



## Before Night Falls

*Reinaldo Arenas , Dolores M. Koch (Translator)*

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Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas describes his poverty-stricken childhood in rural, his adolescence as a rebel fighting for Fidel Castro, and his life in revolutionary Cuba as a homosexual. Very quickly the Castro government suppressed his writing and persecuted him for his homosexuality until he was finally imprisoned.

## Before Night Falls Details

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# From Reader Review Before Night Falls for online ebook

## Joni says

Un libro muy duro, autobiográfico en los últimos días del escritor, consciente ya de la muerte que le acontece a cuentagotas, enfermo, resentido del dolor de los años preso dentro y fuera de una cárcel, perseguido, desolado, desconfiando y traicionado por amigos y familiares. Tiene muchos momentos desgarradores. Por muchos considerado anti propaganda castrista, pero bueno,, hay que escuchar las dos campanas en lo posible, no?

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## Eddie Clarke says

A brave, honest and tragic autobiography, in a way demonstrating the persistence of idealism and hope despite the horrors of Castro's Cuba and the brutal disappointments of exile. Quite raw and unpolished, perhaps due to the circumstances in which it was written (he had AIDS), but nevertheless extraordinarily powerful and emotionally affecting.

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## K.D. Absolutely says

Surprisingly very good. It's main message is freedom. Freedom from repressive Cuban regime of Fulgencio Batista and the more detestable one of Fidel Castro. Freedom from the sexual discrimination against gays in the Communist Cuba and this explains the picture that Reinaldo Arenas (1943-1990): that homosexuality in Cuba was rampant. The book is full of explicit sex scenes not only of homosexuality but bestiality. I suspect that that was intentional in a way that Marquis de Sade (1740-1819) portrayed sex, sadism, murder in his libertine novel *The 120 Days of Sodom* as a protest against the French government prior to the French Revolution (1789-1799). He wanted to picture Cuba in the mind of the reader as full of homosexuals because homosexual acts were prohibited in Cuba.

This biography or memoir is part of the *1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die* so I bought this from Amazon.com almost 3 years ago. I have been postponing my reading of this book because I thought it would be hard to read considering that Arenas was not an English-native speaker/writer. However, I was surprised to find that that book was well-written and his thoughts were organized and his plot was engaging. There are just too many not only of sex scenes but poverty and oppression. At first I thought that there was an irony: how come there is oppression if sodomy can be seen at every corner of Cuban streets and that most male characters, even his relatives, are gay? Then I remembered De Sade and his libertine novels.

His boyhood in the rural town in Oriente and his young man's dreams while living in Holguin (also in Cuba) were painful to read. Too much poverty: his irresponsible father left his mother and so the young gay Arenas continued to look for a man to love and so he had so many male lovers as he felt that he was doing the search for his mom.

Prior to this book, my knowledge of Cuban politics was limited to the news I used to see on television and that part of Che Guevara's life story in Jon Lee Anderson's *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (4 stars). However, this kind of oppressive regime is not new for Filipinos like me who was already a grown up and

politically aware during the time of Ferdinand Marcos (1917-1989) as our dictator president for 21 years.

Because of the irony I felt regarding the picture of homosexuality in Arenas' Cuba, I am not sure if I got the true picture of the country during Castro's regime. However, real or unreal, I did enjoy reading Arenas' prose that I was able to finish this book despite the six other books that competed with my attention for the last two weeks. I just could not put down this book in favor of let's say Beckett o Lourd de Veyra.

My first time to read a Cuban writer and he was gay and he was too good that I did not care even a bit.

I should read the 1001 books of the other Cuban novelists next: Alejo Carpentier and Pedro Juan Gutierrez. I did not know that there are these talented novelists who were born in Cuba. Awesome.

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### **Dimitris says**

Shocking book, perfectly written! It kept me up nights. I don't know what to think, whose side to take as the author, refugee from Cuba to NY, terminally ill with AIDS, narrates his life right before chosing to end it, and this life is basically Gay suppresion vs. Castro's Cuba. I have an unconditional love for both gay fighters and for Castro, whom R. Arenas considers the Devil himself and the cause of all his troubles. Nevertheless, the book gave me enormous pleasure and subjects to think upon, without having to take sides. I read it in Greek.

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### **Lisette Rosa says**

Es la primera vez que tengo la oportunidad de leer un libro autobiográfico y debo decir que fue sumamente impactante. Las condiciones desdichadas a las que Arenas se ve expuesto son meramente reflejos de las ataduras de una sociedad reprimida. Obligado a renegar sus ideologías y preferencias sexuales, éste encuentra refugio en la escritura. Plasma su postura anticastrista y las penurias por las que, no solo él, sino un sin número de cubanos, se ven afectados. Marcando así un hito en la literatura latinoamericana.

La historia es sumamente admirable, aunque debo decir que hubo momentos en los que me resultó un tanto tedioso continuar la lectura, pero ya en las etapas finales de la misma se me hizo imposible despegarme. Me pareció muy interesante las críticas que hizo no solo al gobierno de Castro, algo un tanto irónico(cuando lo lean entenderán el por qué de ese comentario), sino a muchos escritores latinoamericanos de renombre que fueron testaferros de Castro.

Algo que si he de mencionar es que a pesar de que este señor se ha ganado mis respeto y que voy a leer uno que otros de sus escritos, me pareció muy pendeja su forma de "irse" (aunque entiendo sus condiciones ya para este tiempo), puesto que después de tantas adversidades que pudo superar y que es comprensible su tristeza y que ya no aguantaba más, fue muy cobarde de su parte llegar a ese extremo.

Al parecer los grandes tienen que irse de este mundo de manera dramática. Independientemente de ciertos baches, maravillosa pieza.

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### **Valentina Quiceno says**

Reinaldo Arenas, con voz de denuncia, narra las vivencias que tuvo naciendo en una dictadura, y viviendo en

otra mucho peor. Siendo homosexual, y un escritor que no apoya el régimen; tenía muchas razones para ser perseguido y encarcelado por "contrarrevolucionario".

Las memorias de Arenas son fuertes, pero necesarias. Grita en cada página, y sigue gritando hasta ahora.

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### **Jennifer Mccombs says**

The truth that stems from this book is beautiful. Quite possibly my favorite writer at the moment. Each description is original in thought and placed on paper with no insecurities resting behind his hand. Beautiful, original, honest...a human being that was able to turn his own tragedy and life's struggle into a poetic memoir that should greet the eyes of anyone that considers themselves a true fan of great literature. This book will scare the shit out of you and make you think about Cuba and its' people in an entirely new way.

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### **Jason says**

*"...he lived a life whose beginning and end were indeed the same: from the start, one long, sustained sexual act..."* says Guillermo Cabrera about Arenas' life. And man oh man, he wasn't kidding. There is so much sex in this book! It makes me think that everyone in Cuba is a sexhound waiting to pounce on each other, only restrained by social mores and/or the repressive government and its forced status quo. there is so much sex, it's funny. In his childhood he's having sex with all these animals and these incidents end up in invariably faux pas hijinx when he talks about how his cousin (or someone) accidentally kills a chicken, and a whole bunch of his friends fuck a goat. Man, that's some crazy sex. Also, throughout the book, characters are constantly popping boners, everyone's outward feelings and aggressions, transgressions and character mannerisms are somehow translated back to their sexuality. I liked this book, a whole fucking lot. But man, it's crazier about sex than Benny Hill. I read it a while ago. I think he fucked a dog too, i can't remember.

But hey, you shouldn't get shelved on the idea of this guy as a bestial terrorist, it's nothing like that. he's a sexual provocateur, and this statement is even more alive within the context of his run-ins with the government. one of the most interesting parts of this book, i'd say, is how he denies sexual encounters in prison. The house of sexual implosion, rape city. Homosexuals were faced with a supremely masculine cultural more that was pressured to impress machoism and repress all aspects of feminine decor in men(any country where beards are the jount are probably all about macho camaraderie; is that fair to say?) So he describes the terrors of not only being a political dissident in prison, but being a HOMOSEXUAL political prisoner which is like being on fire as you crash into a flaming wall. So this section of a memoir completely devoted to the sexual apotheosis of the otherwise shelved sensual world is suddenly reversed when he has to bite his lip, hide his boner and try to avoid the sexual deviancy taking over in a prison that is a microcosm of the worst politics Cuba has to offer devoting its utmost energies to a fascist reversion of the homosexual contra that the system seems to be so convinced thereof.

Like i said, i liked this book a lot. Although it sure did shine a pretty harsh light on the communist system, which i guess i had a lot of reserved hope for. HERE, let me offer you up a pretty quote detailing the pitfalls of the system: *"the difference between the communist and the capitalist system is that, although both give you a kick in the ass, in the communist system you have to applaud, while in the capitalist system you can scream. And i came [to the US] to scream."* I think my biggest problem with the realities Arenas found in communism were the subversive actions of his supposed friends within a system that is supposed to be cooperative. I guess an honest thing this book projects is the lack of hope for ideal structures in government

and in life, and how the system never owned up to its own failings. It merely reported a life that was not happening. This book turned me against the likes of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and loads of Cuban poets who Arenas describes with scorn on account of their backstabbing too many poets who were not for or critical of the communist system. I realized it is not fair to abash certain talented writers ad hominem for the sake of one poet's opinion of their character, but he paints a pretty grim light on certain figureheads with their backstabbing. Oh well, it's his memoir, he can hate who he wants. Besides, he went through tons of shit trying to identify himself in a country which he loved but which tried to damn him because of what they projected as a threatening liberal attitude. It makes sense that his character was so repressed in the country of which he was so attached, that he came to the US just gushing with scathing denouncements for the people who betrayed him. hmm, maybe that's a bit hypocritical as well. Only human though.

In all, this book is a detached centrifuge, an image from his deathbed of the Cuba he knew represented himself and was as much a part of him as it wasn't represented in the regime which tried to quash his sensual enlightenment. This book was his swan song that he had to deliver to the people and the place from a distance, and i suppose he was very bitter because of it, as he said *"the exile is a person who, having lost a loved one, keeps searching for the face he loves in every new face and, forever deceiving himself, thinks he has found it."* In a sense, this book is really sad, but i think it also offers up a very hopeful image of the human figure. This one guy, a faggot writer with no sense better than any reasonably intelligent individual managed to stand up to a system which he just simply did not agree with, and while his death came before the regime's end, so that his stand in effect lost to the test of time, he still was able to project the poetry of his feat, the journey in a brilliant novel filled with immaculate sensations and the energy of a sexual hunger, the likes of which can only be compared to an overdrive of primitive necessity and fascinating devotion to the maddening human drive for affection and inspiration and need. To leave on a quote, i like this one...Try to understand that he may be talking about a little more than the muttering schizophrenic haunting his dilapidated apartment complex before he moved out of Cuba: *"i have never understood madness too well, but feel that in a way insane people are angels who, unable to bear the realities around them, must somehow take refuge in another world."*

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## **James says**

Well I had to fight through that one at times.

I understand and feel for the author with the Cuban repression of his art, and the squalor that he had to live in. I think he was a wonderful writer, and his novels are probably brilliant. His views of the American far Left made me smile, as how can anyone have a better view of Cuba and the hatred and unjustified oppression that communism in that country produces.

But...

I can not believe for one second many of the tales of his "erotic encounters." Cuba would be seen to gyrate from space if this were true. The island would shake itself apart and fall into the sea. There doesn't seem to be a mode of transport that is not a moving bordello of pulsating homosexuality. It seems that every policeman, soldier, government official, and male in Cuba is either a blatant homosexual or a repressed homosexual. The author would be a walking fertility clinic if half of this is true; in fact I am surprised that he would be able to move without overbalancing due to the liquid content of his body.

Perhaps this was not for me, but it does have merits in writing style and the crystal clear view into the

oppression of literature and homosexuality in Cuba.

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## Matthew says

To check out my review: <https://dancinginth3dark.wordpress.co...>

### True Rating: 3.5

I **FINALLY** finished reading this book after months of laziness and I am proud of myself that I actually read this entire book. I desperately want to give this book the full 5 stars because Reinaldo Arenas's writing is impeccable but unfortunately this book is not meant for public consumption. Ever since news has broken out about the United States negotiations with Cuba, I started getting curious over Cuba's history ever since the Cuban Revolution and wanted to know if anyone has ever writing and lived through this era. Technically I am 1st generation immigrant of Cuban parents since my mother was born and raised in Cuba until she left in 1968 with my grandmother, grandmother, and my uncle.

Throughout my childhood and leading to adulthood I have gotten new glimpses about my Cuban family's history and the horrors of living under Fidel Castro's dictatorship but for once I wanted brand new eyes teaching me the part of Cuba that I did not know existed which were the countless artists that tried to survive in the new communist regime. As I researched books about the revolution, I discovered Reinaldo Arenas who is a famous Cuban writer who was imprisoned for being a homosexual and a writer who spoke against the Cuban government. Plus they made the film version with Javier Bardem and Johnny Depp. (Who wouldn't want to read this after witnessing this?)

So in *Before Night Falls*, we are introduced to Reinaldo Arenas who was born in a very small village in Cuba (Which no longer exist) with a mother who lived with her parents since his father abandoned her when she got pregnant. She fell in love with this man who clearly deceived her and being totally oblivious she had one night of passionate sex and 9 months later gave birth to a child. His family life was very strange because he lived with his mother, grandmother, grandfather, and countless aunts who were desperate to marry a man. All the women in his family suffered a cruel fate when it came to love and I believe because they were so desperate to have a man, they would give up everything to be with him and let him used her until he found the next good looking lady to play around with.

Because he was living practically in nature, he got to see a different prospect of life and for a brief time he felt independent and free because being able to roam around in nature without anyone to bother him, swimming in the river, and overall connecting to the animals gave him this major spiritual and sexual awakening. What's crazy is by the time he was almost 10 years old, he already had desires to have sex with men and even let his older cousin fool around him. Sadly after this period of enlightenment, everything went to garbage come 1959. Cuba before Fidel Castro was in a state of corruptness because they already had a dictator named Batista who was making the country bankrupt to fill his greed. Then comes Fidel Castro who is an intellectual, praised the people and encourage those to fight against Batista in order to bring a new system of government and then finally one day Batista fled the country giving Fidel Castro total control of Cuba.

In that time period, Reinaldo was a teenager who volunteered for the revolution and clearly points out how they say thousands of soldiers died when in reality this big war was more a battle of intellects using

propaganda to exaggerate more than the truth. Under Fidel Castro's regime, he offered free education, medical care, and a bunch of empty promises that later would become lies. Everyone feel in love with Fidel and sadly within a few years countless individuals were being persecuted in the name of the Revolution. If you were part of the government before Fidel, you lost your job, went to jail, or got killed. If you spoke against the government you were killed for being a counterrevolutionary. He changed the currency of the country making it difficult for the rich and other individuals escape the country. He also hated homosexuals and if you were caught for being one you were sent to jail or a concentration camp waiting to serve your sentence. He utterly brought the citizens of Cuba to its knees and beg for mercy.

As Reinaldo was growing up, he gets into military school to become an agricultural accountant but clearly has something else on his mind and pursues writing poetry. In Havana, he enters a contest at the national library for storytelling and wins which offers the opportunity to become a writer and work for the library. He becomes friends with other writers and get to live the artist lifestyle in Havana from having private literary gathers, watching live theater, ballet, and partying in the popular places in Havana. Everything seems paradise but as always the arts is the first thing to go in a communist government and it became illegal to attend the beach, theater, and have literary gatherings that spoke against the government. A bunch of Reinaldo's friends betrayed him by working for State Security or got other important jobs in the government. The sense of friendship became nonexistent because if you spoke against Fidel or mention plans of escaping you would get arrested by the secret police.

Once he was an adult by the early 1970s, he made the dumbest mistake of calling the cops over these two guys who he had sex on the beach who robbed his clothes and other items. When the police arrived and found the two individuals they were sent to the police station. The head of the police was the uncle of one of the individuals and quickly the two individuals said that Reinaldo and his friend tried molesting them and in return they beat him up and stole his stuff. They were immediately released and because Reinaldo Arenas was a famous writer who wrote books that were censored from the government, they arrested him and put in jail.

Luckily he escaped before heading to prison and now he is running for his life. He tried countless ways of escaping the island but to no avail he was caught and finally sent to El Morro which is one of the most horrifying and dangerous prisons in Havana. He was not charged for being a homosexual and he was lucky enough because of that he was not harassed in jail or put into the special section of the prison dedicated to drag queens, homosexuals, or transgender which were constantly abused, raped, or live in worst jail cells. He was in prison for almost a decade, living in excruciating heat, freezing temperatures, barely any food to eat. He was constantly interrogated to make a confession that he was counterrevolutionary, a homosexual, and the names of his conspirators. If he wanted to used the bathroom he had a hole to use which always got feces stuck to his feet and constantly had to smell the foul odor of his other inmates and himself.

In the end he survives through all this horror and finally comes to America thanks to the Mariel boat lift but unfortunately he has been forever changed from the horrors of Fidel Castro. His friends were murdered, put into jail, committed suicide, escape to another country and for years he was not able to see his family. When he came to America he was shocked how the U.S. supports Fidel Castro and what he has done for the Cuban people. He was outraged and felt like a stranger which he practically was since he was an exile never finding a place called home. Sadly because he left Cuba to New York in the 1980s and him being a homosexual he got the AIDS virus and committed suicide in 1990.

The issues that I had with the book is as follows: **1.) THIS BOOK WAS TOO LONG.** OMG this man writes beautiful and has an incredible flow with his storytelling especially since English is not his 1st native language but he could had cut out about 100 pages and be done with it. I disliked how I had to read 100



pages about his childhood in order for the story to become interesting and not put me to sleep. **2.) His sexual encounters became out of control.** He practically had sex with any person who had a penis and I did not find any romance or intimacy with his sexual encounters. I felt like he was like a piece of meat while every man took a bite out of him and discarded him. I understand people who have constant promiscuous sex which is perfectly fine by me but this man supposedly had sex by the thousands. He would go to the beach one day, hid around in the bushes and then there would be a hundred men waiting to have their turn with him.

Finally the final reason that I did not enjoy as much as I did was because this book is not meant for public consumption. And what I mean by that is yes it was interesting learning about Cuba during the 1940s-1970s, but he mentions so many people that he encountered, people of no importance, or individuals that are either quickly forgotten or too much gossip about them that you lose sense of who is who. It is important for everyone to learn about his story, a story that thousands of Cubans have lived through but this book was dedicated more for his friends and family that knew him. Even though we learn of the horrors about Cuba, he plays homage to those who successfully escaped the island and to his friends and family who unfortunately died in Cuba in its disparity.

What this book taught me is how thankful I am for my grandmother to be able to have relatives in America who were able to claim her and her family in order to escape the craziness of what was happening in Cuba. If it weren't for her I would never have been born or I would have been born in Cuba in a country that countless people are starving every day, they lack any means of communication of the outside world, and a country that would have persecuted me already because of sexual identity. It is sad that millions of Cubans have been murdered in the hands of one man, one man only.

People praise Fidel which is perfectly fine because we live in a country where Freedom of Speech is allowed. But if you look at the island in itself, and take the time to witness how these people have become ignorant savages in their own island it makes you wonder who would let these people suffer with no food, clean water, barely any money, and no freedom of speech and equal rights. Then you ask yourself who is control of this government and thats when you put two and two together and realize that the country has had a dictator for 56 years who uses the Cuban revolution as the excuse for his actions. I will never understand how people worship Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. I pray that one day Cuba can finally be free and in peace. I wish no harm towards my enemies but I wish we can finally find peace and put everything to rest.

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## Nicolas Chinardet says

Even before the actual beginning of the book (in the introduction) we become aware of how unreliable Arenas is as a narrator. The impression is repeatedly reinforced throughout the book to the point that it become impossible to fathom what is true from what is exaggeration or even fiction under the pen of someone who seems perpetually dissatisfied with his lot and clearly has an axe to grind.

Having managed to read most of it in the original Spanish with the English translation at hand I was also surprised how shoddy and disrespectful of the text that translation appeared to be. The names of certain characters have been changed (partially and entirely), the pagination altered (paragraphs added, one moved from the front of a chapter to the end of the previous one), and some significant inaccuracies, not to mention

a clear lack of cultural sensitivity from the translator with regards to the gay world.

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## **Montse Gallardo says**

Es un libro que nunca estuvo en mi lista de pendientes, y me alegro profundamente de haberlo incorporado casi sorprendentemente. Ha sido una lectura impactante y de las que dejan poso durante mucho tiempo. Me ha descubierto a una persona que supo ser feliz incluso en las peores circunstancias, que mantuvo la esperanza de llegar a ser libre. Y lo consiguió.

Y me ha gustado tanto que le perdono las algo obvias exageraciones, idealizaciones que nos cuenta. ¿Qué sería de una biografía sin su buena dosis de mentirijillas?

Puedes leer la reseña completa en mi blog: <https://unpaisunlibro.blogspot.com/20...>

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## **Ben Winch says**

I don't know if this is 'literature' - and I certainly didn't read it as if it was (skipping around and skimming sections as I do with rock biographies) - but it feels true to me. And Reinaldo Arenas writes about literature as one who loves it above all - certainly above politics. Not for him any alignment with 'Left' or 'Right', and I agree completely, when the so-called Left can behave as the leaders of Cuba did during the period that Arenas writes about here. Not only that, but when supporters of Castro and the Left worldwide also participate in this repression.

One of the most notorious examples of intellectual injustice in this century is Jorge Luis Borges, who was systematically denied the Nobel Prize simply because of his political views. Borges is one of the most important Latin American writers of this century, perhaps the most important one; however, the Nobel Prize was given to Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the pastiche of Faulkner, personal friend of Castro's, and born opportunist. His work, although not without merit, is permeated with cheap populism, and is not at the level of some other great writers who have either died in oblivion or been ignored.

Sounds harsh? Not when you consider that Marquez cheered Castro's repressive/homophobic policies and criticised remorselessly the so-called traitors who wished to leave Cuba at the height of their repression; by rights Arenas should be far more venomous. And he's right - the Nobel Prize is so often political, and so often prejudiced toward the Left. (And Marquez is not a patch on Borges.) Me, I think the whole point of literature is that it's beyond such concerns, and I think it's beautiful that Arenas could find such joy in reading aloud, with his friends, the poems of a man (Borges) who possibly could not have abided the sexually-outrageous behaviour of these admirers. Isn't that the point of literature: communication?

As to that outrageous sexual behaviour, I don't buy the line that it's exaggerated. I mean, maybe. It's just possible Arenas saw the chance of mocking the would-be guardians of Cuban morality by painting the place as a homosexual free-for-all, but even if so I applaud him for it. F\*\*king Che Guevara posters - what are they if not homoerotic anyway? (Besides, every time I see that guy I hear Alan Vega: 'Che Che / he's wearin'

a red star / he's smokin' a cigar / and when he died / the whole world lied / said he was a saint / but I know he ain't.')

Self-important middle-class so-called artists poncing around talking about revolution, read this book. Sure, Castro stuck it to the powers-that-be in the United States, and maybe that's a good thing, but if you can't allow your citizens their fundamental rights then your revolution, no matter what its intent, has failed. As Arenas says, there's repression in both Cuba and the States, but in Cuba you must remain silent about it, whereas in the States you can scream. Remarkably, this book is not a scream, though at times it's bloodcurdling. And in some way - though Arenas himself convincingly denies it - it's a story of heroism, the simple heroism of a man who must write, who can write only for himself, and who keeps writing no matter what they throw at him. My kind of hero.

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## Zoe's Human says

If you are looking for a nice, inspiring biography that delicately glosses over the actual suffering part of the writer's experience, this book is **not** for you. If descriptions of sexual encounters (enough to be questionable) bother you, this book is also **not** for you.

This was not easy to read by any means. While well written and compelling, the blunt descriptions of the things he saw and experienced are vivid and have genuine emotional impact. I feel admiration for him for having survived and grief for the people who were destroyed - some physically, some mentally.

This book reminds me of how grateful I am to have been born in a country where I needn't worry of experiencing such poverty, oppression, or suffering. I am also grateful to him for sharing his story.

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## T4ncr3d1 says

*"Il coraggio è una follia piena di grandezza."*

Quando Reinaldo Arenas iniziò a scrivere la sua autobiografia era ancora giovane, era ancora a Cuba, la più florida e per questo potente, pericolosa manifestazione della vita e della vitalità, così nemica ai regimi. Scriveva nei boschi, di nascosto, con il sole unico complice; ogni giorno si affrettava a terminare, prima che arrivasse la notte.

Quando Reinaldo Arenas terminò la sua autobiografia era non di molto più vecchio, malato di AIDS, in esilio. Un'altra notte minacciava di giungere, la morte. Eppure, combattente fino all'ultimo, mentre la sua sfacciata fortuna, che innumerevoli volte l'aveva salvato, scivolava via, fu per sua stessa mano che morì, sottraendosi a chiunque e qualunque cosa avesse tentato di decidere della sua vita.

Nella sua autobiografia, che ripercorre una vita umile eppure pulsante, energica, instancabile, che non si piega mai, Arenas intreccia gli affetti e le passioni e i tormenti: gli uomini che l'Isola ha offerto al suo desiderio insaziabile (più di cinquemila, proclama); la passione della scrittura, soffocata dal regime, tradita dagli amici scrittori ipocriti, mai ripagata dagli editori stranieri; i regimi, prima quello di Batista, poi quello di Castro, e quella brevissima, di una illusoria felicità, parentesi rivoluzionaria cui aveva pure aderito, salvo indovinare ben presto il colore dell'operazione condotta dal *lider maximo*. L'amore (omosessuale), la scrittura, la politica sono le tre passioni di Arenas, ma anche i tre volti di Cuba, che l'autore demolisce e ricostruisce in un infinito gioco di specchi: Cuba è l'isola di sole e mare, di spiagge popolate di bei ragazzi, di

amori urlati con vitalità e fierezza; Cuba è anche l'immenso salotto letterario che Arenas e i suoi popolavano, un salotto umile, alla buona, più una taverna che un circolo di intellettuali; Cuba è, ed è diventata soprattutto, l'isola del mare negato, delle spiagge popolate di militari, delle prigioni e dei campi di lavoro forzato. Con una scrittura dolce, ma che sa anche essere feroce, Arenas esalta la vita laddove il regime vorrebbe schiacciarla: geniale intuizione che pagò sulla sua stessa pelle, l'unico modo per contrastare i regimi è quello di esaltare la vita, e per uno scrittore omosessuale come lui, non c'era provocazione migliore dell'amore omosessuale. *Tutte le dittature sono caste e antivitali*, afferma Arenas: e per questo canta di giovani belli e sani che urlano il loro amore al mondo intero. Non è un caso che il regime l'abbia arrestato proprio per questo: per quanto fosse stata solo una scusa per nascondere all'estero l'arresto di un celebre scrittore per le sue posizioni politiche, viene da pensare che omosessualità e anticomunismo fossero una sola cosa, che Arenas fosse stato davvero più pericoloso come omosessuale che come scrittore antiregime. Sicuramente più pericoloso di molti altri, che ben presto si sono piegati, ritrattando, riscoprendosi fedeli al regime: la lista di traditori è lunga, Arenas non risparmia nessuno, pure quel Marquez che giudica il più ipocrita di tutti, sputando su quel Nobel che avrebbe attribuito a Borges, mal visto dal regime. Nei giorni di terrore a Cuba, un amico gli disse: *ricordati che la nostra unica salvezza è la parola. Scrivi*. E Arenas scrisse. Adesso sta a voi leggerlo.

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## Sve says

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## Sean A. says

Absolutely stunningly brilliant, candid memoir. Arenas does an immaculate job, as he would describe it, of screaming against the systems of control (in this case, the so-called communism but really dystopian dictatorship of castro's cuba) which doggedly plagued the author throughout his life. his scream is one of joy, and that joy often abounds from two distinct but sometimes overlapping subjects; sexuality (more explicitly, a hungry homoerotic sexuality) and the sea. these aspects provide the book with its blunt poetic justice and sensibility. the other over-arching theme is his resistance to the brutal tyranny he was subject too under castro (somewhat due but not limited to being because of his homosexuality). totally scathing yet often in the same breathe utterly exuberant. also, the book just oozes sex, which i found great entertainment but also touching, relatable and well articulated. a total heartbreaker of a book but also a testament to what often gets dubbed 'the human spirit' but is more accurately a total stand against oppression and systems of control.

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## Fabian says

Perhaps the single BEST MEMOIR I've ever read-- this work of art is excruciating. There is no doubt that everything that occurred to Arenas happened and that here is testament of how the new wave of Cuban writers, lingering between Batista (incited by him and his regime) & entering into the holocaust that is Communist Cuba by Castro, struggled & died. This voice was not extinguished, however.

Arena's life is full of missteps, amazing accomplishments & plenty of sex. He's proud of himself, never apologizes. His nemesis is not himself (most writers are so full of inner demons- Arenas is a rock of certainty and is so self-aware) but Castro. Always effenCastro.

It is sad that after all this, the Plague in NYC finally claims this intelligent, articulate and overly creative man. It seems that all good things come to an end, but that is no reason to dismiss everything that exists in between.

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## Robert Beveridge says

Reinaldo Arenas, *Before Night Falls* (Penguin, 1993)

Arenas' memoir of life in Cuba has recently been made into one of the finest films extant by Julian Schnabel. Schnabel did an excellent job with the book; while his interpretation of the text was loose in places, he managed to capture in images the style of Arenas' writing.

In other words, if you saw the movie before reading the book, you're going to be somewhat surprised. Some of Schnabel's more memorable scenes are mentioned in passing (if at all) in the book, and one of the film's central sequences, the balloon escape, gets one sentence. Where Arenas and Schnabel intersect is in the lushness, the ability to find celebration and remarkable beauty inside the ugliness of the Castro regime (and, for a few years' worth, the Batista regime before it).

Arenas' memoir is also likely to shock more than a few in its sexual explicitness (another aspect Schnabel rather shied away from, which I found a tad surprising while reading the book), but so be it. There is nothing gratuitous about either Arenas' promiscuity or his literary descriptions of it; it's no different than using the language of excess to describe the beastliness of a life that involves hand-to-mouth poverty and political censure. And throughout, more than anything (and perhaps this is what makes the book so powerful), *Before Night Falls* is a celebration, both of Arenas' life and the lives of many other Cuban writers persecuted as dissidents in the latter half of the twentieth century. \*\*\*\*\* 1/2

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## Atticus06 says

*Ma dopo vent'anni di repressione, come avrei potuto stare zitto davanti a quei crimini? E inoltre non mi sono mai considerato né di sinistra né di destra, né voglio essere catalogato sotto qualunque etichetta di opportunismo politico. Io racconto la mia verità, come un ebreo che abbia sofferto il razzismo o un russo che sia stato in un gulag, come qualunque essere umano che abbia avuto gli occhi per vedere le cose come sono.*

Libro che mi instilla vari dubbi.

Dal punto di vista storico-politico è sicuramente un libro importante, anche se la credibilità viene minata da fanfaronate ed esagerazioni sulla sua vita privata (4000 amanti fino a 24 anni), brani e aneddoti molto numerosi che sembrano vanterie da adolescente, con descrizioni di amplessi fisiologicamente e acrobaticamente impossibili e che alla lunga potrebbero far venire dei dubbi sulla veridicità di alcune vicende raccontate anche se non riguardanti la vita privata dell'autore.

In una biografia, e in un uomo, tutto partecipa a stabilirne la credibilità e queste parti sono importanti per capire l'uomo in questione.

Nulla importa che siano storie omosessuali. Sarebbe lo stesso se fossero eterosessuali.

Le esagerazioni di stampo machista quindi possono influire sulla percezione della verità.

Strano anche che non venga mai nominato Ernesto Guevara, uno dei protagonisti della rivoluzione cubana. Mai citato in questo libro. Uomo simbolo, forse più di Castro per chi vive all'estero, in tutto il mondo quando si parla di rivoluzionari che hanno cambiato la storia.

Ciò non toglie, però, che le storie raccontate da Ameras siano un bel pugno nello stomaco, che descrivono una realtà piuttosto plausibile e simile a quella raccontata da altri scrittori su altre dittature. Insomma, mi viene da pensare che la parte storico-politica sia vera anche se non ho mai sentito Gianni Minà raccontare storie del genere, ma lui era amico di Fidel (un uomo buono, dice lui) e viveva una realtà falsata da quello che il regime voleva far vedere all'estero e quindi dubito fortemente della sua obiettività.

Pensando a Minà mi viene da riflettere rileggendo questo passo:

*Scoprii un animale inesistente a Cuba: il comunista di lusso. Ricordo che durante un banchetto all'Università di Harvard un professore tedesco mi disse: «Posso capire che tu abbia sofferto nel tuo paese, ma io sono un grande ammiratore di Fidel Castro e apprezzo quel che ha fatto a Cuba». In quel momento il professore aveva un enorme piatto di cibo davanti e io gli dissi: «Mi sembra bello che lei ammiri Fidel Castro, ma allora non può finire il piatto che ha davanti, perché nessuna delle persone che vivono a Cuba, salvo gli alti funzionari, può mangiare roba simile». Presi il piatto e lo lanciai contro il muro.*

Per lui non sono molto diversi dai fascisti:

*I miei incontri con questa sinistra godereccia e fascista furono abbastanza polemici.*

Il governo cubano ha negato che ci fosse una persecuzione nei confronti degli omosessuali e ovviamente tutti questi illustri giornalisti hanno creduto a queste dichiarazioni.

Mi chiedo come un giornalista come Minà non si ponga il minimo dubbio su questi fatti continuando a idolatrare un personaggio di dubbia moralità.

La parte della detenzione al *morro* è piuttosto bella e angosciante, come anche la sua infanzia, appassionante da leggere. Il libro alterna fasi bellissime per come è scritto ad altre francamente banali e stereotipate ma penso che abbia a che fare con quella società fortemente machista che lui stesso racconta avere influenzato moltissimo il suo carattere nonostante le sue inclinazioni sessuali.

Per questi motivi l'ho apprezzato ma non amato.

Ci sono anche commenti curiosi su scrittori celebri e sue particolari riflessioni tipo questa:

*Uno dei casi più vistosi di ingiustizia intellettuale di questo secolo fu quello di Jorge Luis Borges, al quale venne sistematicamente negato il Premio Nobel per il suo credo politico. Borges è uno degli scrittori latinoamericani più importanti di questo secolo, forse il più importante; ma nonostante questo il Premio Nobel lo hanno dato a Gabriel Garcia Màrquez, scimmiettatore di Faulkner, amico personale di Castro e opportunista nato. La sua opera, salvo qualche indubbio merito, è piena di populismo, di cianfrusaglieria: non arriva all'altezza dei grandi scrittori morti nell'oblio o trascurati.*

È però un libro che si deve leggere, almeno per eliminare un po' quell'alone di divinità che si è dato negli anni a Fidel, dittatore come tutti i dittatori, e per porci delle domande sulla realtà dei fatti che ancora oggi non è poi così chiara visto che le uniche cose che sappiamo di Cuba sono comunque quelle volute dal regime o quelle scritte e raccontate dai dissidenti, che però a quanto pare, e lo scrive anche Arenas in questo libro, spesso non vengono creduti.

Però quella mancanza di Guevara mi puzza...

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