

Before the night falls.
comparison of the
book and film



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Before the night falls Order No. 392722 February ' 10 Before the night falls

Before the Night Falls by the Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas is a shocking memoir. In this book the writer relives his journey that starts from an extremely poor childhood in rural Cuba and ends with his death in New York about four decades later. The book is a saga of the writer's fight as a young rebel who fought for the Revolution, of how he was suppressed as a writer, of his disillusionment with Castro, of how he was imprisoned and tortured and how eventually he fled from Cuba. Before Night Falls is a stunning book about sexual, artistic and political freedom and about how an individual if he has the urge can create even in the face of opposition.

Julian Schnabel made a movie based on this memoir. The movie with the same name as the book, like the book, recounts Arenas' life. It details his birth in rural Cuba, his youth and his growth as a writer. It shows how he struggled to get published his works considered counterrevolutionary by the Cuban government, his imprisonment and his eventual release from Cuba. It shows him migrating to the U. S. achieving some recognition and success there, before dying of AIDS.

Schnabel inevitably has not been able to put the whole content of the book into the movie. However the essence and most of the themes of the book have been incorporated into the movie. Adapted films may be able to bring a book to life. However it is not possible to make a movie from a book with as much detail or depth as a book. In Schnabel's case adaptation of Before Night Falls, became even more difficult because the book was not only the story of the life of one man but the book also portrayed political history that was quite complicated in nature. A faithful and total adaptation of the

memoir would need more than six hours of viewing. Schnabel while missing <https://assignbuster.com/before-the-night-falls-comparison-of-the-book-and-film/>

out on many portions of the book however remains faithful to some of the important actual events in the life of Arenas. Schnabel handles the movie with a light touch with none of the weighty sequences found in the book. He does not go into the details of the brutality and torment Arenas experiences in prison. The description of life in the Cuban prison had made the book unique.

Arenas's sexual explorations portrayed in the book are portrayed quite timidly in the film. Schnabel does explore the pleasure, freedom and promiscuity of beach culture, but he does this only peripherally. In the book, according to Arenas he has had about 5000 sexual partners by the age of 25. However in the film, he is shown as having no more than what he can count on his fingers. According to one critic, there had to be a "censoring and editing in the name of moral, economic, and political righteousness" (Golden 1982). For instance homosexuality is a very controversial subject, so the director has omitted all the details of Arenas' erotic adventures with other men. Instead there is one scene where two men start to get closer and then there is a black out. There is only implied sexuality. The raw sexuality of the book is absent. Arenas' memoir shocks you with its sexual explicitness. In almost every other page of the book there are details of some kind of sexual encounters with uncles, soldiers, cousins, trees, animals, fellow bus passengers, etc. Schnabel has shied away from this kind of portrayal. The film like the book uses Arenas' poetry. The book has many poetic interludes. In the film the poems are read by the actor who plays Arenas. The director uses a voice-over technique with visual images that succeed in conveying the power and the beauty of the poems as well as maintaining the poetic prose quality of the book

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Also, the movie does not detail the political history of Cuba . One scene showing how the government harmed the peasants is a short scene without dialogue. In the book Arenas describes in detail how writers and professional men and women were forcibly sent into the sugar cane fields and he describes this as “ entering the last circle of hell” (Arenas).

Again there are certain scenes in the film that are not there in the book.

There is this visually stunning scene of a man’s crazy but failed attempt to flee Cuba in a hot air balloon. This scene represents the entire countrys desperation to flee from the country.

The book can be considered more powerful than the book because of the intensity of the details of Arenas’ humble beginnings, his struggles while evading capture and imprisonment and his lengthy stay in prison that had the most despicable conditions one could ever imagine. The writer gives much more detail about Reynaldo’s feelings and emotions, history, and lessons learnt about love and life.

In conclusion it can be said that the film is a successful and faithful adaptation of the book as it takes the main concepts of the novel and converts them into a visual and artistic experience for the viewer. Schnabel uses the language of film to convey the themes and moods of the book.

References

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