

Before night falls essay



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In the novel, *Before Night Falls* by Reinaldo Arenas who lived from 1943 to 1990, the author conveys many subjects and captures the reader to the full extent. Reinaldo Arenas, the author and the person who lived the experience writes this book for us in hopes of capturing our feelings and sympathy of the Cuban Revolution. Arenas wrote over twenty books, including ten novels and numerous short stories and poems.

Arenas was not the only writer affected though as he states that, “ All the literature of this century is somewhat burdened by the theme of uprootedness,” (Arenas, 36) which means every piece of literature surrounded the system of being exiled or the fear of being caught or doing wrong and being thrown out to vanish. He was also strong towards his views of being homosexual, his sexual encounters with animals, his rebellious nature, and his artistic ability in writing. All of which were despised by the Cuban government of Fidel Castro.

Arenas describes himself as an, “ intellectual” (Arenas, throughout the whole book) ; someone who (rebelled) and described their actions and emotions through scripts, writing, etc. unlike someone who is physical in that manner. Reinaldo Arenas explained, “ I write because I want to say something from the depths of myself by using the anger, hate, and love in order to express myself personally (Arenas 91). ” Arenas writes this book through his imaginations and pastimes in Cuba as if it were his diaries. He analyzes his secrecy with artistic writing and sex.

Reinaldo Arenas says, My sexual activity was all with animals. First there were the hens, then the goats and the sows, and after I had grown up some

more, the mares (Arenas 149). ” This shows the indifference towards women and the rest of the societies interests. In other words, Reinaldo was a homosexual and hid through his fear of the totalitarian government by taking his pain out with the animals. This book represents Reinaldo’s search for freedom, and his denied rights and views towards art, political representation, persecution, being ostracized and soon dying.

The book opens to the succulent, splendor forest, full of vivid emotion and color where Arenas started the beginning of his life in Oriente Province, Cuba. The setting is one of poverty, but the natural world around him seemed to be beautiful and dazzling. Arenas shows this by saying, “ The splendor of my childhood was unique because of its absolute poverty and absolute freedom surrounded by trees, animals, and people who are indifferent towards me (Arenas 332).

” This quote foreshadows the rest of the story in that Reinaldo soon faces indifference from other people because he is unique and is doing something a “ different way”. Also, this quotation points out the wonderful time he had as a child where there seemed to be opportunity, before Fidel Castro came into power restricting most rights. Furthermore, Arenas was free as a child and was uplifted by the cognitive nature of opportunity, but as he got older the setting started to change and dreams were tarnished and opportunity was thrown away by political interference.

Reinaldo Arenas’ childhood was the only time of happiness and immaculacy and throughout the rest of the story Arenas is on a desperate search for enchantment in his once short lived paradise. As Arenas states in the book, “

These, to be sure, were farfetched hopes, hopes born of despair, but hope is, after all, mostly for the desperate (Arenas 260). ” This quote purely gives an edge to Arenas’ personality, saying that he, himself is desperate because he still has hopes of the government in doing gratifying things.

Also, it explains that he has not lost all hope, but he is the unique one that will soon be convoluted with indifference because of his “ intellectuality”. As Arenas gets older and older his childhood happiness fades away little by little. Soon a disastrous flood hits Cuba and where Reinaldo lives and it figuratively wipes away Reinaldo’s youth and all hopes that were to be had about Cuba’s government and policies.

Reinaldo explains allegorically, “ The most extraordinary event of my childhood was provided by the heavens, water rushed down gutters, reverberating over the sink roof like gun fire, a massive army marching across the trees, overflowing, cascading, thundering into burrows, water falling on water, drenched and whistling and out of control, and under the spell of violence let loose that would sweep away almost everything in its path...it was the mystery of destruction, the law of life, as I saw it the currents were ruining my life (Arenas 137).

” The structure of this quote is on many levels and it signifies the transition that Reinaldo will have to go through where acceptance is hard to come around in his new setting. Literally, the flood sweeps away all old and fond memories, and leaves destruction in the end, but really Arenas is really trying to convey his youth being gobbled up and left with instability; unable to tackle his compromises. With the theme of homosexuality lingering, there

were many problems with Arenas and the Cuban dictatorship. As Fidel Castro specifically did not like people who had mental disabilities and who were homosexual.

Arenas was well-known around the world but plagued in his own country for the simple gesture of his literature and writing. They say that people who make art are detrimental to a dictatorship or civil war because they can paint the picture ways other people can't see like Pablo Picasso and Frida Kahlo. Both artists who were bisexual and Latino American, were useful in a time of need because their art represented rebellious natures, and things that other people couldn't see like Pablo Picasso's Guernica and Frida Kahlo's self-portraits are example of revolutionaries.

Therefore, Arenas' sex and sexuality was a way of fighting the totalitarian power of the Cuban dictatorship. Reinaldo exclaimed, ““ Why this relentless cruelty against us? Why this cruelty against all of us who did not want to be a part of the banal tradition and dull daily existence so characteristic of our island (Arenas 311)? ” What Arenas is trying to convey is he is “ intellectually” debating why one who is unique should be persecuted as in homosexual terms for him. Homosexuality is execrated in Cuba and Fidel Castro uses propaganda to show how they are evil and enemies of the country.

Castro doesn't believe these people should be aloud to fit in and therefore bringing on people having “ indifference” towards him and making him “ unique”. Nearing the end of the story, Reinaldo was exiled and soon shipped (not literally) to New York on the same boat with all the other mental

deficiency people and homosexuals. Arenas is awaiting his inevitable death because he contracted the AIDS virus, probably from his profound sex with animals. Reinaldo is not much worried with the disease that he has but more at the fact that he has been exiled from his own country because of his uniqueness and this disappoints him.

The setting is the complete opposite than that of the beginning in that it is dark, gloomy, grey, and sorrowful with all hope lost. This is a contrast to his early life in showing how his uniqueness and not being contempt in following the “ banal tradition” has taken the worst turn leaving Arenas in despair and a feeling of dysphoria. Furthermore, this film takes you on a cultural ride through the intellectuality of Reinaldo Arenas; the homosexual Cuban writer. Reinaldo contrasts the two settings of his life in a bright, full of hope childhood transitioning to him saying, “ There was still some hope, however...

There is always some hope, especially for cowards... I was one of them, one of those cowardly or hopeful young men who still thought the government had something to offer (Arenas 293),” and finally easing into a dark and gloomy, full of despair ending. We will now think of the meaning Before Night Falls differently in an artistic way. Before the night was his childhood and freedom, but then the night falls and brings on a horizon of undetectable simplicities that didn't notice Arenas' place. As Americans, we can only have sympathy for this instance, and continue to praise our freedom and be thankful for our wonderful flexibilities.