

REINALDO ARENAS

b. July 16, 1943

d. December 7, 1990

CUBAN AUTHOR

*“If you cannot live the way you want,
there is no point in living.”*

Arenas's writing gained popularity during the height of the AIDS epidemic when readers connected with his oppression.

Reinaldo Arenas was a Cuban poet, novelist and essayist whose work focused on political and social injustices.

Arenas was born into poverty in the Cuban countryside. He wrote his first poems by carving words into tree trunks.

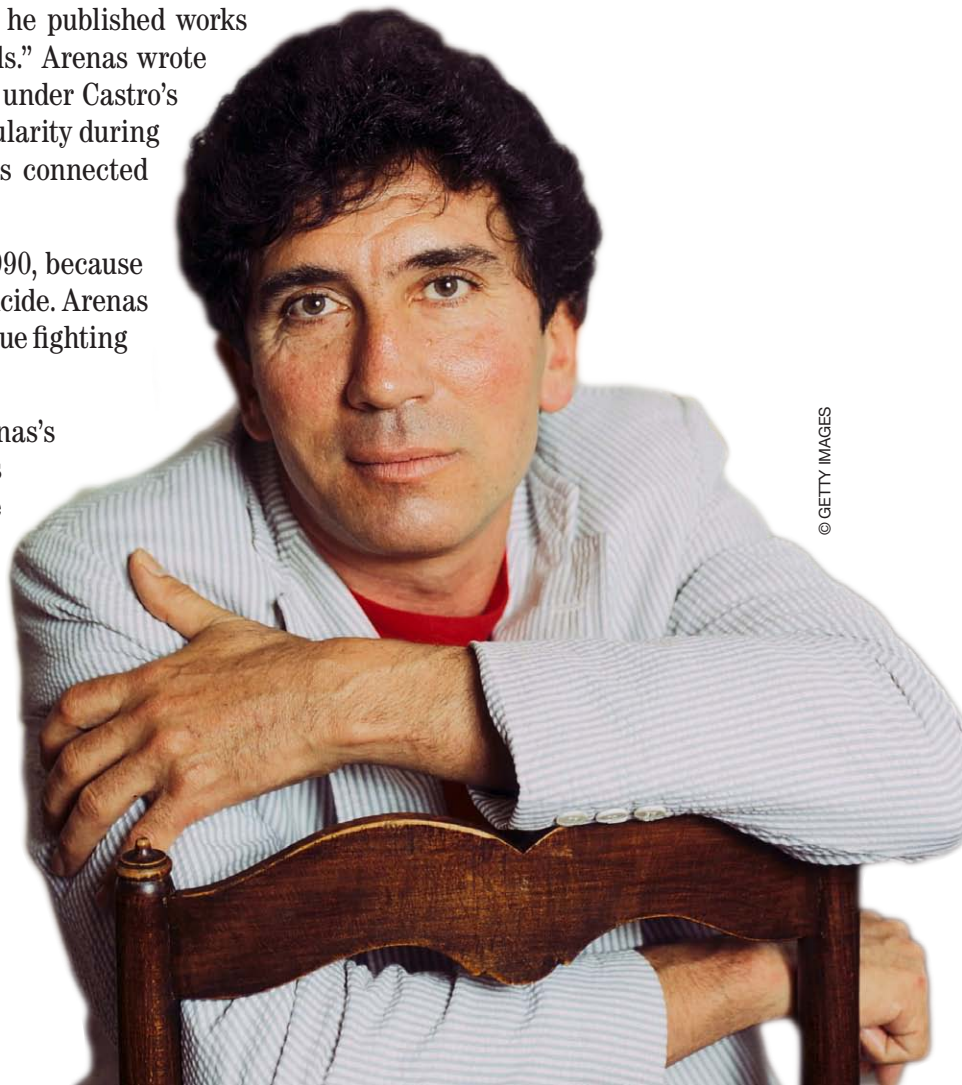
In 1961, Arenas moved to Havana and joined Fidel Castro's revolutionary forces. He studied philosophy and literature at the University of Havana, but did not graduate. In 1966, his novel "Hallucinations" received a First Honorable Mention award from the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists.

The following year, Arenas was persecuted by the Castro regime for his openly gay lifestyle. Many of his works were not reprinted in Cuba, but were published in other countries. In 1974, Arenas was imprisoned for publishing abroad without consent. He escaped from prison and tried to flee Cuba, but was captured and sent to the infamous El Morro prison. While imprisoned, he secretly wrote "Farewell to the Sea," regarded by critics as one of his best works.

He was released in 1976 after being forced to renounce his writings. In 1980, Arenas fled to the United States, where he published works including his autobiography, "Before Night Falls." Arenas wrote about government control and social injustices under Castro's regime and in America. His writing gained popularity during the height of the AIDS epidemic when readers connected with Arenas's oppression.

In 1987, Arenas was diagnosed with AIDS. In 1990, because he was no longer able to write, he committed suicide. Arenas left behind a letter urging Cuban exiles to continue fighting against Castro's rule.

"Before Night Falls," a film based on Arenas's autobiography, was released in 2000. It was showcased at the Toronto Film Festival and the Venice International Film Festival and was screened around the world.



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