



Cuba's Political and Sexual Outlaw: Reinaldo Arenas

Rafael Ocasio

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This detailed biographical account of Reinaldo Arenas's open opposition to Cuba's revolutionary institutions reveals the price that the well-known Cuban dissident--one of the first out-of-the-closet gay writers from Latin America--paid in his quest for political, sexual, and literary freedom. Arenas was a semiliterate peasant in Havana in 1962 when, at age 22, he began a promising literary career. His autobiographical fiction boldly explored strong homoerotic themes, and he was forced to smuggle his work out of the country for publication abroad. Rafael Ocasio presents Arenas as an ideological political outlaw and a vocal sexual dissident, tracing the key political incidents that led Arenas into confrontation with official policies about proper revolutionary behavior. Ocasio examines eyewitness accounts--appearing here for the first time in book form--of work camps founded in the mid-sixties for the internment of social deviants, homosexuals, and religious practitioners, exposing the extent of government persecution of writers in revolutionary Cuba. Using interviews with Arenas, critical reviews published both within Cuba and abroad of his work, and memoirs and recollections of Arenas's publishers, friends, and even rivals, Ocasio examines all major periods of Arenas's literary life, focusing especially on the years he lived in Havana. He corroborates Arenas's own version of his arrest by police entrapment in 1973, his flight from the courts, his imprisonment in El Morro penitentiary, and his escape from Cuba to Miami on the 1980 Mariel boatlift. With his historical overview of the Cuban Revolution's systematic campaigns against homosexuality and his examination of previously unpublished material from Arenas's correspondence in the Princeton University collection, Ocasio presents a compelling biography of a counterrevolutionary activist and writer of international importance.

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