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Female Development amidst Dictatorship in Julia Alvarez's *In the Time
of the Butterflies* and Mario Vargas Llosa's *La fiesta del Chivo*

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Female Development amidst Dictatorship in Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* and Mario Vargas Llosa's *La fiesta del Chivo*

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Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo (ruled 1930-1961) developed the reputation as one of the most violent and oppressive leaders of the Western Hemisphere in his thirty-one years of power. Authors Julia Alvarez and Mario Vargas Llosa provide insight into the effects of Trujillo's infamy by sharing the stories of Dominican women. In Alvarez's novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, the Dominican-American author fictionalizes the lives of the Mirabal sisters, historical women who were assassinated in 1961 for their involvement in the anti-Trujillo movement. Likewise, Vargas Llosa centers much of his novel, *La fiesta del Chivo*, on the life of Urania Cabral, a fictional female character who is raped by Trujillo at the age of fourteen. Both the Mirabals and Urania grow up amidst dictatorship and Alvarez and Vargas Llosa frequently focus on their characters' growth as they progress from childhood and adolescence into adulthood. This formative time in the protagonists' lives is often impacted by Trujillo and his actions.

In particular, Alvarez and Vargas Llosa emphasize the unique process of female identity formation as a means of highlighting the cruelty of the Trujillo dictatorship. Female development is often described as a process that focuses on connection and relationships to others. As a result, women often demonstrate a high ability to respond to the needs and feelings of the people in their lives. Alvarez's depiction of the Mirabal sisters reflects these principles as her characters mature into strong women by learning the value of selflessly caring for others. The Mirabals' concern for people contrasts to Trujillo's character, which Alvarez portrays as violent, selfish and petty. Conversely, Vargas Llosa's protagonist experiences a traumatic event at the age of fourteen that severely inhibits her growth. As a result of Trujillo's cruelty Urania loses her ability to connect with others and becomes cold and distant. Urania's developmental obstacles reflect the debilitating effects dictatorship can have on individuals, and by extension, on a whole nation. In both *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *La fiesta del Chivo* the concept of female development shapes and informs the portrayal of Rafael Trujillo and his corrupt government.

Keywords: *In the Time of the Butterflies*, *La fiesta del Chivo*, female development, Rafael Trujillo, Julia Alvarez, Mario Vargas Llosa

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INTRODUCTION

In 1994, Julia Alvarez published *In the Time of the Butterflies*, a novel that examines the dictatorship of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina (ruled 1930-1961) through the eyes of the four Mirabal sisters, three of whom would be assassinated for their political activism. Six years later, in 2000, Mario Vargas Llosa released his own historical novel, *La fiesta del Chivo*, which also addresses the Dominican Republic. Vargas Llosa brings to life the events of the thirty-one year Trujillo dictatorship through the fictional story of Urania Cabral. While Alvarez's and Vargas Llosa's accounts are very different, they do share several meaningful similarities.¹ Although both authors critique the dictatorship, for example, Trujillo is not the protagonist of either novel. Instead, Alvarez and Vargas Llosa approach the Trujillo Era from a female perspective. Both the Mirabal sisters and Urania Cabral grow up during the *Trujillato*, and offer a glimpse into what life would be like for a young woman raised in a dictatorship. *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *La fiesta del Chivo* follow the development of their young protagonists from childhood and adolescence into adulthood. By employing multiple narrators, both Alvarez and Vargas Llosa give the reader a highly personalized view of the thoughts, growth, and progression of their characters. As the young girls in these novels mature, they experience a series of rites of passage, marking significant moments of

¹ By noting the many similarities between *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *La fiesta del Chivo*, I do not wish to suggest that these novels do not have important differences. Alvarez and Vargas Llosa's accounts differ significantly, especially in their tone, purpose, and characterization. Alvarez, for example, employs a witty style that may occasionally gloss over the seriousness of her characters' situation. Vargas Llosa, in contrast, writes a macabre account of the Trujillo regime, depicting its extreme violence in an almost documentary style. *In the Time of the Butterflies* was also written with a different purpose than *La fiesta del Chivo*. Alvarez writes to describe the daily lives of the Mirabals, while Vargas Llosa's novel is more concerned with political criticism. Finally, Alvarez's characters are celebrated for standing up to Trujillo and becoming strong women of courage. In contrast, Urania struggles emotionally as a result of the abuse she endures and is significantly stunted in her development. These characteristics among others make *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *La fiesta del Chivo* very different accounts of the *Trujillato*. Nevertheless, the fact that both writers use female protagonists to examine the regime and are concerned with their characters' growth and development is an important similarity that is deserving of attention.

growth in their lives. In both novels, female development becomes an important lens through which each author examines the dictatorship. In *In the Time of the Butterflies*, the values the Mirabals learn in their youth contrast sharply to the dictator's self-serving behavior. Conversely, Urania's progression is significantly injured by Trujillo in her adolescence. In many ways she experiences truncated growth and is prevented from living a fulfilling life. Vargas Llosa uses Urania's character as both a representative victim of the regime, as well as a metaphor for the abusive influences of dictatorship on a country. In both novels, the association between female development and dictatorship leads to a better understanding of the authors' criticism of tyranny.

Before addressing the issues of female identity formation raised in *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *La fiesta del Chivo*, I believe it useful to offer some background on Julia Alvarez and Mario Vargas Llosa and their relationship to the Dictator Novel. Both authors build on a large body of literature depicting Latin American dictators. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Facundo: Civilización y barbarie* (1845), a book which criticizes the rule of the Argentine caudillo Juan Manuel de Rosas, is often considered foundational to this popular genre. Other examples of Novels of Dictatorship include Miguel Ángel Asturias's *El Señor Presidente* (1946), Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955), Augusto Roa Bastos' *Yo el Supremo* (1974), Alejo Carpentier's *El recurso del método* (1975), and Gabriel García Márquez's *El otoño del Patriarca* (1975). These novels reflect Latin America's turbulent history with leaders who abuse their power. Ignacio López-Calvo explains, "The fact is that not only do dictators, as the personification of evil, offer superb literary possibilities, but they are also a crucial element for understanding the Latin American past, present and future" (6).

Novels of Dictatorship depicting the Trujillo regime are particularly numerous.² López-Calvo comments that “Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, one of the most dreadful [Latin American dictators], seems to have captured the imagination of international writers like no other” (11). Rafael Trujillo is considered one of the worst tyrants in Latin American history. His reputation for cruelty was founded on many ruthless acts. In 1937, for example, he ordered the genocide of thousands of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic. In order to maintain power he also eliminated those individuals who questioned his authority, such as Jesús de Galíndez, who disappeared in New York City in 1956 while working on a dissertation that documented the abuses of the Trujillo regime. The murder of the Mirabal sisters on September 25, 1960, is one more example of the dictator’s brutality. Trujillo’s violent reign as well as his personality quirks (such as wearing numerous military medals and re-naming streets after his family members) make him a frequent character in literature. Both *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *La fiesta del Chivo* chronicle Trujillo’s extreme violence as well as his idiosyncrasies.

Julia Alvarez’s interest in the Dominican Republic and in the Trujillo dictatorship is intimately connected to her childhood. As a native Dominican, she spent the first decade of her life on Hispaniola before emigrating with her family to the United States in 1960. Alvarez’s father was involved in an underground political group that held plans to overthrow the dictatorship, and the family was fearful of Trujillo’s retaliation. In *Something to Declare*, a 1998 collection of personal essays, Alvarez describes her family’s situation just before they left the island. Though a child at the time, she describes her parents’ anxiety as black SIM (Trujillo’s secret police) cars parked outside their home at night, putting their family under virtual house arrest (15). Alvarez first heard of the

² López-Calvo also mentions *Galíndez* (1990) by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán and Viriato Sención’s *Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios* (1992) among novels depicting Trujillo.

Mirabals several months after leaving the Dominican Republic. Their story made a strong impression on her, but it was not until 1986 that she decided to write about them. In that year she was asked to compose a small paragraph about a Dominican heroine for a women's press. As she researched the project, Alvarez became drawn to the Mirabal sisters and their story. In the following years, Alvarez continued to investigate the siblings and interviewed many of the people who knew them.

Previous to her release of *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Alvarez had published two books of poetry and one novel. That first novel, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991), quickly received critical recognition. Like *In the Time of the Butterflies*, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* also focuses on female protagonists. The novel depicts a family with four young daughters that leaves the Dominican Republic to escape the Trujillo dictatorship. Their story is told in reverse chronological order, with each of the four sisters sharing her perspective. The novel focuses on the difficulties the girls face as they go through the process of acculturation. Though Alvarez is more concerned with the sisters' experience in the United States than with Trujillo, the dictator's effect on the family is obvious. More recently Alvarez has published a number of books of fiction, poetry and essay including *¡Yo!* (1997), a sequel to *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, followed by *Something to Declare* (1998), and *In the Name of Salomé* (2000). The later work is also connected to the author's native country. This historical novel centers on the story of Salomé Ureña who, in 1878, became the first recipient of the National Medal in Poetry in the Dominican Republic. Ureña was a strong advocate of women's education and encouraged her husband, a political leader and president for one year, to support that cause. Alvarez is known as a witty and creative writer whose books take on important issues related to women and to Latino culture.

Mario Vargas Llosa's attachment to the Dominican Republic is less personal. A native Peruvian, many of the author's previous novels have focused on his country of birth. Like Alvarez, Vargas Llosa began to write *La fiesta del Chivo* many years before he would finally realize its publication. In an interview, Vargas Llosa has explained that he imagined the novel as early as 1975, while on an eight month visit to the Dominican Republic for the filming of one of his fictional books (see Barnabé 1). Vargas Llosa was so impressed by the lasting effects of dictatorship in that Caribbean nation that he began to formulate ideas for a novel. Over the following years, he researched the Trujillo regime and talked with Dominicans who had lived through the era. Though Vargas Llosa describes his decision to write about the Dominican Republic as "puramente accidental" (qtd in Barnabé 1), the element of social and political critique that the novel contains is by no means new to the author's oeuvre. Throughout his career, Vargas Llosa has spoken often of the socio-political frustrations which compel him to write: "Literature in general and the novel in particular are expressions of discontent. Their social usefulness lies principally in the fact that they remind people that the world is *always* wrong, that life should *always* change" (qtd. in Williams, *Mario Vargas Llosa*, 8). Perhaps Vargas Llosa described his idea about writing best with his well-known statement, "La literatura es fuego," given when he received the prestigious Premio Rómulo Gallegos in 1967 (Williams, *Mario Vargas Llosa*, 9). For Vargas Llosa, literature is born of frustration and is meant to expose the wrongs in society.

Many of Vargas Llosa's novels, especially his earliest, critique a specifically Peruvian society. His first novel, *La ciudad y los perros* (1963), reflects the time he spent at the Leoncio Prado Military Academy in Lima. Though the young author disliked his experience there, it became a source of material for his writing. In the novel, the military academy functions as a microcosm of Peru. The

book was deemed so critical of the academy that the school officials organized the burning of one thousand copies of the book on the school patio (Williams, *Mario Vargas Llosa*, 13). In another novel set in his native country, *Conversación en La Catedral* (1969), Vargas Llosa writes about the government of Peruvian dictator Manuel Odría (1948-56). The two protagonists of this lengthy novel, Santiago and Ambrosio, sit in a café called *La Catedral* and discuss life in Peru, as well as Santiago's father's connection to the dictatorship. In 1981, Vargas Llosa published *La guerra del fin del mundo*, another novel addressing politics, but this time he chose a different setting. *La guerra del fin del mundo* fictionalizes the actual uprising of a religious community in Canudos, Brazil, and the government's violent retaliation. These novels in particular have cemented Vargas Llosa's reputation as a writer concerned with critiquing societal failing. It should be noted, however, that not all of Vargas Llosa's writing has been political. For example, *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (1977) is a humoristic novel centered on the author's marriage to his first wife Julia Urquidi. Vargas Llosa has also published several novels dealing with erotic themes such as *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (1973), *Elogio de la madrastra* (1988), as well as his recent *Travesuras de la niña mala* (2006). However, the release of *La fiesta del Chivo* (2000) confirmed the author's continuing interest in political issues as well as his on-going belief that literature can bring about some measure of change. For example, in a 2006 interview about *La fiesta del Chivo*, Vargas Llosa stated:

Quizá de joven pensaba, por la influencia de Sartre, que la literatura podía introducir cambios más o menos inmediatos y radicales en la vida social. Hoy día ya no soy tan optimista, creo que no ocurre así. Pero no he llegado al pesimismo de quienes creen que la literatura no causa ningún efecto. Pienso que sí tiene unas reverberaciones en la historia, pero creo que son lentas, que uno no puede planificarlas. (qtd in Patriau 4)

Although change may not be immediate, Vargas Llosa confirms his early conviction that literature can in fact be a catalyst of socio-political reform. No doubt the recent Nobel Prize recipient's writing will continue to influence generations.

Although Alvarez and Vargas Llosa come from distinct backgrounds and employ different writing styles, they address similar themes in *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *La fiesta del Chivo*. Specifically, both Alvarez and Vargas Llosa examine the situation of women under dictatorship. While the political criticism in these novels is not limited to those involving women, both Alvarez and Vargas Llosa make women's experience a significant part of their vision of the Trujillato. *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *La fiesta del Chivo* show the psychological effects that abusive governments can have on women. The protagonists in these novels suffer a broad range of abuses at Trujillo's hand which affects their transition and growth into adulthood. Female development is a key concern of both *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *La fiesta del Chivo*.

Women's development spans a large and expanding body of research. It is not within the aims of this study to review all of the many contributors and ideas in this important field. Instead, I focus on the findings of social psychologist Carol Gilligan. Gilligan's ideas about female identity formation shed light on the ways Alvarez and Vargas Llosa depict their characters and critique dictatorship. In her influential book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (1982), Gilligan writes of the differences between male and female psychology. Since this early publication, she has continued to expand on her ideas in books such as *Making Connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at the Emma Willard School* (1990), co-edited with Nona Lyons and Trudy Hanmer and *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development* (1992) co-authored with Lyn Mikel Brown.

In *In a Different Voice* Gilligan explains that previous to the time of her writing, many psychologists viewed women's development as inferior to men's and saw female differences as defects rather than strengths. The devaluation of female development was rooted in Freud's theories of identity formation, which center on the Oedipus complex. Freud's ideas, however, did not describe female experience and therefore, Gilligan writes, "[h]e considered [the] difference in women's formation to be responsible for what he saw as women's developmental failure" (7). Gilligan argues that developmental differences often provide women with unique values and should not be seen as weaknesses. She cites Nancy Chodorow's findings, which also trace distinctions between male and female growth patterns to childhood and adolescent years. Chodorow suggests that girls' identity is based on attachment and connection while boys' is founded on separation. For most children the primary caregiver is female, which may partially account for gender difference. Gilligan summarizes:

Consequently, relationships, and particularly issues of dependency, are experienced differently by women and men. For boys and men, separation and individuation are critically tied to gender identity since separation from the mother is essential for the development of masculinity. For girls and women, issues of femininity or feminine identity do not depend on the achievement of separation from the mother or on the progress of individuation. (8)

Gilligan centers her findings regarding female developmental psychology on the importance of connection and relationships. In issues involving identity, decision making, and morality women consistently demonstrate a high awareness of the needs of others and a desire to preserve and maintain relationships, while traditional male values prioritize separation, autonomy, and

impartiality. Gilligan does not write to condemn male values, but suggests that by becoming aware of each other's strengths, communities can become more balanced.

Often developmental moments are accompanied by significant rites of passage in an individual's life. Although this thesis is primarily concerned with female development, it may be useful to define the phrase *rite of passage* as well. Rites of passage can refer to a large variety of rituals such as initiation ceremonies in ancient and modern cultures, religious rites such as baptism, or secular rituals like high school graduation or civil marriage. The term "rite of passage" was first used by Dutch anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in 1908. Gennep writes of "special acts" that mark an individual's passing from one phase of life to another:

The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another. Wherever there are fine distinctions among age or occupational groups, progression from one group to the next is accompanied by special acts, like those which make up apprenticeship in our trades. (3)

Gennep explains that all individuals experience changes throughout life in age, roles (occupation), and responsibilities. He remarks that such changes or transitions are "looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence" (3). Alvarez and Vargas Llosa depict several important rites of passage in their character's lives, such as christening, menstruation, attending boarding school, marriage and sexuality.

In *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *La fiesta del Chivo* Alvarez and Vargas Llosa use rites of passage to portray significant developmental moments in the lives of their protagonists. Though the two novels have very different outcomes, both can be better understood through a study of these rites of passage and their impact on the characters' growth. In Chapter One of this thesis, I

examine the relationship between dictatorship and female development in *In the Time of the Butterflies*. In the novel, Alvarez depicts the development of the four Mirabals—Patria, Dedé, Minerva and María Teresa (Mate), historical women who have grown to be legends in the Dominican Republic. With the exception of Dedé, all of the sisters become involved in politics, and form part of the anti-Trujillo movement. On September 25, 1960, Patria, Minerva and Mate were assassinated on their way home from visiting their husbands, who at the time were imprisoned for their own participation in movements that opposed Trujillo. Although the Mirabals are best-known for their brave contributions on the political scene, Alvarez focuses many pages on the growing-up years of the sisters, long before they held any prominence in the Dominican Republic. She writes of their early experiences attending school, making friends, and dating. Alvarez describes important rites of passage in their lives as they mature to adulthood. In many cases, significant rites of passage for the Mirabals occur within female communities or in connection with other women. In Chapter One, I discuss how communities play a role in female identity formation. Because the Mirabals grow in connection with others, they place high priority on the relationships and needs of others in their lives. I show how Alvarez contrasts the Mirabals behavior with that of Trujillo. In *In the Time of the Butterflies*, the Mirabals become courageous women, who exemplify female strengths. Unlike Trujillo, who constantly acts selfishly, the Mirabals are defined by the values they place on relationships and community.

In Chapter Two I examine the negative effects of dictatorship on Urania's growth in *La fiesta del Chivo*. The most significant rite of passage to occur in Urania's adolescence leaves her severely traumatized and unable to form relationships. Urania's 'failure' to progress is a reflection of the devastating effect the dictatorship often had on women, rather than an indication of personal

weakness. When Urania is only fourteen-years old her father offers his daughter's virginity to Trujillo, hoping to mend his political career. As a result, Urania is filled with anger and rage and loses her ability to connect with others and to form relationships. Throughout the novel she is frequently described as isolated and alone. In this chapter, I analyze how Vargas Llosa uses a dictator's sexual abuse of a minor as a criticism for the abuse of power during the Trujillo years. It is significant that Urania's emotional pain arises not only from physical violation but also from her family's betrayal. Urania's father, Agustín, represents the machismo of the Trujillo regime. By offering his daughter to Trujillo, he reflects a society that devalues women. In this chapter I also discuss how "poor fathering" becomes a symbol of the Trujillo dictatorship. In addition, I describe the positive changes in Urania's development that occur as she shares her story with her family after thirty-five years. I show how Urania's growth in the final stages of the novel may represent Vargas Llosa's hope for Latin American's future.

A surprising number of similarities exist between the protagonists of *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *La fiesta del Chivo*. All five women, for example, experience first-hand the abusive nature of the Trujillo regime as they grow up amidst dictatorship. Trujillo's violence, however, impacts Alvarez's and Vargas Llosa's characters in different ways. Ideas about the process of female identity formation help explain the characters' response to dictatorship in both novels. The Mirabal sisters from Alvarez's account experience growth through their connection with others. Alvarez focuses on the role of relationships and community in the Mirabals' daily lives. The qualities and strengths that define the Mirabals in the private sphere also give them the courage to stand against Trujillo. In contrast, Urania's horrific encounter with the dictator has a debilitating effect on her socially and emotionally. Her pain is evidenced by an inability to connect to others and have

fulfilling relationships. Vargas Llosa uses Urania's traumatized growth as a metaphor for the suffering of all Dominicans during Trujillo's time in power. While female development follows a different course for Urania than it does for the Mirabals, the principles that define the female growth process are the same in both novels. Alvarez describes her characters' maturation as a process of connecting to others and cultivating community-centered values. Conversely, Urania's isolation and separation are evidence of her crisis of development. In both novels, the concept of connection elucidates the process of female identity formation and gives insight into Trujillo's violent reign.

CHAPTER ONE: The Process of Becoming Butterflies: Female Development and Community in Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*

In *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Julia Alvarez focuses on the development of the four Mirabal sisters. Alvarez writes in a postscript to the novel that the Mirabal sisters are “models for women fighting injustices of all kinds” (324). She also expresses her admiration for their bravery: “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” (323). While Alvarez depicts many of the heroic acts of the Mirabals in the political movements that opposed Trujillo, she also dedicates numerous pages to the formative years of their youth, long before they held any prominence in the Dominican Republic. Isabel Zakrjewski Brown sums up Alvarez's approach in this way: “In the novel, Alvarez invents the adolescence and early adult years of the protagonists. Having gathered very general information on the sisters' lives through interviews and research, Alvarez then fictionalizes their daily lives [. . .]” (1). For example, Alvarez includes sections on the Mirabals' experiences in boarding school, among friends, and with potential suitors, before they became politically involved. In these settings, she focuses on the values they learn as they mature in life.

It should be noted that Alvarez's depiction of the Mirabals has been a source of controversy for some scholars. For example, Lynn Chun Ink discusses the feminist concerns associated with casting the Mirabals in private settings such as the home and school instead of the public arena. Ink suggests that Alvarez's focus on the daily, familial lives of the Mirabals confines them to the private sphere, instead of centering on their political contributions. Ink writes that Alvarez's “revision of

community [her attempt to show women's historical involvement] tends to utilize the very masculinist imperialist discourse it seeks to undermine" (790). Roberto González Echevarría makes a similar critique in his oft-cited *New York Times* book review: "The sisters appear, on the whole, to be reactive and passive. Their education in religious schools, and their chaste and rather naive development into womanhood, take up too many tedious pages" (1). Like Ink, González Echevarría suggests that Alvarez's emphasis on the private lives of the Mirabals may distract from the depiction of their political achievements (1).

Alvarez, however, defends her version of the Mirabals in her postscript to the novel. She states that she wanted to avoid deifying the Mirabals, although they have become legends in the Dominican Republic (324). In addition, Alvarez's approach supports a set of values which may be controversial, but that is essential in understanding the novel. In the private settings that Alvarez often chooses for her characters, the Mirabals frequently demonstrate traditionally feminine values such as friendship and relationship building. As the Mirabals grow up amidst dictatorship they learn to value people and individuals and often express their consideration and selfless concern for others. These principles are consistent with other writing by Alvarez. In the book *Women Writing Resistance* (2003), a collection of short essays, editor Jennifer Browdy de Hernandez includes a brief essay by Alvarez entitled "I Came to Help: Resistance Writ Small." Alvarez comments on women's ability to help society by forming connections and relationships. She writes about Camila Ureña, the daughter of the famous Dominican poet Salomé Ureña. Unlike her mother, Camila lived a quiet, non-descript life, teaching Spanish at Vassar for years. To everyone's surprise, in 1960, Camila left home and went to Cuba to join the literacy brigade. Alvarez comments that change frequently occurs through small actions such as these. She writes, "I trust [in] that connective, consensus-

building, hands-on process which I think of as a traditionally female process with its roots in the kitchen, women working together” (212). In this quote, Alvarez also notes that women’s strength often comes in their ability to build and form connection with others.

In the same essay, Alvarez cites several examples of groups of women who have made small changes that brought about significant results. Her description of these powerful, female movements sheds light on her characterization of the Mirabals. Alvarez writes,

[A] group of women wearing handkerchiefs and black dresses and practical tie shoes circle a plaza in Argentina. A young woman in a threatened forest hugs a tree. Another and another join her. A handful of women in a Greek village refuse to sleep with their husbands until they end a war. A housewife in South France opens the back door and ushers her Jewish neighbors to a cellar of her house. (212)

In these examples, Alvarez describes a community aspect to women’s resistance. Likewise, community plays an important part of the Mirabal siblings’ lives in *In the Time of the Butterflies*. As the young Mirabals mature into adulthood they learn and demonstrate positive values within group settings. This phenomenon is consistent with the findings of social psychologist Carol Gilligan regarding the process of women’s development. She explains that the link to others is foundational to female growth. She states, “[W]omen not only define themselves in context of human relationships but also judge others in terms of their ability to care” (17). It is not surprising, then, that there are numerous examples of communities in *In the Time of the Butterflies* and most of them are comprised exclusively of women. The Mirabal sisterhood is one of those female

communities.³ Additional examples of groups of women in Alvarez's novel include the all-girls school the sisters attend, the female section of the prison to which Minerva and Mate are confined for a period of seven months, the religious retreat Patria attends, and Enrique Mirabal's second family, which is comprised of four daughters.

Considering Alvarez's comments on women's resistance, her approach to the Mirabal's lives is more clear. Alvarez focuses on their developmental years, years spent in community settings where they learn the importance of caring for others and building relationships. Throughout the novel, relationships shape who the Mirabals become. Through the influence of the networks of friends established by the young Mirabals, they transform into strong women and form a legendary part of the anti-Trujillo movement. These women, as described by Alvarez, are heroines not only because of their political involvement but also because of their values of friendship and care.

As part of her focus on development, Alvarez creates a series of pivotal moments, or rites of passage, in the Mirabal sisters' lives that shape their identity as they mature into womanhood. Alvarez's emphasis on the transformative experiences of her characters is evident from the title of her novel. While butterflies refer to the code names of the Mirabals in their underground political activities, the transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly is also a powerful symbol of growth.⁴ As

³ It is noteworthy that societies of women such as the Mirabal characters are frequently found in literature. Nina Auerbach explains that societies of women have played a significant role in literary history. She mentions in particular Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868, 1869). Like *In the Time of the Butterflies*, these novels both contain literary sisterhoods (the Bennets and the Marches, respectively), which exemplify the value of female societies.

⁴ On a basic level the change from a caterpillar to butterfly can be seen as a symbol of transformation. In addition, it is significant that some cultures have noted the powerful imagery associated with butterflies and have involved them in traditional ceremonies. For example, Bruce Lincoln describes how this symbol plays a role in the female initiatory rites of the Tukuna people of Northwest Brazil. Part of the ceremonies included the seclusion of the young initiand in a chamber for three days. Lincoln comments that "[t]he seclusion chamber is, in truth, something of a retort of crucible, in which a dramatic transformation is effected" (54). A song is sung before the girl emerges that associates her with a caterpillar in

Alvarez's focus is on her characters' development, she naturally begins her story at an early period in their lives. *In the Time of the Butterflies* commences in 1938, when the Mirabals—Mate, Minerva, Dedé, and Patria—range in age from three to fourteen years old. Alvarez recreates the process through which each of the girls matures. For example, one early experience of growth occurs in chapter two, which contains a coming-of-age experience for Minerva and lays the foundation for her future political involvement. As the chapter begins, Minerva is twelve years old. She and her two older sisters have convinced their father to allow them to attend an all-girls boarding school called *La Inmaculada Concepción*. Some of the significant events of this chapter include Minerva making friends with another girl named Sinita, Minerva's first menstruation, the story of Lina Lovatón, and Minerva's discovery of Trujillo's corruption. Through these experiences, Minerva loses her previous childhood naiveté regarding the Trujillo regime and develops a more realistic understanding of the dictatorship. Alvarez creatively entitles the first section of the chapter "complications," a term which takes on multiple meanings. First, it refers to the onset of menses, an important rite of passage. In many cultures menarche signals that a young woman is ready to be initiated into society. Alvarez's inclusion of this detail signals that Minerva is at a developmental threshold.

Alvarez parallels Minerva's knowledge of Trujillo's corruption with her first menstruation. This pairing of major events symbolizes how trying life might be for a young girl growing up during the *Trujillato* and holds an implicit critique of the dictatorship. The night Minerva begins bleeding

a chrysalis. Lincoln writes, "The chamber is thus compared to a cocoon into which the girl went as a caterpillar, immature, plain, and terrestrial, and from which she emerges a butterfly, mature, beautiful, and celestial" (55). Although Alvarez is most likely not referencing the initiation rites of the Tukuna with her title, it is noteworthy that the caterpillar/butterfly metaphor can be used to describe female growth and transformation.

also happens to be the night her new friend Sinita shares how her brother and uncles were murdered by Trujillo. In addition, Sinita describes Trujillo's crooked path to the presidency. For Minerva, who like other children grew up sheltered about Trujillo's true nature, the news is disheartening. She describes her shock as a total blow to her belief system: "It was as if I had just heard Jesus had slapped a baby or Our Blessed Mother had not conceived him the immaculate conception way. 'That can't be true,' I said, but in my heart, I felt a china-crack of doubt" (17). After Sinita and Minerva's late-night conversation about Trujillo, Minerva falls asleep with abdominal pains and wakes up with the realization that her "complications" have started. In many ways, her life becomes more "complicated" now that she recognizes Trujillo's corruption. During this time she develops an interest in politics, an interest that will later cost her life. Minerva also comes to realize that life for a young woman could be especially difficult under the dictatorship. Minerva becomes aware not only of Trujillo's political corruption, but also of his mistreatment of women. Later in chapter two, the story of Lina Lovatón, a beautiful, fellow-student, provides further evidence of Trujillo's true nature to Minerva. In the novel, Lina, a schoolmate of Minerva, unintentionally attracts Trujillo's attention. Though Trujillo is married and thirty-five years older than the seventeen year-old Lina, he seduces her. On a trip to visit Trujillo, Lina becomes pregnant and as a result drops out of school. As Minerva witnesses this event, she gains new understanding of the situation of women under Trujillo's government. After Lina's experience, Minerva starts to bind her chest, hoping to stall her physical development and escape Lina's fate. At this time, Minerva also begins to feel an intense desire to put an end to the Trujillo Dictatorship.

Minerva's new-found awareness of Trujillo's corruption coupled with her physiological change bring about an initiatory experience in her life. Douglas J. Weatherford points out that new

knowledge or perspective is often a key element of a person's coming-of-age. He writes, "Initiation [. . .] is the process by which a liminal protagonist takes on a new metaphysical and/or social identity with its corresponding changes in knowledge, world vision, social status, and gender roles" (11). Minerva notes that all of her experiences lead to a deepened understanding of life, particularly in the Dominican Republic:

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 Inmaculada 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)

Minerva mentions the freedom that comes from knowledge, yet at the same time the lessons learned are far from positive. In her case, entering the adult world means learning about the corruption of the regime, something she had not understood before. This lesson will define her life's work of fighting that evil.

The location as well as the lessons Minerva learns in chapter two are significant to the novel. First, Minerva experiences this crucial time in her physical and psychological development at an all-girls boarding school, or in a community of women. This location symbolizes the importance of relationships in the process of female maturation. Minerva's revolutionary tendencies are also fostered by her connection to Sinita as well as to Lina. Both have been wronged by Trujillo, and Minerva desires justice for her friends, particularly for Sinita. In addition to learning about politics from Sinita, Minerva gains a deeper understanding of friendship as she connects with Sinita across socio-economic boundaries. Sinita is ostracized at school because of her shabby clothes and apparent poverty, and Minerva is one of the only students who will talk with and befriend her.

When Sinita tells her story, Minerva begins to see Sinita in a different way: “She told me stuff I didn’t know about her. I thought she was always poor, but it turned out her family used to be rich and important. Three of her uncles were even friends of Trujillo. But they turned against him when he began to do bad things” (17). Minerva learns that things, especially under the dictatorship, are not always as they appear. She discovers that the revered Trujillo of her childhood is nothing more than a façade and that looks can be deceiving. In the shabby and apparently-rude Sinita, Minerva gains a close friend. Minerva’s knowledge and friendship also come with a greater level of responsibility. The nuns at the school quickly notice the two girls’ friendship and ask Minerva to look after Sinita. Minerva accepts the responsibility, not realizing that she will have to protect Sinita later from the dangers of the regime. Alvarez describes Minerva’s first year at school as a formative time and it is not coincidental that her growth occurs as a result of friendship and relationships. Through these experiences Minerva gains her interest in politics, an interest that will shape the rest of her life.

Another important rite of passage in *In the Time of the Butterflies* involves the more restrained sister, Patria. While Patria’s most obvious rite of passage involves marrying Pedro González (she meets him when he visits the all-girls boarding school) another influential time for her is when she decides to join the anti-Trujillo movement. Throughout the novel, Patria is known for being a dedicated wife and mother and staying out of trouble. However, things change when she attends a religious retreat in the mountains of the Cibao region in June of 1959. While on the retreat, there is a surprise invasion by a rebel group in the same area. A series of explosions rocks the building where Patria and the other women are listening to a sermon. The invasion is quickly stopped by Trujillo’s forces but has a significant effect on the country. In fact, the Mirabals later

form an underground movement which they name *El 14 de junio*, to commemorate the day of the failed attempt.⁵ During the explosions, Patria witnesses a traumatic event when she looks out the window and sees a young rebel boy gunned down. She relates to this boy as if he were her own son and the terrible scene has a profound impact on her. Afterwards she whole-heartedly participates with her sisters in their revolutionary activities.

Although witnessing a traumatic event may not seem like a rite of passage, Patria's experience proves to have a transformative effect on her. She says, "Coming down the mountain, I was a changed woman" (162). When Patria returns, her family members are all waiting for her, fearing she may have died in the explosions. Symbolically, her experience represents a kind of death and rebirth. Mircea Eliade writes: "Every ritual repetition of the cosmogony is preceded by a symbolic retrogression to Chaos. In order to be created new, the old world must first be annihilated" (xiii). Eliade goes on to explain that in initiatory rites, for example, a child must symbolically die to childhood in order to be reborn or resurrected to adulthood (xiii). Likewise, during Patria's experience, she is figuratively reborn as a revolutionary. She describes how previous to the retreat, she "wouldn't have hurt a butterfly," but now is "shouting, 'Amen to the revolution'" (164). Alvarez also describes Patria's transformation as an important rite by using religious symbolism. It is significant that Patria's experience occurs in the mountains, or on higher ground, during a religious retreat. Her story is not unlike Moses', who also received his calling on a mountain after a sacred experience. But while Moses' experience fits the model of separation for male development, Patria's transformation takes place among a community of women, and as a result of another person's (the young boy's) suffering. In Patria's story, Alvarez again links the

⁵ This is the same revolutionary movement to which Alvarez's own father belonged before her family emigrated to the United States in 1960 (Alvarez, *Something to Declare* 198).

Mirabals' growth to community and relationships. Patria will ultimately sacrifice her life because of the connection she felt to the young boy she witnessed dying.

Mate's journal accounts of her imprisonment in chapter eleven also describe a powerful rite of passage and are some of the most stirring and emotional moments in the novel. Through Mate, Alvarez shows that, for women, community-focused thinking not only benefits society, but also forms a basis for a sense of selfhood in women's development. Describing the importance of Mate's prison account, Silvio Sirias writes, "It is through Mate's prison diary that Alvarez most closely explores women's issues. Mate proves to be the most enlightened, yet compassionate, feminist among the Mirabal sisters" (66). All of the chapters told from Mate's point of view are journal accounts. Her earliest entries begin when she is in grade school and include descriptions of clothes, school, boys, and family life. While Mate's early writing is endearing and sometimes even comical, she does not demonstrate the depth and reflection that is apparent in some of her sisters' chapters. Sensing Mate's superficial nature, Minerva buys her sister a journal because contemplation and writing "deepen one's soul" (30). Still Mate remains aloof to her sister's revolutionary activities until she meets Leandro, whom she later marries. Leandro is a member of the same underground organization as Minerva and her husband Manolo. When Mate learns of Leandro's involvement, she too asks to join Minerva. Drawn initially to the underground through love rather than revolution, Mate confesses that she is not as strong as her older sister: "I admit that for me love goes deeper than the struggle [. . .]. I would never be able to give up Leandro to some higher ideal the way I feel Minerva and Manolo would each other if they had to make the supreme sacrifice" (147).

By developing Mate's character as an 'ordinary' young woman with no particular interest in politics, Alvarez emphasizes Mate's growth in prison. Early in chapter eleven Mate gains an increased appreciation for others. She and Minerva are held in a prison called *La Cuarenta* with a group of female political prisoners (revolutionaries like the Mirabals). To Mate's dismay, she and the other women held for political reasons share a small room with sixteen other female inmates who were convicted on more serious crimes. Mate initially describes those women with disdain: "Nonpolitical,' all right. Prostitutes, thieves, murderers—and that's just the ones who have confided in us" (228). Initially Mate is judgmental towards the other women, but when they act charitably towards her, she changes her perspective: "[I]t raised my spirits so much, the generosity of these girls I once thought were below me" (230). As her friendship with certain inmates solidifies, she reflects, "There is something deeper. Sometimes I really feel it in here, especially late at night, a current going among us, like an invisible needle stitching us together into the glorious, free nation we are becoming" (239).

Curiously it is in this communal environment that Mate is able to develop her own unique voice and perspective. At one point during the sisters' seven-month stay, Mate is chosen to be interviewed by the Organization of American States, which was concerned about how the prisoners were being treated. The women know the interview room will be bugged by Trujillo's secret police (the SIM), so Mate will be limited in what she can say. Minerva and another prisoner write a statement regarding their mistreatment in prison, which they hide in Mate's hair for her to let drop during the interview. Minerva also asks Mate to write an additional personal statement about a traumatic experience she had while in prison when she was tortured by the SIM for information. Mate is hesitant to write the later statement because, though anonymous, word could get back that

someone in the women's quarters complained and an innocent guard that she befriended (Santicl6) may be punished by the SIM. Minerva argues with Mate about the necessity of the second testimony. Mate describes her conversation with Minerva in her diary:

Ay, Mate, promise me, [Minerva] says, looking in my eyes, please promise me.

So I say to her the only things I can say. I promise you this, I'll be true to what I think is right.

Minerva has never heard such talk from me. Fair enough, she says, fair enough. (251)

Mate goes to the interview with both statements hidden in her hair, but in the end she only lets Minerva's fall and not her own. In this circumstance, Mate follows her own moral values, independent of what Minerva thinks she should do. Mate's reasons reflect a deep awareness for her friendships and relationships. By releasing only Minerva's statement, she is able to help the political prisoners as well as shield the guard who has been kind to her. Mate's ability to stand up for her ideals to protect her friends exemplifies her growth. Gilligan explains that women's focus on relationships carries into adulthood. She writes, "When women construct the adult domain, the world of relationships emerges and becomes the focus of attention and concern" (167).

Mate's conflict between pleasing Minerva or protecting her friends suggests a tension women often face because of the priority they place on relationships. While being other-focused can be seen as a strength, women also run the risk of stifling their desires to keep peace or to build relationships. Carol Gilligan and Lyn Mikel Brown write, "Women [. . .] tended to speak of themselves as living in connection with others and yet described a relational crisis: a giving up of voice, an abandonment of self, for the sake of becoming a good woman and having relationships" (*Meeting at the Crossroads 2*). *Voice* and *silence* become key terms in Gilligan's research. She describes voice in the following way: "Voice is central to our [women's] way of working—our

channel of connection, a pathway that brings the inner psychic world of feelings and thoughts out into the open air of relationships where it can be heard by oneself and by other people” (20).

Voice is the ability to be true to one’s thoughts and feelings and to express them when needed.

Voice represents a kind of authenticity in action and relationships. Mate’s decision in prison is an excellent example because she acts in a way that is true to her inner moral compass, instead of sacrificing her values to keep peace with Minerva.

In *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Patria, Minerva and Mate become strong women of voice, but Dedé’s situation is more complicated. Through the character of Dedé, Alvarez acknowledges that relationship-focused development can be dangerous. Throughout the novel, Dedé is an example of a woman who constantly gives up her desires and values to keep peace in a patriarchal society and household. Because her husband, Jaime, forbids Dedé from becoming involved in politics, she is the only sister who does not join the anti-Trujillo movement. But, long before Jaimito refuses to allow Dedé to participate, she begins to compromise her beliefs to appease others. This tendency is seen clearly when the young Mirabals hatch a plan to attend boarding school. Although Dedé wants to leave with her sisters, she invokes her self-sacrificing nature and offers to remain at home to help her father with the store. Dedé places others above herself and is willing to sacrifice much—even an opportunity at adventure and education—to appease others. Alvarez both praises and chastises Dedé’s desire to meet the needs of those around her. While Dedé often nobly aids the people in her life, sometimes she does so to her own detriment and against her better judgment. In such cases, she silences her own instincts and enables others to take advantage of her.

Sadly, Dedé compromises her own desires when she agrees to marry her cousin Jaimito, in spite of her inner misgivings about him and the negative way he treats her. Alvarez describes Jaimito's character as difficult and he is often unwilling to listen to her. In one particular scene Jaimito tries to convince Dedé that her friend Lío's political involvement is too radical and that it is hurting the country. Dedé believes that Lío can make a difference, but Jaimito suggests that he should compromise more of his beliefs and standards. In their conversation, Alvarez introduces the idea of compromise and shows how Dedé is unable to stand up to her cousin and express her thoughts.

Jaimito tried convincing Dedé to his way of thinking. "Don't you see, my heart, all life involves compromise. You have to compromise with your sister, your mother has to compromise with your father, the sea and the land have to compromise about the shoreline, and it varies from time to time. Don't you see, my life?"

"I see," Dedé said at last, already beginning to compromise with the man she was set to marry. (79)

In this scene, Dedé agrees with Jaimito, but obviously there is tension. She pauses before she answers him, suggesting that she has a difference of opinion, and yet she does not share it. Although there are problems in their communication, Dedé overlooks these when she agrees to marry Jaimito.

In addition, Alvarez describes Jaimito as the man Dedé is "set" to marry, suggesting that Dedé does not recognize her choice in the matter. Indeed, Dedé further compromises her feelings and desires when she (hesitantly) accepts Jaimito's proposal of marriage. Both her parents and her cousin's parents had always assumed the two would marry. Jaimito also puts pressure on Dedé.

However she is unsure of her feelings. Her thoughts reflect her uncertainty: “They had been headed for it since they had patted mud balls together as toddlers in the backyard. Everyone said so. There was no question—was there?—but that they would spend the rest of their lives together” (82). Instead of considering her own wishes, Dedé focuses on how family members had planned their marriage for years and on Jaime’s feelings for her. Unfortunately it does not seem to bother Jaimito that Dedé is hesitant. Likewise, throughout their marriage, he continually ignores Dedé’s counsel, wishes, and feelings, often to his own detriment. In several cases, he loses money because he refuses to take his wife’s advice even though she is a talented businesswoman.

Over time in her marriage, Dedé constantly silences herself to keep peace, but her sisters notice that she is struggling and unhappy. This is especially true in regard to her sisters’ revolutionary activities. Although Dedé would like to participate, Jaimito adamantly refuses. Alvarez emphasizes this point when Dedé’s sisters approach her about keeping some contraband hidden on their land:

What could Dedé say? She had to talk to Jaimito first. Patria had given her a disappointed look, and Dedé had gotten defensive. “What? I should go over Jaimito’s head? It’s only fair. He’s the one farming the land, he’s responsible for this place.”

“But can’t you decide on your own, then tell him?”

Dedé stared at her sister, disbelieving.

“That’s what I did,” Patria went on. “I joined, and then I talked Pedrito into joining me.”

“Well, I don’t have that kind of marriage,” Dedé said. She smiled to take the huffiness out of her statement.

“What kind of marriage do you have?” Patria looked at her with that sweetness on her face that could always penetrate Dedé’s smiles. Dedé looked away.

“It’s just that you don’t seem yourself,” Patria continued, reaching for Dedé hand.

“You seem so—I don’t know—withdrawn. Is something wrong?” (176)

Patria notices Dedé has been stifling herself and is concerned that her sister is becoming more reserved. When Dedé does try to talk to Jaimito about the land, he refuses her request. Dedé plans to leave Jaimito, but a family crisis pulls them together for a time. Though Dedé recognizes Jaimito’s controlling nature, she also takes some responsibility for their marital struggles: “It was natural to blame herself. Maybe she hadn’t loved him enough” (181). Dedé recognizes that by accepting Jaimito and burying her own voice, she entered a marriage that resulted in unhappiness. In this way Alvarez shows the dangers of women silencing their inner beliefs and feelings in order to appease others.

In addition to plot, Alvarez also uses narrative structure to show Dedé’s loss of voice. The novel contains three sections, each divided into one chapter dedicated to each sister, making a total of twelve chapters. Alvarez allows three of the four sisters to tell their stories using the first person. For example, Patria’s chapters are told in her own voice in an almost testimonial style: “From the beginning, I felt it, snug in my heart, the pearl of great price. No one had to tell me to believe in God or to love everything that lives. I did it automatically [. . .]” (44). Minerva’s chapters are similar in structure and style to Patria’s: “All I knew was I was not falling in love, no matter how deserving I thought Lío 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). The chapters dedicated to Mate’s perspective are the entries that the youngest Mirabal writes in her diary, and are also related in the

first person. For example, on the day of her first communion Mate writes, “Minerva says keeping a diary is also a way to reflect and reflection deepens one’s soul. It sounds so serious. I suppose now that I’ve got one I’m responsible for, I have to expect some changes” (30). Unlike her sisters, Dedé’s perspective is given through an omniscient third-person narrator: “Dedé was scared, and angry at herself for being so. She was growing more and more confused about what she wanted. And uncertainty was not something Dedé could live with easily” (77). The use of the third-person with Dedé suggests that she is not in possession of her own voice. While Dedé’s sisters are more free to make their own decisions and express their thoughts, Dedé is more conflicted. Alvarez uses this narrative structure to emphasize Dedé’s inability to truly find expression.

While Dedé often chooses not to stand up for her feelings and desires, her silence also exemplifies the difficulties placed upon women in a strong patriarchal society. Trujillo’s treatment of women was particularly cruel and misogynistic. Surprisingly, however, his character appears infrequently in the novel. Instead Alvarez uses examples of other characters to represent the dictator and to demonstrate the difficulties women faced during his time. Writing of Alvarez, Ignacio López-Calvo comments, “Indeed, her censure of patriarchalism of husbands and fathers runs parallel to the condemnation of Trujillo’s despotism. The abusive and immoral middle- or upper-class man metaphorically represents an embryonic state of a potentially more dangerous development: the dictator” (95). Jaimito is one example that Alvarez uses in the lives of the Mirabals to depict Trujillo’s character.

Indeed, Dedé’s silence involving Jaimito becomes representative of the national silence that defined the island country due to the oppressive nature of dictatorship. In chapter six, told by Minerva, Alvarez uses the metaphor of thunderous rain to describe how Trujillo was able to silence

the Dominican people. As the family travels back from the capital where Enrique was illegally held by Trujillo for petty, personal reasons, it begins to pour. Minerva describes the rain in the following manner:

It is raining here, too, [. . .]. North to Tamboril and the mountain road to Puerto Plata, the rain drives on, in every *bohío* and small *conuco*, and on out to the Atlantic where it is lost in the waves that rock the bones of martyrs in the deepest sleep.⁶ We've traveled almost the full length of the island and can report that every corner of it is wet, every river overflows its bank, every rain barrel to the brim, every wall washed clean of writing no one knows how to read anyway. (116-17)

Trujillo's presence fills the country, and the effect is silence. At a brief rest stop Minerva says, "We sit *silently*, listening to the rain on the thatched roof, a numb, damp, fatalistic feeling among us. Something has started none of us can stop" (116; my emphasis). Even Minerva, the most outspoken Mirabal, is overcome by the rain in this section. The downpour represents the oppressive and overpowering nature of the Trujillo dictatorship on the Dominican Republic. Dedé's relationship with Jaimito is also reflective of the national situation. Like Trujillo, Jaimito is intolerant of differences of opinion. Dedé's relationship with Jaimito represents the oppression that results when people are not allowed freedom of expression.

Fortunately for Dedé, silence is not the end of her story. Dedé realizes that, as the sister who survived, her life has value. In fact, in the epilogue, there is evidence that Dedé is finally able to recover her voice. The epilogue is dated 1994 and is told from Dedé's perspective. It begins with

⁶ Trujillo was known for casting dissidents out to sea for the sharks to eat. This reference may allude to that practice and shows that Trujillo's cruelty extended—symbolically and literally—beyond the shoreline of the country.

a description of what happened after the sisters' death. For the first time in the novel, Alvarez uses the first-person pronoun with Dedé's character:

Later they [people saddened over the sisters' death] would come by the house in Ojo de Agua and insist on seeing me. [. . .] Each visitor would break my heart all over again, but I would sit on this very rocker and listen for as long as they had something to say.

It was the least I could do, being the one saved. (301)

Ironically, Dedé finds her voice as she voluntarily chooses to give to others. In her relationship with Jaime, she had to stifle her own desires and reservations to give, but now she chooses to sacrifice, because she believes in the cause. Dedé's most significant developmental moment seems to be after her sisters' death when she begins to help the Dominican people by carrying on the martyred sisters' legacy. In the epilogue, Dedé describes a scene in which her friend Olga tries to convince her to leave her home and the memories of her sisters and to live for herself. Dedé refuses, explaining,

'After the fighting was over and we were a broken people'—she shakes her head sadly at this portrait of our recent times—'that's when I opened my doors, and instead of listening, I starting talking. We had lost hope, and we needed a story to understand what had happened to us.' (313)

Just like Minerva's growth through Sinita at the *Inmaculada*, Patria's transformation on the mountain and Mate's development in prison, Dedé grows to find her voice by helping the community in meaningful ways. She recognizes that she is needed and, by responding to the needs of others, she finds herself. In this sense, the novel comes full circle.

In the end, all four of the Mirabal sisters become strong women who exemplify important female values and perform meaningful service for their nation. Although Trujillo appears infrequently in the novel, Alvarez contrasts his personality with the Mirabals' strengths. Some of the events that shape Trujillo's character in the novel are his sexual advances towards Minerva, his unjust holding of Enrique Mirabal when Minerva refuses him, his relationship with Lina Lovatón and his refusal to allow Minerva to practice law after she graduates from law school. Writing about Trujillo's character in *In the Time of the Butterflies*, López-Calvo comments, "Trujillo's pathological thirst for revenge and adulation is an aspect of his personality that reveals his cruel, and, perhaps, immature nature [. . .]" (91). In addition, Alvarez describes Jaimito's *machismo* to emphasize characteristics of the regime. In all cases, Alvarez decries Trujillo's petty and selfish leadership and suggests that the values of the Mirabals are, unfortunately, absent in his character.

In The Time of the Butterflies gives a unique perspective on women and their impact on society. Alvarez's interpretation of the Mirabal sisters focuses on the private lives of the Mirabals and the transformative experiences that shape them on the path to adulthood. In many ways, *In the Time of the Butterflies* is about change and transformation. Silvio Sirias comments,

In The Time of the Butterflies lends itself perfectly to a liminal reading. The Mirabal sisters, the government of the Dominican Republic, the Church, as well as the narrative are, for the greater part of the novel, suspended in a liminal state—betwixt and between what they were and what they are to become. (82)

For the Mirabals, connection with others is the catalyst of their development during the liminal moments of their lives. Many of the important events for the siblings occur within the context of community. The Mirabal sisters come to embody values traditionally associated with women, such

as a selfless concern for others. Alvarez's description of the Mirabals' formative years focuses on a few particular values that can make a difference in society. Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* is not only the story of the famous *Mariposas* but of the characteristics that shaped them into strong women who impacted a nation.

CHAPTER TWO: “A mí, papá y Su Excelencia me volvieron un desierto”: Poor Fathering and Female Development in Mario Vargas Llosa’s *La fiesta del Chivo*

Like Julia Alvarez, Mario Vargas Llosa writes about the Trujillo dictatorship from a female point of view in *La fiesta del Chivo*. While there are three storylines contained in the novel, the central one develops around the fictional character of Urania Cabral.⁷ Like the Mirabals, Vargas Llosa’s character grew up in the Dominican Republic during the Trujillo years. The story of Urania’s development into adulthood, however, differs greatly from the pattern the Mirabals follow in Alvarez’s novel. While the Mirabal sisters experience growth through relationships with others, and generally become model women, Urania is frequently associated with solitude and isolation. As the novel begins, Urania is forty-nine years old and has no family of her own. She describes herself as a workaholic and has little spare time for others.⁸ Though Urania is portrayed as social and friendly in her childhood, her development was halted painfully by a traumatic experience at the age of fourteen, when her father offers her virginity to Trujillo hoping to mend his political career. After this horrendous experience, Urania shuts herself off from others, including her extended family,

⁷ *La fiesta del Chivo*’s three storylines are developed in alternating chapters. The book begins with Urania’s story, related in the present (the late 1990s), with frequent references to the past. The second storyline is told from the perspective of Trujillo in 1961 on the day of his assassination. Vargas Llosa conveys the Generalissimo’s morning schedule, the meetings he has, his thoughts and reflections—including his frustration with his aging body—all leading up to his death. The third plot tells the story of Trujillo’s assassins as they wait concealed on the side of the road for his car. While in hiding, they each reflect on their reasons for being there, often remembering the injustices they have suffered at Trujillo’s hands. At last the dictator appears and they assassinate him. With Trujillo gone, the accomplices’ plan to set up an interim government seems to be working. However, to their detriment, Trujillo’s secret police (SIM) remains intact, and a bloody power-struggle erupts. Vargas Llosa proceeds by describing the chaotic aftermath of the death of Trujillo as the SIM seeks for his murderers, while continuing to tell Urania’s story of development.

⁸ Urania states that she works obsessively. She tells her father that her only hobby is to study the Trujillo years and her cousins that her life consists of “[t]rabajar, trabajar, trabajar hasta caer rendida” (564).

potential new friends, and lovers. She becomes cold and distant, and though she finds professional success, her personal life is full of emptiness and unhappiness.

Not only does Vargas Llosa describe Urania's crisis of development, he also critiques those individuals who brought about her trauma. Sadly, the perpetrators of Urania's tragedy are the two primary figures of authority in her life—her father (she is raised without a mother) and Trujillo (who ruled the country in an intensely personal style for over thirty years). Vargas Llosa shows that the Dominican Republic of Urania's youth was not a safe place for a young woman to mature. This is evident in how Urania's father and Trujillo betray her trust, even though it is their responsibility to protect her. Ultimately their actions lead to the developmental and psychological consequences she suffers later in her life.

The inclusion of abusive authority figures is not new to Vargas Llosa's work. Raymond L. Williams points out that, in *La fiesta del Chivo*, Vargas Llosa returns to several familiar demons from his past novels. Williams writes, "El demonio más conocido es el de las figuras autoritarias que han ido apareciendo en su obra como figuras paternas, como figuras militares y como figuras dictatoriales. En esta novela, las tres figuras son sintetizadas en un solo personaje: Trujillo" (*Mario Vargas Llosa: Otra historia* 272).⁹ While Williams only mentions Trujillo, Urania's father should be considered a significant authority figure as well. Indeed, Urania recognizes the roles of both individuals when she explains to her cousins, "A mí, papá y su Excelencia me volvieron un desierto"

⁹ Several notable novels by Vargas Llosa that contain authority figures include *La casa verde* (1966), a novel that critiques corrupt political officials for their abuse of the workers in a brothel, and *Conversación en la Catedral* (1969), a novel dealing with the Peruvian dictatorship of Manuel A. Odría. Other novels depict the negative use of authority by governments. For example, *La ciudad y los perros* (1962) chronicles the difficulties students face in a strict military academy in Peru. Meanwhile, *La guerra del fin del mundo* (1981) depicts the bloody turn-of-the-century clash between the government and a religious group in Canudos, Brazil. The war ended in 1897, when the Brazilian authorities sent a large army to squash the uprising.

(564). In *La fiesta del Chivo*, not only are those responsible for Urania's crisis of development persons of authority, they also happen to be paternal figures in her life.¹⁰ Throughout the novel, Vargas Llosa develops much of his criticism of the Trujillo regime around the theme of poor fathering. Urania's dysfunctional paternal relationships become a metaphor for the Trujillo dictatorship and the psychological effects of abusive authority. This chapter examines Urania's rape, the implications it has on her development, and how Urania's character connects to Vargas Llosa's portrayal of the evils of dictatorship.

Just as in Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*, rites of passage also play a role in the description of female development in *La fiesta del Chivo*. In *In the Time of the Butterflies*, rites of passage signify moments of growth in the protagonists' lives. In *La fiesta del Chivo* Vargas Llosa describes Urania's rape, though brutal and destructive, as an initiatory experience. This violation completely changes her personality and shapes the way she sees the world. At the time of her rape, Urania is characterized as a liminal protagonist, no longer a child, but not quite an adult either. Vargas Llosa also draws attention to this fact: Describing Urania (and her cousin who is of the same age) the narrator comments, "Habían dejado de ser niñas pero no eran todavía señoritas" (375). Unfortunately at this important moment in Urania's development, violence and force become the defining factors of her life. The fact that Urania's life is shaped in many ways by rape is a critique of the society in which she lives. Bruce Lincoln comments that initiation by rape is "a pattern followed in a number of male-centered, misogynistically inclined cultures [. . .]" (78). That

¹⁰ This element may in part be autobiographical as Vargas Llosa has often discussed his own strained relationship with his father. In an interview with Gustavo Faverón Patriau, for example, Vargas Llosa comments, "Como la relación con mi padre fue tan traumática y me ha marcado tanto, a mí no me extraña que se reproduzca de manera constante, con Urania, con Zavalita . . ." (5).

Urania's loss of innocence occurs through abuse is a stark criticism of the Trujillo regime and a commentary about the status of women during his reign.

Urania's rape marks a developmental crossroad in her life, dramatically transforming her personality. Mircea Eliade describes how rites of passage signal a change as great as the death and rebirth of an individual (xiii). An initiate's former mode of being symbolically comes to an end as a new self is born. Similarly, Urania undergoes a loss (or the death) of her childhood innocence and nature. Through the experience, she also gains new knowledge as she comes to realize the abusive and deceptive nature of the regime. In addition, Urania also comes to see Trujillo's weakness. Trujillo created an image of himself as invincible and all-powerful and yet, due to failing health he is unable to complete the sex act. The rape scene, though vulgar and explicit, is essential to the novel because it unmask the dictator's physical weakness and impotence. Williams comments, "Así, uno de los cráteres más destacables de la novela es al final, cuando la joven Urania, de catorce años, es llevada a una finca de descanso para un encuentro erótico con el viejo Trujillo de setenta años de edad y sin capacidad sexual" (*Otra historia* 269). The unveiling of Trujillo's perversion and corruption brings about Urania's loss of innocence as well as her acquisition of knowledge. In addition to her disgust over Trujillo's character, she also learns that he is not all powerful, which Vargas Llosa symbolizes through the dictator's impotence. In addition, Urania is shocked to discover her father's level of loyalty to a corrupt regime. Her father's betrayal further accounts for Urania's disillusionment. This trauma, tragically, becomes Urania's coming-of-age experience.

Urania's rape shapes her life and has serious implications for how she will progress into womanhood. At this point, development becomes an important theme in *La fiesta del Chivo*. Vargas Llosa shows the lingering psychological effects that Urania experiences for years after her

trauma. For example, following the rape, Urania shuts herself off from others and is unable to form or maintain relationships. Relational skills are a sign of female growth and are necessary for progression. Carol Gilligan explains, “By changing the [male] lens of developmental observation from individual achievement to relationships of care, women depict ongoing attachment as the path that leads to maturity” (170). Gilligan suggests that connection to others is necessary for women to develop a sense of self and identity: “Intimacy [or connection] goes along with identity, as the female comes to know herself as she is known, through her relationships with others” (12). Vargas Llosa understands the importance of relationships in female development and thus describes the issues in Urania’s life as a problem of connection. He frequently emphasizes Urania’s isolation. Symbolically, the first sentence in chapter one is simply “Urania” (11). This one-word sentence is an early sign of the protagonist’s separation. The meaning of Urania’s name is also significant. Sabine Köllman comments, “[T]he name Urania has special connotations: it refers to Uranus, the coldest planet, a possible symbol of Urania’s emotional situation” (291). Thus from the first word/sentence in the novel, Vargas Llosa alludes to a key weakness in Urania’s development.

Urania’s isolation begins in the weeks following her rape. After her encounter with Trujillo, she flees to her school where her teachers hide her and procure a scholarship for her to study in the United States. Over the next few years, Urania successfully earns a Bachelor’s degree and studies law at Harvard University. Afterwards Urania works first for the World Bank and later for a law firm in New York City. While Urania understandably severs ties with her father, she also ends all communication with her extended family and beloved cousins. In her years as a student, Urania purposefully makes no friends. She studies obsessively and distances herself from others. She remembers dreading the few social engagements she attended as an undergraduate : “[N]o pud[e]

dejar de ir algunas veces a fiestas, salir de excursión con muchachos y muchachas, simular que flirteaba [. . .], pero regresaba tan exhausta al *dormitory* por todo lo que debía fingir durante aquellas diversiones que buscaba pretextos para evitarlas” (219). Urania also reflects that in her years as a law student at Harvard she never once went to a party, bar, or dance (219). Her childhood teacher and friend Sister Mary is the only person with whom she retains contact.

Throughout the novel, Vargas Llosa uses metaphors to describe Urania’s reclusive nature. She is compared at different times to a planet (11), a desert (564), and an iceberg (228). The metaphor of an iceberg seems particularly appropriate. Urania’s co-worker, Steve Duncan, accuses her of being a “témpano de hielo” (228) when she coldly declines his proposal of marriage. As if proving his point, Urania nearly laughs at his display of emotion when she refuses him. Like an iceberg, nothing can approach Urania because of the enormous (emotional) weight hidden under the surface. Though Urania has never shared her childhood trauma with anyone, Duncan correctly guesses that there is more to Urania than appears. While years have passed since the night Urania spent in Trujillo’s mansion, the emotional scars from that experience are ever-present. Urania reviews the event in her mind and comes to understand the role her trauma has played in her need both to drive men away and to excel at her studies and career. Reflecting later on her conversation with Duncan, Urania notes that she has done well at everything in life, “menos en ser feliz” (230).

Urania’s coolness suggests that she has lost the ability to relate with others. Carol Gillian explains that female thinking often reflects an awareness of others especially in problem solving and decision making situations. Women tend to show a heightened consciousness to the needs of the people in their lives and feel a responsibility to help and care for them. Gilligan writes, “[I]n the different voice of women lays the truth of an ethic of care, the tie between relationships and

responsibility, and the origins of aggression in the failure of connection” (173). In a similar vein, Simon Baron-Cohen describes differences between male and female brains. He suggests that the male brain is more prone to categorization, while the female one is skilled at empathizing. He writes, “[F]ar more women than men report that they frequently share the emotional distress of their friends. Women also show more comforting behavior, even of strangers [. . .] (31). Urania, however is unaware of others’ feelings. Her cold refusal of Duncan is one example of her inability to consider or notice his emotions, and explains her laughter of surprise over his pain.

Given Urania’s emotional distance, her isolation may not initially appear problematic or even undesirable to her. Early in the novel, Urania acts as though the lack of connection in her life does not bother her. As a literary character, Urania almost stereotypically fulfills the role of the spinster. Naomi Braun Rosenthal explains that spinsters were often seen as workaholics who selfishly preferred work to people (ix).¹¹ In her conversation with her father, Urania acts indifferently about not being married. Though later she confesses that she is miserable and alone, she dons the façade of an independent woman with no need for others:

La ventaja de haberme quedado soltera, papá. ¿Sabías, no? Tú hijita se quedó para vestir santos. Así decías tú: <<¡Qué gran fracaso! ¡No pescó marido!>>. Yo tampoco, papá. Mejor dicho, no quise. Tuve propuestas. En la Universidad. En el Banco Mundial. En el bufete. Figúrate que todavía se me aparece de pronto un pretendiente. ¡Con cuarenta y nueve años de encima! No es tan terrible ser solterona. Por ejemplo, dispongo de tiempo para leer, en vez de estar atendiendo al marido, a los hijitos. (72)

¹¹ For a more in-depth discussion on the spinster in literature, see Naomi Braun Rosenthal’s *Spinster Tales and Womanly Possibilities*, 2002.

Because of Urania's lack of emotion, as well as for her intellectualism and professional success, Stephen Henighan suggests that Urania's personality does not reflect traditional female values. He describes Urania as a, "creación de un personaje asexual, una mujer sin vida afectiva, un 'hombre honorario' que comparte las ambiciones y los afanes literarios de los protagonistas masculinos de las novelas anteriores de Vargas Llosa" (377).

While Urania's character may seem outwardly unfeminine and cold, she later reveals deeply felt desires for connection and relationships. For example, when Urania finally shares the story of her rape with her extended family, she admits that not marrying or having a family has been a personal tragedy for her:

[E]stoy vacía y llena de miedo, todavía. Como esos viejos de New York que se pasan el día en los parques, mirando la nada. Trabajar, trabajar, trabajar hasta caer rendida. No es para que me envidien, te aseguro. Yo las envidio a ustedes, más bien. Sí, sí, ya sé, tienen problemas, apuros, decepciones. Pero, también, una familia, una pareja, hijos, parientes, un país. Esas cosas llenan la vida. (564)

Urania's fears cause her to suppress her desires for relationships, but they are still a part of her. Unable to recognize or realize her inner feelings, she is disconnected from her true nature. Urania's inner detachment is illustrated in her choice of study. She explains that she elected to study law simply because it was the first thing to come to mind: "Pero Urania acababa de decir "abogacía" porque fue lo primero que se le vino a la boca, hubiera podido decir Medicina, Economía o Biología" (220). Urania's decision was not founded on an innate desire to help others hurt like her or because she particularly enjoyed law, but because work and school are simply a means to stay busy.

Although Urania tries to hide the void in her life, she ultimately admits that she is unhappy. Unfortunately, she refuses to do the one thing that would likely help her the most—share her story. Urania’s life is deeply affected by her traumatic experience. She devotes years of her limited free time to an exhaustive study of the regime, and yet she does not disclose this part of her life with others. In the novel, Urania tells her father that she never speaks of her rape (159). The lack of connection in her life and her silence about her personal history create a vicious cycle. Unable to form relationships, she has no one to share her story with, and because she does not communicate, she cannot open up about herself and create meaningful friendships. Writing of the often-therapeutic nature of sharing trauma with others, Susan J. Brison writes,

The communicative act of bearing witness to traumatic events not only transforms traumatic memories into narratives that can then be integrated into the survivor’s sense of self and view of the world, but it also reintegrates the survivor into a community, reestablishing bonds of trust and faith in others. (xi)

Though Urania does eventually communicate with her family at the end of the novel, for thirty-five years she remains silent and does not benefit from appropriately sharing her story.

Writing about holocaust survivors, Dori Laub tells the story of a woman who lost everything during World War II. Her life after the Holocaust in many ways resembles Urania’s. Laub describes how in the proceeding years she never spoke of her tragic losses, even with the family and children she has afterward. As a result she “constructed a life in such a fated way, that it came to be a testimony to her loneliness and bereavement, in spite of the fact that her world was filled with living people [. . .]” (63). Had this woman been able to share her experiences, she may have relieved some of her inner burdens. Laub also writes,

None find peace in silence, even when it is their choice to remain silent. Moreover, survivors who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory, that is, of a forcibly imposed 'external evil,' which causes an endless struggle with and over a delusion. The "not telling" of a story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny. The events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor's daily life. (64)

By not telling her story, Urania unwittingly allows the past to rule over her and her actions. Considering the mental anguish she endures, her behavior towards Duncan is more comprehensible. While Urania's story appears to have a positive final twist, Vargas Llosa emphasizes that she is overly traumatized and is unable to share her story for many years.

Considering the source of Urania's trauma helps explain her isolation and silence. In many ways, Vargas Llosa sums up Urania's story with the line, "A mí, papá y Su Excelencia me volvieron un desierto" (564). In this sentence, Urania describes both the nature of her problem as well as what caused it. She explains that her emptiness and isolation were caused by the two individuals who held the responsibility for protecting her. Under extreme pressure, Urania's father chose to sacrifice his daughter's innocence in an attempt to make amends with Trujillo.¹² Prior to this despicable act, Agustín Cabral, Urania's father, actually had a healthy and loving relationship with

¹² Although Cabral's role as a victimizer is not diminished in the novel, Vargas Llosa also shows that Cabral had limited options during the Trujillo Era. Cabral is described as a highly intelligent and hardworking individual. Vargas Llosa explains that for a man such as Cabral it would be difficult to escape the regime. One important line in the novel states, "Lo peor que puede pasarle a un dominicano es ser inteligente o capaz. [. . .] Porque, entonces, tarde o temprano, Trujillo lo llamará a servirle [. . .]" (207). During the *Trujillato*, few people could avoid an allegiance with Trujillo. Salvador Estrella Sadhalá, one of Trujillo's assassins, comments that the rich and talented were recruited to support Trujillo and the poor and middle class often worked in his factories or businesses (207). Thus the regime affected society on all levels. Understanding the ubiquitous nature of Trujillo's government helps explain Cabral's involvement with it and the pressure he was under.

his daughter. Because Urania's mother passed away, she was raised by her father. Urania remembers, "Tu padre había sido tu padre y tu madre aquellos años. Por eso lo habías querido tanto. Por eso te había dolido tanto, Urania" (23). Cabral's complicity in Urania's rape scars her almost as much as the act itself. Urania's memories of her trauma show the pain she feels as she realizes her father's involvement. When she first arrives at Trujillo's mansion, known as *La Casa de Caoba*, she still does not understand why she is there. Cabral had simply told his daughter she was going to a party. Slowly Urania begins to understand:

Su incredulidad irrealizaba lo que le estaba ocurriendo. [. . .] ¿El senador Agustín Cabral la enviaba, ofrenda viva, al Benefactor y Padre de la Patria Nueva? Sí, no le cabía la menor duda, su padre había preparado esto con Manuel Alfonso. Y, sin embargo, quería dudar.
(550)

Urania is overcome by the fact that her beloved father would betray her and she becomes full of hatred towards him. She even contemplates committing suicide in Trujillo's mansion, but decides against it because she wants to live to see her father suffer for his actions (551). Cabral's damaged relationship with his daughter is part of the reason Urania becomes so isolated.

Father-daughter relationships shape a developing girl in many ways. In *The Wounded Woman: Healing the Father-Daughter Relationship*, psychologist Linda Schierse Leonard explains, "As a daughter grows up, her emotional and spiritual growth is deeply affected by her relationship to her father. He is the first masculine figure in her life and is a prime shaper of the way she relates to the masculine side of herself and ultimately to men. Since he is "other," i.e., different from herself and her mother, he also shapes her differentness, her

uniqueness and individuality. The way he relates to her femininity will affect the way she grows into womanhood. (11)

By sacrificing Urania to Trujillo, Cabral devalues Urania and reduces her femininity to something that he can control for his own personal reasons. His actions deeply scar her. In her book on father-daughter relationships, Leonard includes a section on the Greek drama *Iphigenia in Aulis* by Euripides. This play bears striking similarities to Urania's story in *La fiesta del Chivo*. In the drama, King Agamemnon leads the Greek army against Troy. Though the Greek ships are ready to sail for Troy, there is no wind. By consulting a seer, Agamemnon discovers that the poor sailing conditions were caused by the goddess Artemis, whom he has offended. In order to regain the wind, Agamemnon is told he must sacrifice his beloved daughter Iphigenia. Agamemnon debates whether or not to go through with the act. He knows the Greek army is excited for battle and may mutiny if they do not sail against Troy. Agamemnon's wife and daughter discover the plan and try to dissuade him, but in the end he becomes convinced that he must go against Troy for the greater good of Greece and for his own glory. In the end, Iphigenia is sacrificed and the winds return.

Iphigenia in Aulis represents a culture that diminishes the value of women. Agamemnon's actions indicate that he views his daughter as a possession. Schierse Leonard writes, "The father-daughter sacrifice has its roots in the dominance of masculine power over the feminine" (30). Agamemnon also acts out of self-interest. He desires the continued power and glory he believes this battle will bring him. Similarly, Cabral views his daughter as a possession when he offers her to Trujillo in order to restore his relationship with the dictator. Though Trujillo's mysterious break with Cabral appears to be no more than a loyalty test, Cabral becomes desperate with the loss of his connection to the Generalissimo. Sabine Köllman comments that Cabral sees Trujillo as a father

figure, which explains his anxiety over his break with the dictator (279). Trujillo created a system that kept his officials constantly vying for his attention and approbation. Urania comments on the almost paternal (and abusive) relationship he created with his collaborators when she explains her confusion over why they would constantly endure his abuse and in the end “quererlo, como llegan a querer los hijos a los padres autoritarios, a convencerse de que azotes y castigos son por su bien” (82). Tragically, Cabral subordinates his daughter to his (symbolic) father and, like Trujillo, becomes a poor father himself. Through his actions, he places greater value on the masculine, devaluing his daughter and the feminine.

Urania’s strained relationship with her father and her fear of Trujillo, cause her to create defenses which limit her growth and prevent her from establishing friendship. When women have suffered a difficult relationship with their fathers they often create protective walls. Schierse Leonard uses the metaphor of the ‘armored Amazon’ to describe one type of defense women acquire:

Developmentally, I find that this pattern arises as a reaction against inadequate fathering, occurring either on the personal or cultural level. In reacting against the negligent father such women often identify on the ego level with the masculine or fathering function themselves. [. . .] So they build up a strong masculine ego identity through achievement or fighting for a cause of being in control and laying down the law themselves [. . .]. (17)

Like the ‘armored Amazon’ that Schierse Leonard describes, Urania focuses on achievement and being in control. She excels in her studies and lives a highly structured lifestyle. Out of fear and pain over the wounds inflicted on her both by her father and Trujillo, Urania sacrifices her feminine ability to connect and adopts, instead, a cold demeanor as a means of self-defense. However,

Urania's adopted rigidity comes with a high price, which she recognizes later in her life. She describes herself as "vacía" (564) because she is unable to have the fulfillment that relationships might bring.

Eventually Urania's wall of self-defense becomes a prison. Schierse Leonard explains that a woman becomes "trapped in an 'Amazon armor,' a powerful persona which may not correspond to her basic personality since it has been formed out of a reaction and not out of her inner feminine center" (61). An individual may become overpowered by a false persona she creates in order to self-protect. Women, like Urania, who take on a more rigid personality, often stifle their feminine identity. This is the case when Steven Duncan, Urania's co-worker at the World Bank, accuses her of not being Dominican. Dominicans are known for warmth, friendship, and reaching out to others. When Urania coldly and indifferently turns down Duncan's proposal of marriage, he tells her, "Tú sí que no pareces dominicana. Yo lo parezco más que tú" (229). Though Urania acts as though she does not care about his accusation, she remembers the conversation years afterward and recalls that Duncan later married another coworker. Urania's memories of the details of her one-sided relationship with Duncan suggest regret over not being able to express love and shows that her inner desires are trapped behind protective walls.

The damage Urania experiences from her impaired relationship with her father is also compounded by the involvement of the dictator. In addition to the patriarchal relationship he had with those close to him, such as Cabral, Trujillo can also be viewed as a father figure to the entire country and to Urania. Trujillo was referred to as "El Benefactor de la Patria," describing the stability and support he brought to the country. His hands-on command over the nation's economy, press, and military created an intensely personal-style of leadership. By law all

Dominicans also had a plaque in their homes, reading, “*En esta casa Trujillo es el Jefe.*” Vargas Llosa comments that this practice placed Trujillo symbolically within every household (qtd in Barnabé 4). López-Calvo points out that there is also an interesting linguistic connection between the terms “dictator” and “father.” The Greek word for father, from which “despot” derives, means “head of household,” referring to the “master of children or slaves” (5). Dictatorships such as Trujillo’s frequently treated the people as such, making decisions for them and depriving them of basic liberties and agency.¹³ For Urania, who as a child was sheltered from the true nature of Trujillo, the dictator could easily be seen as a symbolic father-figure. Vargas Llosa seems to make this connection during the rape scene that takes place in Trujillo’s *Casa de Caoba*. Urania thinks to herself, “¿El senador Agustín Cabral la enviaba, ofrenda viva, al Benefactor y *Padre* de la Patria Nueva?” (550, my emphasis). Trujillo’s role as a paternal figure makes his abuse of Urania more emotionally traumatic. It is interesting that when Urania’s aunt, Adelina, asks Urania how she can speak disrespectfully about her father, Urania says, “Porque no era tan buen padre como crees, tía Adelina” (299). Here, Urania’s words about Cabral can also apply to Trujillo. While Trujillo played the role of father-figure, he abused his power.

Vargas Llosa uses Urania’s experience to express criticism of a regime that did not respect women. Trujillo was a well-know womanizer. In his government, women often became objects of pleasure or prestige. Lauren Derby explains that Trujillo used women to build his reputation: “His charisma was founded as much on the concrete numbers of women he acquired (and their class status) as it was on violence and the near mythological fear he inspired by eliminating men” (1113).

¹³ Köllmann also comments that the connection between patriarchy and dictatorship has been explored in other works of Latin American fiction, most prominently in García Márquez’s *El otoño de la Patriarca* (276, see note).

Trujillo's degrading treatment of women is one of the reasons Vargas Llosa chose to include Urania's character in *La fiesta del Chivo*. Referring to Trujillo's government, Vargas Llosa explains,

La dictadura fue particularmente cruel con la mujer. Como todas las dictaduras latinoamericanas tuvo un contenido machista; el machismo es un fenómeno latinoamericano. Pero eso, imbricado con lo que es un régimen autoritario, de poder absoluto, convierte a la mujer realmente en un objeto vulnerable a los peores atropellos.
(qtd in Barnabé 4)

Vargas Llosa was so concerned by Trujillo's mistreatment of women that the title of the novel actually refers to Urania's rape. Williams explains that the word *fiesta* from the title refers to the celebration over the assassination of Trujillo as well as to Urania because her father tells her she is going to a *fiesta* when he sends her to Trujillo's mansion (*Otra historia* 269-70). Williams points out that the story of Urania is intricately connected to the whole novel. Metaphorically, the rape of Urania symbolizes the rape of the country by the dictator. In many ways her story encapsulates Vargas Llosa's criticism of Trujillo.

In the novel, Trujillo's misogynistic attitude towards women eventually affects other people in society, as evidenced through the story of Agustín Cabral. Vargas Llosa includes several other examples of individuals who are negatively influenced by Trujillo. For instance, Urania discusses a story with her now-aged father about don Froilán, one of their neighbors when Urania was a child. At a party, with Froilán in attendance, Trujillo boasts about having an affair with his wife. In this situation, Froilán, though certainly humiliated, says nothing and acts undisturbed. Vargas Llosa incorporates several similar anecdotes in *La fiesta del Chivo*, describing women who were abused and left unprotected by the men in their lives. The story of Rosalía Perdomo, the daughter of a rich

family, is another example. Though Rosalía is very young, Ramfis Trujillo, the son of the dictator, notices her and flirts with her. Rosalía is unsuspecting of his character and innocently leaves school one day to accompany Ramfis and his friends. She is brutally raped and almost left for dead. Though Urania says the story is well-known in society (150), Ramfis is never punished for his actions. Through examples like this, Vargas Llosa shows that the machismo of the dictatorship influenced others, as in the case of Agustín Cabral.

In addition to the widespread disparagement of women, in *La fiesta del Chivo* there is also a surprising lack of female presence. The principle characters of the novel are predominately male, with the exception of Urania. The other central characters are Trujillo, and the group of men who plan and carry out his assassination. The individuals in Trujillo's storyline are his male officials, including the despicable leader of the SIM, Jonny Abbes García, and the controversial politician Joaquín Balaguer. Possibly the most notable absence of female presence is in Urania's life. The fact that Urania was raised without a mother (her mother died in a car accident when Urania was young) symbolizes a general lack of women's influence in society. The story of Urania's neighbor doña Froilán suggests that even the women present in her life were (forcibly) connected to the regime. Urania mentions that, as a child, doña Froilán became a maternal figure for her: "Urania la quería [a doña Froilán] por lo cariñoso que era, por los regalos, porque la llevaba al Country Club a bañarse en la piscina, y, sobre todo, por haber sido amiga de su mamá. Imaginaba que, si no se hubiera ido al cielo, su madre sería tan bella y señorial como [ella]" (75). Although as a child Urania admires her neighbor, she later realizes that doña Froilán was not a positive female role model. While visiting doña Froilán on one occasion, Urania notices that Trujillo comes to the Froilán residence while the husband is away. Urania, at the time, is too young to understand the situation

and is quickly sent home without an explanation. This initially confusing incident marks her and she reflects on it later in life while talking with her father. Vargas Llosa uses the lack of women and positive female role models in the life of his protagonist to illustrate the marginalization of women under the dictatorship.¹⁴

The dominance of male characters in *La fiesta del Chivo* shows a lack of balance, where exaggerated masculine values reach dangerous extremes. Writing about male/female priorities, Gilligan notes, “Power and separation secure the man in an identity achieved through work, but they leave him at a distance from others, who seem in some sense out of his sight” (163). In a similar vein, Baron-Cohen comments that “men tend to value power, politics, and competition” (32). It is interesting that values such as power and competition, when taken to extremes, can result in tyranny. While both male and female priorities are needed in society, they must balance each other. Gilligan writes,

[M]ale and female voices typically speak of the importance of different truths, the former through the role of separation as it defines and empowers the self, the latter of the ongoing process of attachment that creates and sustains the human community. (156)

Gilligan asserts that both sets of values are considered beneficial and necessary. Indeed, a healthy society would balance the two “truths” described by Gilligan. Unfortunately, in the society depicted in *La fiesta del Chivo*, men and women cannot balance each other because women are not respected. In many cases in *La fiesta del Chivo*, women are silenced, abused, or absent.

¹⁴ There is one notable exception: Sister Mary does become a friend and female role model to Urania. She greatly aids Urania in her escape to the United States. Still, the fact that the two maternal figures in her life as either absent or dominated by the regime is very significant.

The machismo that characterized the Trujillo government is unfortunately not new to Latin American politics. In *La fiesta del Chivo*, Vargas Llosa traces the evils of dictatorship to Latin American history. Urania tells her father, “En esos treinta y un años cristalizó todo lo malo que arrastrábamos, desde la conquista” (72). While this quote may refer to many things, it is significant that the Conquest often reinforced gender inequality. In *Reading Columbus*, Margarita Zamora writes of the connection between gender and the Discovery. She explains,

Columbian writing ultimately interprets the difference between Europeans and Indians as a gender difference, not in a sexual or biological sense, but as a difference ideologized and inscribed onto a cultural economy where gender becomes fundamentally a question of value, power, and dominance. (173)

Zamora explains how the native inhabitants of the New World, as well as the New World itself, were typically depicted in art and letters as female, while the conquistadors were portrayed as masculine. Thus male domination became an important metaphor in describing the Conquest.¹⁵ In a similar way, the rape of Urania becomes an essential parallel for describing the Trujillo dictatorship. As Williams points out, it is significant that the title of the novel refers to her rape.

¹⁵ Another interesting connection to the Conquest is described by López-Calvo. He writes, [T]he background of the Spanish conquest of America is a recurring topic of the *Trujillato* narratives. While it usually remains as a backdrop to the present situation of the Dominican Republic, the constant allusion to the colonial past clearly implies that these authors see the plague of caudillos and dictators in Latin America as a direct consequence or continuation of the *repartimientos* and *encomiendas* imposed by Spain during the colonial times. (39)

López-Calvo refers to the political system of government—*repartimientos* and *encomiendas*—during the Conquest and colonialization, where strong men or caudillos were given political power. As López-Calvo suggests, many authors see this early system of governance as the foundation for the Latin American dictator. The *encomienda* system encouraged the development of the ‘strong man’ and intensely personalized leadership, such as Trujillo’s.

Trujillo is like the conquistador who overpowers the country. Rape is associated with control and force. Likewise, Trujillo can be characterized for his abuse of the agency of the people.¹⁶

In the rape metaphor Urania represents her country, which is controlled by the dictator. In addition, she also becomes a symbol of Latin America. The conclusion to Urania's story is significant, and controversial, because her development can be seen as a metaphor for Vargas Llosa's vision of Latin America's future. The question arises—will Latin America, and Urania, remain trapped by despotic leaders, or is there hope of freedom? Michael Valdez Moses suggests that Vargas Llosa's view of Latin American politics (as well as the ending to Urania's story) is pessimistic:

What sets *The Feast of the Goat* apart from the other great Latin American dictator novels of García Márquez and Carpentier (works that conclude optimistically and, in good socialist fashion, in anticipation that the age of the tyrant is at last coming to its end) is its chilling sense that the past will continue to haunt both the present and the future. (70)

Valdez Moses suggests that if Vargas Llosa is less than optimistic, it is most likely because he has seen the rise, fall, and reinstatement of new despotic leaders in Latin America (6). Concerning Urania, Valdez Moses also writes, “Nor does Urania's fate provide much greater solace. She is forever marked and deformed by Trujillo's tyranny” (70).

Valdez Moses is not the only person to suggest that Urania's outcome is tragic. López-Calvo also writes that Urania is “trapped in her own mental torment” and that she “never truly becomes an active agent of her own liberation” (38). Part of the pessimism regarding Urania's conclusion can be related to an incident in the last page of the novel. While Urania is returning to her hotel from

¹⁶ The loss of agency is a constant theme in *La fiesta del Chivo* and one of the principle motivations of Trujillo's assassins. For example, one of the conspirators says, “[E]l Chivo había quitado a los hombres el atributo sagrado que les concedió Dios: el libre albedrío” (207).

visiting her cousins, a slightly inebriated tourist offers to buy her a drink. Urania overreacts by telling him, “Get out of my way you dirty drunk” (569). This scene suggests that in spite of her return to her native country and her visit with her father and family, that she still carries emotional baggage from the past. Henighan writes, “Estas últimas escenas confirman que [. . .] Urania todavía le debe sus rasgos personales al mundo de 1961” (378).¹⁷

Certainly Vargas Llosa suggests that Urania is in no way entirely *cured* of her past trauma. But while the conclusion of Urania’s story can be seen as pessimistic, there is also an indication of a positive resolution for her. When seen in the light of her developmental struggles, the final pages of Urania’s story actually demonstrate incredible growth and change. In the concluding chapter of *La fiesta del Chivo*, Urania breaks her thirty-five year silence and tells her story to several family members consisting of her aunt, cousins, and her cousin’s daughter Marianita. By sharing her story, Urania begins to re-develop relationships with her family members. As Susan J. Brison comments, the act of telling one’s story “reintegrates the survivor into a community, reestablishing bonds of trust and faith in others” (xi). Urania is a victim who has deeply desired human contact, but who has been kept from it by the self-protecting walls she has created. By communicating with her family, Urania reestablishes meaningful relationships with them. Though Urania expresses concern for sharing such a difficult story, her cousin reassures her, “Qué tú dices, muchacha. Ahora entiendo qué pasó contigo, ese silencio que nos dejaba tan dolidas. Por favor, Urania, vuelve a vernos. Somos tu familia, éste es tu país” (568). Marianita tells Urania, “Yo a ti te voy a querer mucho, tía Urania. [. . .] Te voy a escribir todos los meses. No importa si no me contestas” (568). Following this touching scene with her family, Urania leaves and returns to her hotel to pack, but

¹⁷ Henighan does admit that Urania grows, but feels she not change significantly and suggests that the conclusion to her story is pessimistic.

pauses for a moment. In the last line of the novel Urania decides, “Si Marianita¹⁸ me escribe, le contestaré todas las cartas” (569).¹⁹

Urania’s decision demonstrates important growth. During the entire novel until this moment, Vargas Llosa characterizes Urania as distant and unconnected to others. The fact that the final scenes of the novel show such a dramatic change in Urania is significant. By suggesting that his protagonist is dynamic, Vargas Llosa also expresses openness in his views of Latin America in general. Though the bloody aftermath of the Trujillo dictatorship is well-chronicled in the novel, Vargas Llosa suggests through Urania that the past does not have to reoccur in the present. Just as Urania overcomes some of her demons, Latin America may be able to break the cycle of dictatorship. If Urania’s growth can be seen as symbolic of Latin American development, these final pages suggest the author’s hope for Latin America.

¹⁸ Marianita’s name has caused me some reflection. It is interesting that two critical figures in Urania’s well-being are Sister Mary and Marianita. Sister Mary secures a scholarship for Urania and is the only person that Urania really communicates with for thirty-five years. Marianita is the family member who is able to help Urania decide to change and maintain her newly reestablished relationships with her family. These women are life-lines for Urania. It is possible their names are connected to the Virgin Mary, a symbol of salvation. Whether intentional or accidental, religious or otherwise, this interesting correlation seems to suggest that Urania’s salvation comes through connection and relationships.

CONCLUSION

Both Julia Alvarez and Mario Vargas Llosa make female experience an important theme in their novels addressing the Trujillo dictatorship. This thesis examines how ideas of female developmental psychology lend to a more profound understanding of the novels *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *La fiesta del Chivo*. In the analysis of these books I have often relied on the findings of Carol Gilligan to focus on the importance of relationships in the process of female maturation. Alvarez and Vargas Llosa utilize the idea of connection to others to show the development of their protagonists. In the first novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Alvarez illustrates the value of relationships as the Mirabals experience significant rites of passage. Some key examples include Minerva's first menstruation and Patria's call to the revolution. Through these and other events the Mirabals mature and thus increase in their ability to care for others. Mate comforts women struggling in prison when she herself endures many trials, Minerva reaches out to her illegitimate sisters and helps Margarita pay for her education, Patria joins the revolution knowing the dangers her choice places on her family, and Dedé becomes a mother for her deceased sisters' children. The Mirabal siblings' ability to show kindness contrasts with Trujillo's style of governance, which Alvarez describes as violent, selfish and immature. Although Trujillo falls short, Alvarez shows true strength through the Mirabal sisters' selflessness and warmth.

Vargas Llosa, like Alvarez, focuses on female development in *La fiesta del Chivo*. His protagonist, however, suffers a traumatic initiation that leads to inhibited growth. The novel begins with the image of a woman who at the age of forty-nine is lonely and deeply wounded because of her past. Vargas Llosa emphasizes Urania's isolation thereby stressing the seriousness of the

emotional injury she received at a formative time in her life. Urania is thus prevented from developing along healthy paths of female maturation. She suffers inner frustration and lack of fulfillment and prevents others from being a part of her life. Vargas Llosa uses Urania's truncated development to depict the unjust treatment of women during the dictatorship. Indeed, the Dominican Republic of Urania's youth is described as highly *machista* and women in Vargas Llosa's novel are either absent or controlled by Trujillo and those who work for him. More importantly, the Generalissimo's domination of women such as Urania is symbolic of the unchecked power he had over the Dominican Republic for thirty-one years and his rape of Urania is a metaphor for the suffering of all Dominicans during his reign. Throughout that time many were denied basic rights and Urania's story shares insight into their struggles. Though still scarred, years pass and Urania is able to look beyond the trauma she suffered in order to reach out to her family. Her progress at the novel's conclusion represents hope that the cycle of tyranny can be broken.

Although Urania's story differs greatly from the Mirabals', there is value in comparing the two. Ironically, the differences between the Mirabals and Urania often speak of similar truths. The role of connection in the protagonists' development is crucial to both stories, although it is often expressed differently. For example, Alvarez's characters are frequently able to look past the abuse they suffer and respond to the needs of others in their lives. *In the Time of the Butterflies* focuses on the strengths the Mirabals develop as they mature into women who actively take a stance against Trujillo's oppressive dictatorship. In contrast, Urania is traumatized to a point that she is unable to speak of what happened to her. She closes herself off from family members, friends and even her own country as she lives in exile for thirty-five years. Urania's stunted growth is evidenced by her lack of connection and reflects the debilitating nature of dictatorship on the individual. It is

noteworthy, however, that some healing occurs as Urania begins to rebuild her relationship with her family. While the experiences of all the female protagonists are quite different, *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *La fiesta del Chivo* both attest to the power of connection in women's lives.

The values that shape the Mirabal sisters and Urania Cabral are particularly meaningful in relation to dictatorship. The two novels examined in this thesis address the world-wide issue of the mistreatment of women under oppressive governments. They depict how detrimental abusive regimes can be to women and to the individual. The stories of the Mirabals and Urania show that the discrimination of women is a tragedy that has serious implications in society. Where women are not valued their important perspectives may be lost. In particular, Alvarez emphasizes the contributions women can make by expounding on the Mirabals' values. In contrast, Vargas Llosa shows what can happen when female priorities are lost or diminished. By including the stories of women in their discussion of dictatorship, Alvarez and Vargas Llosa show that female experience and perspectives are valuable and essential to building a healthy community.

In the Time of the Butterflies and *La fiesta del Chivo* reflect the historical reality of machismo in Latin America under dictatorships. In *La fiesta del Chivo* Urania comments that many of the evils of the Trujillo dictatorship trace their roots to colonization. Indeed, the colonial tradition of dividing land among a few powerful men fostered the creation of the Latin American dictator. While dictatorship continues to exist in some countries today, there is some indication of change. It is significant that Latin America has seen a rise in democratically-elected female presidents in recent years including Michelle Bachelet of Chile (2006-2010), Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-present) of Argentina and the newly elected Dilma Rousseff of Brazil. This phenomenon suggests a positive change in the Latin American political system regarding the status of women. Perhaps the

optimistic twist at the end of *La fiesta del Chivo* is not unfounded and the cycle of dictatorship and its accompanying machismo may be eroding in Latin America as women find their voice in the political system.

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