The King's Toilet: Cruising Literary History in Reinaldo Arenas' Before Night Falls

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Abstract
In this article I will read Before Night Falls as Arenas' queer version of Cuban literary history and his relation to it. Against the commonplace assertions that demand that Before Night Falls be primarily understood, if not exclusively, as an invective against Fidel Castro or, in the other extreme, as an ars moriendi and AIDS testimonial from a sexual dissident, I wish to revisit this text on the twentieth anniversary of its publication to underscore a missed reading that can help situate how Arenas, one of the most transgressive writers theorized in this collection as the Generation of '72, might also be its most conservative in his attachments to the very modernist aesthetic agencies eschewed by so many of his generational contemporaries. This is not to ignore, of course, the most obvious and sometimes illuminating readings of Before Night Falls that have fallen on either end of the political continuum, or somewhere in between, but rather as an opportunity to revisit Arenas' important autobiography on the anniversary of its publication this year. And so it is to Before Night Falls' afterlives that I now turn in order to reconsider and map el caso Arenas' literary histories.