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## An Exploration of Loyalty, Complicity, and Female Resistance in Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*

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An Exploration of Loyalty, Complicity, and Female Resistance in Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of  
the Butterflies*

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
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## Preface

I am half Ecuadorian and half Dominican. My father is Ecuadorian, and my deceased mother was Dominican; my biological parents were immigrants, and I was born and raised in New York. As a younger girl, I would always wonder about my parents' home countries and wished to learn everything about them. I developed a strong interest in my father's origins because he was the only one who would tell me stories about his childhood, his family back in Ecuador, and what it's like to live in Ecuador. I do remember asking my mother about her childhood and memories of the Dominican Republic, but it was always difficult for her to talk about the past. Since my mother's passing, I have been trying to connect with my Dominican heritage in any way possible to feel spiritually connected with my mother.

The first time I read *In the Time of the Butterflies* by Julia Alvarez, I was a sophomore in high school, and my foster mother Jacqueline had given me the book to read. I remember her telling me it was about the Dominican Republic and that I should read it to learn more about the country's history. I remember not being interested at first, but I gave it a try and read the novel. After reading it the first time, I didn't understand the story because I did not know about the history of the Dominican Republic or have even a clue of who Trujillo was. However, that novel buried itself deep in my brain and resurfaced last year around this time when I was first thinking about how my Senior Project would turn out.

I decided to do a literary analysis of Julia Alvarez's novel because I wanted to learn about my mother's country. I thought it would be a good opportunity to spend time and engage with a story that deals with female empowerment, resilience, and Dominican politics. After a year of working on this project and examining the novel deeply, I feel more connected and more interested in pursuing different types of research on the Dominican Republic. This project has

challenged me to understand how literature can be used to send a powerful political message; the use of fiction especially, allows an author to present an argument that expresses an emotional aspect of the issue. Alvarez's novel represents a version of history that is fictionalized but with the purpose to create a space for discussion, so that the story of the Mirabal family can be understood and continuously examined by many.





## Introduction

The novel *In the Time of the Butterflies* by Julia Alvarez, first published in 1994, tells a fictional story about the Mirabal sisters. The Mirabal sisters are historical figures who were part of the resistance group against the Trujillo regime from the late 1940s until they died in 1960. Alvarez fictionally reconstructs the lives of the four sisters from the years 1938 to 1994. The writer Isabel Zakrzewski Brown in “Historiographic Metafiction in ‘In the Time of the Butterflies’” explains the structure of the novel:

The narrative voices of *In the Time of the Butterflies* include that of the author, the putative author, described as a Dominican gringa, and the documentary and fictional voices of the Mirabal sisters. The private and public discourses elaborated in the text of the novel include diaries, interviews, lists, post-scripts, and authorial commentary. The Postscript to the novel doubles as a model for the conception. (103)

Through the years, we see how the sisters grew up in the Dominican Republic under the power of a dictator. The author recreates important events and information to give a voice to the sisters who were murdered and to inform future generations about the sisters and their deeds against a dictator. In general, Alvarez demonstrates the role of women and feminine power in terms of political resistance. The novel shows us how resistance figures inspired the Dominican people to fight against a dictator who had a great deal of influence and power over the country as a political entity, but also over the intimate, personal lives of its citizens. Most importantly, we learn how their environment inspired some of them to become warriors.

The novel starts with a mysterious, unnamed reporter from the U.S visiting Dedé in 1994 to interview her and learn her sisters’ story. The reporter is a “gringa Dominicana” who isn’t fluent in Spanish (3). As readers, we may assume this reporter to be a fictionalized version of the author. As she states in the postscript, Alvarez’s writing process for this novel was to recreate the

story of the Mirabal sisters not to provide a historical document but to “travel through the human heart” in order to reach English-speaking readers in particular (324).

Alvarez has a personal connection to the sisters; her family left the Dominican Republic summer of 1960, before the death of the Mirabal sisters. Her father had participated in the underground resistance movement, and her family escaped before being caught by Trujillo’s secret police, the “SIM.” New York City then became Alvarez’s home. She has spent most of her life in the U.S, but she has always wondered about the Mirabal sisters because of her family’s story. In the postscript, the author says:

When as a young girl I heard about the “accident,” as a young girl, I could not get the Mirabal sisters out of my mind. On my frequent trips back to the Dominican Republic, I sought out whenever information I could about these brave and beautiful sisters who had done what few men—and only a handful of women—had been willing to do. During that terrifying thirty-one year regime, any hint of disagreement ultimately resulted in death for the dissenter and often for members of his or her family. Yet the Mirabals had risked their lives. I kept asking myself, What gave them that special courage? (323)

Alvarez’s need to answer her question led to the creation of the novel; through fiction, she was able to imagine and depict the stories of the Mirabals during the era of Trujillo. She was born in 1950 and had moved to New York City in 1960, a year before Trujillo’s assassination and the end of his regime. Therefore, she didn’t live through the *Trujillato*, which helps to account for the fact that her book is a fictionalized version of the historical facts. She explains: “The actual sisters I never knew, nor did I have access to enough information or the talents and inclinations of a biographer to be able to adequately record them” (324). The information and chronology of events in the novel also have been fictionalized, in order to create a story in which Alvarez’s writing would permit her to share a story about female resistance in a patriarchal society.

Foreshadowing, symbolism, and figurative language are some of the standard literary devices found in the novel. The author often foreshadows at the end of chapters to illustrate

events that deal with adverse circumstances or a traumatic shift in the book. For example, the foreshadowing of the sisters' death appears early in the novel and several times throughout the story. The actual event of their death is not described in complete detail; the foreshadowing allows readers to form the expectation of their death towards the end of the novel. In the first chapter, for example, the sisters' father Enrique says, "She'll bury us all in silk and pearls," referring to his prediction that Dedé "is going to be the millionaire in the family" (8). However, the chapter ends with this passage:

As Dedé is helping her father step safely up the stairs of the *galería*, she realizes that hers is the only future he really told. Maria Teresa's was a tease, and Papa never got to Minerva's or Patria's on account of Mamá's disapproval. A chill goes through her, for she feels it in her bones, the future is now beginning. By the time it is over it will be the past, and she doesn't want to be the only one left to tell their story. (10)

These are some examples of how Alvarez demonstrates foreshadowing in the novel. As readers, we are constantly reminded that the sisters' death awaits at the end of the novel. The reminder forces the reader to recognize that, as characters in a historical fiction, their destiny was laid out from the very beginning, because the moment the family allows for suspicion against the Trujillo regime to grow, the question of death is inevitable for them due to their determination to be free of *el Trujillato*.

Secondly, there are numerous phrases where symbolism is present in the novel, especially when the characters are speaking about Trujillo and the country's politics. For example, in the title of the book, *In the Time of The Butterflies*, the word "butterflies" refers to the Mirabal sisters, who were called "las mariposas" (butterflies in Spanish) as their code name in the resistance movement. Butterflies represent freedom because they can fly away and travel. A butterfly can also symbolize resurrection and endurance because of the process of metamorphosis from caterpillar to adult. Alvarez demonstrates how the sisters go through

transformations in stages like a butterfly. One key example is how the novel is structured; each sister has her own chapter, which is divided into three different parts based on chronological order. The first section of the book, from the years 1938-1946, recounts their childhood, and the second section, from 1948-1959, is their next life stage: personal growth and individuality are demonstrated here by each sister. Lastly, the third section describes the same crucial year, 1960, from each sister's point of view. Alvarez also does well in depicting Dedé's complexity, because she was the only sister to survive the assassination in 1960. When recounting Dedé's story, the author compares a past and modern viewpoint in each part because as the sole survivor, her most significant life burden is being the one left behind.

Another critical aspect of Alvarez's writing is the beautiful, long passages in the novel using figurative language as the sisters engage in dialogue. Minerva, as the most outspoken of the sisters, is the character that is mainly seen speaking in a manner that allows her to convey her true meaning indirectly. At the beginning of the novel, her family struggles to accept her views on politics. Therefore, Minerva's speech style is a strategic way for her to argue against Trujillo whenever she has the chance. It also permits her to not be extremely blunt all the time. In the *Trujillato*, spies and secret police were part of the political system, and Trujillo's dictatorship enforced absolute control over the Dominican people. Although Minerva doesn't fear Trujillo and his loyal or complicit subjects, she does control her speech habits to protect her family.

As previously mentioned, Alvarez's fictional insertion in the story—that is, her framing of the story as a “gringa” journalist's interview with Dedé—demonstrates her personal need to have answers about the Mirabal sisters. When dealing with memory and storytelling, the use of metafiction allows the author to investigate and share a story about resistance without dealing with the absence of an archive. The Mirabal sisters and Trujillo's regime were real people and

events in the Dominican Republic, but due to fear and lack of evidence, history, particularly personal stories, can be forgotten. In writing this novel Alvarez creates a foundation for the Mirabal sisters; their voices, pain, and resilience live on in the novel to be heard and understood by many.

As we look at the *Trujillato* from a distance, we might easily wonder how it was possible that the Dominican people allowed such a brutal dictatorship to endure for more than thirty years. Through her characterization of the four Mirabal sisters, Julia Alvarez shows how complicated the relationship between a dictator and the citizens of a country can be. In this essay, I will show that the psychological responses of loyalty, complicity, and resistance are represented in this novel in order to understand through the experiences of the Mirabal sisters, who each had a complex, love-hate relationship with Trujillo, a dictator who was well embedded in the lives of the Dominican people. The focus is to comprehend how Alvarez personifies the Mirabal sisters and create a space where their voice of justice can continue to be heard throughout the world because literature can immortalize history.

### Historical Facts

Trujillo rose to power in 1930 while he was a general in the military. The book *The Dominican Republic Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, describes Trujillo in these terms: “The most ruthlessly ambitious of them all was General Rafael Trujillo, who had risen from a childhood of impoverished obscurity to command of the armed forces through a mixture of cunning and violence” (330). With his connections, he was able to form his notorious coup called “La 44”, during the presidency of Horacio Vásquez (1860-1936). The president had a medical condition that forced him to seek treatment outside the country, granting Trujillo the opportunity to scheme various measures to reach a position in the government. The Dominican Republic became a country governed by an authoritarian ruler due to the coup d’état organized by Trujillo that broke into the capital Santo Domingo on Independence Day, February 27, 1930, which allowed him to become a candidate for the elections. In the novel, Minerva says, “According to Sinita, Trujillo became president in a sneaky way. First, he was in the army, and all the people who were above him kept disappearing until he was the one right below the head of the whole armed forces” (17). Trujillo’s era began from fraud, threats, and assassination attempts to get himself to the top. The following thirty-one years of his regime also displayed those three elements when manipulating his people.

A critical historical piece of information about the regime, relevant to the depictions of the characters in the novel, specifically Patria and Dedé, is the regime’s expectations of women during that period. For example:

The Trujillo regime adopted maternalism and eugenics as official policy; they thus followed the 1940s trend in Europe and the United States to seek to increase and improve the population through state intervention with measures ranging from prizes to mothers with many children to penalizing infanticide. (*Dominican Reader*, 337)

Trujillo used women as a tool to strengthen his regime. His policies of maternalism and eugenics are two strategies he used to create Dominican norms and convince the Dominican people that he was improving their country. The expectations of women that will be discussed in the following chapters have to do with Trujillo's control over women's bodies and lives.

Trujillo committed numerous other crimes throughout his time as a dictator: he orchestrated massacres, authorized assassinations, established an army to violate human rights, and patrolled the country's people. As previously mentioned, Alvarez's novel tells a fictionalized story about the sisters. Still, it is essential to remember that the Mirabal family and specifically the sisters were real revolutionaries who had suffered under the hands of Trujillo while trying to free their country from his rule. The *Dominican Reader* states:

The arrest and brutal murder of three of the four Mirabal sisters was a watershed moment in the history of the Trujillo regime. Born into an educated, elite family, the Mirabal sisters joined their husbands to form a clandestine political organization called the 14th of June with the intent of bringing down the Trujillo regime. Their code name within the movement was the "butterflies." They were tortured and raped in jail, and their death at the hands of the regime mobilized many against the brutality of the regime at a time when its violence was entering a new phase of ferocity, as it lashed out at the Catholic clergy and women, targets that had been off limits previously. (372)

The death of the Mirabal sisters in 1960 pushed forward the revolutionary movement; their death had made a statement, and the people were ready to remove Trujillo from the government. The novel is not explicit with the details on the torture and murder of the sisters. Still, it is necessary to mention the historical information because the "Las mariposas" were resilient and fierce women, and Alvarez depicts their nature according to their courage. Lastly, the following chapters will examine the history depicted by Alvarez of Mirabal sisters and Trujillo in the novel



*In the Time of the Butterflies*. Although a correlation exists between history and Alvarez's depiction of the sisters, the following is a literary analysis. This historical background provides a general overview of the "El Trujillato" and the Mirabal sisters who fought against the regime.

## Psychology

The following examples and concepts taken from the field of psychology will strengthen the main argument of the present essay: while demonstrations of loyalty to and complicity with the Trujillo dictatorship are seen throughout the novel *In the Time of the Butterflies*, resistance is the third factor in the dynamic that most fully illuminates the story of the Mirabal sisters.

The concept of showing complicity with a dictator has its origin in corruption. The corruption stems from the power dictators obtain, and the way society supports that dictator. There are various reasons why a population decides to be an accomplice to a dictator: personal gain and fear are two reasons that will be discussed. In the case of the Dominican Republic, Trujillo managed to have loyal followers and groups of people involved in his illegal and unjust actions, which made them accomplices of his activities throughout his tenure. Trujillo had power, money, and recognition, and these qualities allowed him to manipulate and use people. He also instilled fear in the Dominican people with his power: he forced his image to be compared to that of God, which allowed him to be respected and feared in the same sense as a believer may view God. Therefore, it is important to analyze the social aspect behind the citizens' acts of complicity; Alvarez demonstrates the dilemma in living in an era ruled by Trujillo through the stories of the sisters who each have a complicated connection to the dictator.

In this essay, examining the characters' relationship with Trujillo will be a key to discovering how difficult it was for the Dominican people to secure their freedom for thirty-one years. To ground my analysis of the novel, I will first examine certain concepts from the field of psychology—for example, Milgram's experiment, cognitive dissonance, and bystander intervention—which will allow for a richer literary analysis. The ultimate goal in this section is

to increase our understanding of how dictators in real life can make their people accept a brutal regime.

### **The Phenomena of Complicity and Loyalty: some clarifications**

For this analysis, I will define complicity as the decision to engage in an illegal or illicit act (based on morals and social norms) with another person. This idea of complicity is different from that of loyalty because in being complicit, one is deciding to participate in the illicit act on their own. One could engage in an unlawful act for some personal gain, or others could coerce one. Either way, this complicity implies the person's rationalization to decide to be part of the unlawful, unethical, or socially unacceptable actions. This means that they understand that there may be consequences that they may have to face. This is different from loyalty because in being loyal, one is "blindly" accepting something that is considered illegal or wrong in order to maintain a relationship with another person or persons. Therefore, while acting loyal, one may not be making the most rational decision, acting in the name of feeling admiration or trust for the group or person involved in illegal or morally questionable acts. Complicity, in other words, requires a subject to be conscious of their surroundings, and still to make the decision to be complicit with a figure.

It is also important to clarify that complicity is different from simple acts of obedience. On a scale between complicity and loyalty, obedience would be closer to loyalty. The reason for this is that in obeying, one may or may not have the ability to make their own decisions; one can act on the terms of the figure who is in a superior position in social or political terms. Therefore, they are choosing to be obedient. This is different from complicity because one chooses to be complicit by accepting the reality of the situation. This is why it will be important to introduce

cognitive dissonance to strengthen the analysis of the Mirabal sisters, because throughout the novel they demonstrate this behavioral concept numerous times.

### **Cognitive Dissonance**

Leon Festinger developed the concept of cognitive dissonance in the 1950s. This concept refers to a mental conflict that occurs when one's beliefs and behaviors do not adjust to each other; when there is information that contradicts one's process of thought and action, an imbalance occurs. Festinger, in his "Cognitive Dissonance" study of 1962, says, "Cognitive dissonance is a motivating state of affairs. Just as hunger impels a person to eat, so does dissonance impel a person to change his opinions or his behavior" (93).

Cognitive dissonance can occur when a person has specific ideas or morals regarding a situation, but acts in a way that contradicts their perspectives, which causes the person to experience a cognitive imbalance and to become stressed. People experiencing this will feel more stressed if they continue with their actions that do not align with their ideas about life or the specific situation that is stressing them. For that reason, there will be a moment when the person will look for a way to stop this imbalance, in order to calm down. In such a situation, people will find themselves trying to reject information that contradicts their beliefs and behaviors, in order to restore coherence and nullify the mental conflict that can cause mental stress. This can be seen by finding ways to receive support or information that supports the actions and beliefs that are almost always unconventional. For example, Festinger developed the idea behind cognitive dissonance when he learned of a cult that gathered people to escape earth in a flying saucer because they believed the world was ending. The aliens would provide them with a new home. The cult convinced people to leave their families, jobs, and schools to prepare for their new

destiny. Festinger and a group of his colleagues decided to infiltrate the cult and take reports on the group. Festinger was more interested in how cult supporters reacted once his theory was denounced as a bogus case. The people in learning their beliefs were not accurate sought social support and comfort, an article in Britannica Encyclopedia says that was a way for them to, “lessen the pain of its disconfirmation” (Jerry Suls, Britannica). Jerry Suls, the contributor of the article on Festinger explains, “[The members’] behaviour confirmed predictions from [Festinger’s] cognitive dissonance theory, whose premise was that people need to maintain consistency between thoughts, feelings, and behaviours” (Britannica).

The Trujillo era can also be compared to the cult example of cognitive dissonance. For thirty-one years, Trujillo was able to rule the Dominican Republic with an authoritarian style of government that was made possible by his control over the country’s people. Like a cult leader, Trujillo manipulated the Dominican people into trusting him by creating a distorted image of himself: he got people to admire him and even worship him. The *Dominican Reader* states, “We estimate conservatively that no less than a hundred and fifty public demonstrations or large meetings [relating to Trujillo] were staged in 1953” (363). Trujillo had control of the press and presented himself to his people the way he desired: as a savior. When in reality, Trujillo wanted to have absolute power over the country. The Mirabal sisters experience cognitive dissonance throughout the novel because they have the challenge of becoming aware of expectations set by Trujillo and setting themselves free of his mental and physical hold by acquiring information that causes the cognitive dissonance and forces them to change their views on *el Trujillato*.



## Chapter I: Character Analysis

*Dedé realizes she is speaking to the picture of Minerva, as if she were assigning her a part, pinning her down with a handful of adjectives, the beautiful, intelligent, high-minded Minerva. 'And María Teresa, ay, Dios,' Dedé sighs, emotion in her voice in spite of herself. 'Still a girl when she died, probrecita, just twenty-five.' Dedé moves on to the last picture and rights the frame. 'Sweet Patria, always her religion was so important.'... 'Well almost always' (Alvarez, 6-7)*

This chapter will analyze the Mirabal sisters in the way Alvarez depicts them. The sisters are all different from each other but share the same loyalty towards family and values. Although it may seem the fictionalization of the sisters puts their character traits into categorical boxes, Alvarez demonstrates the complexity of each sister and how their personalities play a role in how they view the regime and decide to show resistance to it. This is why it is best to understand the depictions of the characters' behaviors in terms of a spectrum between complicity and loyalty. However, resistance interferes with the spectrum and creates a "triangle" of balance between the two behavioral concepts of loyalty and complicity.

## Patria

Patria, the oldest of the sisters, was born on February 27, 1924. In the novel, she is the sister who has a solid connection to her religion and a strange affinity for Trujillo. Patria displays from a young age her interest in God and her desire to become a nun. She convinces her parents to send her to a Catholic boarding school, Inmaculada Concepción, at the age of fourteen so she can develop a stronger bond with God. (Her sisters Minerva and Dedé also join the school around the same time, although for different reasons.) Patria is an interesting character because we can see her desperation to be consumed in practicing her religion. She constantly faces moments that challenge her faith, which she often gives into; these are experiences that make her doubt her faith, but that also help to transform her and make her a stronger person each time.

At the age of seventeen, while still attending school, Patria falls in love and gives up her dream of becoming a nun. She meets Pedrito González, a farmer, who she says “was born to the soil,” due to his lack of formal schooling, but who is an earnest and hardworking man. She sees in him someone she will take care of, which she says gives her “the same excitement as when I’d been able to coax a wild bird or stray cat to eat out of my hand” (50). Patria’s faith also shapes her views on her role as a woman. She is the first sister to get married at seventeen and to have children. Having lost her first child in a miscarriage, she felt she was being punished, but didn’t know she had sinned so gravely to be denied the life of her baby. That situation pushes her to question and challenge her faith, allowing her to recognize the power she holds in being able to create the life she wants by making her own decisions. The miscarriage also exposed her to the harsh reality that terrible things happen to good people. Years later, Patria gives birth to her first son, Nelson, and gets pregnant again with her second child Raulito. During that period, Patria is much older but still struggles with her faith; this is why she decides to attend a church retreat to



mend her relationship with God. The last day of her retreat was on June 14th, which was the day Trujillo had authorized an invasion in the retreat region. Patria and her unborn son are put in danger. This experience marks her firm decision to join her rebellious sister Minerva and fight alongside her in the underground revolt against Trujillo. During the invasion, Patria has an epiphany and says to herself, "I'm not going to sit back and watch my babies die, Lord, even if that's what You in Your great wisdom decide" (162). Although her faith and her complicated relationship with God linger throughout the novel, which makes her go through many changes, Patria learns to use that spiritual grounding as a tool of empowerment.

In the novel, Trujillo is seen as a God, and the people of the Dominican Republic worship him as such by putting his image next to the image of Jesus. The common religion in the Dominican Republic is Roman Catholicism, and to this day, the country follows conservative Catholic religious and social norms. Practicing religion is also part of everyday life in the country. Therefore, having an altar at home, praising God's name, and attending mass are normal and expected activities. In 1930, when Trujillo became the dictator, he reached a level of power comparable to that of God through the fear and admiration felt by the Dominican people. It is an interesting concept that a religious figure known as the holy one would be interchangeable with a dictator who committed vicious crimes. However, the idea of "fear of God" accounts for why many characters in the novel (other than the sisters) are depicted as loyal and complicit subjects to the regime. That type of "fear" makes one have a specific type of respect for God. Those who are "God-fearing" tend to be a good example of how a Christian person should be, not only because they can recognize God as a figure that is beyond what we can comprehend, also because it makes one seem more trustworthy (in the religious sense) because they are less likely to sin and more likely to follow the commandments.

Patria is the only one among the sisters who has a strong relationship with God and who makes important decisions in her life according to her faith. Patria has always felt a spiritual connection since the moment she was born. She says, “No one had to tell me to believe in God or to love everything that lives. I did it automatically like a shoot inching its way towards the light” (44). This is an important character trait because it also allows us to see how the author demonstrates the complexities of being loyal and complicit during that period of time. This is because, during the Trujillo regime, it was a requirement that citizens devote themselves to Trujillo as one would to God. This is alluded to with the mention that besides a picture of the Good Shepherd the Mirabal family had in their home, “hung the required portrait of El Jefe, touched up to make him look better than he was” (53). The fact that an image representing Jesus and the Catholic religion is “beside” an image of Trujillo shows that the Dominican people were expected to be religious and hold the same amount of respect for Trujillo. Trujillo’s image was “required” to be “beside” the image of Jesus. Within the novel, one may argue that Patria forms a relationship with God and a similar one with Trujillo, in which she, in a way, views them as equals.

When Patria had a miscarriage with her first child, she was heartbroken, and it was the first time in her life when she questioned God. She says to herself, “How could our loving, all-powerful Father allow us to suffer so? I looked up challenging Him. And the two faces had merged!” (53) Trujillo and God turned into one person. As mentioned before, it seems as though both God and Trujillo are interchangeable figures in the way of what both represent to the Dominican people. This is a controversial but interesting idea because, in modern times, God is seen as “good,” and Trujillo is considered by many as “bad.” It is also important to state that Trujillo’s image till this day is split into two: those who view him as evil and those who view

him as an honorable historical figure. Those differences in opinion are due to the complexity of Trujillo's history because he indeed did help rebuild the country in areas of economic need but it is also proven that he committed heinous crimes. That is why his comparison to God in a way makes sense because, in the Old Testament, God was wrathful and punished those who sinned. In the New Testament, Jesus warns the people of God's anger, although he is portrayed more like a loving and forgiving figure. This is interesting because it is not uncommon for dictators to take on a God-like role and expect their followers to worship them as such. As mentioned before, God has been portrayed as a figure that ruthlessly punishes those that don't follow his word, which is what Trujillo was known to do as well. God also is portrayed to be forgiving and loving to all his followers, which is also how Trujillo represented. Alvarez, however, makes it clear that Trujillo's good deeds and care of the Dominican people are an inauthentic act.

When Patria concludes that because God didn't prevent her miscarriage, he was also capable of doing "bad" or "evil", she starts to realize that Trujillo, like God, was also allowing and doing terrible things to people all around her and on the island. Therefore, does Patria think that God's supposed forgiving and loving character is an act too? Based on her anger, one can assume that Patria is confused as to why she would be punished in such a manner. That experience made her question her faith and overall loyalty to God, which is a common response for people who experience horrible events in their life; they wonder if God ever loved them in the first place. Then her near experience with losing her second child, Raulito, during the invasion that is authorized by Trujillo: also makes her realize that again, Trujillo and God were in a way parallel figures causing the death or potential death of her children. To challenge Trujillo, Patria has to be fearless in challenging God and seeking change on her own terms.

We can comprehend Patria's decision to be part of the resistance with her sisters after going through personal traumatic experiences that made her resilient. Here we have a representation of a strong female character who happens to follow conventional religious rules and taboos, but at the same time chooses to participate in and be around those of the resistance. Before being a feminist, Patria is a mother, and it's the role she most cherishes and has desired since she was young. However, her traumatic experience with losing a baby had allowed her to harden her heart a little and become a strong person. This, of course, led to her being more accepting and open to challenging those in power. For example, when she tells her sisters that, "God, who played the biggest joke on us, could stand a little teasing"(55) Patria had found the courage within herself in others to stand on her own two feet. This is understood when Patria says to herself, "And so it was that Patria Mercedes Mirabal de Gonzalez was known all around San José de Concuco as well as Ojo de Agua as a model Catholic wife and mother. I fooled them all! Yes, for a long time after losing my faith, I went on, making believe" (55). Not only was Patria challenging her views, she was adapting to the environment around her, which made her take on this task of "making believe." Although she states she lost her faith, she never quite loses it, but rather the control her faith had over her changes; she becomes the one in control of her decisions. She realizes that for herself is what allowed her to understand her sisters better and willing to become part of the resistance.

It is after Patria loses her faith and rebuilds her strength that she also behaves in a loyal way towards God. And because God and Trujillo's faces had merged in her mind, one can make the argument that she realized she was being loyal to the regime too. She does so by only being preoccupied with filling her role as a Dominican woman; however, when she starts to question her situation and her own behavior, she realizes the hold Trujillo has on her because he uses

religion as a tool to manipulate his followers. This is why when she says to herself, “Maybe because I was used to the Good Shepherd and Trujillo side by side in the house, I caught myself praying a little greeting as I walked by...not because he was worthy or anything like that. I wanted something from him, and prayer was the only way I knew to ask” (202). In her own way, we see that Patria still views Trujillo as a God-like figure, but she uses her faith to combat Trujillo strategically. It may seem as though Patria starts to demonstrate complicit attitudes towards Trujillo, but we later see how she uses her faith as a form of resistance.

## Dedé

We know from Dominican history that Dedé is the only one of the sisters who survived the assassination in 1960, presumably because she did not engage in resistance at the same level as her sisters. Within the novel, Dedé can be characterized as someone who chooses not to take a different path than the one already laid out for her, not because she fears the consequences but because she finds comfort in rules and norms. Dedé typically follows a specific set of rules and expectations without questioning them, because it's the organized matter that makes her feel safe. Her way of thinking is "If you do as you're told, then nothing bad should happen." Dedé is the second-oldest sister, and she too began to attend the Inmaculada Concepción school, but left a semester later to help her father run their family-owned general store. As mentioned above, Patria went to the school in search of her calling as a nun. Dedé, on the other hand, joined just to follow her father's orders. But when her father mentions how he would be lonely without his girls, Dedé says, "I'll stay and help, Papá" (12). While her sisters are trying to get away from home in search of something that is bigger themselves, Dedé chooses to remain in the spot that she is familiar with.

In spite of her desire for stability, there is a time when we see Dedé's character change when she begins to question her own morals and views. Lío, a student who formed part of the early acts of the resistance, was both her love interest and someone who challenged her. Although love becomes a factor that makes her want to be daring and step out of her comfort zone, in the end, she lacks the courage to pursue Lío and join her sisters in the resistance. That lack of courage turns into the sense of guilt she deals with after the death of her sisters and the downfall of the regime. For example, in the interview with the American reporter she says:

Because Lío presented a very real opportunity to fight against the regime. I think that, after him, Minerva was never the same.” And neither was I, she adds to herself. Yes, years after she had last seen Lío, he was still a presence in her heart and mind. Every time she went along with some insane practice of the regime, she felt his sad, sober eyes accusing her of giving in. (66)

The memories of Lío and what he stood for—freedom, rebellion, a challenge—haunted Dedé’s thoughts for years. Dedé recognizes that she could have let herself be guided by him since he inspires her, but now he just represents an imaginary “what-if”. Dedé is perhaps the most complicated character depicted by Alvarez because Dedé knows it’s wrong to go along with the regime yet she doesn’t challenge it; she just knows that Lío wouldn’t approve of her actions. This is interesting because one would believe that love for someone you care for deeply would motivate you to be someone else or at least to behave in a way that protects that special person to see Dedé behave this way later with Jaimito, her husband, but not with her family.

Dedé doesn’t stay with Lío because he develops a relationship with her sister Minerva. One could argue that because of Minerva’s and Lío’s relationship, Dedé wasn’t able to explore different parts of herself. However, being in Lío’s presence does give her the courage to loosen up and enjoy herself, which she later does in her relationship with Jaimito. Jaimito himself isn’t like Lío; he “avoided anything that might cause trouble” (76), which aligns with Dedé’s personality; in Lío’s presence, she had tried to live in a way that she thought Lío may respect. It’s a complicated situation because if she truly cared for Jaimito, she would live as he does, and not be fazed by what Lío cared about. If she had loved Lío the way she thinks she does, she doesn’t really show it with her courage to join him in the struggle against Trujillo. In fact, later in the novel, the main reason why Dedé makes the definite decision to not join the revolt against the dictatorship is that Jaimito prevents her from doing so. She doesn’t want to risk ruining and ending her marriage to him, so she stands by him. Here we do see her protecting her marriage

and therefore acting in the way Jaimito wants her to act because she loves him. Nevertheless, making that decision was probably easier than facing her own fears: death, the regime, going against everything she had known and thought to be true.

Dedé is depicted as someone who craves stability and structure in her life. She fears not having control over a situation; therefore, she would prefer to remain with what she knows, even if it may not be right for her. The narrator explains that “uncertainty was not something Dedé could live with easily” (77). That is why she didn’t understand why Lío and her sisters had so much courage to challenge authority without a well-thought-out plan. Dedé says she is a practical person; if she were to join a revolution, she would, “First...depose the dictator in this and this way. Second... have arranged for a provisional government. Third... mean to set up a committee of private citizens to oversee free elections” (77). She claims she “would have understood talk like that” (77), which is why she doesn’t relate to Lío and her sisters with their raw bravery. Lío says, “it’s common sense,” (77) to want to fight against the regime, but for Dedé not having a plan is not common sense but rather foolish behavior. Dedé is not willing to risk her life for a cause that has a likely outcome in death.

In the aftermath of Dedé’s sisters’ death, she keeps their legacy alive, even though her guilt eats away at her. Dedé takes care of her sisters’ children and raises them to know the weight that their parents’ names hold. She deals with the constant reminder in conversations that revisit the fact that her sisters are dead and she is forced to relive the past. We learn that Dedé doesn’t enjoy going to receptions honoring her sisters because she has to put up with people who were complicit in the regime being two-faced with her. For example, she says to herself:

People will be asking things, well-meaning but nevertheless poking their feelings where it still hurts. People who kept their mouths shut when a little peep from everyone would have been a chorus the world couldn't have ignored. People who once were friends of the



devil. Everyone got amnesty by telling on everyone else until we were all one big rotten family of cowards. (317)

Dedé doesn't only hold resentment towards others, more importantly, she resents herself. She recognizes her own complicity and includes herself in the "big rotten family of cowards" that she considers the Dominican people (317). Although the fight and the "nightmare" of the *Trujillato* as Lío calls it (318) is over and the country and its people are able to be free, Dedé deals with the realization that their present-day freedom came at the cost of the butterflies—that is, at the cost of her sisters' deaths.

Dedé struggles with anger towards herself because she doesn't demonstrate her own power to fight the regime till the end of the novel before her sisters' death. Dedé doesn't go through a traumatic experience or an event that forces her to suspect her surroundings until Lío, a person in proximity to her, gets exposed for being a traitor to the regime. Therefore, while the others all learn that Trujillo was a despicable dictator while they were at school, Dedé in a way was oblivious.

Dedé didn't participate in the secret political meetings her younger sister Minerva was attending while at school, and she didn't even learn about that information like the youngest sister Mate had discovered when she was a young teenager. Dedé throughout the beginning of the novel doesn't have a specific reason to doubt and question the regime. Due to this lack of eye-opening experience, she is confused when she learns that Lío was an "enemy of state"; for example, the narrator says:

She didn't really know Lío was a communist, a subversive, all the other awful things the editorial had called him. She had never known an enemy of state before. She had assumed such people would be self-serving and wicked, low-class criminals. But Lío was a fine young man with lofty ideals and a compassionate heart. Enemy of state? Why then, Minerva was an enemy of state. And if she, Dedé, thought long and hard about what was right and wrong, she would no doubt be an enemy of state as well. (75)

This is an interesting aspect of Dedé's character because we learned previously that she was infatuated with Lío yet it doesn't cross her mind that he is communist, even when Lío does not hide his political beliefs in his conversations with her. He also doesn't directly say he is a communist but he speaks about communist ideology and his desire to start a revolution in the country. The question here is whether her infatuation with him blinded her from seeing him as he truly is or if her loyalty to the norms Trujillo set prevents her from understanding that those seeking change were not "criminals" as she had been persuaded to assume due to Trujillo's cult-like ideologies. It is also curious that she says Lío's views are "lofty ideals" and that he has a "compassionate heart," she didn't see anything wrong with Lío's beliefs because he wanted to change that would benefit the Dominican people. This part is interesting because Dedé doesn't notice the difference between his views and that of Trujillo's. For example, when Jamitio was accusing Lío of being a "troublemaker", saying that he was "cooking up plots and then running off to some embassy for asylum, leaving his comrades to rot in jail," Lío says, "We can't let Chapita kill us *all*" (73). Dedé was present during that argument that arose from a volleyball match, yet she didn't absorb the information provided by Jamitio and Lío himself on his own character. Also, considering that Minerva's character doesn't hold back on speaking against Trujillo, why does Dedé not consider early on the fact that the people nearest to her indeed were against Trujillo? Her display of loyalty to the regime is the most apparent because she was comfortable with her life during the regime. To continue the narrator explains Dedé, "didn't understand until that moment that they were really living—as Minerva liked to say—in a police state." (75). She was unaware of how the *Trujillato* was impacting their lives. Dedé didn't directly feel the weight of the regime because her parents were loyal followers of Trujillo, and

unlike Patria, Dedé didn't experience a situation that exposed her to the harsh truth that their dictator, like God, seemed to be punishing even those who hadn't sinned.

Dedé's demonstration of loyalty is particular because her character doesn't express love or devotion to Trujillo as Patria's character does. Dedé's type of loyalty stems from her lack of agency and her lack of a need to question the way systems are set up. She doesn't wish to set out the way of life that was expected of women during that time period. For example, at the volleyball game, where she meets Lío for the first time, he tells Dedé to join the game considering Minerva was playing, which Dedé refused because "she has always considered sports—like politics—something for men" (70). As previously discussed, Dedé prefers to be the type of woman that allows the man to lead and decide for her. We see her be that way her father when she wanted to stay at home and help around the home instead of seeking an education for herself. Now we see her admit that she tries to maintain a role that is specific to keeping women submissive. This is why she chooses to start a relationship with Jamitio instead of Lío; with Jamitio she is able to stay in her comfort zone and allow him to take charge.

Dedé's relationship with Jamitio is the determining factor for her complicit behaviors in the novel. We see previously that Jamitio judges Lío for participating in various political resistance groups, and from that we learn that Jamitio is conservative in his political views; he doesn't speak against the *Trujillato* because he doesn't want the attention and consequences that come with that. Later in the novel, years after the death of Dedé's sisters, she is questioned about her early days during an interview with an American reporter. Dedé recounts that all of her sisters' husbands were in prison except for hers because Jamitio didn't involve himself in the resistance: Dedé says, "Back in those days, we women followed our husbands," (172) when asked whether she had been involved in the resistance. This is another example of Dedé's lack of

independence because she is bound by her own expectations of being a woman, wife, and mother. Dedé values family and is loyal to her husband but that loyalty, which in reality is a false sense of comfort, allows her to hide from her fears: to challenge herself and leave behind the docile persona. Due to her decisions, she later deals with guilt, but that agony leads her to demonstrate a unique type of resistance in comparison to her sisters.

## Minerva

Minerva is depicted as a total feminist and the one among the sisters who takes on a leadership role. From the beginning of the novel, we learn that Minerva is fierce and resilient; her personality undergoes little change throughout the story. For example, her first diary entry starts with her comparing herself to the rabbits in the cage on her father's farm; she comes to the realization that she would never want to be like a caged rabbit, nor would she get used to being in a cage. We learn that when she tries to free the rabbit, it “ started whimpering like a scared child” (11). Even after Minerva slapped it to get it going, it didn't budge from its place. Years later, after being released from prison due to her participation in the resistance activities, she demonstrates the same attitude by saying, “Today, Gandhi would not do. What I needed was a shot of Fidel's fiery rhetoric. He would have agreed with me” (262). As these examples demonstrate, she has raw potential and a spark to become the force that leads to change in the country.

Minerva's strong and blunt character not only interferes with her relationships with her sisters but also with her parents. The sisters' parents are both conservative, with the mother being a stay-at-home wife and the father running a family business and farm. We mostly see the father have traditional expectations for his daughters in the novel; he wants them to stay at home and take care of family duties. The mother, on the other hand, says, “those girls need some learning. Look at us” (12). She didn't know how to read, and with the family farm doing financially well, she believed the girls, “needed the education to go along with [their] cash” (12). Although the father doesn't want them to go to a formal school, in the end, he agrees, because he wants to see his daughters happy.

When Minerva first faces her father, she convinces him to allow her to attend the Inmaculada Concepción school with Patria. Although her father is hesitant in letting her attend, Minerva sees it as an opportunity to get away from home and grow as a person:

And that's how I got free. I don't mean just going to sleepaway school on a train with a trunkful of new things. I mean in my head after I got to Immaculada and met Sinita and saw what happened to Lina and realized that I'd just left a small cage to go into a bigger one, the size of our whole country. (13)

At the boarding school, Minerva becomes friends with Sinita, a girl who has been exposed to the atrocities Trujillo was committing early in his era of power. At the school, Minerva's thirst for freedom increases, and she quickly learns that Trujillo is going to interfere with her academic ambitions, which only fuels her anger. When Minerva and her friends Sinita, Elsa, and Lourdes, have to put on a short performance for Trujillo, Sinita convinces Minerva to participate because it would allow them to secretly protest against him. This scene is long and complex, but it is important to summarize here because it is the beginning of Minerva's direct fight with Trujillo. The play is about the Dominican Republic gaining independence from Haiti in 1844. When the girls go to perform for Trujillo in the capital on his birthday, the performance ends with Sinita metaphorically expressing her hatred for Trujillo, and Minerva being exposed to nonconformist behavior. This marks the first time when we see Minerva be complicit by chanting "¡Viva Trujillo!" more than once to signal the end of the performance. On the way home in the car, moths fly into the car's windshields and leave marks which cause her to feel as though she is "looking at the world through a curtain of tears" (29). Minerva acknowledges her own fear; knowing that the country is being ruled by a ruthless dictator and that very few threaten his position empowers her to become courageous like Sinita because she is starting to see for herself the darkness surrounding Trujillo.

In order for Minerva to reach her greatest potential, she has to challenge those closest to her first to be able to break free from personal constraints as well. The norm of what a Dominican woman “looked” like in the 1930s-1960s would have involved being a conservative, stay-at-home wife. This is why she clashes with Dedé; they are at two ends of a spectrum, with Dedé representing the gender norm and Minerva being the revolutionary woman. After Minerva graduates from the boarding school, she returns home, only then to realize that she was missing her purpose in life. She says, “Maria Teresa was off at school, Dedé was newly married, Patria two times a mother. And here I was, a grown woman sitting on my father’s lap” (85). Minerva is aware she is not accomplishing the same goals as Dede and Patria, but she doesn’t choose to go down the same path as them even though she may be feeling stuck. Her path in life is to challenge the status quo.

As seen in the section about Dedé, Minerva meets Lío while in high school: later she says, “when I met Lío, it was as if I woke up” (86); Lío becomes her love interest and the person that pushes her to participate in the resistance. By the time they meet, Lío is already directly involved in an underground resistance group and he is targeted, and supervised by the government. He is seen as a threat and Minerva’s involvement with him also makes her a target, but that doesn’t push her away from him. In fact, she feels powerful and in control of her beliefs. But her family, specifically her father, doesn’t accept Lío and causes Minerva to lose contact with him. When Minerva figures out that her father hid letters sent to her by Lío, she says, “It seemed suddenly that I’d missed a great opportunity. My life would have been nobler if I had followed Lío” (87). These are examples of Minerva choosing to surround herself with people and environments that encourage and protect her drive to challenge the regime.

When Minerva comes face-to-face with Trujillo at a private party, which he hosted to be able to seduce her, she takes this opportunity to use her sex appeal to question and challenge him. For example, Trujillo approaches Minerva and says, “women from El Cibao make the best dancers and the best lovers” and proceeds to call her a “national treasure” (98). In a witty manner, Minerva responds, “I don’t feel very much like a national treasure,” feeling “a dangerous sense of my own power growing” (98). This compels her to provoke Trujillo. The encounter continues with Minerva manipulating him to grant her the freedom to study law in the capital: “If El Jefe says he wants me to study, Papá will have to let me,” she tells him, “I’ve always wanted to study law” (98).

Throughout the novel, Alvarez depicts Trujillo as power-hungry, not only over politics but also over women, which the whole country is aware of. This is why Minerva knows to use her feminine energy to speak with Trujillo, especially if she is going to be requesting favors. She first compliments him by saying, “You gave the women the vote in ‘42. You encouraged the founding of the women’s branch of the Dominican party. You’ve always been an advocate for women” (98). Trujillo is flattered by her comments and offers the possibility of seeing her regularly. He says, “I could see our national treasure then on a regular basis. Perhaps, I could conquer this jewel as El Conquistador conquered our island” (99) Minerva reminds him that she is only interested in her law degree. This is an important aspect of her character because she demonstrates the courage she has to not only engage in a mind game with Trujillo but also to defy him.

After the time Minerva spends in prison, she learns to enjoy other parts of herself while she’s on house arrest. For example, she first acknowledges that she is not only a member of the resistance but she is also a mother. She says, “How lovely to be called mother again; to have



their little arms around my neck; their sane, sweet breath in my face” (258) she is able to cherish and find peace with her family. This is a different side of Minerva that the reader gets to witness after her spirit was crushed in prison; eventually, Minerva grows into her motherly responsibilities and it nourishes her mentally. By being with the people that matter most, she is able to go back to her old self: the woman that fights for what she believes is just. Based on all the examples provided, Minerva is a character incredibly dedicated to her family and the overall well-being of others, she’s not an intensely empathetic person, but she is able to differentiate between what is morally good and what is plainly malevolent and she doesn’t lack the courage to be part of the change.

Alvarez depicts Minerva as being a handful since she was a child and ultimately her death was caused by her passion and sense of justice. Overall she is the character that is the least complicit and loyal to the regime. She actively rejects Trujillo and all her decisions are based on resisting the regime. Her personal life and objective in the resistance are intertwined with each other, which is interesting because, as stated, her decisions revolve around resisting Trujillo. We see her do this based on her desire to have an education, the partners she decides to have, and her need to have her family be involved in the revolution.

Minerva is on the end of the spectrum that would be labeled as “resistant” in terms of her behavior towards the regime. Although she may not act in a way that marks her as a loyal or complicit subject with regard to the dictatorship, she still displays loyalty to her family, which ironically makes her behave in a complicit manner in order to protect them. We get an early glimpse of the complexities of her character when she describes a memory;

Sometimes, watching the rabbits in their pens, I’d think, I’m no different from you, poor things. One time, I opened a cage to set a half grown doe free. I even gave her a slap to get her going. But she wouldn’t budge! She was used to her little pen. I kept slapping her,

harder each time, until she started whimpering like a scared child. I was the one hurting her, insisting she be free. Silly bunny, I thought. You're nothing at all like me. (11)

The metaphor here demonstrates that Minerva refuses to accept a situation that doesn't align with her beliefs. One is aware of the circumstances, she chooses to fight and not stay put in the "cage" (11). This also shows us how determined she is to free those around her that are held in mental and physical traps set by Trujillo. The way she behaved with the doe is the way she is with her family and friends, constantly trying to show them that they can escape Trujillo's grasp.

Minerva also recognizes that her aggressive behavior to force change can be harmful. This is important because it relates to her relationship with her sisters, specifically Dede and Patria. When Minerva is around Patria, she has to be careful of her choice of words when the context has to do with Trujillo. Minerva doesn't want to make Patria uncomfortable, but she also feels uncomfortable by not being able to freely express herself. However, this demonstrates that for her family she is willing to put on an act of loyalty or complicity.

With Dede on the other hand, she may feel most distant because Dede is the complete opposite of Minerva. Although in the beginning, Patria displayed strong loyal/complicit behaviors, in the end, she changes and chooses to stick by Minerva, but Dede doesn't show that same type of change. One may say Dede is the only sister who wasn't courageous enough to be part of the change, which is why she didn't die along with her sisters. The rabbit can represent Dede, not only has she become accustomed to the cage, but she also fears leaving the cage and fears the person trying to save her. However, Minerva in the end respects and accepts that not everyone will be so willing to be freed. Minerva's greatest strength is patience even though it may seem she is a very impatient person because she exudes strong and dominant energy, yet she is careful with her decisions and those around her. She is a very thoughtful character.

Minerva's thoughtfulness also makes her question and analyze every aspect of her life deeply. For example, when considering having a romantic relationship, she says to herself, "All I knew I was not falling in love, no matter how deserving I thought Lio was. So what? I'd argue with myself. What's more important, romance or revolution? But a little voice kept saying, Both, both, I want both" (86). As mentioned before, Minerva's decision-making process is heavily tied to her belief; she's not easily influenced but is considerate. Another example is when she finds out about her father cheating and having another family in secret. One would expect that being the strong, feminist character she is that she wouldn't forgive and would even hold resentment at the least towards her father, but instead she says, "I was much stronger than Papa. Mama was much stronger. He was the weakest one of all. It was he who would have the hardest time living with the shabby choices he'd made. He needed our love" (89). She recognizes her strength and the weaknesses of those around her.

Although Minerva is strong-willed, there is a moment where the author allows us to see how even she can crumble under the weight of the *Trujillato*. For example, when Minerva was a young lady, she and her family were personally invited to attend a gathering hosted by Trujillo. That invitation was a way for Trujillo to be in a space where he could seduce Minerva because she had previously caught his eye. Minerva meets, dances, and has a conversation with Trujillo which she would have preferred not to do, but the safety of her family depended on it, because not attending would have made them a target for retribution from Trujillo. In his presence, the author makes Trujillo seem like a perverted man by his direct filtration and inappropriate touching. In the midst of their dancing and clever mind games (to get information out of each other), she says to herself, "Instantly, I feel ashamed of myself. I see now how easily it happens. You give in on little things, and soon you're serving in his government, marching in his parades,

sleeping in his bed” (99). She comes to that realization when she was trying to ask about Lio but one slip of the tongue made Trujillo suspicious, and to calm his suspicion she puts on a friendly act. This is when she sees how one may end up in a situation where they are buttering up to Trujillo because of the power he holds and how quick he is to abuse it in order to get what he wants. This is important because we see how it applies to being loyal or complicit in a dictatorship. In that situation, Minerva puts on an act of complicity to protect Lio and her family. This is a clear example of why the Dominican people during the regime were so quick to follow a dictatorship even if they were aware of the things that went on in the background like the crimes committed by Trujillo. Fear is a quick factor that plays in each character’s story. Although Minerva may have not feared for her own well-being, she feared for the people closest to her because she was aware of Trujillo’s abuse of power and overall aggression. That fear becomes the basis of her form of resistance later in the novel.

## Mate

Maria Teresa, who goes by Mate in the novel, is the youngest sister in the Mirabal family. From a young age is involved with the resistance against Trujillo. There is about a nine-year difference between her and Minerva. While Mate was attending the Immaculada Concepcion, Minerva was there with her but soon after, with the rest of the sisters, they graduate, and Mate continues at school by herself. The first diary entries for Mate during the years (1945-1946) are of her experience at the boarding school, and we see her opinions and beliefs change due to Minerva's influence. Mate, in the beginning, shows a strong sense of devotion and respect towards Trujillo. For example, on Benefactor's Day (the Sunday after Three Kings Day, in 1946) that Trujillo claimed for himself so the Dominican people could celebrate him. Mate, in particular, was excited for that day, she says,

While we're waiting, I am taking these few minutes to wish El Jefe Happy Benefactor's Day with all my heart. I feel so lucky that we have for a president. I am even born the same month he is (October) and only nine days (and forty-four years!) apart. I keep thinking it shows something special about my character. (37)

Behavior like this seems normal for a child who grew up in a home where the dictator was always spoken of respectfully by her parents. Mate can be considered a reflection of her family. As she realizes the truth about the dictator and the events happening around the country under this command, Mate transforms into a character that resembles Minerva.

Understandably, Mate becomes a younger version of Minerva because Mate's time is when Mate stopped being a child. Minerva's influence didn't only impact her view on the dictator but also on life in general; Minerva was a big sister who was comfortable teaching Mate about boys and sex. Most importantly, she shared her non-conformist ideas with her and was always honest with Mate. Being at school together wasn't the only factor that brought them

together; the father's cheating scandal drove Mate to look up to Minerva. This is another reason why she is so quick to follow behind her in the resistance.

Mate receives a journal from Minerva that she decides to call her "little book": in this book, we learn about Mate's personal feelings questioning her soul. Minerva gives her the task to do reflection because it "deepens one's soul" (30). Mate struggles to understand what it means to have a soul and the responsibility of exploring it, which Minerva tells her, "a soul is like a deep longing in you that you can never fill up, but you try. That is why there are stirring poems and brave heroes who die for what is right" (31). This foreshadows their death and is another example of how Minerva influenced Mate to think like a revolutionary. Although at first, it wasn't necessarily clear to her because of her love and respect for Trujillo, as Mate becomes more comfortable with writing in the book, we begin to see how she craves honesty and knowledge of the world she knows.

It is interesting to read the thoughts of a high-schooler going through puberty, questioning their purpose in life, and going to school as a typical teenager. Still, she has to also deal with living in a regime with a dictator who created a lifestyle for the people that doesn't seem unordinary. Mate's sisters are significantly older than she; she was born in 1935, five years into the regime. Therefore, Mate doesn't know about life before the regime, and it is why she expresses excessive devotion at the beginning of the novel. As seen with the other sisters, the author demonstrates the complicated relationship each sister has with the dictator because he was a figure well infiltrated in the lives of the Dominican people. Patria compared Trujillo to God, but we see Mate compare her father to the dictator; Mate's relationship with her father impacts her view of men in general.

Minerva's rebellious behavior intrigues Mate because she is not aware at the beginning of why her sister goes around making sarcastic remarks about the dictator or lying about her whereabouts, which is punishable by law. For example, Mate says, "[Minerva] said the strangest thing. She wanted me to grow up in a free country" (39). Minerva says these types of things to Mate without a clear explanation because it's dangerous. Mate doesn't have any suspicions about her country or government until she finds out that Minerva was attending secret political meetings. As mentioned in a previous chapter, Minerva was friends with Elsa, Lourdes, and Sinita, girls whose families were not loyal subjects to the regime. Mate says, "Don Horacio is Elsa's grandfather who is in trouble with the police because he won't do things he's supposed to like hang a picture of our president in his house." (39). This is when Mate starts to learn that she indeed wasn't living in a free country. She also confesses, "I think it's because I have three older sisters, and so I've grown up quick" (32), which is why her growth in the diary entries seem rushed, because we see her talk about boys one day and then covering up for her sister's illegal activities next. All of these examples demonstrate Mate leaving behind her child-like innocence and transforming into a complex and self-aware individual.

The older version of Mate depicted in the later chapters of the novel is more involved in the resistance, but her views are not entirely similar to Minerva's. By the time Mate turns 18, we see that she forms her own opinions on Trujillo and the regime. Before, her love and devotion to Trujillo stemmed from her parents, she now knows that Trujillo was ruthless and only cared about absolute power. In her view, Trujillo is a bad person based on his actions, but it's complicated because, as previously mentioned, she holds the same love and respect for her father, who by this point in the novel has passed away. For example, she says, "So, I'm walking around doing a double spell, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo in one shoe, Enrique Mirabal in the other"

(121): Mate performs a spell that will rid her problems with a bad person and a person whom she loves. For the spell to cast out a bad person, the performer must cast the spell using their left foot and shoe. To solve issues with a loved one, the same spell would then be done on the opposite side, with the right foot and shoe. This part is thought-provoking because we don't learn which shoe she represents her father or Trujillo. One can assume that she put her father in the "loved" shoe; however, the answer is unclear. Later in the novel, she says, "But ever since Minerva's speech and Mama's letter (and my shoe spell) we haven't had any trouble with the regime"

(131). This shows us that, in a way, Trujillo and her father are interchangeable characters because her father cheated and had a secret family; Trujillo also committed his heinous acts on innocent people. Mate was a victim in both situations, yet she knew that she would end up forgiving her father because of the love she had for him; we see that initially she also holds the same standard for Trujillo.

Alvarez demonstrates how difficult and complex it was to live under a regime with a dictator like Trujillo because he created a nationwide cult and laid a foundation of blindness-loyalty, or guilt-filled complicity. When Mate goes to the capital, she sees Queen Angelita (the daughter of Trujillo) and says, "looking at her, I almost felt sorry. I wondered if she knew how bad her father is or if she still thought like I once did about Papá, that her father is God"(135). She feels pity for the daughter of Trujillo because she was once in the same position of putting one's father on a pedestal. Still, Mate's character represents a person who had to grow up quickly to understand she was living in a cage set by someone she admired.

Minerva continues to be the person who encourages Mate to learn the truth of their society; for example, when Mate learns about Minerva's sneaking out to political meetings, her eyes open, and she starts to analyze her surroundings more closely. She says, "I see a *guardia*,



and I think, who have you killed. I hear a police siren, and I think who is going to be killed. See what I mean?" (39). During this transitional period, in which she is still in her early teens, she understands that Trujillo is not an admirable person; that must have been difficult to accept, considering that she previously said that she felt lucky to have Trujillo as president. Mate's earlier attitude is an excellent example of the definition of loyalty previously given: being blindly faithful to a figure or cause and unaware of the reality that surrounds them. For example, Mate grew up knowing Trujillo as the president that wanted to improve the country's economic conditions and strengthen their status as a country in the eyes of the world. But she begins to question that view. She goes on to say:

I see a picture of our president with eyes that follow me around the room, and I am thinking he is trying to catch me doing something wrong. Before, I always thought our president was like God, watching over everything I did. (39)

Considering she grew up in a home where Trujillo's picture hung next to an image of Jesus, it is understandable why she, like Patria, saw Trujillo as a God-like person. Mate experiences a good amount of cognitive dissonance, like Patria, because her childhood beliefs are put to the test by the modern truth: Trujillo wanted the Dominican people to worship him by depicting an image that allowed him to maintain absolute power; his good acts were always being published in the newspaper but he controlled the media and his crimes were never made public during his regime.

Unlike Patria, Mate compares Trujillo with her father, which leads her to display complicit behaviors towards Trujillo. For example, when Mate hears her father has other daughters, she doesn't completely understand how this came to be. Her father never explained his actions or apologized for what he had done; the situation just was, which is why she eventually says, "I hate men. I really hate them" (118), showing us her discomfort produced from that confusion. But we learn early on the reason why she struggles to forgive her father when she

says, “I am not saying I don’t love our president, because I do. It’s like if I were to find out Papá did something wrong. I would still love him, wouldn’t I?” (40). Since in Mate’s situation, her father and Trujillo become interchangeable figures, we see that Mate struggles to hate Trujillo in the beginning because that would mean she hated her father. Even after her father broke the bond of their family by starting a second family, and after he had passed away, she was able to forgive him, and in that forgiveness, we see her develop a specific manner in dealing with Trujillo. For example, when her father passes away, her mother has to write a letter to Trujillo about the matter, but Mate writes the letter instead because the mother is illiterate. In the letter, it says, “I want to take this opportunity to affirm my husband’s underlying loyalty to Your Person and avow that both myself and my daughters will continue in his footsteps as your loyal and devoted subjects” (120).

After the passing of their father, the sisters and mother try to avoid any situation that may cause issues with Trujillo. Mate learns the best way to be out of Trujillo’s sight is by feeding into his ego. This is something Minerva had learned from her earlier one-on-one experience with Trujillo. Mate goes on to say, “every once in a while Trujillo has to be buttered up”(121): she had written the speech for Minerva that allowed her to get permission from Trujillo to attend law school. One can question whether Mate’s letters are rooted in her previous infatuation with the dictator because Minerva, on the other hand, cannot even chant Trujillo’s name without experiencing cognitive dissonance.

Mate’s character demonstrates a more complicit attitude towards Trujillo because she understands that by behaving in a way that will please Trujillo, she will grant her family some security. She is complicit in providing safety and beneficial gain for her family. Unlike Minerva, Mate finds a way to make oppression useful to her because her methods of seeking justice and

change are different from those of her sisters. For example, when Mate learns early on that, Minerva's views were influenced by Fidel's revolutionary ideas in Cuba's 50s. Mate agrees with Minerva's ideas about treating people with dignity, but she says, "never in a million years would I take up a gun and force people to give up being mean." (123) As previously mentioned, Mate is not forceful like Minerva. She has different methods and views on tackling the political issue of their country, which is later seen when she engages directly in the resistance.



## Chapter II: Resistance

After discussing how each sister differs in her examples of loyalty and complicity towards the regime, it is important to analyze how each sister shows resistance according to her particular characteristics. Alvarez is careful to demonstrate how each sister is complex, and due to their unique experiences and personalities, we get to see how the sisters make their differences work together to form a resistance group. Although the sisters display acts of resistance early on in the novel, it is important to focus on the later chapters, once the sisters are adults and each has formed her own identity. As a group, with the exception of Dedé and her husband, the rest of the sisters and their husbands are sent to prison for being involved in a resistance group.

In the novel, 1960 is the year we see three of the sisters be punished with death due to their direct involvement with their resistance group. Dedé was left behind due to her obedience to her husband and lack of courage to redefine herself; as the sole survivor, she took the responsibility of burying and honoring her family. By that point in the novel, we learn that Patria and Mate were following Minerva not because she persuaded them to join the resistance, but due to their own willingness. For example, when Patria visits Dedé to ask for a favor in hiding incriminating evidence on her land, she says to Dedé, “But can’t you decide on your own, then tell [Jaimito]?” (176). Patria had joined the resistance group on her own and then convinced her husband to do so as well, which is why she doesn’t understand why Dedé could not do the same.

Patria shows us that in her marriage she is able to make decisions for herself and have her husband support her. That isn’t the same case with Dedé, because we learn previously that Jaimito prevents her from maintaining a good relationship with her sisters. When Dedé’s sisters visit to convince her one last time to join them in their plan to remove Trujillo from power, we learn that she indeed wanted to join them. She plans to leave him and writes him a note that says,

“I feel like I’m buried alive. I need to get out I cannot go with this travesty” (180). This is the first time we see Dedé crave freedom and independence, but she quickly recognizes that desire comes at the price of losing her children due to Jaimito’s threats. Jaimito would not have allowed her to make that decision because Jaimito presents himself as a person who is complicit with the *Trujillato*. Although he may know or suspect the intentions of the regime, he chooses to stand by it due to fear of the consequences of defying Trujillo.

Dedé’s demonstration of resistance comes later in the novel, after her sisters’ death. At the beginning of the year 1960, we see Patria having complicated feelings towards Trujillo. As discussed in the previous chapter, Patria started praying to Trujillo and treating him as though he were a spirit, similar to Jesus or God. For the reader, this is a confusing period, because we understand her desperation to keep her family safe, but her desperation forces her to fall complicit. Patria says about Trujillo, “I knew who was *really* in charge” (203). Recognizing Trujillo’s authority, Patria offers herself to Trujillo’s spirit, asking in exchange for the family to be released from his power: Mate, Minerva, Pedro, (Minerva’s husband) Manolo, (Mate’s husband), Leonardo, and her son Nelson. However, Patria does confess that if she had made the same offer to God, that there “would be no limit to what...[the] Lord would want of Patria Mercedes, body and soul and all the etceteras besides” (203). Her earlier statement regarding “who was really in charge” means she no longer regards Trujillo as a figure that can be interchangeable with God. One can question her reason for praying to Trujillo and can consider it complicit behavior; however, she says because she “wasn't ready to enter His kingdom,” she couldn’t make the same promise to God because the consequences would be greater (203). Like Dedé, Patria understands that practicing in the resistance will eventually lead to death, and her loyalty to her family is preventing her from committing herself to God.

Patria's resistance truly starts when she decides to promise God to be his "sacrificial lamb" (206). The pain and anxiety of her son, Nelson being in prison, urged Patria to make the pact she was avoiding making with God. Just as we analyzed at the beginning of the novel, Patria uses religion as her weapon for fighting the regime. When news breaks out that her son Nelson will be pardoned because he was a minor (he was seventeen at the time of his arrest and had turned 18 while in prison), Patria remembers her vow. On the day of Nelson's release back into society, Trujillo and news reporters are present, and Trujillo gets questioned about "policies regarding political prisoners and the recent OAS charges of human rights abuse" by an American journalist (225). When Nelson is released and appears before the reporters, Patria claims to have heard the voice of God saying her name. Jaimito, on the other hand, reassures her that it is actually Trujillo calling her to receive her son. However, she insists by saying, "I know a godly voice when I hear one. I heard Him all right, and He called my name" (226). Here again, we see the strange Trujillo-God dynamic. Resistance for Patria consists of this internal fight she has with her image of Trujillo and her faith. She learns to use her faith as a weapon. Trujillo was a skilled dictator in the way that he mentally and spiritually embedded himself in the lives of the Dominican people; conversely, the sisters used their own trauma and fears from the regime to encourage their fight.

During the time Mate spends in prison, she doesn't exhibit the same complicated feelings and views she once had, as Patria does with Trujillo. In prison, Mate explains on March 19, 58 days into her sentence that she is in "a 25 by 20 of the size of her "size 6 feet" cell with twenty-four other women, including her sister Minerva (228). They both spent months in prison. There was a period where they could have been granted a pardon, but Mate mocks Minerva by saying, "We Mirabals had to set a good example. Accepting a pardon meant we thought we had

something to be pardoned for. Also we couldn't be free unless everyone else was offered the same opportunity” so they choose to stay for the remainder of their sentence (236). During this period Mate struggles with her mental health. The innocence she once had because of her age (around 25 years old), and the fact she was the youngest sister, was being stripped away. She begins to experience panic attacks and deal with depression-like symptoms because she misses her young child Jacqui. Although Mate was dealing with the darkest parts of herself, she also begins to learn how to mentally challenge the regime by attending a “little school” set up by Minerva, in which they and other prisoners in the cell have classes and discussions about how to be a revolutionary and survive in a revolution.

Mate’s resistance begins with following in Minerva’s footsteps because she looked up to her older sister. Earlier in the novel, we see Minerva guiding and shaping Mate’s political views. For example, when Minerva gives Mate a journal, Mate quickly becomes comfortable with documenting her life and inner feelings. There is an instance when Minerva befriends a girl named Hilda; Mate writes that Hilda, “wears trousers and a beret slanted in her head like she is Michelangelo” (40). She is a modern feminist for that time period. In the journal, Mate explains that the police were looking for Hilda because she had incriminating information found in her car. Eventually, Hilda is caught and taken away. Soon after Minerva reads Mate’s journal and tells her, “it was not right to really right to read it, but sometimes you have to do something wrong for a higher good” (43). Mate has to bury her book because Hilda’s name is in it. This is the start of her direct involvement with the resistance at such a young age.

Mate’s involvement with the resistance develops because of Minerva’s friendship with Hilda; we see later on that Mate continues to follow in Minerva’s footsteps, although her own personality interferes with her ability to follow Minerva’s model too closely. For example, as



previously mentioned, during the beginning of Minerva's interest in Fidel's early ideology, Mate says, "I agree with her ideas and everything. I think people should be kind to each other and share what they have. But never in a million years would I take up a gun and force people to give up being mean" (123). Mate is kind-hearted and wishes to see the good in people, or at least to give people the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps that is why she, too, dealt with complex feelings towards Trujillo for a long time.

Mate's innocence was a tool at the beginning of the novel. As discussed in the previous chapter, she had learned how to strategically benefit from Trujillo's ego and power. When she first wrote the letter for her mother regarding her father's death, she said, "But ever since Minerva's speech and Mama's letter (and my shoe spell) we haven't had any trouble with the regime" (131). Mate had used her good writing skills and wit to charm Trujillo into allowing Minerva to attend law school and grant her family some time to maintain a low profile. However, we see the same pattern of underlying respect towards Trujillo in Mate as we did with Patria. To be able to have written a convincing letter and speech like that, Mate had to be a skilled liar; otherwise, the letter can only be explained because some of her early feelings of devotion were buried somewhere deep within her. This is an example of Trujillo being installed in the consciousness of the Dominican people. However, unlike Patria, Mate doesn't recount those complex feelings while in prison because her exposure to physical and mental torture was the traumatic experience that forced her to look at the regime from a different perspective.

Mate's personality, the specific characteristics mentioned earlier that are deeply connected to her, don't change even in the face of trauma, as is the case with Patria. Mate grows mentally stronger in prison, but her natural approach of looking at her surroundings still remains the most powerful trait of her character. For example, Patria's relationship with her religion

remained a key part of her character even when she went through dark periods that forced her to question herself and her beliefs. With Mate, we see the same kind of resilience: her good nature doesn't shift. For instance, during the sister's time in prison, a guard nicknamed "Santicl6" secretly gives Minerva and Mate better treatment than the rest of the inmates by passing them items brought from their home. Due to the relationship, Mate doesn't necessarily fear him; however, Minerva and another prisoner, Sina, who had joined Minerva's little school, warn her about "getting too fond of the enemy," no matter how good Santicl6 is to them (234). Another example is when Mate is tortured in order to provoke her husband to reveal information about the resistance movement; Mate says, "I could tell they were all ashamed of themselves, avoiding my eyes, quiet" (256). Even after getting physically assaulted, she is able to read the intentions of others; the situation is complicated because she doesn't condone their actions, but she is aware that their behavior is a result of their loyalty to the regime. As Mate had stated, she wouldn't seek peace through threats and violence with her own hands.

As thoroughly as Minerva had trained Mate, she couldn't change her empathic heart. Minerva's personal story in prison is intertwined with the chapter devoted to Mate; therefore, we mainly see Minerva maintain her tough character. As previously stated, Minerva was in charge of the "little school," and she had also convinced Mate to stay in prison with her longer to maintain their reputation and the principles of the resistance movement. In the previous chapter, we learned of Minerva's resistance early on in the novel: her leadership abilities are innate. Minerva's resistance is raw; her character demonstrates a sincere boundary-breaking presence rooted in her own yearning to receive more than the life Trujillo had set up for the Dominican people during his regime. Unlike her sisters, Minerva's own personal trauma doesn't happen till later in the novel, when she is released from prison and put under house arrest. This is when we

see Minerva's vigorous exterior be fractured; her release back into society and everyday life put her resilience to the test. For example, when she returns home, she thinks house arrest is the best punishment she can receive because she will be reunited with her family; however, she suffers from PTSD for a while before adjusting to her new life. Minerva explains:

After seven months in prison, a lot of that time in solitary, the overload was too much. The phone ringing; a visitor dropping by (with permission from Peña, of course); Peña himself dropping by to see about the visitor; Don Bernardo with guavas from his tree; rooms to go in and out of; children wanting their shoelaces tied; the phone ringing again; what to do with the cured milk. (257)

At first, even simple tasks and activities are hard to process. Minerva deals with depression and PTSD, but she finds herself and her purpose from that dark period. Minerva quickly realizes that she was letting herself be sucked into a hole of self-pity. She says, "I had been so much stronger and braver in prison. Now at home I was falling apart" (258). Eventually, her children and family nurse her spirit back, but she recognizes that she is not her "old self" for a long time.

In short, Minerva struggles to go back to her old self, the self that didn't know what fear was. However, she decides to deceive herself and the people around her to maintain her sanity and continue with the revolution. Her greatest motivation is her husband, Manolo, who remained in prison after her release. Briefly, Manolo was the leader of the sector of the resistance called the June 14th Movement; he had met Minerva in law school early in the novel, and they quickly became a couple and had children together. The dominant fear Minerva carries with her is her husband being killed under Trujillo's orders. Throughout her final chapter in the novel, there are various instances where Minerva states she knows that her husband will be murdered. She doesn't want to accept that fate, but considering he is the main political actor interfering with Trujillo, it makes sense why that may be the outcome of her husband's activities. Minerva

doesn't necessarily fear for her own life, but she is starting to understand how difficult it will be to remove Trujillo from power, mainly because her imprisonment and that of her group put the revolution in the hands of other leaders. Minerva shows a different type of courage and resistance in her final moments than the one we have seen previously. She becomes a vessel of comfort for her family and a reminder to the Dominican people that the *Trujillato* needed to end.

Of all the characters portrayed in *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Dedé is the clearest example of how Trujillo was embedded in the lives and consciousness of the Dominican people. In the previous chapter, I analyzed her character and showed various examples that demonstrate a lack of courage on her part, compared to her sisters. That lack of courage derives from her sense of comfort in her position as a woman during the era of the regime. She is the opposite of Minerva: she prefers to follow a leader rather than make decisions for herself. Her passive character trait is consistent for all situations that may present themselves: domestic activities, politics, personal beliefs, etc. For example, early in the novel, when she and her sisters attend a volleyball match where they meet Lio, he tells Dedé to join the game because Minerva didn't have an issue playing. At this point, the general narrator recounts, "I don't play," [Dedé] says rather more meekly than she intends. "I just watch." The truth of her words strikes Dedé as she remembers how she stood back and watched the young man open the back door for whoever wanted to sit by him. And Minerva slipped in!" (70). Dedé's own self-awareness at that moment surprises her because, as previously stated, in meeting Lio, she learns how cowardly she is.

The novel suggests that Dedé's way of thinking stems from the norms women were expected to follow during the regime and the example set by her parents during her childhood. Although their father was very giving towards his daughters, his expectations and her mother's actions as a compliant wife played a role in her upbringing. This is why it is not strange as to

why Dedé goes on to date and later marry Jaimito, a character that demonstrates dominant male traits early on, one that allows him to have control of Dede's life.

Later in the novel, before her sisters were sentenced to prison, Dedé was asked to join their movement; at this point, she is faced with an ultimatum: the revolution or her marriage. The narrator states:

Dedé had been ready to risk her life. It was her marriage that she couldn't put on the line. She had always been the docile middle child, used to following the lead. Next to an alto she sang alto, by a soprano, soprano. Miss Sonrisa, cheerful, compliant. Her life had gotten bound up with a domineering man, and so she shrank from the challenge her sisters were giving her. (177)

Dedé wanted to join her sisters in their activism, but her sense of duty as a wife to Jaimito was holding her back. As we previously learned, Jaimito prevents Dedé from seeing her sisters, which also restrains her from changing into a different Dedé: a version of herself that can be fearless. As the story progresses, Dedé starts to realize that part of her wants to be daring, especially for the better good of the country. However, the foundations of the *Trujillato* did have a firm grip on her for the majority of the novel, as she grapples with her two different wishes: being a "good" wife to Jaimito versus being a politically active sister. Facing this dilemma, she questions her self-worth. She starts regretting her marriage, saying, "Jaimito's a good man, whatever anyone thinks. But he would have been happier with someone else, that's all" (212). Although Jaimito doesn't support Dedé or her sisters, she still chooses to defend him. With that, she stays with her husband. But later, her sisters' imprisonment causes Dedé's display of resistance to emerge from deep within her.

## Conclusion

*In the Time of the Butterflies*, is a novel about the preservation of historical female resistance. Alvarez's need to reconnect with her family's story, turned into an account in which the Mirabal sisters' history is preserved and introduced to countries and people who are not familiar with them or the Trujillo regime. Isabel Zakrzewski Brown observes that:

The novel continuously shifts from the "made-up" to the referential given the degree of intertextuality between Alvarez's novel and the Galvin and Ferreras biographies. The dialectics between history, biography, and fiction, such as take place in Alvarez's novel, ultimately serve to underscore the participation of women in anti-Trujillo movements, a heretofore little heralded activism. (103)

As we previously discussed, Alvarez uses fiction as a tool to convey the emotions that belong with the history of the Trujillo regime. Through the fictionalization of the Mirabal sisters, we as readers are able to imagine their lives better and have a clearer understanding of what it may have been like to live and die during the *Trujillato*.

With the use of fiction, Alvarez is also able to demonstrate the complex personality traits of each sister and their dynamic relationship with Trujillo. The message of female activism is communicated through the exploration of each character as an individual. The Mirabal sisters can come together and form their revolutionary movement because they accept each other's strengths and weaknesses. Each sister displays their form of resistance and how they use it to their advantage against the regime. Zakrzewski Brown highlights, "Alvarez documents the 'metamorphosis' of the sisters as they gradually become more politically active and increasingly feminist. The transformation is circumstantial. With the exception of Tete (Dedé), the sisters are all young adults by the time they become politically active" (102). Minerva, Patria, and Mate learned their strengths in battling Trujillo; this transformation even includes Dedé, who took years to feel the need to seek freedom from Dominican female norms.

The Mirabal sisters were able to hold their feminine and masculine energy, which allowed them to demonstrate resistance. Trujillo's politics involved establishing a "gender battlefield," as Zakrzewski Brown states when discussing Trujillo's patriarchal views (102). We see Minerva use her sex appeal to approach Trujillo to retrieve answers about Lío; Mate uses her writing skills early on to persuade Trujillo and ultimately ends up protecting her family for some time. Patria's kindness and faith grant her the ability to diminish her personal parallel views between Trujillo and God, which is deeply rooted in the traditional catholic society. Lastly, Dedé displays courage later in the novel. Still, her decision to become the caretaker of her sisters' children and everything left behind them is her greatest strength. Her maternal instincts that restricted her early in the novel turn out to be the exact strength that allows her to keep her family's legacy alive. In maintaining the Mirabal sisters' story alive, the message of resistance continues to live on.

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