to fail, to rise, or to be heard.

Q: Do you have upcoming projects that my readers should have on their radar?

A: Yes! My next middle grade novel, "Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish," is out Summer 2018 (also published by Viking). It's the story of a boy's

journey to Puerto Rico to find his estranged father. In the process, he discovers pride in himself, his family, and his cultural identity.

### 3. Workshops

#### Slice Literary Writers' Conference

##### WHAT: A Writer's Survival Guide Panel

At a past Slice conference Francine Prose explained how she balanced writing with motherhood: from the time her sons boarded the school bus to the time they returned, she wrote. Junot Díaz told the Wall Street Journal that he sometimes writes sitting on the edge of the tub: "My ex would always know I was going to write because I would grab a notebook and run into the bathroom." Balancing writing with the rest of life is often so overwhelming, it can seem that those who succeed know a secret the rest of us missed. Whether we are parents, students, employees, or just plain procrastinators (or a combination of these roles), it's often a constant struggle to find the time and the right place to write. So, how does the writing ever get done? A group of authors reveals how they manage to block out time for their work without compromising other life essentials. Glean tips on how to find time in overcrowded schedules and how to optimize productivity when you do steal those precious moments for your work.

WHEN: Sunday, September 10, 4:30 p.m. - 5:40 p.m.

WHERE: St. Francis College, 180 Remsen Street, Brooklyn, NY

##### WHO:

Rumaan Alam, Author, Rich and Pretty

Michele Filgate, Writer, Book Critic

Lisa Ko, Author, The Leavers

Marcela Landres, Editorial Consultant

Courtney Maum, Author, Touch

REGISTER: Visit <https://slicelitcon.org>

List of upcoming workshops: <https://marcelalandres.com>

### 4. Resources

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HOW EDITORS THINK

"I read How Editors Think in one sitting and was engaged from beginning to end. It is well written, highly informative, and humorous—I found myself laughing out-loud in a few spots! Thanks for sharing the secrets of the trade."  
—Mayra Lazara Dole, author of Down to the Bone

Inspired by my experience as a former Simon & Schuster editor, How Editors Think: The Real Reason They Rejected You reveals what it really takes to get published. For more information, visit: <https://marcelalandres.com>

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#### FAIRY TALE AWARD

Deadline: July 15

Two prizes of \$1000 each and publication in Fairy Tale Review will be given for a group of poems and a work of prose influenced by fairy tales. For more information, visit <http://fairytalereview.com/>

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#### AWP'S MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Deadline: August 1-12

The Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP) mentorship program matches emerging writers and published authors for a three-month series on topics such as craft, revision, publishing, and the writing life. Those who have never been associated with an MFA program and those writing from a perspective typically underrepresented in the literary world are particularly encouraged to apply. There is no charge to apply, and there is no fee for this program. For more information, visit [https://www.awpwriter.org/community\\_calendar/mentorship\\_program\\_overview](https://www.awpwriter.org/community_calendar/mentorship_program_overview)

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#### COLORADO REVIEW

Reading Period: August 1-April 30 for fiction and poetry (nonfiction is read year-round)

The Colorado Review is interested in fresh writing that displays sophistication in both form and content. They pay more competitively than many other literary journals. For more information, visit <http://coloradoreview.colostate.edu/colorado-review/submit/>

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#### THE GEORGIA REVIEW

Reading Period: August 16-May 14

The Georgia Review, one of the most highly respected literary journals in the U.S., features essays, fiction, poetry, graphics, and book reviews. They publish work by experienced and new writers alike. For more information, visit <https://thegeorgiareview.com>

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#### SARABANDE ESSAY CONTEST

Submission Period: September 1-30

Sarabande Books authors and titles have won or been short-listed for, among many others, the Pulitzer Prize, National Book Critics Circle Award, and several PEN/American honors. They seek essay collections between 150-250 pages in length. For more information, visit <http://www.sarabandebooks.org/open-essay>

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#### LOW RESIDENCY MFA MINORITY SCHOLARSHIP

Deadline: September 1

The MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College, the first and most distinguished low residency program for poets and fiction writers, has always been a place exceptionally diverse in gender, age, occupation, academic background, and aesthetic views. The Holden Minority Scholarship provides full tuition and residency fees for a student of color for all four semesters. For more information, visit <http://www.wvcmaf.org/friends-of-writers/friends-of-writers-scholarships/holden-scholarship/>

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#### TRANSLATION PRIZE

Deadline: September 8

Gulf Coast Journal offers \$1000 and publication for a work of prose translated into English. All entries will be considered for paid publication on their website as Online Exclusives. For more information, visit <http://gulfcoastmag.org>

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#### GUGGENHEIM FELLOWSHIPS

Deadline: September 19

The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation offers fellowships to poets, fiction writers, and creative nonfiction writers. For more information, visit <http://www.gf.org>

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#### LITMAG SEEKS LONG POEMS/NOVELLAS/ESSAYS

The Seattle Review only publishes long poems, novellas, and essays. They seek exceptional, risk-taking, intellectual and imaginative work. For more information, visit <http://depts.washington.edu/seaview/>

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#### JUST PUBLISHED: THE BEING OF AMERICA

The Being of America: Personal Narratives about Being Mixed Race in the 21st Century, takes on race and considers them through the firsthand accounts of mixed race people in the United States. Edited by mixed race scholars Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, Sean Frederick Forbes, and Tara Betts, this collection consists of poets, writers, teachers, professors, artists, and activists whose essays articulate the complexities of interracial life. For more information, visit <http://2leafpress.org>

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“A children’s story that can only be enjoyed by children is not a good children’s story in the slightest.”—C.S. Lewis”

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