

RE-ENVISIONING HISTORY: MEMORY, MYTH AND FICTION IN LITERARY
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE TRUJILLATO

By

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In Memoriam
Alvaro Félix Bolaños
Luis Cosby

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	4
ABSTRACT	7
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	9
Historical Amnesia	10
The 1937 Massacre of Haitian Migrants	13
Las Mirabal	14
The Trujillo era	15
Classification of Narratives	16
Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina	17
The United States Intervention of 1916 - 1924	22
The Role of the United States in Trujillo’s Regime	23
Narrating the Nation	26
A Matter of Perspective in Narrating the Trujillo era.....	27
Turn Towards History: New Historicism & Cultural Materialism.....	29
Fiction, History and Truth	29
The Burden of History	34
Conclusion	35
2 LITERATURE AS MEMORY: THE 1937 MASSACRE OF HAITIAN CITIZENS AS NARRATED IN <u>EL MASSACRE SE PASA A PIE</u> AND <u>THE FARMING OF BONES</u> ...	37
Introduction.....	37
Narrating Horror	40
The Official Word: Silence.....	42
A Witness Testifies: Freddy Prestol Castillo.....	44
A Survivor’s Tale: Edwidge Danticat.....	48
Exile, Solitude & Sterility.....	53
Victim or Perpetrator?	56
Haitian Response to the Massacre	61
Dominican Reaction to the Massacre	64
Racism as Official Discourse: <i>Antihaitianismo</i>	65
Haitians as Thieves	71
The Dangers of Nationalism	72
Imagining Trujillo.....	76
Conclusion	77
3 CHALLENGING “EL JEFE” IN <u>LAS MIRABAL</u> AND <u>IN THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES</u>	82

Introduction.....	82
The Mirabal Sisters – Historical Background	83
<u>Las Mirabal</u> : A Dominican Interpretation of the Sisters	85
<u>In the Time of the Butterflies</u> : The Voice of the Dominican Diaspora.	87
<u>Las Mirabal</u> and <u>In the Time of the Butterflies</u> : Providing Testimony	89
Resisting the Reader in <u>In the Time of the Butterflies</u>	91
Narrative Structure in <u>Las Mirabal</u> and <u>In the Time of the Butterflies</u>	93
A Matter of Perspective	95
A Cure For Historical Amnesia	96
Narrating the Dominican Republic	98
Dominican Men: Too Afraid to Fight Tyranny?	99
The United States Military and Trujillo: The Weakening of the Dominican Male.....	102
Racism in the Dominican Republic	104
Dominican Nationalism and United States Imperialism	107
Resisting Patriarchy in the Dominican Republic	111
Feminism and Patriarchy in the Trujillo era.....	111
Trujillo, The Dictator: The Second Level of Patriarchy.....	115
The Heroine and the Tyrant.....	117
Minerva Mirabal: Narrating A National Heroine	119
The Mirabal Family	119
Motherhood and Love of Country	121
The Mythification of Minerva	122
Conclusion	126
4 PORTRAIT OF A DICTATORSHIP: “THE ERA OF TRUJILLO” IN <u>CEMENTERIO</u> <u>SIN CRUCES</u> AND <u>LA FIESTA DEL CHIVO</u>	131
Introduction.....	131
Writing to Correct a Wrong: Andrés Requena	137
Dictators and Cowards.....	139
Requena’s Cry for Help: <u>Cementerio sin cruces</u>	141
<u>Cementerio sin cruces</u> : Providing testimony	146
An Outsider Looks In: Mario Vargas Llosa	147
Re-imagining the Dominican Republic during the era of Trujillo	150
The role of women during the era of Trujillo	155
Portrait of a Dictator	162
Conclusion	165
5 CONCLUSION.....	168
LIST OF REFERENCES	181
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	196

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RE-ENVISIONING HISTORY: MEMORY, MYTH, AND FICTION IN LITERARY
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE TRUJILLATO

By

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This study analyzes how literary narrative perceives and represents 20th century Dominican history, in particular Rafael Leonidas Trujillo's dictatorship. The narratives analyzed in this study are: El Masacre se pasa a pie (1973), by the Dominican Freddy Prestol Castillo, The Farming of Bones (1998), by the Haitian-American Edwidge Danticat, Las Mirabal (1976), by Ramón Alberto Ferreras, In the Time of Butterflies (1995), by the Dominican-American Julia Álvarez, Cementerio sin cruces (1949), by the exiled Dominican author Andrés Requena, and La Fiesta del Chivo (2000), by the well-know Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa. The narratives selected share much in common in that they are all to greater and lesser extents historical-political narratives. They are also narratives of dictatorship and focus on the experience of living under a dictatorship, not the dictator. Additionally, the selected narratives can also be categorized as those written during the Trujillato and those written after Trujillo's assassination. This is important in that his death allowed for the re-writing of the official history without fear of repercussion.

Of particular interest to this study is how the literary texts chosen reconstruct Dominican historical discourses thereby creating new interpretations. This study also focuses on the development of Dominican national identity or identities, (black, white, Indian, masculine,

feminine, etc.) and their representation in literature. The Dominican historical event or period that will be studied is the 'Trujillato' or the era of Trujillo (1930-1961), and more specifically within this time frame, the massacre of the Haitians along the Dominican-Haitian border in 1937, and the imprisonment and execution of the Mirabal sisters in 1962. For each historical event, I have selected two novels: one written by a Dominican and another written by either an 'outsider' or someone who is 'marginalized'. This analysis allows for a better understanding of how national identities are constantly being re-negotiated and of how Dominican history is constantly being recorded and re-written by both Dominican and non-Dominican authors.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Without memory, our existence would be barren and opaque, like a prison cell into which no light penetrates; like a tomb which rejects the living . . . if anything can, it is memory that will save humanity.

- Elie Wiesel, “Hope, Despair and Memory”

El escritor ha sido, es y seguirá siendo un descontento. Nadie que esté satisfecho es capaz de escribir, nadie que esté de acuerdo, reconciliado con la realidad, cometería el ambicioso desatino de inventar realidades verbales. La vocación literaria nace del desacuerdo de un hombre con el mundo, de la intuición de deficiencias, vacíos y escorias a su alrededor.

- Mario Vargas Llosa, “La literatura es fuego”

The central focus of this study is on how literary narrative perceives and represents some events in 20th century Dominican history. Specifically, it analyses the way in which the dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, the 1937 massacre of Haitian citizens along the Dominican-Haitian border and the revolutionary and national heroine Minerva Mirabal, have been narrated by some representative writers, in Dominican as well as other literatures. It will also focus on how the nation has been narrated and how these narratives engage with and challenge earlier accounts of the same event.

Literature is important in the study of history, as it narrates the human experience of history. History begins where memory ends. Both are significant in the study of past events. It is also significant for future events. Memory, as noted by Elie Wiesel in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, can save humanity. Additionally, Gayle Green explains that “memory is our means of connecting past and present and constructing a self and versions of experience we can live with. To doubt it is to doubt ourselves, to lose it is to lose ourselves; yet doubt it we must, for it is treacherous” (293). Literature adds an important element to memory. As Mario Vargas

Llosa notes, “La literatura nos da una imagen que es una imagen que parece viva, que en cierto modo es viva, y que la memoria no puede darnos” (Felipe González 36).

This study includes narrative of both memory and history. Some authors write from memory, others from a historical distance. All aim to keep the Trujillo era alive in collective memory. With Green’s words in mind this study critically examines the history being recreated in these narratives. This analysis will allow for a better understanding of this dictator’s literary representation and of how Dominican history is being recorded and re-written in literature.

Historical Amnesia

As time moves forward, it is easy for history to be lost, forgotten from historical and cultural memory. The ex-Spanish president, Felipe González (1982-1996), notes that “los españoles no conocen a Franco, la generación con cuarenta años ya no saben quién era Franco” (37). Similarly even Dominicans who suffered under Trujillo, one of the world’s most brutal and longest dictatorships, are forgetting him. The journalist and author Bernard Diederich offers an anecdote that serves as a compelling example:

A little boy playing under a huge shaded tree in the backyard of the Juan Tomás Díaz house looked puzzled when a recent visitor asked if it was the garage they had discovered the body of *El Jefe*. [The boy responds] “What *Jefe*?”. (264)¹

Some academics believe that the act of forgetting is important in the creation of national unity. For example, Ernest Renan in “The Meaning of Nationality” explains that, “the essential element of a nation is that all its individuals must have many things in common, but must also have forgotten many things” (137). This idea repeated by Benedict Anderson in Imagined Communities (2000). However, it is precisely this forgetting, which Renan believes is an important element in the formation of nationalism, that the narratives in this study are fighting

¹ The use of italics is the author’s.

against. Moreover, Julia Álvarez in “A Message from Julia” observes, “The Czech novelist Milan Kundera says in one of his books that the struggle against power ‘is the struggle of memory against forgetting’”. These authors seek to remember and to ensure that future generations will also know the Trujillo era. This act of remembrance can be subversive, as Kundera has noted. Remembering is also important for change. As Wiesel states:

Remembering is a noble and necessary act. The call of memory, the call *to* memory, reaches us from the very dawn of history. No commandment figures so frequently, so insistently in the Bible. . . . New Year’s Day, *Rosh Hashana*, is also called *Yom Hazikaron*, the day of memory. On that day, the day of universal judgment, man appeals to God to remember: our salvation depends on it. If God wishes to remember our suffering, all will be well; if He refuses, all will be lost. Thus, the rejection of memory becomes a divine curse, one that would doom us to repeat past disasters, past wars. (“Hope”)

In the same vein as Wiesel, Green believes that “memory is especially important to anyone who cares about change, for forgetting dooms us to repetition” (291). Yet problematically, memory is not infallible. As Green observes:

Memory revises, reorders, refigures, resignifies; it includes or omits, embellishes or represses, decorates or drops, according to imperatives of its own. Far from being a trustworthy describer or ‘reality,’ it is a shaper and a shape shifter that takes liberties with the past In fact, memory is a creative writer, Mother of the Muses, . . . maker of stories – the stories by which we construct meaning through temporality and assure ourselves that time past is not time lost. (294)

It is not only memory that provides an obstacle to the understanding of past events. Holocaust survivors, like the prisoners who experienced unimaginable torture in Trujillo’s prisons and those who survived the 1937 Haitian genocide, have found it difficult to narrate their experiences. Of this Wiesel explains:

We tried. It was not easy. At first, because of the language; language failed us. We would have to invent a new vocabulary, for our own words were inadequate, anemic. And then too, the people around us refused to listen; and even those who listened refused to believe; and even those who believed could not comprehend. Of course they could not. Nobody could. The experience of the camps defies comprehension. (“Hope”)

As one reads of the atrocities committed by United States Marines in the Dominican Republic, the torture political prisoners endured under Trujillo, or the senseless and brutal killing of Haitian infants by Trujillo's army, it is indeed difficult to comprehend. And yet, we must comprehend if we hope to prevent it from happening again and as Wiesel notes "save humanity" ("Hope").

Keeping the memory of the Trujillo era alive is only one of the reasons the six authors selected for this study write. As Vargas Llosa notes an author is "un eterno aguaFiestas . . . [un] perturbador social". He continues:

Es preciso, por eso, recordar a nuestras sociedades lo que les espera. Advertirles que la literatura es fuego, que ella significa inconformismo y rebelión, que la razón del ser del escritor es la protesta, la contradicción y la crítica. ("Literatura")

According to him, authors write because they are unhappy with the world they live in, so they create new ones. The authors in this study, some who rewrite history from memory (Prestol Castillo, Ferreras, Requena) and others who interpret it from a greater distance (Danticat, Álvarez, Vargas Llosa) recreate and reinvent the Trujillo era using the voices of the marginalized and the deceased, thereby resuscitating them and allowing them to tell their story. Their act of remembrance is both subversive and yet necessary for humanity.

Since this study is interested in how Dominican history has been perceived and represented, for each historical event I have chosen two narratives: one written by a Dominican author who is both temporally and geographic close to the historical event and another written by a non-Dominican author, who is distanced temporally and geographical from the narrated event. These narratives can further be categorized as those written during the Trujillo regime, which begins August 16, 1930, and those written after Trujillo's assassination on May 30, 1961. His death was important because it allowed for the re-writing of the official history without fear of repercussion. According to Doris Sommer and Esteban Torres, aside from freedom of

expression Dominican critics “agree that Dominican art can be divided into two major period before and after the tyrant” (277). This division is based more on ideology than chronology. As they explain, after Trujillo’s death several exiled writers returned to the Dominican Republic.

These authors:

[brought] with them a series of questions . . . about the meaning of their work. The social upheaval was so severe that their intellectual and artistic intervention was not noticed until later, when the habits of criticism and dialogue were established . . . This urgency and catharsis tended to limit the production and the impact of literary work. (277-8)

This lasted until the 1965 U.S. invasion of the country, which would not only polarize the country but also initiate a type of transcendental epic style of literature (Sommer and Torres 278).

The 1937 Massacre of Haitian Migrants

The first historical event studied is the massacre of thousands of Haitian citizens by the Dominican army, along the Dominican-Haitian border in October of 1937. The massacre occurred early in Trujillo’s dictatorship and served to illustrate that his cruelty had no boundaries. It also helped him better define what it meant to be a ‘Dominican’: as in it is not being ‘Haitian’. Haitians represented the necessary ‘other’ needed to create a national identity. Haitians were black and of African descent. Dominicans, according to Trujillo and Joaquín Balaguer, were white and of European roots. The narratives El Masacre se pasa a pie (1973), by the Dominican Freddy Prestol Castillo and The Farming of Bones (1998), by the Haitian-American Edwidge Danticat, offer differing literary representations of the massacre. Prestol Castillo was a witness to the genocide. He claims that he wrote his narrative during the massacre and that, out of fear of it being discovered by Trujillo’s henchman, he buried the manuscript until 1973, when it was published. In his narrative Prestol Castillo seeks the understanding of his reader and attempts to explain how Dominicans could have participated in such a horrific act. In

contrast, Danticat was born in Haiti in 1969 and came to the United States when she was twelve years old. Her narrative is told from the viewpoint of a female Haitian survivor of the genocide and reflects a feminine and Haitian perspective. In comparison with Prestol Castillo, she is distanced both chronologically and geographically from the historical event.

Although it happened 80 years ago the massacre still has a profound impact on the Dominican psyche. As Michelle Wucker explains:

The memory of what happened at the Massacre River in 1937 is still vivid in the minds of the islanders. Even now, it is nearly impossible for Dominicans and Haitians to think of each other without some trace of the tragedy of their mutual history that took place that year. (Why The Cocks Fight 44)

The xenophobia that led to the massacre is still evident in Dominican society today. In 2001 in Santo Domingo, a book titled Geopolítica de la isla de Santo Domingo: Migración haitiana y seguridad nacional by Pelegrín Castillo Semán was published. It readily illustrates the feelings of xenophobia towards Haitians by Dominicans, some of whom view the Haitians as the source of all Dominican problems. This racial intolerance can also be seen in the 1930's in the works of both Manuel Peña Batlle and Joaquín Balaguer. More recently, it was seen in Dominicans treatment of Haitians in the 1990's. In June of 1991, U.S. Congressional Hearings were held regarding the unacceptable working conditions of Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic. In partial response, Dominican President Joaquín Balaguer who had served as Trujillo's puppet president, ordered the expulsion of all Haitians under the age of 16 or over the age of 60 living in the Dominican Republic. Six to seven thousand Haitians were forcibly expelled and an estimated 25,000 fled in fear (Corte, et al. 97).

Las Mirabal

The second historical event analyzed is the life and death of three of the four Mirabal Sisters at the hands of Trujillo. The Mirabal sisters, who were well-known anti-Trujillo activists,

occurred at the very end of the regime (November 25, 1960) and is credited, by some historians, with providing the motivation needed to finally assassinate him. Today, Dominicans view the three Mirabal sisters as national heroines and an important monument stands in their honor in Santo Domingo. Since they were executed only months before Trujillo's assassination, there weren't any literary narratives on this event written during the Trujillo era. Therefore, the two narratives selected were written after the death of Trujillo. The Dominican narrative is the fictional biography Las Mirabal (1976), by Ramón Alberto Ferreras, who was an anti-Trujillo leader. He was imprisoned many times by Trujillo and Balaguer and dedicated the narrative to political prisoners. Undaunted, by his repeated visits to La Victoria prison, Ferreras criticizes Balaguer in Las Mirabal and publishes it while Balaguer is president. The second narrative studied is In the Time of Butterflies (1995), by the Dominican-American Julia Álvarez. It is also a fictional biography. The title makes reference to fact that Mirabal sisters were also known by their code name 'Las Mariposas' or 'The Butterflies'.

The Trujillo era

Providing a general view of the Trujillo regime, I have selected the following accounts: Cementerio sin cruces (1949), by the exiled Dominican author Andrés Requena and La Fiesta del Chivo (2000), by the well-know Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa. Trujillo's active libido and numerous conquests of women were legendary, prompting Dominicans to nickname him, "El Chivo", "The Goat" in English. As Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheenbrand explain, the goat "symbolizes the powers of procreation, the life force, the libido and fertility . . ." (435).

Interestingly, while each narrates the Trujillo era, both authors wrote for a non-Dominican reader. It is important to consider that Cementerio sin cruces was written during the Trujillo era, which led to Requena's assassination in New York City, in March of 1952. He had, at one point, been a Trujillo supporter and had served as a Dominican diplomat in Chile. He later became an

editor of an anti-Trujillo newspaper and a known anti-Trujillo leader. Although he was in exile at the time it was written, his narrative provides an inside view of the political situation in the Dominican Republic. Conversely, Vargas Llosa, who writes his account forty years after Trujillo's death, does not have first hand knowledge of the inside workings of this dictator's regime.

Classification of Narratives

Narratives can be classified into dozens of genres and sometimes they fall into more than one. While all six narratives focus on the Trujillo era, only one is a historical novel. There is no one definition for this genre and the definitions offered by literary critics vary. The differences in definition, for the most part, are based on the relationship of the narrative time with the author's lifetime and the extent to which the historical events and characters are present in the novel. Seymour Menton in his study of what he calls Latin America's new historical novel, defines it as “. . . novels whose action takes place completely (in some cases, predominantly) in the past – arbitrarily defined here as a past not directly experience by the author” (16).

Likewise, William W. Moseley in his study on the Chilean historical novel defines it “as a fictitious narrative of some length, dealing with a period prior to the conscious lifetime of the author, and built upon an historical framework of major importance” (338). However, David Cowart in History and the Contemporary Novel (1989) offers an alternate definition. He writes:

I myself prefer to define historical fiction simply and broadly as fiction in which the past figures with some prominence. Such fiction does not require historical personages or events . . . nor does it have to be set at some specified remove in time. Thus I count as historical fiction any novel in which a historical consciousness manifests itself strongly in either the characters or the action. (6)

Both Menton and Moseley maintain that the time of the novel should be prior to the author's lifetime, while for Cowart this distinction is not necessary. For the purposes of this study, the definition offered by Menton and Moseley will be used. According to it, all of the narratives

included in this study, with the exception of The Farming of Bones, would be excluded because they include the author's own lifetime.

Similarly, there is no one official definition for the 'novel of dictator'. Carlos Pacheco defines it as "todas aquellas obras de prosa narrativa cuyo tema principal sea la figura del dictador (aunque él no sea necesariamente el personaje protagónico) o el régimen dictatorial" (38). He does not distinguish between novels of dictator and novels of dictatorship and uses the terms interchangeably. On the other hand, Angel Rama, uses the term, "novelas sobre dictadores" (15). According to him, the authors of these works "no buscan incorporar al panteón de las glorias nacionales a los dictadores y a sus esbirros, sino que pretenden comprender un pasado reciente cuya sombra se proyecta hasta hoy" (15). Unlike Pacheco, this author of this study does not consider the terms interchangeable. Therefore, while all of the narratives include Trujillo as a character, none of the narratives selected are novels of dictator as defined here because he is not a major character in any of the narratives studied. The focus of these narratives is not Trujillo, the dictator, but the experience of living under his regime. Given that these texts seek to understand the past, by allowing Trujillo's victims, some posthumously, to provide testimony, all of the narratives studied would be "novelas sobre dictadores". They are also narratives of dictatorship since in each text the oppression of the Trujillo era is a central theme.

Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina

The 20th century saw a long list of dictators rise to power among them; Idi Amin, the Emperor Bokassa, Papa Doc Duvalier, Francisco Franco, Adolf Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Benito Mussolini, Augusto Pinochet, Pol Pot, Mobutu Sese Seko, Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-tung and Rafael Leónidas Trujillo. They told their people they and the nation were one; that they *were* the nation. While many brought death and destruction to their people, few were murdered or overthrown. Rafael Leónidas Trujillo is one of the few who were murdered.

For more than three decades, Trujillo *was* the Dominican Republic.² While dictators usually achieve power as the result of wars and violence, Trujillo forced his way into power with the help of the United States military. Trujillo got his start in politics during the United States occupation of the Dominican Republic (1916-24) when he joined the Dominican National Police force created by the U.S. Marines. He rose rapidly through the ranks as he and the newly created police force helped the marines defeat a Dominican resistance movement. In 1930 he used the National Police force, which had been created, armed and supported by the United States government, to seize political power from President Horacio Vásquez. Trujillo staged fraudulent elections claiming he had more votes than there were registered voters. It is for this reason that, according to Howard Wiarda, “Noel Henríquez called Trujillo ‘the bastard son of the occupation forces,’ and why the United States is often held accountable by Dominicans for the entire Trujillo era” (9). Trujillo’s dictatorship, which spanned from 1930 the year he deceitfully became president of his country, to 1961 when he was assassinated, was one of the longest, cruelest, and most absolute in modern times. Until Fidel Castro of Cuba surpassed him, Trujillo had ruled longer than any other leader in Latin America. As Wiarda explains:

The Trujillo regime was probably the strongest and most absolute dictatorship ever to be established in the world. Trujillo did not share power with anyone but maintained nearly absolute authority in his own hands. It would not be accurate to label his system with Left or Right, Nazi or Fascist, for the Trujillo regime was essentially the story of a single individual and his personal power. (179)

In an effort to take ownership of and control the Dominican Republic, Trujillo monopolized the nation’s economic system. He took personal control of large parts of the Dominican economy

² Useful analyses of the Trujillo regime include: Trujillo: The Life and Times of a Caribbean Dictator (1986) by Robert D. Crassweller, La Era de Trujillo (1999) by Jesús de Galíndez, and Dictatorship and Development (1970) by Howard J. Wiarda.

and expropriated the sugar estates and cattle ranches of political opponents.³ In short, Trujillo ran the Dominican Republic as if it were a business he owned. At the time of his death in 1961 Trujillo was worth 800 million dollars [5.3 billion dollars today] (Rogozinski 258).

As part of Trujillo's effort to merge himself and the Dominican Republic into one, he cultivated a national ideology which had three main components: *hispanofilia*, a Spanish term which has no English equivalent and means love or admiration of Spain, anti-Haitianism and anticommunism. As Roberto Cassá et al. explains, Trujillo's vision of nationalism believed that:

El dominicano era mejor que el *otro*, que el enemigo, el haitiano, recurrencia ajustada al carácter reaccionario de ese pretendido nacionalismo. De ahí que la esencia hispánica tuviese por correlato obligado el enfrentamiento nacional con Haití – magnificado hasta proporciones aterradoras – como categoría fundamentalísima de la constitución de la propia nación dominica. (60)

It is Trujillo's hard line towards communism that assured him support from the United States.

The cruelty and sadism Trujillo's regime is difficult to imagine. He organized an efficient network of informers and security forces creating a reign of terror. He ordered the assassination of countless Dominicans, among them the Mirabal sisters, the subject of chapter three of this study, and the author Andrés Requena, who is the subject of chapter four of this work. Trujillo also killed non-Dominicans. He was responsible for the deaths of the Spaniards José Almoína in Mexico City and Jesús de Galíndez in New York City.⁴ Most famously, in 1960 Trujillo attempted, but failed, to assassinate the Venezuelan President Rómulo Betancourt. Betancourt

³ For more information see Frank Moya Pons' "Import-Substitution Industrialization Policies in the Dominican Republic, 1925-61".

⁴ Almoína, a Spaniard, had been Trujillo's private secretary from 1945-1947. He had published a lavishly pro-Trujillo book titled Yo fui secretario de Trujillo (1950). Interestingly he was also the author of a book titled Una satrapía en el Caribe (1949), which denounced the Trujillo regime, and was published under the name Gregorio Bustamante. It was this book that would cost the author his life. In 1960 while living in exile in Mexico City, he was run down by a truck and shot by Trujillo's men. Galíndez published his doctoral dissertation titled La Era de Trujillo, which infuriated the dictator. He was living in New York at the time of his kidnapping on March 12, 1956. He was flown to the Dominican Republic where he was apparently murdered. The English translation of his work is titled The Era of Trujillo, Dominican Dictator (1973). The American pilot Gerald Murphy, who flew Galíndez to the Dominican Republic, later disappeared himself.

had harshly criticized Trujillo's brutal regime, infuriating the dictator. However, Trujillo's greatest expression of cruelty came in October 1937 when he ordered the massacre of thousands of Haitian citizens living along the Dominican–Haitian border; this is the subject of the second chapter of this study. Despite his record of human rights violations Wiarda notes that:

If not positively favorable, United State policy toward Trujillo consistently remained benevolently neutral; and it was not until the last two years of his rule that the traditionally warm relations began to cool. (137)

Trujillo also had a penchant for self-adulation and Dominicans were constantly reminded of his greatness. He renamed Pico Duarte, the highest mountain in the Antilles, Pico Trujillo and Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic and the oldest city in the Western Hemisphere located in Trujillo province, Ciudad Trujillo. Every main street in every city bore his name and every park was adorned with busts of Trujillo, totaling more than 1,800 in Santo Domingo alone (Zuluaga 30). As Wucker notes the dictator was “[o]nce listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the world leader who build the most statues in his own honor” (69). In every business, hung a plaque declaring that, “In this house, Trujillo is boss”, on water pumps, “Trujillo alone gives us water to drink”, on a group home for senior citizens, “Trujillo is the only one who gives us shelter”, and along roadsides signs proclaimed, “Thank You, Trujillo”. José Almoina notes, “La megalomanía de Trujillo es posiblemente el caso más pintoresco de cuantos puede ofrecer la historia del mundo. Hay que reconocer que en esto no ha tenido par el dictador dominicano” (Una satrapía en el Caribe 48). Not to be outdone by other generals around the world, Trujillo became the world's first five star general (William Krehm 170). His own son Ramfis became a colonel at the age of four, most likely making him the youngest colonel in history; at age eleven he would become a General. Trujillo also likened himself to Jesus Christ and the sign “God and Trujillo” appeared everywhere, even in flashing neon along roadsides. Dominican's first response to Trujillo's death as Wucker notes, “was to tear down the many

monuments he had build to himself [and change] the name of the capital back to Santo Domingo from Ciudad Trujillo” (Why the Cocks Fight 69).

Trujillo also gave himself numerous awards and titles. Miguel Collado observes Trujillo was “[e]l tirano de los mil nombres” (16). His list of titles is almost endless and include the following: His Excellency Generalísimo Doctor Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, the Honorable First Magistrate of the Nation, General of Generals, Benefactor of the Fatherland, Restorer of the Financial Independence of the Dominican Republic and Father of the New Dominion. Additionally, he awarded himself many medals prompting Dominicans to give him the pejorative nickname “Chapitas”, referring to the use of bottle caps (chapitas in Spanish) as toy medals by Dominican children. Not surprisingly, in his obituary “End of the Dictator” in Time he was described as a “medal-jingling dictator.”

Trujillo’s megalomania was not limited to the Dominican Republic. In 1936, a year before the Haitian massacre, Trujillo arranged a joint nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize for himself and Haitian President Sténio Joseph Vincent. Among the people nominating him was Max Henríquez Ureña, a Dominican intellectual and statesman. It was rejected on the grounds that Trujillo had seized power militarily. The award instead went to another Latin American, Carlos Saavedra Lamas for his work in ending the Chaco War between Paraguay and Bolivia (1932-1935).

Trujillo has been immortalized in novels, movies, plays, and music although in his case truth was stranger than fiction. For example, the Trujillo era can be seen in motion pictures such as the El misterio Galíndez (2003). The movie is based on a novel by Spanish writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán and focuses on the abduction, torture, and death of Jesús Galíndez. In the 2001 motion picture In the Time of the Butterflies based on the novel by Julia Álvarez of the

same name is released. Also, in 2005 the motion picture La Fiesta del Chivo, based on the novel by Mario Vargas Llosa of the same name is released. The director is the Peruvian director Luis Llosa, Vargas Llosa's cousin. As Galíndez observed, "The human side of this political personage is most interesting and worthy of a novel" ("Inside" 241). Likewise Krehm notes:

[. . .] the grotesque dictatorlets that have stalked through the earlier chapters of this book were summed up and outdone in the person of the Dominican Republic president, doctor and generalissimo [sic] Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. There the racketeering of the Nicaraguan Somoza cohabitated with the sadism of the Guatemalan Ubico under a crazy quilt of exhibitionism; in fiction such a character would be torn apart by the critics for its slapdash improbability. (169)

For this reason, among others, historians and artists, both Dominican and non-Dominican alike, have found Trujillo to be an irresistible subject. It is also for this reason that narrating Trujillo is so difficult.

The United States Intervention of 1916 - 1924

The United States intervention of 1916, without which Trujillo would not have risen to power, had a profound affect on the Dominican psyche. As Juan Bosch describes:

Era una agresión imperialista, un abuso imperdonable de fuerza ejercido en un país débil; pero el pueblo dominicano, con el alma envenenada por la pócima caudillista, no tenía ya capacidad para reaccionar. . . . La República había muerto, y su cadáver iba a dar vida a una nueva era, que Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, colocándose a la altura de Cristo, bautizaría con su nombre. (119)

Similarly, Américo Lugo maintains that, "Aquí no ha habido guerra con los Estados Unidos de América: ni hemos sido vencidos, ni hemos aceptado, sino sufrido su ocupación" (20-1).

Dominicans had little choice but to accept Trujillo as a leader for they knew that rejecting him would likely lead to another United States invasion. As Vargas Llosa explains in an interview with Ramona Koval:

I think one of the most depressing aspects of a dictatorship, any kind of dictatorship, is that when you study it, when you investigate, when you approach the phenomenon, you discover that a dictatorship wouldn't be possible without many accomplices. Many, many accomplices. In certain cases—in most cases, I would say—with a large support of society

for very different reasons, but in a given moment, it as if a very large section of a society decides to abdicate their right to be free, to participate in social and political life; and to transfer these rights to a big man. And without this abdication, I don't think someone like Trujillo or all these great dictators in history would have been possible. (“Interview with Mario Vargas Llosa,” Books & Writing's Summer Season)

However, some Dominicans reacted to the various occupations with nationalism. Lugo states that, “El Nacionalismo es la defensa de nuestro carácter original español, es la defensa de la libertad de las generaciones dominicanas del futuro, es la defensa de nuestro pasado glorioso, es la defensa de la Gran Patria Hispano-Americana” (16). It is this Dominican nationalism that would resist United States imperial efforts. As Lugo writes, “[e]l Nacionalismo rechaza, asimismo, la misión de policía que los Estados Unidos de América pretenden arrogarse en territorio dominicano” (11). The Dominican authors in this study were not, as described by Vargas Llosa, “accomplices”. Ferreras, Prestol Castillo, and Requena rejected Trujillo and fought against him.

The various United States interventions and their effects, both psychological and political, on the Dominican people have been narrated extensively in Dominican literature where they have been viewed as a historical trauma. In this study, it appears most prominently in the works of Ferreras and Álvarez who, through the characters in their narratives, provide testimony of atrocities committed by the United States Marines.

The Role of the United States in Trujillo’s Regime

Trujillo was assassinated just outside of Santo Domingo in 1961 by a group of army officers and civilians, allegedly with CIA backing. As Julio César Martínez states, “[y] lo mató la CIA, niéguelo quien lo niegue [sic] con miras de capitalizar una acción que jamás se hubiera realizado si no hubiera sido con el apoyo y la venia de la CIA” (8). Dominicans had not able to kill Trujillo without the support and help of the United States. Wiarda explains, “According to

some of those involved, the psychological factor of United States assistance was most important” (171). Dwight Eisenhower, in his presidential memoir, recalls that:

By May, intelligence reports told me, that the life expectancy of the Trujillo regime once again appeared uncertain. Trujillo had begun to attack Dominicans associated with the Catholic Church. ‘This kind of attack, I remarked on hearing the report, ‘is usually the last desperate resort of a dictator’. (534)

Eisenhower’s comments reflect Trujillo’s loss of control in the Dominican Republic towards the end of his dictatorship. As Abraham Lowenthal explains, “Whatever the reasons, it is clear that by 1961 American officials regard the Dominican Republic as a potential ‘second Cuba’ and that it was necessary to remove Trujillo from power” (527). Despite the obvious involvement of the CIA, Wiarda observes “[f]or nationalistic reasons, the role of the United States in the conspiracy is seldom mentioned in the Dominican Republic.” (172). There is a certain irony in his manner of death as he was killed with weapons provided by the United States, the same country whose weapons he used to seize power. It is also ironic that Trujillo’s death was, in part, a result of his megalomaniacal and macho personality. As the former Spanish president Felipe González and Vargas Llosa discuss:

- González. Una de las características de su dictadura caudillista era presumir de no hacerse proteger. Cosa que con frecuencia hacía como exhibición de poder.

-Vargas Llosa. Bueno, el machismo, ¿no? Él era el macho, no necesitaba que lo protegieran. Detestaba tener guardaespaldas. En realidad, por eso lo mataron, ¿no?

- González. Eso es. Ese recorrido era absurdo que lo hiciera sin protección. Nunca se le hubiera ocurrido a Franco hacer un recorrido de esa naturaleza sin protección. (23)

After his assassination, Dominicans danced for months to popular merengue, “Mataron al Chivo en la carretera” an irreverent merengue written to celebrate the general's assassination.

In 1962 Juan Bosch, who had lived in exile during Trujillo’s regime, became president of the Dominican Republic. He was ousted a year later, in 1963, by a military coup. In April of 1965, civil war broke out between Bosch’s followers and the old Trujilloist army. The United

States, fearful of another Cuba, took over the country and supported the Trujilloist army. According to Thomas Skidmore and Peter Smith “[t]he invading force consisted of 22,000 marines, a contingent whose size amazed even American civilian officials on the scene” (290). José Alcántara Almánzar offers insight on how Dominicans view the “War of April”. He describes, “así denominamos a aquella heroica experiencia del pueblo dominicano en defensa de su proceso democrático y de su soberanía” (325). In 1966 Joaquín Balaguer, who had served under Trujillo, was returned to power by the United States, replacing Juan Bosch who had been democratically elected in December 1962. President Eisenhower notes in his memoir that “[a]nother recurring subject in all of my talks was a refutation of the charge that the United States favors imperialism and dictatorship ‘We repudiated dictatorship in any form,’ I told an audience in Santiago” (532). Yet, many Dominicans would disagree with the former president. As Wiarda explains:

For the Marine-created constabulary through which Trujillo rose to power, for the praise which congressmen, clerics, ambassadors, and other high officials showered upon him, for the aid given him, and for the close and friendly relationship which long existed between the two countries, the United States was often considered by many Dominicans to bear responsibility for the entire Trujillo era. (192)

Similarly Lowenthal points out that “[o]nly when events elsewhere made Trujillo seem more a threat than a source of stability in the Caribbean did American support for Trujillo end” (526).

The United States’ long support of Trujillo without regard for the suffering of the Dominican people (and Haitian during the 1937 massacre), calls to mind an opinion held by Aimé Césaire. He writes, “American domination – the only domination from which one never recovers. I mean from which one never recovers unscarred” (77). The narratives in this study reflect Césaire’s observation and offer critiques of the post colonial situation of the Dominican Republic by showing how the United States replaced the previous Spanish colonizers and Haitian occupiers through its multiple invasions of the country and its endorsement of Trujillo,

and later the neo-Trujillista Joaquín Balaguer as leaders. As Juan Bosch once stated, “This country is not pro-American, it is United States property.” (“Balaguer and His Firm Ally, the U.S., Are Targets of Dominican Unrest,” The New York Times).

Narrating the Nation

In offering their interpretation of Dominican history, the authors create an image of the Dominican Republic. Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). This image is both created and reflected by, in part, narrative. Neil Larson maintains that “[t]he nation, far from being the pre-existing, essential content of the narratives making up a tradition, it itself is nothing but a narrative, a fiction, produced by, among others, these very fictional narratives themselves” (Determinations 84). Moreover, Álvarez in “Ten of My Writing Commandments” claims, “We storytellers are helping to create the culture we live in, and so, in a very real sense, we are helping to rule the empire” (38). For these reasons narration is an important representation of the nation.

In addition to studying how the Trujillo era is narrated, this study will also focus on how the Dominican Republic is perceived and represented in the six fictional narratives studied. These authors have differing relationships to the country they narrate. For Ferreras and Prestol Castillo it was home. For Álvarez, who can now return but chooses not to, and Requena, it is a land from which they were exiled. Danticat and Vargas Llosa have an indirect relationship with the Dominican Republic. If, as Sommer maintains, “literature informs a national consciousness by articulating it”, then what national consciousness is created by the narratives written by outsiders? (Foundational Fictions 20). Considering that collective memory can be distorted by narrative, this study will attempt to provide an answer.

A Matter of Perspective in Narrating the Trujillo era

In each case, the narrative written outside of the Dominican Republic (Danticat, Álvarez, Vargas Llosa) achieved far greater commercial success. This success has allowed these voices to eclipse Dominican narrative (voices), which also seek to offer their own interpretations of the past yet have a difficult time being heard. These authors, even those who write in English as both Danticat and Álvarez do, have the ability to shape how Dominicans view themselves and how others view Dominicans and the Dominican Republic. Roberto Marcallé Abreu, a Dominican journalist and author, explains how this is possible. He says:

Nuestra literatura, en sentido general, y es lo que creo, está al margen de la que hoy día se produce en el mundo. . . . y nos debe llenar de vergüenza que vengan de fuera a explotar temas locales con una repercusión internacional que ningún escritor nuestro ha logrado. (419-20)

He continues to explain that Dominicans do not read Dominican literature because there exists a “desprecio de las letras nacionales” (409). He partially credits this to a lack of advertising and marketing of Dominican literature. Therefore, due in part to the large publishing companies that promote it, narrative on Dominican history written by outsiders is more widely read by both Dominicans and non-Dominicans alike.

Césaire’s earlier observation on the scarring caused by American domination leads to a question posed by Larson. How has Dominican literature recorded this painful period? Larson, in an article titled “¿Cómo narrar el Trujillato?” argues that while Trujillo is dead, his influence remains. As evidence of this, he points to the democratic election of the neo-Trujillista Joaquín Balaguer in 1986. Larson also argues that life for the vast majority of Dominicans has not changed much in the forty years since Trujillo’s assassination. Based on these political and economic facts he believes that Dominicans have not been able to effectively narrate the era of Trujillo. He states:

El Trujillato parece estar suspendido en la mente de la sociedad actual como contenido vivido, pero sin forma adecuada, representado, en el mejor de los casos, como un sinnúmero de anécdotas sensacionales ensartadas en el hilo biográfico del propio dictador. (90)

However, Trujillo appears often in Dominican narrative. Collado observes that Trujillo, as a shadow or perhaps a ghost, appears constantly in Dominican narrative (12). However, Bruno Rosario Candelier claims that Dominican literary production has not reflected their “ser nacional” and that with few exceptions, Dominican novels have only written about Dominican internal conflicts and armed revolutions (Tendencias 15). In contrast to their Dominican counterparts, who suffered the psychological trauma of dictatorship, the authors in this study (Danticat, Álvarez and Vargas Llosa) who live outside of the Dominican Republic have very successfully narrated the Trujillo era. Their position as outsiders places them in a privileged position as they do not directly experience the ongoing effects of Trujillo’s dictatorship mentioned by Larson. As Carine Mardorossian explains “exiled writers are often seen as better equipped to provide an ‘objective’ view of the two worlds they are straddling by virtue of their alienation” (16). It is this alienation that allows them to more effectively narrate the Trujillo era.

Fernando Valerio Holguín offers a response to Larson in an article titled “En el tiempo de Las Mariposas de Julia Álvarez: Una interpretación de la historia.” He claims that the representation of the totality of an era is impossible and in support of his argument cites Pierre Macherey, who believes that what authors reflect are fragments of history, much like a broken mirror reflects fragments of a whole. The narratives I have selected for my work are much like the broken mirror metaphor used by Macherey, in that they individually reflect fragments of Dominican history.

Turn Towards History: New Historicism & Cultural Materialism

In the late 1970's and early 1980's, literary critics became interested in the relationship between literature and history and in how literature reflects, shapes and represents history. In particular, critics of new historicism believe that literature and history are inseparable; that literature is used in the representation of history and that literature contains insights into historical moments (John Branningan 169-70). They are also interested in how cultures are represented and believed that to this end all texts could be examined for their historicity, just as any historical phenomenon (e.g. a merengue on Trujillo's death) could be analyzed much as one would a literary text.

New historicism and cultural materialism, which emerged later, share many of the same views, such as a focus on the political function of literary texts. Yet, a major difference is that new historicists usually concentrate on those at the top of the social hierarchy (the wealthy, the monarchy, the church) and how those classes maintain power, while cultural materialists prefer to concentrate on those at the bottom of the social hierarchy (the poor, women and other marginalized peoples) and how they subvert power (Dino Felluga). This study combines elements of both in its study of the wealthy and educated Dominican Mirabal sisters and an illiterate, poor, Haitian woman and genocide survivor. Additionally, it looks for ways in which subversion and resistance to political oppression are articulated and represented.

Fiction, History and Truth

As previously noted, an important focus of this study is the relationship between literature and history. There is no precise definition for the term 'literature'. Roland Barthes offers this simple definition, "Literature is what gets taught" (qtd. in Eagleton 172). However, 'history' is easier to define. Nancy Partner defines it as "meaning imposed on time by means of language: history imposes syntax on time" (97). She continues to say that:

Knowing that time is resistless, amorphous, the universal solvent of meaning, we yet demand, . . . *form*, and in this quintessentially human act of imposing form on formless time are coiled the high tensions of art, religion, and philosophy. (92)⁵

Similarly, David Carr believes that “narrative imposes on the events of the past a form that in themselves they do not have” (11). Narrative plays an important function in society because as H. Porter Abbott explains, “narrative is the principal way in which our species organizes its understanding of time” (3). Both the historian and the novelist share the same task, in that both impose form on the formless, in this case it is time, and in doing so they create narrative, necessary for humans to understand time.

Hayden White has widely studied the relationship between history and narrative and believes that historiographical and fictional narratives are not only related but that historiographical narratives need literary narrative in order to be understood. In Tropics of Discourse (1978) White maintains that:

The older distinction between fiction and history, in which fiction is conceived as the representation of the imaginable and history as the representation of the actual, must give place to the recognition that we can only know the *actual* by contrasting it with or likening it to the *imaginable*. (98)

As White explains, literature not only plays a unique role but also is also necessary in the interpretation of reality. This idea is reflected in Dedé Mirabal’s comments in the “Epilogue” of In the Time of the Butterflies where she describes the death of her three sisters. She states, “We had lost hope, and we needed a story to understand what had happened to us” (313). In Metahistory (1973), White maintains that the historical works of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Croce are much more than objective reconstructions of past reality and argues that they contain an element of imagination. He rejects the idea that historians narrate history as it happened because imposing form on time, which is formless, requires the use of narrative, which has its

⁵ Emphasis is the author’s.

own rules and structure. Therefore, according to White, no clear distinction exists between historiographical and literary narration, a point further developed in The Content of Form (1987). Paul Ricoeur, in Memory, History, Forgetting (2004) asks simply, “Does not the representation of the past consist in a interpretation of the stated facts?” (235). The obvious answer for this author is yes. Both the historian and the artist in their narratives interpret the past.

If we recognize, as the above-mentioned critics do, that there is no frontier between literary narration and historical narration, since both are narratives and both include the interpretation of past events, then both are equally valid in the study of history and humanity. This point is clearly made by White when he says of the literary critic and novelist Gene Bell-Villada:

Would he wish to say that their works do not teach us about real history because they are fictions? . . . Are their novels less true for being fictional? Are they less fictional for being historical? Could any history be as true as these novels without availing itself of the kind of poetic tropes found in the work of Vargas Llosa, Carpentier, Donoso, and Cortázar?
(Figural 13)

Much can be learned from past events through the study of literary narrative and, in particular in Latin America, where novels tend to focus more on the social-political than the psychological and where there has always been a close link between history and the novel. Additionally, in One Master for Another (1983) Doris Sommer states, “books have no clear-cut frontiers with other works of literature or other discourses like history, politics, economics, etc.” (x). They are a part of the discourse created by culture and therefore are a reflection of it. Aimée Césaire, in agreement with White and Sommer, believes that historians or novelists are the same thing (55). In the sense that both apply narrative to time, there is no difference between the historian and the novelists.

The novelist Virginia Warner Brodie makes an important observation. She reminds the reader that, “A novel, is by definition, fiction. The characters never really lived; the incidents never really happened. Perhaps it was not like that at all” (211). Roberto González Echevarría

similarly writes that, “the novelist ‘invents’ new plots and characters” (The Voice of the Masters 69). In other words, the Trujillo who appears in these narratives has been ‘invented’ by the authors. González Echevarría continues, “within the text of the novel, it is the novelist, through the voice of omniscience, who has replaced God. The third person is the novelist’s unholy, yet powerful, ghost” (69). Álvarez in the “Postscript” of In the Time of the Butterflies informs the reader that, “I began to invent them [the Mirabal sisters] . . . what you find in these pages are not the Mirabal sisters of fact, or even the Mirabal sisters of legend” (324). Therefore, when talking about historical fiction or novels of dictatorship, one must keep in mind that it is, above all, fiction. While the characters in the novel may share the names with actual famous historical people, they are ultimately fictional creations of the author. This is not to say that fiction does not have historiographic value. Vargas Llosa maintains that:

La verdad que expresa una novela, la verdad que expresa la literatura no es la verdad histórica. No es la verdad sociológica, no es una verdad que se pueda demostrar objetivamente. Es una verdad subjetiva. Es una verdad que no es demostrable pero sí es una verdad en el sentido que nos ilumina como no nos ilumina ninguna ciencia social una determinada realidad. . . . [La marcha Radetsky] Es una novela que a mí me parece deslumbrante porque lo que él cuenta sólo una novela podía contarlo; no hay historiador, no hay sociólogo, que pueda describir esos mecanismos internos que tienen que ver con la psicología, con el sistema de valores de lo ciudadanos que fue socavando el imperio hasta que ese imperio, con la Primera Guerra Mundial, se desmoronó. (Felipe González 34)

As Vargas Llosa explains, literature serves an important and unique role in society as it is the means by which history can be experienced.

Additionally, history and literature differ in focus. As James G. Kennedy notes, “The real difference [between a history and a novel] is that the historical imagination gives generalizations that are factually true, whereas the literary imagination offers individuals’ experiences which have at best practical truth” (153). While historians are mainly interested in generalizations, authors are interested in individual experiences. It is in their narrative that the voice of the marginalized can be heard and how the human experience of history, in this case dictatorship,

can be explained, understood, and perhaps even felt. In this way, authors supplement the historian's representation of history. It is also why literary narrative is important in the study of history.

Vargas Llosa, a novelist, believes that literary narrative is superior to historiographic literature because:

Al final uno cree que las guerras napoleónicas en Rusia fueron como las describió Tolstoi y no como las describen los historiadores porque *La guerra y la paz* es una novela que uno no puede olvidar. Es una novela plagada de inexactitudes históricas, pero ¿a quién le importa esas inexactitudes históricas cuando entra en la magia extraordinaria de *La guerra y la paz*? (36)

The authors in this study are not unique in blurring the lines between fiction and history.

Historians have also 'crossed the line', so to speak, and meddled into imaginative writing. Both have done so for similar reasons. The renowned Dominican historian Bernardo Vega, in the preface of his first piece of fiction, Domini Canes: Los Perros del Señor (1988), mentions that when he writes a historical text, he always tries to "mantener la objetividad y el rigor académico que este tipo de trabajo obliga" (9). However, he realizes that this type of writing is not well read. He continues, "La labor académica, por su propia naturaleza, no es entendible o no atrae a un segmento importante de la población que sí debería conocer sobre estas cosas y que sólo se interesa en leer ficción ligera" (9). Here, Vega recognizes the ability of fiction to reach a larger audience and, therefore, have a greater impact. Additionally, he explains that mixing history with fiction is justified "pues la literatura y el mito pueden poner de manifiesto lo que la historia ha ocultado o lo que ha sido olvidado" (10). Vega ventures into the world of historical fiction for several reasons: first, he wants the freedom to write with imagination and second, he wants Dominicans to think about their history.

The Burden of History

Alfred MacAdam observes that since the 1940s in Spanish American literature, “Writing has now become the means by which Latin America can learn to live with its ghosts, learn from them and use the burden of history instead of being crushed by it” (562). Additionally, he believes that this recent literature serves as a “monument that seeks to keep a collective memory alive - with all its contradictions - against the wishes of ‘official’ history” (562). The narratives in this study support MacAdam’s observations. The inside cover of In the Time of the Butterflies, by Julia Álvarez, consists of names of people who Trujillo assassinated. As Ilan Stavans notes, these names transform Butterflies into a political artifact. He states, “Recalling the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C., the names seem endless, an homage to patriotic anonymity” (555). Included in the list are the names of two distinguished Dominican authors who were killed for their writings, Ramón Marrero Aristy and Andrés Requena. Ramón Alberto Ferreras, who fears that the Mirabal sisters are being forgotten, writes Las Mirabal in an effort to keep their memory alive. Freddy Prestol Castillo offers his testimony in El Masacre se pasa a pie in an effort to not be overwhelmed by the inhumanity of the genocide he witnessed. Edwidge Danticat, in The Farming of Bones, introduces the North American reader to a historical event that is largely neglected, thereby keeping the 1937 massacre alive in historical memory. Similarly Andrés Requena bravely writes Cementerio sin cruces so that the world may know just how much the Dominican people were suffering under Trujillo’s regime. His narrative, written during the Trujillo era, can be seen as plea for help. It is a plea that would go ignored. Mario Vargas Llosa, in La Fiesta del Chivo, challenges ‘official’ history by allowing Trujillo’s assassins to narrate their experiences living under political oppression. In the six narratives studied, the voice of the victims is central. Thus, speaking in the ‘unofficial’ voice of the marginalized, they all challenge the ‘official’ history provided by Trujillo.

Winston Churchill, in response to an inquiry regarding his perceived lack of concern for what future generations might think of him, famously said, “History will be kind to me for I intend to write it myself” (John Martin). History, as historians and artists are currently writing it, has not been kind to Trujillo. According to Jawaharial Nehru, independent India’s first prime minister “[h]istory is almost always written by the victors and conquerors and gives their viewpoint” (Oxford). In each of these narratives Trujillo has been repositioned as the ‘other’ as it is not he telling the story. He is no longer the victor and his viewpoint is missing in these narratives. With the possible exception of Danticat, who narrates events before her time and Vargas Llosa, who doesn’t have a direct relationship with the Dominican Republic, these authors, who consider themselves to be authoritative interpreters of Dominican history, are interested interpreters of their histories and are by no means detached from the experiences they are narrating. These authors are currently the victors and the narratives include their viewpoint. Each author studied, Danticat and Vargas Llosa included, uses literary narrative to question, subvert, rewrite and reinvent official historiographic discourse. In their narration of counter histories, these authors using literary strategies, not only highlight the fiction but also the silences of official histories.

Conclusion

The chapters that follow will examine the historical experience of the Trujillo era as recovered by literary narrative instead of historiographic narrative. These six narratives were selected because they produce a critical understanding of Dominican and, to a lesser extent, Haitian history. Read closely in the chapters to come, they also illustrate the variety of narratives of dictatorship with the Trujillo era as a subject. It is hoped that the study of these narratives, each told from the viewpoint of the victim, will lead to a better understanding, not only of this

dictator, but also of the devastating effects of political oppression on its victims. This understanding is necessary if we hope to rid the world of dictators.

Finally, David William Foster in Alternate Voices in the Contemporary Latin American Narrative (1985) mentions that as critics “we must cease to devote all of our critical energies to Gabriel García Márquez and Jorge Luis Borges and concern ourselves with other vast literary riches of Latin America” (xvi). In its study of lesser-known Dominican authors such as Ferreras, Prestol Castillo and Requena, this dissertation is, in part, an answer to his call.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE AS MEMORY: THE 1937 MASSACRE OF HAITIAN CITIZENS AS
NARRATED IN EL MASSACRE SE PASA A PIE AND THE FARMING OF BONES

El General
searches for a word; he is all the world
there is. [. . .]

El General has found his word: perejil.
Who says it, lives. [. . .]

The general remembers the tiny green sprigs
men of his village wore in their capes
to honor the birth of a son. He will
order many, this time, to be killed

for a single, beautiful word.

-Rita Dove “Parsley”

The *negrita* falls forward. The word has killed her. Through her throat. Uvula. Tongue.
Teeth. Lips. Through her breath. Given the circumstances, one wonders if the Devil hasn’t
joined Trujillo’s Cabinet

- René Philoctète Massacre River

Introduction

The first week of October 1937, Dominican dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo ordered his oversized army of 2700 men to identify and kill Haitian citizens living on the Dominican side of the Dominican-Haitian border.¹ Trujillo’s goal was not to merely send Haiti a political message, but rather to kill as many Haitians as possible.² According to Richard Turits: “After the first days of the slaughter, the official checkpoint and bridge between Haiti and the Dominican

¹ Almost two years prior to the massacre, a Time (2 Dec. 1935) article notes that Trujillo’s army of 2700 was oversized for a country the size of the Dominican Republic but was needed in order to keep him in power (“Canceled Junket”).

² Human Rights Watch notes that, “The 1937 Massacre coincided with the fall in world sugar prices, making migrant labor – here largely employed in US-controlled plantations – more vulnerable to xenophobic aggression.”

Republic were closed, thus impeding Haitians' escape" (591). He also notes that Haitians were "slain even as they attempted to escape to Haiti while crossing the fatefully named Massacre River that divides the two nations" (591).³ Additionally, Turits explains that the Dominican Army used machetes rather than guns because it, "reduced noise that would have alerted more Haitians and propelled them to flee" (590).⁴ In the span of a few days, thousands of defenseless men, women, and children were brutally slaughtered. Turits writes that "[a]s a result of the massacre, virtually the entire Haitian population in the Dominican frontier was either killed or forced to flee across the border" (630). In his biography of Trujillo, Robert D. Crassweller describes the massacre:

At Dajabón, on the banks of the Massacre, more thousands were cut down by machete and rifle as they sought the refuge of the old boundary line. Bodies clogged the river. Bodies were piled into obscure little valleys. Bodies lay in the village streets and on country roads and in gentle green fields. Trails of blood lay on dusty country lanes up and down the border. Blood dripped from trucks that carried corpses to secluded ravines for disposal. (154-5)

The journalist Albert Hicks was sent to the Dominican Republic just days after the massacre to interview survivors. His description of the massacre is similar to Crassweller's.

By the morning of October 4, the massacre had spent itself. Tales of the horror immediately spread through the Dominican Republic and Haiti, tales of brutalities unequalled in modern history. Groups of Haitians here, groups there, hacked to death with machetes, stabbed to death with knives, shoe with Krag rifles. Haitian homes raided, whole families wiped out, babies beaten to death against trees and sides of houses, tossed on bayonets. The tales were endless and investigations several weeks later proved them all to be true. (111)

³ The river, El Masacre, was named for the killing of French buccaneers by Spanish soldiers in the 18th century, not for the 1937 massacre.

⁴ Eugenio Matibag explains, "Because knifing or bayoneting was the preferred mode of dispatching the victims - it saved bullets and also made the deaths seem the work of enraged Dominican farmers and ranchers - the Haitians refer to the massacre with the Krèyol kout kouto, the 'stabbing, like a single knife wound'. The Spanish term of the same even was el corte: the cutting, as in the harvesting of cane. And during the first week of October, feme os, farming of bones, meant the mowing down left and right of borderland Haitians, a harvest of death by the thousands" (147).

The massacre did not generate much interest among the ruling class in Haiti. Consequently, no one really knows how many Haitians, and Dominicans mistaken for Haitians, lost their lives.

Furthermore, the victims of the massacre lived along the border, a place seen as both part of and separate from the rest of the country. Lauren Derby explains the extent of their marginalization:

[. . .] the border has concurrently been seen by *capitaleño* elites as the primordial sign and site of barbarism, or a hybrid space of racial and international admixture [. . .] This imaginary spatial map delimits those included and excluded from the nation. (491)

Their marginalization explains, in part, the lack of interest in determining the number of victims.

Therefore, figures on the number of people killed vary widely. Crassweller believes “[a] figure between 15,000 and 20,000 would be a reasonable estimate, but this is guesswork” (156).

However, Lowell Gudmundson and Francisco A. Scaran place the figure at 30,000 (340).

Edwidge Danticat, one of the authors studied in this chapter, places the figure even higher. She says, “The estimates are from 14,000 to 40,000. I lean more toward the higher number” (David Barsamian 3).

Trujillo’s intent in ordering the massacre was to firmly define the border between the two countries and nationalize lands currently belonging to wealthy landowners; not rid the Dominican nation of Haitians or to “whiten” the country as is commonly believed.⁵ Turits observes that:

The efforts of the Dominican state to eliminate Haitians were directed essentially at the frontier provinces, not throughout the country. And in terms of its lasting impact on the Dominican Republic, the Haitian massacre materially altered only the frontier, not the nation as a whole. (631)

Furthermore, he notes that there was only “one reported instance when the country’s plantation workers were attacked during the massacre” and that the “rest of the country’s over 20,000

⁵ The massacre left Dominican landowners without laborers to work the land prompting many leave. Trujillo seized the abandoned land.

Haitian sugar workers, [. . .] were not targeted (626). If Trujillo's intent were to whiten the country Haitians throughout the country, would have been killed. Yet, the massacre was limited only to the border region. After the massacre Turits maintains, "the border, once a porous and somewhat artificial division to frontier citizens, had become instead a deep and horrific scar" (631). Similarly, John Augelli explains: "The international boundary between the two countries was consciously honed into one of the sharpest political and cultural divides in the world" (33). Despite the tremendous cost of human life, some viewed the newly defined border positively. Andrés L. Mateo explains that Dominican intellectuals under Trujillo claimed that "si hay fronteras es por la montaña de cadáveres de 1937. Si hay Patria, es por Trujillo . . . Gracias a él, por otra parte, la nación ya no es dubitable en sus contornos" (122). Thus, some Dominicans justified the massacre as needed for nation building.

Narrating Horror

The narratives analyzed in this chapter, El Masacre se pasa a pie (1973) by the Dominican lawyer and author Freddy Prestol Castillo (1913-1981) and The Farming of Bones (1998) by the Haitian author Edwidge Danticat (1969 -) are set against the background of the 1937 massacre of Haitians and present fictionalized accounts of the massacre. Both narratives illustrate the difficulty of narrating genocide. Frederic Jameson notes, "History is what hurts" (102). The history retold in El Masacre and The Farming of Bones is no exception; it is painful and traumatic. Representing such a horrific historical event is a difficult task for the imagination, challenging both the author and the reader. Reinterpreting the moment is a challenge when reality is indeed stranger than fiction or is more horrific than what the imagination can imagine. The gruesome nature of the 1937 Haitian Massacre exceeds most imaginations. This is even more so when the author was also witness to the event and has been traumatized by it. Dominick LaCapra explains:

Extremely traumatic series of events beggar the imagination, and such events often involve the literalization of metaphor as one's wildest dreams or most hellish nightmares seem to be realized or even exceeded by brute facts. Such facts go beyond the imagination's powers of representation. Indeed, when things of an unimaginable magnitude actually occur and phantasms seem to run rampant in 'ordinary' reality, what is there for the imagination to do? Such events cannot be intensified through imaginative recreation or transfiguration. (Representing the Holocaust 181)

At the time, the massacre seemed unreal to both Dominicans and Haitians who had difficulty believing news of the event. Prestol Castillo's text, in both structure and content, reveals that he is overwhelmed by the task of narrating the massacre and his writing has been criticized for lacking imagination. However, despite its many narrative flaws, some literary critics have praised the text. Doris Sommer, for instance, observes that the text narrative "is an example of the kind of writing that is apparently impoverished by the author's lack of imagination, but respected for his unmediated objectivity" ("El Masacre se pasa a pie: Guilt and Impotence Under Trujillo." 164). Similarly, Danticat realizes the limitations of both her imagination and narrative and is challenged by the massacre. In an interview with Shauna Scott Rhone she explains, "The horror of what happened can't be matched by writing it. No matter how many times it's written, it can't be close to the truth of living it" (3).

The gruesomeness of the event also challenges the reader. The inhumanity described in these two texts of horror and suffering often threatens to shock the reader into incredulity and can traumatize the reader. LaCapra observes that texts representing the Jewish Holocaust, "Indeed, texts may undergo minor traumas or trigger them in the reader" (History and Memory After Auschwitz 16-7). Given that these narratives recreate an unimaginable horror and cruelty, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the reader to not be affected. The 1937 massacre is not unique in the challenges it poses for representation. Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Pérez note that in Latin America reality can seem unreal. They claim, "One hardly needs novels, because

our fantastic reality far exceeds our fiction. Surrealism is still the order of the day” (75). It seems equally unreal today.

The Official Word: Silence

El Masacre and The Farming of Bones bear witness to an event the official governments of both countries have ignored and tried to silence. Renèè Shea explains, “The event slipped from history, unspoken by the governments on both sides of the Massacre River” (“The Dangerous Job of Edwidge Danticat” 97). In the Dominican Republic, not only did Trujillo imposed silence but Lucía Suárez notes that, “To be Dominican, the people had to condone (or ‘not know about’) the massacre, and forget their own racial history and ethical responsibility” (132). In other words, love of country required that the massacre be forgotten. Furthermore, what little was written about it was untrue. Prestol Castillo writes, “El periodista de mi país, atado al carro de la opresión, que dará en titulares la noticia de esto acontecimientos que él no ha visto. Noticia mentirosa” (50). In contrast to these reporters, Prestol Castillo’s testimony comes from first hand knowledge and is published after Trujillo’s death. The publication of the text while Trujillo was alive would have surely lead to Prestol Castillo’s imprisonment or death.

Like his Dominican counterpart, President Vincent of Haiti also insisted that the massacre be silenced in his own country. William Krehm explains:

Faced with mounting discontent, Vincent curtailed civil liberties. When the Dominican massacre took place, and the press tried voicing the indignation of the Haitian nation, it was gagged. Journalists were condemned to hard labor. Some of Vincent’s former nationalist comrades languished in his prisons. (201)

Eighty years later, the massacre is still ignored in Haiti. Danticat says in an interview, “This is a part of history that’s not in the history books; it’s not something we talk about.” (“An Interview between Edwidge Danticat and Renèè Shea” 12). Not surprisingly, no official monument exists

in memory of the victims in either country and no official event exists to commemorate the date of the massacre.

Despite the silence imposed by the government of both the Dominican Republic and Haiti, Michelle Wucker notes that the inhabitants of Hispaniola have not forgotten the massacre:

The memory of what happened at the Massacre River in 1937 is still vivid in the minds of the islanders. Even now, it is nearly impossible for Dominicans and Haitians to think of each other without some trace of the tragedy of their mutual history that took place that year. (Why the Cocks Fight 44)

Likewise, Augelli observes that: “Time has done little to soften the feelings of fear and hatred that the Dominicans harbor toward Haiti” (22). Not only have Dominicans and Haitians not forgotten the event, some feel that it is time to talk about it. In an interview with Wucker, Danticat tells of the support she has received from the Haitian and Dominican community.

Algunos haitianos, encantados de que estuviera acerca de un tabú en la historia, enviaron investigaciones, fotografías, libros y artículos. Otros le advirtieron que no distorsionara la historia. Algunos pensaron que debía dedicarme a escribir algo positivo sobre Haití, algo en que triunfamos, como la revolución [. . .] Algunos amigos dominicanos me apoyaron y me dijeron que era hora de desenterrar este acontecimiento. (“Edwidge Danticat: La voz de los olvidados” 43)

The support Danticat has received from Haitians and Dominicans as well as the success of El Masacre speaks to the need to talk about the massacre that still exists more than 80 years after the event.

For differing reasons the authors studied in this chapter have chosen to counter official history and to remember the genocide. In choosing to remember, they reflect an observation made by Harold Schulweis who notes, “the question of our time is not whether to remember but what to remember and how to transmit our memory” (ix). For Prestol Castillo and Danticat the question has not been whether or not to remember the massacre, but instead the on how the past should be reconstructed and narrated. Their narratives offer what George Lipsitz calls “counter-memory.” According to him, “counter-memory is not a rejection of history, but a reconstitution

of it” (227). This study will look at complicated relationship between the traumatic event, memory, and imagination. Examining the texts narrative practices and themes will provide insight into this massacre and of how these two countries define themselves and each other.

A Witness Testifies: Freddy Prestol Castillo

The Dominican author and attorney Freddy Prestol Castillo is not well known outside of his country. He was the author of two novels, El Masacre se pasa a pie and Pablo Mamá published posthumously in 1985. He also published essays, short stories, news articles, and law textbooks. Prestol Castillo also held several public posts under Trujillo, but was never a strong supporter of the dictator. After Trujillo ordered the killing of the Dominican author Ramón Marrero Aristy, a close friend of Prestol Castillo, he became much more critical of the dictator.

El Masacre se pasa a pie is Prestol Castillo’s first novel. It was published in 1973, twelve years after Trujillo’s assassination and 36 years after the massacre. Prestol Castillo was 24 years old at the time of the massacre and was one of three judges sent to preside over the legal proceedings against the Dominicans involved with the killing of the Haitians. (Vega Trujillo y Haití 142). There are differing accounts as to whether Prestol Castillo arrived just before or just after the massacre. In the text, the narrator witnesses the event. While in Dajabón⁶, he keeps a journal that, after years of being buried in his mother’s patio, was recovered and published as El Masacre se pasa a pie. Despite its controversial subject matter, the book was very well received within the Dominican Republic. David Howard explains that, “El Masacre se pasa a pie has sold over 34,000 copies, a substantial amount given that the majority of publications in the Dominican Republic do not exceed an initial print run of 1,000 copies” (140). The commercial

⁶ Dajabón is a Dominican town on the Massacre River, which divides the Dominican Republic and Haiti. It is one of the largest border points between the two countries and was one of the towns most affected by the massacre. Directly across the river is the larger Haitian town of Ouanaminthe.

success of the book illustrates Dominicans' interest in their past and a hunger for the knowledge that Trujillo sought to silence.

A blend of fact and fiction, El Masacre defies literary classification. Lydia Gil explains, “no es un texto ficticio, pero que tampoco se trata de un testimonio” (38). Prestol Castillo labels it a novel; yet he later tells Sommer in an interview that, “Yo lo puse novela al terminarlo, pero lo considero simplemente mi libro” (“El Masacre se pasa a pie: Guilt and Impotence Under Trujillo” 165). Prestol Castillo is both the author and narrator, yet the book lacks the reflection and structure often found in an autobiography. The narrative, broken down into 31 chapters, is fragmented and not always chronological. Most of the chapters of El Masacre, 2 - 26, are dedicated to the massacre and its effects on both its perpetrators and victims. When the author/narrator arrives in Dajabón the genocide has already begun. He is confused and asks, “**¡El Corte!** . . . ¿Qué era aquello? . . . Ninguno me lo había querido explicar” (22)⁷.

The slaughter, which Prestol Castillo describes as “el festín homicida” (26) and “la vendimia roja” (27), is narrated with most detail in the second chapter. In describing the massacre the voice of the narrator, that of the young magistrate, seems to disappear. Rita De Maeseneer notes:

En muchos fragmentos no se encuentran ni siquiera huellas explicitas de la presencia del yo narrador, de manera que el lector tiene la impresión de que esos fragmentos son narrados por un narrador omnisciente. Es como si el yo narrador se escondiera detrás de una voz general, ambigüedad que expresa la dificultad de hablar de la matanza, de asumir en la escritura este hecho doloroso del pasado dominicano. (165)

Additionally, the disappearance of the narrative voice also speaks to the guilt and impotence he feels in his inability to do anything to stop the killings he knows are inherently wrong. Chapters 1, 27, and 31 are mostly autobiographical focusing on details of his life. They describe a young

⁷ Emphasis is the author's.

man born into wealth. However his wealth vanishes when sugar prices fall dramatically in the 1920's. Prestol Castillo is bitter at the loss of his family fortune and must borrow money to pay for his law license.

Paradoxically, the author both criticizes and justifies the massacre as he also tries to explain how Dominicans, and in particular himself, could have been capable of such inhumanity.⁸ As Howard observes, “the narrator is unable to face up to his responsibility to humanity and fails to react to the campaign of racial murder, although he knows that he should do so” (141). Furthermore, Sommer notes that the “narrative alternates between horrible atrocities and guild-ridden impotence” (Foundational Fictions 171). For Prestol Castillo writing is a way to deal with the guilt he feels for his involvement in the massacre. He writes:

Me repugnaba estos jueces, cuyo trato rehusaba. ¿Me parecían cerdos? Comían un pan culpable Pero . . . ¿No era yo, también un cerdo? Así me recriminaba mi conciencia. Sin embargo, digo: ¡no lo soy! Escribo mis notas de este crimen! Es para denunciarlo! Si callara, me igualaría a los jueces, que llegan cada día, demacrados, a comer un plato de lentejas en el mesón y callarán para siempre. (116)

Gil also notes the internal conflict the narrator describes and notes that the work is a, “texto híbrido que presenta simultáneamente la denuncia de los actos barbáricos que se llevaron a cabo [. . .] y la defensa del comportamiento dominicano frente a estos eventos de 1937” (43).

Crassweller explains that while Dominicans did not approve of the killings, many felt that securing the border was necessary (159). Although Prestol Castillo does not show empathy toward the victims, he realizes that the massacre was wrong. However, he also feels that

⁸ In addition to El Masacre se pasa a pie Prestol Castillo also wrote the essay, Paisajes y meditaciones de una frontera (1943). Both deal with the 1937 massacre. The essay is not easily accessible. It is only available in two U.S. libraries: Harvard University and University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras and is in Limited Circulation. Therefore, I have not been able to read it.

Dominicanization of the border was necessary. Therefore, the narrative continually contradicts itself as the author attempts to both support and condemn the massacre.

For Prestol Castillo, the story told in El Masacre is a lived reality and a reconstruction of memory. He relies on what Maurice Halbwachs calls “autobiographical memory” (52) to recreate his narrative as much of his original document, which he claims was written in 1937 while he was in Dajabón, has been destroyed. In the preface to El Masacre he writes,

En esos instantes me parecía haber perdido un hijo! Al fin apareció: era más bien un rimero de abono. Otra vez, quise llorar: hojas rasgadas, casi ilegibles; pedazos raídos por los insectos, trozos convertidos en estiércol. A la postre, había aparecido el hijo deforme, el monstruo . . . Pero el hijo! (14)⁹

Although Prestol Castillo witnessed much of he retells, he is nonetheless writing from a position of forgetting. Michael Bernald-Donals explains:

Witness is a moment of forgetting, a moment of seeing without knowing that indelibly marks the source of history as an abyss. It is a moment of the disaster; and that moment, the moment of forgetting, demands that the memory be inscribed, though it is a memory - a testimony - whose historical circumstances and whose discursive control are simply not available to subsequent witnesses. (214)

In another article, Bernald-Donals and Richard Glejzer reiterate that witnesses to an event also experience forgetting. They note that, “. . . living memory is not so much the recuperation of events as it is an imprint of the loss of the event, and narratives histories, built as a bulwark against memory’s loss, stand in for and replace the event” (5). Similarly, LaCapra maintains that:

With respect to trauma, memory is always secondary since what occurs is not integrated into experience or directly remembered, and the event must be reconstructed from its effects and traces. (Representing the Holocaust 21)

⁹ The use of italics, punctuation, and spelling errors have been faithfully transcribed from the text and reflect Prestol Castillo’s style. Because he uses ellipses frequently, I have placed my ellipses in brackets to distinguish between the two.

Therefore, what witnesses such as Prestol Castillo provide is not a description of the event as it unfolded, but rather as Bernald-Donals explains, “the effect of events upon witnesses” (205).

The structure of El Masacre illustrates the traumatic effect the massacre had on the narrator/author.¹⁰ It is repetitive, poorly organized and requires a patient reader. Suárez in the The Tears of Hispaniola notes that the narrative:

[. . .] reads like a horrible stream-of-consciousness memory of fragments of conversations, orders, fearful comments, and impotent observations by the author. In many ways, I propose, it seems that the text tries to make sense of an irrational horror. That irrational horror is described via fragments of interactions between people who are inebriated actors screaming accusations they will later have to believe. (45)

Sommer explains that the reader, recognizing the narrative’s value as a testimonial, keeps on reading.

[. . .] many of Prestol’s Dominican readers are either impatient with his undisciplined prose or indulgent because of his book’s value as a testimonial both to the horror of the trujillato and to the intellectuals whom he could not buy off. (“El Masacre se pasa a pie: Guilt and Impotence Under Trujillo” 164)

Thus, the massacre’s effect on the young magistrate is seen in both the content and structure of his writing. The fragmented, repetitive narrative reflects the trauma he is experiencing and his inability to rationalize the horror in his own mind, much less put it into words.

A Survivor’s Tale: Edwidge Danticat

Edwidge Danticat was born in Haiti and moved to the United States when she was twelve years old. Mallay Charters notes that she is the “first African Haitian female author to write in English and be published by a major house” (42). She is also, according to Martin Munro, “Haiti’s most widely read author” (35). Danticat received national attention when her book Krik? Krak! was a 1995 National Book Award nominee. In contrast with Prestol Castillo,

¹⁰ Cathy Caruth, a leading literary theorist of trauma defines it as: “An overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (“Unclaimed experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History” 181).

Danticat was born 32 years after the massacre. Therefore, she must rely on learned history or “historical memory” (Halbwachs 52) for information on the massacre and writes from research and the individual and collective memory of those she interviewed. Although Danticat did not directly experience the event, she has been emotionally affected by the massacre. In the “Preface” to Massacre River (2005)¹¹ Danticat writes:

Having read René Philoctète’s Massacre River, I grieved then, as I do now, for the Massacre River’s survivors, those who suffered the machetes that chopped the Haitian heads and the fingers that counted them. (8)

Danticat is aware of the pitfalls of speaking for others. In an interview with Shea she notes, “I was purposely questioning myself and what I was doing - writing this story in English, stealing it, if you will, from the true survivors who were not able or allowed to tell their stories” (“The Hunger to Tell: Edwidge Danticat and The Farming of Bones” 17-8). Danticat incorporates this concern into her narrative. Yves, in The Farming of Bones tells Amabelle, “‘I know what will happen,’ he said. ‘You tell the story, and then it’s retold as they wish, written in words you do not understand, in a language that is theirs, and not yours’” (246). Like Prestol Castillo, Danticat does not fictionalize history with the purpose of entertaining the reader. She recreates the massacre with the hope that it will lead a healing which has not yet taken place. Therefore, she does not blame the Dominican people for the massacre.¹² Danticat offers an explanation for the massacre in the voice of Tibon, a Haitian sugar cane worker. He explains:

The ruin of the poor is their poverty, [. . .] The poor man, no matter who he is, is always despised by his neighbors. When you stay too long at a neighbor’s house, it’s only natural that he become weary of you and hate you. (178)

Also, in an effort to show cruelty is not limited to only Trujillo, the narrator explains that the:

¹¹ Massacre River is the English translation of Le peuple des terres mêlées. Port-au-Prince: Deschamps, 1989.

¹² Charters explains, “to foster greater understanding between the two nations, Danticat organizes joint Haitian-Dominican community youth groups in the New York area with writer Junot Díaz” (43).

[The Haitian King Henri Christophe] was sometimes cruel. He used to march battalions of soldiers off the mountain, ordering them to plunge to their deaths as a disciplinary example to the others. Thousands of our people died constructing what you see here. But this is not singular to him. All monuments of this great size are built with human blood' (279).

Thus, both nations have been victims of cruel leaders. Danticat's project consists of helping to heal the wounds between Haiti and the Dominican Republic and creating a memorial to the deceased so that they may be remembered.

The Farming of Bones, which won the American Book Award in 1999, explores the effects of the massacre on individual lives and is Danticat's response to the forgetting of the 1937 massacre.¹³ In the narrative she imagines the lives of Haitians and reinterprets their place in Haitian history. The protagonist and narrator of the The Farming of Bones is Amabelle Désir, a young Haitian woman and survivor of the massacre. Danticat bases Amabelle on the true story of a Haitian domestic worker thereby resuscitating her from the dead so that she may tell her story. The author explains to Sarah Anne Johnson:

It was about a Dominican colonel who killed his maid at the dinner table to prove his loyalty to Trujillo, the president of the Dominican Republic. I realized the maid was Amabelle, but she lives. Once I had that, and all the research, I could enter the story. (25)

Albert C. Hicks, a news reporter also writes:

In an inland town an Army captain and his señora laid their napkins down as they finished the first course of their evening meal. Their servant was no longer young. She had been with the family for several decades. Her hair was gray against her black face. She entered the dining room to clear the table. The captain rose from his chair, picked up the carving knife and before the gray, old woman realized what her master was doing, the captain had sunk the blade into her breast. The piercing cry that stabbed the night air came from the throat of the horrified señora. The servant, at her feet, had made only a few gurgling sounds and had died. For a considerable period after that day the captain's wife had to live locked in a room in a sanatorium, a raving maniac. She couldn't understand that her husband was simply acting on orders from El Generalissimo. (106-7)

This is not the only account of violence within the family unit. Crassweller documents:

Under military orders, the exterminations were carried out even on individual basis, within the bosoms of families. The case of a Captain Bisonó was later widely recalled. On direct orders, and in his own home, he discharged his revolver into the body of his family's aged Haitian cook, who had been regarded for years as one of themselves. (155)

In an interview Danticat she states that, "When she [Amabelle] gave testimony, it felt very much like I was a recorder and she looked over my shoulder as I wrote" (3). Amabelle's voice is that of the oppressed and marginalized; she is young, poor, orphaned, Haitian, and a woman. She represents the triumph of survival in that despite the silence imposed by her government, her voice is heard.

Amabelle's testimony is narrated in the first person, in the past tense and is linear. However, it is interrupted by fragments of dreams and memories that are non-linear, printed in bold and narrated in the present tense. The narrative begins with a memory, an intimate moment between two lovers, Amabelle and Sebastian, and starts with the words, "His name is Sebastian Onus" (1). This sentence is repeated throughout the narrative for Amabelle believes that, "Men with names never truly die. It is only the nameless and faceless who vanish like smoke into the early morning air" (282). In giving the nameless like her lover Sebastian, a Haitian sugarcane worker, a name she hopes that their lives will not be forgotten.

The story takes place in the fictive Dominican border town of Alegría and begins shortly before the massacre. The name of town stands in stark contrast to the reality of the place. Of the name Amabelle says, "Perhaps there had been joy for them [Dominicans] in finding that sugar could be made from blood" (271). It concludes 25 years later with Amabelle bathing in the Massacre River and searching for a new beginning, although it is not clear if she finds it. It is the same river where her parents had drowned 25 years earlier, leaving her an orphan.

From the very first chapter The Farming of Bones describes the effects of both physical and psychological trauma on the individual. Danticat uses Amabelle, a Haitian domestic worker,

to personalize the political and her scarred body is the site of government violence. As she notes, “Now my flesh was simply a map of scars and bruises, a marred testament” (227).

Despite the silence imposed by the presidents of both countries, the past is visibly written on Amabelle’s body. These scars, which she views as a testament, also serve as a physical reminder and prevent her from overcoming the massacre. Nancy Peterson explains, “Engulfed by a painful history, Amabelle remains empty of any human or humane feeling throughout her life” (171). She says, “I choose a living death because I am not brave” (283). Amabelle also illustrates what Sigmund Freud describes as profound mourning. He explains:

Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of someone who is loved, contains the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of interest in the outside world - in so far as it does not recall him - the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love (which would mean replacing him) and the same turning away from any activity that is not connected with thoughts of him. It is easy to see that this inhibition and circumscription of the ego is the expression of an exclusive devotion to mourning which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests. (244)

After losing Sebastian in the massacre, she is unable to find intimacy with anyone else and remains alone. The text however does end with the possibility that Amabelle may finally overcome the massacre. The final sentence of the book states, “He [a Haitian homeless professor], like me, was looking for the dawn” (310). Yet, the reader is left to wonder if Amabelle ever finds it.

Danticat dedicates 64 of 320 pages of text to the actual massacre. When narrating the massacre, the book does it in the past tense. The change of verb tense speaks to the inability of narrating trauma as is it being experienced. For Amabelle, her dreams are her memory. They are told in present tense, in bold font and in chronological order. It is in her dreams that she remembers her parents and others she has lost. She is not unique in this as it is same for Mimi, Sebastian’s mother who says to Amabelle, “Leave me now . . . I am going to dream up my children” (243). Unable to write down their memories, Amabelle and Mimi’s memories are

stored in their dreams. Dominican women also rely on dreams to remember. Señora Valencia uses dreams to remember her mother, who died while giving birth to her (15). Memory, in particular is important for Danticat who explains that her grandmother, “believed that no one really dies as long as someone remembers, someone who will acknowledge that this person had, in spite of everything, been here” (“We Are Ugly, But We Are Here.” 27).

Exile, Solitude & Sterility

The author/narrator in El Massacre and Amabelle in The Farming of Bones share a condition of aloneness and sterility. Prestol Castillo notes:

Escribí bajo cielo fronterizo, en soledad. Sin darme cuenta, yo estaba exiliado. Evidentemente, en aquel yermo, era un preso más. Sin ser preso. . . . Escribía furtivamente, mientras la aldea dormía. Y en aquel meandro profundo del silencio yo pensaba en mi triste destino: condenado a soledad, lo mismo que mi generación, penitenciada a la esterilidad. (7)

For Prestol Castillo the border represents exile. He describes the border as, “Frontera: Puñales, sequía, reses, hambre” (127). Crassweller describes that Dajabón and other border towns, “took on a character they retain today - a remoteness and an almost somber loneliness” (150). It is an unwelcoming, almost inhabitable place that is sparsely populated and where, according to Prestol Castillo, “Hacia aquellas lejanías sólo van restos de máquinas y restos de hombres” (21). The border represents the margins of the nation and is a place where few people want to live. The fact that Prestol Castillo was sent to the border is indicative of his marginal position in society.

Amabelle is also a marginal member of society, both in the Haiti, the country of her birth, and in the Dominican Republic. She is considered an outsider in the Dominican Republic and an inside/outsider in Haiti, not a foreigner, but not Haitian either. She explains Dominicans view of Haitians:

To them we are always foreigners, even if granmèmès’ granmèmès’ were born in this country,’ a man responded in Kreyòl, which we most often spoke - instead of Spanish - among ourselves. ‘This make its easier for them to push out when they want to’. (69)

However, Amabelle does not see herself as an outsider in the Dominican Republic. The physical scars left by the massacre mark her as an outsider in Haiti, the country of her birth. She explains that in Haiti, “They recognize us without knowing us. We were *those* people, the nearly dead, the ones who escaped from the other side of the river” (220). In being forced to return to Haiti, Amabelle is exiled from the place she considers home, the town of Alegría on the border. It is a difficult place to inhabit, as Amabelle mentions, “A border is a veil not many people can wear” (264). She belongs to the space created by the mixing of two cultures, the border, and therefore does not identify completely with either country.

In addition to living at the margins of their respective nations, both Prestol Castillo, the character, and Amabelle are alone. Neither narrator marries nor has children. Prestol Castillo states, “No tengo con quien dialogar [. . .] Estoy solo” (131). He does have a girlfriend named Ángela. However, the relationship is doomed to fail. He says, “Había un contraste enorme entre mi cobardía, uncido al carro de la tiranía, y aquella vida, heroica, aquel ser delicado y bello, vestida como la más desgraciada de aquellas obreras” (141). She would mail him letters “invitándome a ‘ser un hombre’, y dar la espalda a la dictadura” (142). For Ángela leaving the country is a sign of manhood. He writes that she, “Me señalaba el camino: el mar, el extranjero, ‘para así, readquirir la calidad de hombre’” (142). Prestol Castillo’s’ also friend urges him to leave telling him, “Toma el camino de la liberación! Ten tanto valor como Angela! Eres joven. Si tuviera tu edad, no estaría aquí” (143). However, a sense of duty to his family keeps him from leaving. He explains that, “mi madre y hermanos, pequeños, todos los cuales dependían del pan que pudiera darles yo” (143). His inability to leave makes him feel cowardly. He says: “[...] Angela - la valiente- la que se había escapado sola - y me sentía el más cobarde de los hombres!” (147). He leaves the reader wondering why he could not have supported his family from exile.

Amabelle is also alone. The drowning of Amabelle's parents in the Massacre River leaves her orphaned and foreshadows the many more deaths to come. She works as a servant for the Dominican family who had taken her in after her finding by the river where her parents had just drowned. Yet, the same river means both life and death for Haitians. Crossing it means both life and death. Amabelle's parents drowned crossing the river. It is also the river where bodies were dumped during the massacre. However, the river also signifies a better life. Amabelle notes that, "Both he [Sebastien] and me, we would have been beggars if we did not come here" (121-2).

The massacre orphans Amabelle again, separating her from both her adoptive Dominican family and Sebastien. She also displays the difficulty of living with memory and trauma; her need to remember does not allow her to overcome trauma. She believes:

The slaughter is the only thing that is mine enough to pass on. All I want to do is find a place to lay it down now and again, a safe nest where it will neither be scattered by the winds, nor remain forever buried beneath the sod.

I just need to lay it down sometimes. Even in the rare silence of the night, with no faces around. (266)

Unable to deal with the trauma endured and she isolates herself. She explains, "There were times when I shut myself in those two rooms that were mine and took to bed for months" (269). She shares a bed with Sebastien's friend Yves, but notes that, "When he climbed onto the bed, I pretended to be asleep - or even dead" (250). Ultimately, she is unable to overcome the death of her lover, Sebastien, who is killed during the massacre. His mother tells her, "I asked my son why there is no love between you and him, and he told me about Sebastien" (244). Amabelle's inability to live is explained by Caruth who writes, "It is because the mind cannot confront the possibility of its death directly that survival becomes for the human being, paradoxically, an endless testimony to the impossibility of living" ("Violence and Time: Traumatic Survivals" 25).

However, despite strong desire to tell the story of Sebastien, Amabelle waits years to tell her story and then, given the opportunity to share it with her childhood companion, Señora Valencia, she chooses not to because she realizes the futility in sharing her story with her. Although Señora Valencia harbored Haitians in her house during the massacre, she is supportive of her husband Señor Pico who as an Army officer carried out the orders to kill. Thus, no one in the narrative actually hears Amabelle's story.

Victim or Perpetrator?

In times of great challenges, when survival is at stake, the line between victim and perpetrator can be very fine. El Masacre and The Farming of Bones, illustrate how it is possible to be both victim and perpetrator. In the very first lines of the introduction of the narrative Prestol Castillo portrays himself as a victim and as a hero, someone willing to risk his life so that the truth may be known. He writes, “Al cabo de mis sufrimientos, estaba escrito el libro. Si caía en manos de la policía secreta, habría sido sentenciado a muerte. El peligro hizo de mí y del libro dos personajes oprimidos” (8).

Prestol Castillo also portrays the Dominican people as victims of oppressive government. He notes, “En Santo Domingo está prohibida la expresión del pensamiento. Sólo tenemos el derecho de hablar para hacer loas al Presidente” (19). He maintains that Dominicans are innocent of the crime committed because they were simply following orders. Eric Santner mentions some Germans involved in the Holocaust viewed themselves as innocent because they were under orders and thus the evil did not come from within but was instead external. He explains:

This strengthens the feeling of being oneself the victim of evil forces; first the evil Jews, then the evil Nazis, and finally the evil Russians. In each instance the evil is externalized. It is sought for on the outside, and it strikes on from the outside. (7)

Prestol Castillo emphasizes that the order to kill came from the most powerful person in the country and was carried out by those with the least amount of power in society. He describes, “Lo afecta la sentencia que dictó un señor todopoderoso en la capital de mi país. Este ordenó: ‘Mueran todos los Haitianos!’” (84). Some of the ‘soldiers’ sent to the border, were nothing more than poor farmers rounded up and ordered to kill Haitians. Manuel Robert, a soldier, says:

. . . yo hasta toy arrepentío . . . que me faltan fuerza! . . . Cuanto má negro matamo, hay que matá mucho má! . . . Eto es el diablo! Eto parece que no acabará! . . . Mis pobres hijos! . . . Ni habían comío cuando me atrapán. Iba yo palos laos de ‘Mariano Cestero’ cuando ahí me paran y me dan este puñal. (43)

His comments reflect that the soldier also is a victim of Trujillo. He explains, “Y eran órdenes. Ordenes que el Capitán tenía que ejecutar, temeroso él de vestir el mismo traje. Ordenes. Y las órdenes . . . se cumplen, y nada más!” (103). Other soldiers were prisoners who had been freed so that they may carry out the order to kill. The narrator observes, “La noches de la aldea estaban grávidas de puñales, de presidarios libertados. La noche olía a ron” (7). In El Masacre, evil was external and imposed on the temporary soldiers, many of whom used alcohol to numb their feelings of wrongdoing and who later ended up insane as a result of their participation in the massacre.

This makeshift Dominican Army, comprised largely of poor farmers and criminals who had no choice but to serve, is confused as to why they have been ordered to kill. Prestol Castillo transcribes the words of a soldier:

- Y yo, que me diba pa mi casa, de los lao de Moca y me hicíen mata to los negros que jallara, sin sabé por qué. Se me ocurrió hablarle al Sargento y en un trís me traga! ‘Son joidene!’ . . . son ‘joidene’ . . . Que dique poi que roban vaca! . . . Ta bien! . . . pero yo no tengo vaca ni diablo que robaime! (45)

Another soldier wonders, “¿Por qué se han de ir los negros, tan buenos? . . . Trabajaban barato . . .” (39). Like the soldiers, the officers in charge are also confused by the order. Prestol Castillo

notes that the captain must resort to alcohol in order to carry out the apparently nonsensical orders he has received.

Capitán Ventarrón no podía resistir el peso de la tragedia de la cual se le hacia ejecutor. Tenia el cargo de teñir de rojo toda la larga campana, los llanos y las lomas. Para asumir su papel de Atila, acudía al alcohol. ¡Matar a millares! Ancianos, niños y mujeres . . . ¿Por que? . . . ¡No lo sabía! . . . Era un ‘orden’ . . . (24)

Yet, the captain had no problem stealing from the Haitians he killed. He tells his soldiers that the cattle belonging to the Haitians killed were being sent to Trujillo. But, the soldiers quickly realize “Que no hay tal Cumando! sino el mismo Capitán! que se las roba toas y las manda pa su finca, en Mao! . . . Carajo!” (45).

The soldiers, like the captian, also drank heavily. Prestol Castillo notes that, “No hay límite en esta tierra ni para el alcohol ni para la muerte” (87). He narrates one of the soldiers’ comments:

-Acabo de recibí unaj óidene seriaj. El Gobierno ordena el degüello de cuanto ‘mañese’ jallemo. No repete edá ni pinta. Quémelos jata vivos. Ey! . . . Saigentooo! . . . tá jablando el Capitán Ventarrón! Un trago! . . . (23)

However, not even alcohol was enough for some soldiers. They were simply unwilling or unable to carry out the order given and deserted. Hicks describes:

Here and there gunfire was heard above the cries of the Haitians. But most of the shots were killing mutinous Dominican soldiers. Great numbers were refusing to obey the orders of The Benefactor of the Fatherland. (107)

Prestol Castillo also notes, “El amanecer se inicia enterrando los reservista que querían fugarse. Aquí nadie puede fugarse” (46). Here Prestol Castillo reiterates that the soldiers were also victims of the massacre.

El Masacre also describes the effects of the massacre on those charged with carrying out the killings, in other words the perpetrators who he also views as victims. He writes:

Estos ‘reservistas’ retornan hoy a la aldea cansados, alcoholizados. Sientan fiebres y raras dolencias. Algunos morirían de inexplicable mal. Otros, como el Raso Patricio,

enloquecerían. Después de “El Corte”, deambularon muchos locos en la aldea. Casi todos quedarían con los nervios destrozados. Habría monómanos, víctimas de insomnios; y en todos, la misma desolación. ¿Por qué han matado? . . . (102)

Prestol Castillo notes that it is possible both a victim and tormentor. He repeatedly compares the Haitian victims with the Dominican perpetrators and writes, “Entonces miró al resto de aquella tropa desvencijada y sin fe, tan mártir como los mismos haitianos” (46). He also compares the perpetrators, who he recognizes are criminals, with other workers around the world. He observes, “Son los obreros del crimen. Fatigados y sin esperanzas, como los demás obreros del mundo” (43). After the massacre, the soldiers, to their great surprise, were treated as criminals for having killed. Prestol Castillo writes:

Los ‘reservistas’ recibieron órdenes de pasar a cambiar la ropa. Dejarían los trapos sucios que traían y debían vestir entonces el traje vil, rayado, de los reclusos, el uniforme de los presidiarios criminales. [...] Manuel Robert como que despertó violentamente, cuando el Sargento de Guardia entregó las ropas degradantes, prenda del ladrón o del criminal, a veces del político - de mi país . . . A él, Manuel, que había cumplido las órdenes del General que ordenó el degüello, convertirlo en presidiario? . . . ¿Era un error? . . . ¿No sería otro? (103)

Prestol Castillo, who was sent to serve as judge in the legal proceedings against the soldiers, views the country as a whole as a victim. He writes that the Dominican Republic is, “*un pobre país ignorante y castigado por el hambre*” (10). Comparing their level of poverty to that of Haiti he states:

. . . pobrecillos de nosotros! . . . pobrecillos! Eso somos! . . . Ron, tambora, merengue . . . y dictadores! . . . Toda esta belleza! ¿Para qué? Para contemplar la barbarie! Ah! sí! . . . Los haitianos! . . . pobrecitos . . . Necesitan sanidad, comida, educación. . . ¿salvajes? . . . Tanto como nosotros! (10)

The author repeatedly attempts to convince the reader that the Dominican Republic was not much different than Haiti and that Dominicans were just as much victims as the Haitians slaughtered in the massacre. In addition to poverty, the Dominican Republic is a country gripped by tyranny. He explains, “*La tiranía es el tirano y todos los que no son el tirano*” (8). He later

describes that educated people, like his friend who he simply calls “El Doctor”, live in constant fear. He writes:

Se asfixiaba en el ambiente tóxico de la tiranía. Sospechoso al fin para la dictadura, creíamos que en cualquier momento un asesino pagado, irresponsablemente, a favor de noche e impunidad, le arrancarían la vida al salir de la cátedra o en cualquier esquina. (9)

The Dominican Republic imagined by Prestol Castillo is poor, uneducated, and oppressed.

Ironically, it is not too different from the victims of the massacre.

In El Masacre, the narrator feels guilt for his involvement in the massacre, yet he does not reach the level of empathy. Santner explains:

The capacity to feel grief for others and guilt for the suffering one has directly or indirectly caused, depends on the capacity to experience empathy for the other *as other*. This capacity in turn depends on the successful working through of those primitive experiences of mourning which first consolidate the boundaries between self and other, thereby opening up a space for empathy. (7)

The author/narrator is also unable to identify with the victims, who at times he views a little more than animals. Prestol Castillo grew up wealthy, disconnected from poorer Dominicans. He writes:

No conocía lo que había dentro de aquellos bohíos, achatados y tristes. Yo veía los obreros, sucios, unos hombres que cantaban tristes melodías en los atardeceres del Puerto . . . Parecíanme otra clase de hombres . . . Algo así como los niños miran en un libro de dibujos horribles, animales peligrosos y fuertes. (16-7)

In contrast he notes, “La gente masticaba ‘chiclets’, hablaba inglés, jugaba al tenis y después iba al cine o a las exclusivas salas de Fiestas” (17). The use of the word *animales* to describe the poor versus his use of the word *gente* used to describe the wealthy provides insight. Prestol Castillo’s inability to see the poor as human beings, much less as equals, prevents him from feeling empathy for the victims of the massacre. At one point he claims, “el haitiano e una ‘garrapata’ que le ha caído [sic] a la Republica [sic] y a la garrapata hay matarla hasta la última!” (72). Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich also explain that:

In these attempts to shake off guilt, it is remarkable how little attention is paid to the victims. . . . Now there is hardly for any kind of sympathy with others. If somehow, somewhere, one finds an object deserving of sympathy, it usually turns out to be none other than oneself. (25)

This attitude is observed in Prestol Castillo text when acknowledges a difference between himself and other Dominicans. He writes, “Dos tipos de victimas de la miseria de mi país. Una diferencia había: Aquellos eran ignorantes. No sabían el peso de su cruz. Para los universitarios con hambre la coyuntura era más cruel aún, conocían su crimen” (117). Thus, he views himself as the worst victim in attempt to deal with the guilt he is feeling.

Amabelle, a victim, would also find herself in the position of perpetrator, or killer. She suffocates Odette, the woman who had saved her from certain death, to keep her from screaming as they swam across the Massacre River towards Haiti. She describes:

It is the way you try to stun a half-dead bird still waving its wings, a headless chicken courageously racing down a dirt road. I kept one hand on her mouth and moved the other one to her nose and pressed down hard for her own good, for our own good. She did not struggle but abandoned her body to the water and the lack of air. (201-2)

Amabelle is traumatized by her own actions. After reaching the shore, she stands over Odette’s body for several hours. She says, “Wherever I go, I will always be standing over her body. No farewell could be enough. All I had wanted was for her to be still” (205). Like the Dominican soldiers who killed Haitians so that they themselves would not be killed for failing to follow orders, Amabelle makes the same decision. She suffocates Odette so that she may survive. Amabelle seems to justify her actions by noting that she did it for “our own good” (202), but doesn’t explain how dying could be “good” for Odette.

Haitian Response to the Massacre

The Haitian President Vincent chose not to response or avenge the deaths. Crassweller notes that, “There was not even a diplomatic initiative by Haiti for five days” (156). Quentin

Reynolds, a journalist with Collier's Weekly, was sent to the Dominican Republic to investigate the massacre. He reports:

Trujillo, following the Hitler pattern, had found his whipping boy. With Hitler it was the Jew; with Trujillo it was the Haitian. There was little that Haiti could do about it. I saw President Stenio Vincent, who had been a poet. 'What can we do?' He shrugged helpless shoulders. 'We are not a warlike people'. (ix)

Philoctète offers the differing explanation for the lack of a Haitian response to the killing of its citizens:

[. . .] a twenty-peso bill: *Banco Central de la República Dominicana Veinte Pesos de Oro*. The price agreed upon by the Haitian government for a Haitian neck, for Haitian organs, for a Haitian memory. A Haitian ass. . . . Voilà! The League of Nation is satisfied. . .

That tens of thousands of skulls are knocking about, rattling around, clonking into one another - *basta!* So what! Port-au-Prince has cashed in, no muss, no fuss, no delegation, no ceremony, no special delivery. No formal receipt. No sealed envelope. Just handed over directly. A grocer's change: twenty pesos for a head. (178-9)

The lack of Haitian response shows the lack of importance the people living along the border had in Haitian society and how easily and cheaply their lives were sold. Frank Moya Pons explains that, "The Dominican government paid \$525,000 as compensation for damages and injuries occasioned by what was officially termed 'frontier conflicts'". (The Dominican Republic 369). Furthermore Crassweller writes, "A substantial part of the agreed -upon final \$275,000 [. . .] was disbursed under the table to deserving public figures instead of being devoted to compensation for losses and injuries suffered in the massacres" (159). Prestol Castillo offers the following explanation for lack of Haitian interest in the massacre:

En Haití hay hambre y odio de raza. Los mulatos que estudiaron en París, o que apañaron los latifundios, miran con odio a sus hermanos, la raza de ébano que quedó sin tierra y que roba eternamente al Santo Domingo alledaño al río Masacre. (80)

The same idea expressed by Tibon, a Haitian sugar cane worker, in the The Farming of Bones who says, "They have so many of us here because our own country - our government- has

forsake us [. . .] Poor people are sold to work in the cane fields so our own country can be free of them” (178).

The lack of reaction on the part of Haiti caused confusion for the Dominican Army. Captain Ventarrón in El Masacre wonders, “¿Vendrán? ¿Vendrán los haitianos a vengar sus hermanos? . . .” (31). Later the captain observes, “No vienen haitianos vengadores” (88). The lack of response allowed Dominicans to refuse responsibility for the act. The author Philoctète explains in Massacre River, “The highly sensitive citizens of the Dominican Republic have no doubt quickly grasped what we need not point out: the Haitian authorities have abandoned the Haitian border people. [. . .] We [Dominicans] wash our hands of this” (175).

In The Farming of Bones, there is also surprise at the lack of a response. Yves asks, “Tell me, why don’t our people go to war because of this? [. . .] Why won’t our president fight?” (197). To this date, there not been an official Haitian response to the mass killing of its citizens. However, the survivor’s response to the massacre can be found in Danticat’s text. As Shea notes:

The survivors of the massacre, like Amabelle, confront the Dominican Republic and Haiti with a silent, but disruptive corporeal testimony that draws attention to a reality that has been buried and enciphered in the historical record. (“The Dangerous Job of Edwidge Danticat” 104)

Danticat also notes her book is, “[. . .] about survivors, and we’re children of survivors” (“An Interview between Edwidge Danticat and Renèe Shea” 4). In the absence of an official response, the response of the survivors is the only one heard. The success of The Farming of Bones ensured that it was a response heard around the world.

Dominican Reaction to the Massacre

Trujillo never accepted responsibility for the massacre and to the end maintained that the killings were the result of a dispute between Dominican farmers and cattle ranchers and Haitians.

The reaction of the Dominican people to the massacre was mixed. Eugenio Matibag explains:

For Trujillo and the Dominican people, moreover, the massacre achieved a sort of symbolic success or vindication: no one would applaud such atrocities, no one could approve them unreservedly, but the genocide meant secure borders, and secure borders meant a secure country, and what many condemn in public they commend in private anyway. (149)

While some Dominicans agreed with the Dominicanization of the border, others chose to risk their lives to hide Haitians. Prestol Castillo writes, “Aún temen algunos, pues hay haitianos escondidos en las casas” (32). Likewise, in The Farming of Bones, Señora Valencia helped Haitians avoid the massacre. She says:

During El Corte, though I was bleeding and nearly died, I hid many of your people [. . .] I hid a baby who is now a student at the medical school with Rosalinda and her husband. I hid Sylvie and two families in your old room. I hid some of Doña Sabine’s people before she and her husband could escape to Haiti. I did what I could in my situation. (299)

Señora Valencia is caught between sympathy for Haitians, hiding several in her house, and loyalty to her husband. While she was saving the lives of Haitians, her husband, Señor Pico, was killing them. There is great irony in her hiding of Haitians in the house of a Dominican army officer for as Iván Grullón explains, “En nuestro país se puede ser ‘pro-yanqui’, pero no pro-haitiano, aunque sean aquellos quienes explotan los dominicanos” (29). Although Señora Valencia risks her life to save Haitians, she also defends her husband’s actions claiming that, “Many good men commit terrible acts these days” (150). As a couple, they represent the division found in the Dominican Republic between the killers and those brave enough to go against the order to kill. Yet, Amabelle wonders, “Would she be brave enough to stand between me and her husband if she had to?” (141).

Racism as Official Discourse: *Antihaitianismo*

Antihaitianismo, Spanish for anti-Haitianism, began during Hispaniola's colonial history, when France ruled Saint Domingue and Spain ruled Santo Domingo. After achieving independence from France, Haiti from 1822-1844 occupied Santo Domingo. In 1844, Dominicans gained its independence from Haiti. Relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic have been hostile ever since. Michel-Rolph Trouillot notes that, "The Haitian invasions of the eastern side have often been held as the starting point of Dominican Negrophobia" (3).

The Dominican Republic would also come to define itself in relation to Haiti. Roberto Cassá further explains that:

[E]l dominicano era mejor que el *otro*, que el enemigo, el haitiano, recurrencia ajustada al carácter reaccionario de ese pretendido nacionalismo. De ahí que la esencia hispánica tuviese por correlato obligado el enfrentamiento nacional con Haití – magnificado hasta proporciones aterradoras – como categoría fundamentalísima de la constitución del a propia nación dominica. (60)

Joaquín Balaguer believes, "Santo Domingo es, por instinto de conservación, el pueblo más español y más tradicionalista de América" (63). According to Dominicans, their country is white, Catholic, and Hispanic. In contrast, Haiti is black, practices Voodoo, and is African. Thus, Dominicans view themselves as racially superior. It also means that for Dominicans, nation becomes tied with race. However, anti-Haitian beliefs in the Dominican Republic are at odds with the ethnic reality of many black Dominicans, placing them in a situation in which they must negate their black heritage. Trouillot explains, "Between Ryswick and Aranjuez, Santo Domingo, a society with one of the world's highest ratios of individuals of mixed ancestry, became also a negrophobic society" (2). Even Trujillo, whose grandmother was Haitian, in order

to imagine himself as a Dominican had to deny his own ancestry.¹⁴ Additionally, John Augelli notes, “The Dominican peasants, even those who were obviously black, came to feel ashamed of any association that smacked of Haitian origin” (33). This, in part, helps explain just how Dominicans, or how anyone in general, could be capable of such inhumanity and cruelty. García Cruz explains that Dominicans:

[S]e caracteriza por una obsesión de ser blanco, de actuar como un blanco y lucir como un blanco. Este individuo niega y oculta su descendencia negra, se avergüenza de sus rasgos y de su pasado, y en su necesidad compulsiva de refinarse y mostrarse distinto, hay temor y ansiedad excesiva de ser descubierto, por lo que tratara de apartarse de todo aquello que le recuerde su origen, será hostil con sus compañeros de raza y de cultura y por eso su crueldad hacia ellos, pues le recuerdan y le reviven su punto de partida. (115)

The correlation of blackness with Haitian identity is a long-standing theme within Dominican national ideology. However Lauren Derby explains:

Raza was not primarily marked by skin color; indeed this marker would have been a most ambiguous signifier in a zone which had seen four hundred years of extensive intermarriage and cultural mixing. Yet there was a difference, universally acknowledged in the border, between Dominicans and Haitians [. . .] Race here was fundamentally a cultural construct. (525)

Therefore, the complexities of national (Dominican) national identity came down to a simple word, *perejil*. As Philoctète describes, “The grand design of a national government is to kill people through the power of a word . . . As a weapon against the border people, Rafael Leónidas Trujillo suggested ‘*perejil*’” (146-7). Philoctète also notes:

For the last forty-eight hours, the Haitian people of the border have been learning to say ‘*perejil*’. A banal word. A kitchen herb. That can cost a life. If you can pronounce it well, you are Dominican, blanco de la tierra, and the soldiers present arms: ‘¡Guardia salud!’ But if the r wanders into the i, the j, or if the p, and the l, the r become dislocated, jam up, grab at one another, come undone, start scrapping, go off in a huff, then you are Haitian and ready for the firing squad: ‘¡Guardia, fúsilelo!’ [sic]. (111)

¹⁴ Alberto Despradel Cabral notes that: “Rafael Leonidas, hijo de Altagracia Julia Molina Chevalier por la parte materna, era nieto y bisnieto de haitianos” (79).

Augelli also explains that, “The Dominican peasants, even those who were obviously black, came to feel ashamed of any association that smacked of Haitian origin” (33). Gudmundson and Scaran maintain that, “Accordingly, the dark skin common in the Dominican population was transformed into a trait inherited from Indian ancestry” (340). Given that it was impossible to be black and Dominican, Dominicans of darker color were considered ‘Indian’. This Dominican racial myth is perpetuated in El Masacre when the narrator describes doña Francina as, “una bella india de la aldea” (35).

The Farming of Bones also illustrates the same racial myth. Señora Valencia gives birth to twins, one slightly darker than the other. She says to Amabelle, “See what we’ve brought forth together, my Spanish prince and my Indian princess. [. . .] She will steal many hearts, my Rosalinda. Look at that profile. The profile of Anacaona, a true Indian queen” (29). Her comments propagate Dominican racial national myth. Interestingly, the lighter-skinned baby named after Trujillo, dies within days of birth. The darker child lives and thrives, the opposite of what happens during the massacre, only days away from happening.

Antihaitianismo is often named as the catalyst for the massacre, which was unprovoked, brutal, and came without warning. Rumors of the killings quickly reached the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince. However, given the 1935 agreement on the border between the two countries, Haitians had difficulty believing what they were hearing.¹⁵ Haitian historian Jean Price-Mars describes their reaction to news of the killings:

¿Sería cierto? ¿Sería posible? Y, ¿por qué?, se preguntaba uno, ansioso. La noticia parecía tan extravagante como inverosímil. Qué pudo haber, por tanto, sucedido para dar origen a esta matanza colectiva de haitianos en la República Dominicana? (215-6)

¹⁵ Spain and France agreed by the Treaty of Aranjuez of 1777, upon the Rivers Dajabón or Massacre as the boundary. However in 1895, in the Treaty of Basel Spain ceded the entire island to France. From 1822-1844 the whole island was under the control of the Haitian President Boyer. On February 27, 1844 the Dominican Republic became a sovereign state. On February 27, 1935 Presidents Stênio Joseph Vincent and Rafael Leónidas Trujillo signed a new border agreement.

In the Dominican Republic, there had also been no warning and the response was similar. Turits explains that to people living along the border, “the genocidal rampage appeared to come out of nowhere, like an act of madness” (620). Derby also notes that before the massacre, “Border Dominicans did not hold an univocal set of negative stereotypes related to Haiti and Haitians. Most of the Dominicans border residents visited Haiti frequently” (513). Similarly Turits writes: “As one Haitian refugee from the massacre recalled, ‘Although there were two sides, the people were one, united.’” (526). He further maintains that, “And no clear economic hierarchy or conflict existed between ethnic Haitians and ethnic Dominicans in the region’s rural areas.” (528). Reaction throughout the rest of the country was similar. Moya Pons notes that massacre, “caused a gigantic shock among the Dominican people, who either witnessed with terror the massacre or heard the ominous rumors about it that circulated from household to household” (The Dominican Republic 368). The reaction of shock, surprise, and bewilderment described by both Haitian and Dominican historians illustrates that before the massacre, *antihaitianismo*¹⁶ was not very prevalent in the Dominican Republic. Fernando Valerio Holguín explains that:

The discourse of anti-Haitian primitivism served as an intellectual justification for the dehumanization, enslavement, and genocide of Haitian people, set forth as a historical necessity for the foundation of ‘Patria Nueva’ of which Trujillo was God and Father. (Primitive Borders 83)

Turits also believes that the conflict between Haitians and Dominicans came after the massacre and served to justify it. He explains:

This new mode of racism emerged as a result of state terror and the official anti-Haitianism that followed it and served to rationalize the massacre. The main consequence of the bloodbath for Dominicans was the destruction of the Haitian-Dominican frontier world and the transformation of popular meanings of Dominican identity, culture, and nationality.

¹⁶ *Antihaitianismo* is a negative prejudice towards Haitians, who are viewed as descendents of black slaves by Dominicans who see themselves as descendents of white Spaniards. This anti-Haitian ideology was heavily propagated during Trujillo’s dictatorship. Also Derby explains that: “The dominant Dominican ideology, anti-Haitianism is essentially a class-based prejudice, a rejection of the sub-stratum of Haitian cane cutters who are seen as patently subhuman” (493).

But this construction of Dominican nationality rests on historical amnesia of the pre-massacre frontier world, of its culturally pluralist nation as well as its transnational community. It also rests on a problematic interpretation of the Haitian massacre as a reflection of (rather than an impetus for) the widespread anti-Haitianism that exists today in the Dominican Republic. In 1937 Dominican frontier residents had to bury the Haitian members of their community. And in so doing, they also buried their own way of life, and ultimately the memories of their collective past. (535)

Therefore, what is often overlooked is the fact that Trujillo used *antihaitianismo* to justify the massacre and it was only after the massacre that it became prevalent in the Dominican Republic.

El Masacre expresses a strong anti-Haitian undertone and racist sentiment. Howard notes that in the narrative, “Haitians are described consistently as primitive, savage, and alien to the Dominican civilization, an ironic reversal of the barbarity of the Dominican-led massacre” (141). Haiti is consistently identified with blackness. The narrator says, “La noche anulaba, pintaba de negro. Como el destino de Haití. Con el color de Haití” (88). He also describes how Haitian people, who are African descent are unable to speak Spanish. He observes, ¡Qué temblor y pavora ví en más de un labio grueso, afro-español, y en más de una articulación de sonidos ambiguos, pugnando por hablar claro el español, para demostrar que era dominicano quien hablaba!” (23).

El Masacre mentions the little value Dominicans placed on Haitian life at the time of the massacre.

Pienso en la agonía de Haití, despreciado aun por los dominicanos negros, que lo consideran inferior y cobarde. Por su parte este haitiano ha desplazado al criollo en una competencia de trabajo dando más rendimiento por menor salario, en una vida cuasi animal. (71)

He notes that Dominicans have dehumanized Haitians and writes, “. . . el hombre puede fácilmente explotar al hombre. Sobre todo, hay unos seres a quienes difícilmente podría llamarse hombres: los negros de Haití, brazo barato” (35). Along the border, many Dominicans married Haitians. Their offspring were viewed with disdain. Prestol Castillo writes, “. . . hijos mío y de

la haitiana. ¡No sirven! ¡Mala raza!” (60). In the Dominican Republic any amount of Haitian blood was enough to qualify one as “Haitian”. Prestol Castillo repeats anti-Haitian ideology in his text, which takes place before, during, and shortly after the massacre. However, Crassweller mentions that before the massacre there was not “any general prejudice against individual Haitians, who mingle in large numbers with Dominicans. The ancient hostility was national and public, not personal and private” (149-50). Therefore, the Prestol Castillo inaccurately represents the border area before the massacre and repeats Trujillo’s justification for the massacre, which blamed Haitians for the massacre.

The Farming of Bones also presents an inaccurate picture. Señor Pico in The Farming of Bones most clearly illustrates the disdain Dominicans had for Haitians before the massacre. Upon learning that Haitians had drunk from some of his cups Amabelle says, “he shattered the cups and saucers, one by one” (116). He also shuns his daughter Rosalinda, who according to Amabelle, had “her father’s bronze complexion” (293). In shunning her for the color of skin, which is similar to his, he is also negating a part of himself. Amabelle is also aware of *antiahitianismo* even before the killings began. She comments, “I was never naïve, or blind. I knew. I knew that the death of many was coming. I knew that the streams and rivers would run with blood. I knew as well how to say ‘pèsi’ as to say ‘perejil” (265). For her, the massacre did not come as a total surprise. The Framing of Bones also illustrates the little value of human life on the border. Many of the characters prefer death to living. Mimi, who is young says, “ I don’t want to live so long. . . I’d rather die young like Joel did. . . . I’d rather have death surprise me, I don’t want to wait a long time for it to come find me. (60). Like El Masacre, The Farming of Bones inaccurately represents the border region before the massacre and suggests that Haitians may have been responsible for their own deaths.

Haitians as Thieves

Anti-Haitian ideology also claimed that Haitians were stealing from Dominicans and therefore the border needed to be enforced. Fernando Infante explains, “El día dos de octubre, en el Ayuntamiento de Dajabón improvisó un discurso declarando que no tolerará la continuación de las depredaciones haitianas en las regiones fronterizas” (77). However, Derby disagrees and explains that:

The accusation that Haitians were somehow behind a constant, silent drain of Dominican cattle across the border is a rumor circulated constantly in the border from the early part of this century until today, even though many border residents agree that the claim that the Haitians were constantly stealing Dominican goods was not true. (521)

Prestol Castillo’s text reveals the rift between myth and reality seen in the comments made by Infante and Derby. He mentions that Dominicans did not believe that Haitians were thieves but were required to say so. He writes, “Pero cuando llegaba la ronda a su casa, él hablaría mal de los haitianos. ‘No se puede vivir. Todo lo roban! ¡Son unos perros! . . .’ decía el aguzado don Francisco” (92). However, the text repeats the idea that the Haitians were stealing from the Dominican Republic. The narrator notes, “Otra causa de extinción del ganado era el robo de los haitianos” (29). He later mentions, “Sí, habían sido los malditos haitianos, que acabaron con las reses” (98). He perpetuates the idea that Dominicans are going hungry because of Haitian theft and claims:

Ah! ‘mañases’ del Diablo! . . . Antenoche estubién aquí, y no quedó un rabo e yuca pa los probe negros jijo mío . . . y pa mí tengo, que los haitianos trabajan con el Diablo! . . . Caminan con la noche como de día! . . .(30)

At another point he says, that Haitians are “[l]a langosta negra arrasaba en las noches los plantíos de yuca y maíz” (80). In presenting Haitians as thieves, Prestol Castillo justifies the massacre. Haitians are to blame for having stolen from Dominicans. Yet, the text continually contradicts

itself. At times, it maintains that Haitian are thieves, at other times sympathizing with Haitians and justifying their actions. The narrator explains:

El sargento gritaba. Dentro de su embriaguez, en el momento del sacrificio de los negros de Haití, inexplicablemente venia a su mente algo que surgía del subconsciente: ‘estos negros, son bueno . . . Pero son ladrones! Deben morir!’ (27).

Haitians, almost in acknowledgment of their wrongdoing don’t question the sentence of death.

The narrator says, “Los negros iban a cumplir una sentencia de muerte, sin protesta” (27). In contrast, Amabelle narrates a very different Haitian response. She displays a defiant tone when she notes:

The Generalissimo’s mind was surely as dark as death, but if he had heard Odette’s ‘pèsi,’ it might of startle him, not the tears and supplications he would have expected, no shriek from unbound fear, but a provocation, a challenge, a dare. To the devil with your world, your grass, your wind, your water, your air, your words. You ask for perejil, I give you more. (203)

She also describes others who were defiant and says, “‘I will stay and fight,’ Unèl said. ‘I work hard; I have a right to be here. The brigade stays to fight. While we fight we can help others’” (126).

The Dangers of Nationalism

Both El Masacre and The Farming of Bones highlight the atrocities that occur under dictatorships and other repressive regimes. Often these acts of violence are justified as necessary out of love of nation. Trujillo disguised hatred and racism as nationalism. Love for the Dominican Republic included xenophobia towards Haitians. Trujillo enthusiastically promoted *antihaitianismo* and as Augelli notes, “public denunciation of the Haitian connection became a duty” (33). Human Rights Watch reports that, “Throughout the mid-twentieth century, Trujillo fed the Dominican population a steady diet of anti-Haitian propaganda, relying on the schools and the media to disseminate these ideas”. Among those ideas was the idea that Haiti posed a threat the Dominican Republic. Turits explains, “Dominican intellectuals represented the

Haitian presence in the Dominican frontier as a “pacific invasion” that was endangering the Dominican nation” (562). Furthermore, Vega believes that:

Trujillo, como la mayor parte de los dominicanos, temía que la República Dominicana fuese eventualmente abrumada por la mayor población haitiana, empobrecida, analfabeta, y la más densa del Nuevo Mundo. (Trujillo y Haití 62)

According to intellectuals working for Trujillo, the country was under siege from its poorer, more populous neighbor. José Almoina, who had been Trujillo’s secretary, even goes so far as to justify the genocide. In a book published thirteen years after the massacre and while Trujillo was still in power, he writes of the dictator:

[N]o se le puede culpar por hacerlo. Los sucesos de 1937 fueron el saldo a la historia de la ocupación de 1822-1844 [. . .] Trujillo resolvió en 1937 todo un proceso histórico, clarificó para siempre el ambiente y dejó liberado el porvenir de su Patria. [. . .] Trujillo tenía entonces que salvar a su país y lo hizo con plena conciencia de las responsabilidades, enfrentando un peligro evidente y hasta aventurando su propio destino. (Yo fui secretario de Trujillo 121-2)

Similarly Mateo notes, “Con la masacre del 1937, Trujillo arriba a la máxima fulguración del nacionalismo, a la demostración tranquila de recursos extremos para salvar la Patria” (119).

Thus, the massacre is justified from Trujillo’s perspective as the self-defense of a country and culture under siege.

Some Dominicans also thought their culture was under attack by Haitian immigrants. Joaquín Balaguer, President under Trujillo, maintains “[l]o que Santo Domingo desea es conservar su cultura y sus costumbres como pueblo español e impedir la desintegración de su alma y la pedida de sus rasgos distintivos” (64). Thus, the massacre is seen as necessary for protecting Dominican culture. Eugenio Matibag notes:

For Trujillo and the Dominican people, moreover, the massacre achieved a sort of symbolic success or vindication: no one would applaud such atrocities, no one could approve them unreservedly, but the genocide meant secure borders, and secure borders meant a secure country, and what many condemn in public they commend in private anyway. (149)

Matibag's observation explains, in part, the many contradictions found in Prestol Castillo's narrative.

Like Trujillo, El Masacre uses nationalism as a justification for the massacre. As Howard notes, "*El masacre* presents the tragedy of extreme nationalism and the atrocities of genocide" (141). The narrator laments the lack of a border between the two countries. He describes, "Miseria con una sola moneda: la luna redonda, que flota sobre el agua del Masacre, pobre riacho . . . que se pasa a pies (129). He later reiterates that the river "no es frontera, ya que se pasa fácilmente a pie" (129). The text also references Haiti's occupation of the Dominican Republic as justification for the massacre although, the narrator at one point refuses to let it be an excuse of genocide. He states:

Horror! Horror! ¿Es que tenemos que cobrar deudas de sangre, también con sangre? . . . No! Pese a sus crímenes del siglo pasado, los haitianos son nuestros más desgraciados hermanos, más desgraciados que nosotros! (10)

Later, he remembers Haiti's violent past while wondering why Haiti has not responded to the killing of its citizens. He remembers, "Sobre aquellas sabanas nos liberamos de las cadenas con que sojuzgó Haití a la República Dominicana por 22 años. En ese periodo Haití degolló, fusiló, hostigó sin piedad, al pueblo dominicano. ¿I [sic] estos puñales de hoy?" (72). Regarding

Prestol Castillo's use of history to justify genocide Grullón notes:

Es lamentable, sin embargo, que este escritor, al evocar tanto el pasado, haya dejado la impresión de que dicha matanza se justificaba frente a los crímenes cometidos por los haitianos un siglo atrás, cuando las tropas de Dessalines masacraron en su retirada hacia Haití a los dominicanos indefenso que encontraron en su camino. (39)

The massacre is often viewed as an outcome of reassertion of Dominican nationality along the border. Similarly, Pedro San Miguel explains that the massacre is also viewed as necessary for the defense of Dominican nation, "Así, la horrible matanza de haitianos realizada en las zonas fronterizas en 1937 es presentada como un acontecimiento de primer orden en la defensa de la

nacionalidad dominicana” (88). F. E. Puello Moscoso explains, “He dicho, y lo repito, que aquí no hay conciencia nacional. No hay ciudadanos, hay habitantes” (96). Prestol Castillo recognizes the need for the border and notes that most Dominicans have no idea of nation. He says, “En esta vida - la de don Francisco es un signo - la República Dominicana no pasa de dos vanas palabras, ‘República Dominicana’: no la conoce nadie” (91). Furthermore, Prestol Castillo describes his childhood teacher as someone who was, “extranjerizado en sus preferencias” (15). He also lacks any sense of nationalism. As Prestol Castillo notes:

No conocía su país. Era de una familia ilustre de la capital y jamás había salido a ‘esos pueblos’ de su propio país. Limitados a sus pequeña ciudad colonial, llena de rancios prestigios, hacían alarde de una concentración citadina, en el fondo antinacional, que los separaba de las demás provincias, aldeas y territorios. (15)

In short, the teacher has difficulty in imagining the towns along the border as belonging the Dominican Republic. His comment, “Esos pueblos deben ser insoportables” (15), reflects his inability to imagine them as part of the Dominican Republic. Prestol Castillo paints an unflattering image of his teacher, noting that he was, “[. . .] un maestro sofisticado, lleno de cortesía vacía, desprovisto de sentido nacionalista” (17). In his treatment of the teacher, Prestol Castillo acknowledges that the not all Dominicans have a clear definition or concept of the Dominican Republic.

The Farming of Bones warns against the dangers of nationalism and the narrative criticizes the type of nationalism, both Haitian and Dominican that can lead to these atrocities.

After the massacre Amabelle lives with Man Rapadou who explains that she poisoned her husband during the American occupation of Haiti because “[. . .] greater than my love for this man was love for my country. I could not let him trade us all, sell us to the Yankis” (277).

Dominicans also kill out of love of country. Señora Valencia’s father says of her husband, Señor Pico, ““ I have seen this before. Your man, he believes that everything he is doing, he’s doing

for his country. At least this is what he must tell himself” (138). Thus, both Dominicans and Haitians kill out of love of country.

Imagining Trujillo

Like the massacre itself, which is the text both justifies and condemns, the soldiers’ comments made after meeting Trujillo El Masacre are contradictory. Some view Trujillo as a deity. They are told, “no se laven la mano con que saludaron al General” (120). The narrator describes that Trujillo “[e]ra como la aparición y desaparición de una deidad” (120). Another soldier observes, “-El General estaba vestido como un Dio. Con ese Jefe, cojo yo a Haití en dos día” (121). However, others describe:

El General apareció al fin. Venía vestido con todas sus condecoraciones. Brillaba el sol sobre oro, plata y aceros. Un traje azul, un hombre erecto y encima una cabeza gris y joven. [. . .] Su mano era delicada, fina como de salón.

‘-. . . Y ese, es el General?’

‘- No parece! . . .’

Ellos lo creían más grande, más fuerte, sobrenatural. . . Y se volvían a preguntar si ese era el mismo General . . . Ese hombre lo puede todo! . . . Y ¿por qué tiene las manos tan finas? (120)

The soldiers who question Trujillo’s status as a deity feel defrauded. Yet, there is no resistance to Trujillo, no mention of overthrowing him from power. The only person who resists Trujillo is Angela, the narrator’s fiancé, and rather than stay and fight for freedom, she flees the country.

Trujillo, as a character appears indirectly in The Farming of Bones. His large portrait hangs in Señora Valencia’s living room, much like his presence hangs over the Dominican Republic. Amabelle also hears his voice on the radio. She says, “a voice for all of its authority was still as shrill as a birdcall” (97). Although Amabelle never sees Trujillo, his presence saves her life. Amabelle and her Yves are in Dajabón trying to cross into Haiti when they are attacked by an angry mob. Trujillo is also in Dajabón speaking in a church. Amabelle and Yves lives are

saved when Trujillo's departure from the church distracts the mob. A priest communicates Trujillo's racist ideology. Father Romain, who Amabelle visits hoping for information on Sebastien, repeats Trujillo's anti-Haitian and nationalist ideology. Because of severe beatings by Trujillo's men, he is imbecilic and drooling as he repeats Trujillo's xenophobic words.

On this island, walk too far in either direction and people speak a different language, [. . .] Our motherland is Spain; theirs is darkest Africa, you understand? They once came here only to cut sugarcane, but now there are more of them than there will be can to cut, you understand? Our problem is one of dominion. Tell me, does anyone like to have their house flooded with visitors, to the point that the visitors replace their own children? How can a country be ours if we are in smaller numbers than the outsiders? Those of us who love our country are taking measures to keep it our own. [. . .] Sometimes I cannot believe that this one island produced two such different peoples. [. . .] We, as Dominicans, must have our separate traditions and our own ways of living. If not, in less than three generations, we will all be Haitians. In three generations, our children and grandchildren will have their blood completely tainted unless we defend ourselves now, you understand? (259-60)

His sister explains to Amabelle that while Father Romain was in prison, "They forced him to say these things that he says now whenever his mind wanders" (260).

Conclusion

The narratives studied in this chapter are acts of memory; El Masacre is personal memory, The Farming of Bones is based on historical and collective memory. Prestol Castillo and Danticat, for differing reasons, have chosen not to forget. Nobel Laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel notes that the desire to forget traumatic experiences is normal. However, when there are no memorials for the dead, it is up to living to remember. In his Nobel lecture, Wiesel states:

Of course we could try to forget the past. Why not? Is it not natural for a human being to repress what causes him pain, what causes him shame? Like the body memory protects its wounds. When day breaks after a sleepless night, one's ghosts must withdraw; the dead are ordered back to their graves. But for the first time in history, we could not bury our dead. We bear their graves within ourselves.

For us, forgetting was never an option. (12-11-86)

Like the Jewish Holocaust, the victims of the Haitian massacre have no graves. They also have no identity. As Philoctète's notes, "Words have birth certificates - and death certificates, too"

(146). The Haitians slaughtered had neither. Prestol Castillo notes:

Los muertos de esta vorágine no tienen nombre. Ni siquiera cifra como el presidio. Si nuestras mulas chocan en el camino, con un cadáver, pararemos las mulas y enterraremos a ese hombre. ¿Cuál hombre? El muerto no sería 'hombre', para don David. Era, 'un haitiano' . . . 'Nada más que un haitiano'. (85)

Similarly, Amabelle the narrator of The Farming of Bones, notes of those killed in the massacre, "There were no graves, there were no markers" (270). The words of Wiesel, Prestol Castillo and Amabelle bring to mind Schulweis who believes "[m]emory is a warning, a protest, and act of fidelity to the martyrs" (xv). Thus, for some it is out of respect for and in solidarity with the dead, that one must not forget.

By means of the written word, each author memorializes the victims of the massacre, who otherwise would not have a memorial. In particular, remembering the victims is paramount to Danticat who explains:

I hope this does not sound too pretentious, but I feel that in some way the work is a kind of memorial to those who died, a plea to remember them. Some reviewers said the book suffered from that intent. I hope not, but I do hope that each time someone picks up that book they will think of those forty thousand plus people who were massacred. (Johnson 25-6)

After writing the short story "Nineteen Thirty-Seven" included in Krik? Krak?, Danticat visits the Massacre River. She explains in an interview with Charters:

There were no markers. I felt like I was standing on top of a huge mass grave, and just couldn't see the bodies. That's the first time I remember thinking, 'Nature has no memory' [. . .] and that's why we have to have memory'. (43)

Similarly Nick Nesbitt observes, "[. . .] the poet takes from the dead their only possession, their memory among the living, and abrogates it to her own project" (207). Danticat's project is one

of healing. As Peterson explains, “writing a traumatic history of injustice can lead to healing” (170). During an online interview with her readers and the Chicago Sun-Times, Danticat said:

The reason for telling a story like that is not to rub salt on old wounds but to remind people that we cannot let these things happen. Haiti took over the Dominican Republic once and we, too, caused them a lot of pain. As Amabelle would say, now it is time for testimony, but also for healing. (“An Atrocity Lushly Revisited”)

Furthermore she asks Shea, “How can a nation or a culture work through a past event that they choose to not recognize or wish to forget” (“The Dangerous Job of Edwidge Danticat” 100).

An analysis of both narratives shows a denunciation of the massacre by the authors through very different means. Prestol Castillo attempts to explain how Dominicans could have participated in such a horrific event. He justifies the massacre as needed for nation building as Dominicans, like his childhood teacher had not concept of nation. He also blames Haitians for their own deaths. Therefore, his narrative focuses on the effect of the massacre on Dominicans. In contrast, Danticat’s narrative focuses on the massacre’s effect on Haitians, without ever blaming Dominicans for the massacre.

For the reader familiar with the 1937 Massacre, El Masacre and The Farming of Bones remind the reader of the little value of human life. Trujillo, who single-handedly masterminded the killings, was never arrested and charged with crimes against humanity. To the contrary, the massacre had very little impact on his close relationship with the United States and he continued to receive its support. The massacre was widely reported on in the United States press. Despite this, it took a month for the United States to acknowledge the massacre.¹⁷ Yet, not much happened as a result. Howard Wiarda notes, “The Haitian slaughter of 1937 produced some concern in the United States, but he easily weathered this storm” (138). Furthermore, Raymond Pulley explains that, “The Roosevelt administration took little notice of the Dominican Haitian

¹⁷ Crassweller notes that “The United States showed official concern on November 7” (157).

incident of October 1937 . . . [and] no reprimand for this crime against the Haitian people emanated from Washington” (31). Less than two years after the massacre, on July 13, 1939 while Trujillo was on a state visit to the United States, The New York Times reported, “US Representative Hamilton Fish praised General Trujillo’s statesmanship and described him as ‘a builder greater than all the Spanish conquistadors together’” (“Mayor Welcomes Trujillo to City” 3).

Likewise, international reaction to the massacre was limited. Wiarda claims that the slaughter of some 15,000 Haitians in 1937 produced a revulsion abroad which threatened Trujillo’s rule (32). However, Philoctète disagrees and notes that, “No Red Cross agency anywhere in the world spoke up on their behalf [...] nor did any other international, philanthropic, humanitarian organization” (123). So marginalized were the victims of the massacre that Philoctète observes that, “ Even religions aren’t giving a thought to the Haitian border people” (131).

Thus, there are no happy conclusions to be found in either history or these narratives. The message is in the 20th century it was possible to murder thousands of innocent people, less than 1,000 miles off the shores of the United States (less than the distance between Miami and New York City), and not suffer any negative consequences. If there is any satisfaction for the reader, it comes from knowing that each author has given a voice to the victims thereby countering the official silence of history.

In the United States, Haiti is synonymous with poverty. As Joel Dreyfuss explains, “I call it ‘the Phrase’ and it comes up almost any time Haiti is mentioned in the news, ‘the Poorest Nation in the Western Hemisphere’” (56). He continues to say that:

The Phrase grates with us because it also denies so much else about Haiti: our art, our music, our rich Afro-Euro-American culture. It denies the humanity of Haitians, the

capacity to survive, to overcome, even to triumph over this poverty, a historical experience we share with so many other [sic] in this same Western Hemisphere. (58)

Yet, Haiti is much more than that. Both Prestol Castillo and Danticat's narratives testify to the strength and resilience of the Haitian people and the richness of their culture.

CHAPTER 3
CHALLENGING “EL JEFE” IN LAS MIRABAL AND IN THE TIME OF THE
BUTTERFLIES

In my own D.R. we have many rains: / the sprinkle, the shower, the hurricane, / the tears,
the many tears for our many dead.

- Julia Alvarez, “Redwing Sonnets”

Cuando supe que habían caído las tres hermanas
Mirabal
me dije:
la sociedad establecida ha muerto.

- Pedro Mir, “Amén de Mariposas”

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the fictionalization and literary representation of two important 20th century Dominican historical figures, the dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina and the revolutionary and national heroine Minerva Mirabal Reyes. It also focuses on how the Trujillo era and the Dominican Republic have been narrated. The two works analyzed are Las Mirabal (1976), by the Dominican author Ramón Alberto Ferreras, and the In the Time of the Butterflies (1995), by the Dominican American author Julia Alvarez. The Mirabal sisters, Patria, Minerva and María Teresa were part of a revolutionary group which sought to overthrow Trujillo. Of the sisters, Minerva was the most politically active. Consequently, hers is the most developed character in the texts selected and it is the reason this study focuses mainly on her and not on her sisters. These two narratives, published 19 years apart, provide contrasting, opposing, and very different literary manifestations of the Dominican Republic, Trujillo, Minerva, and the events that lead to her murder by Trujillo’s men on a lonely and dangerous mountainous road.

The Mirabal Sisters – Historical Background

On November 25, 1960, Trujillo's henchmen assassinated Patria, Minerva, and María Teresa Mirabal after ambushing their Jeep on a mountain road. In the days leading up to their death it had been widely rumored that Trujillo wanted the sisters murdered for their involvement in the "Movimiento Revolucionario 14 de Junio" (MR-1J4). Minerva's husband, Manuel Tavárez Justo, was the leader of this leftist revolutionary group which sought a government similar to the one in Cuba.¹⁸ Leandro Guzmán, María Teresa's husband, was also closely involved. Minerva and María Teresa were also linked to the movement and had been imprisoned earlier in 1960. The men ordered to kill the sisters were reluctant and invented any excuse to avoid it. According to Bernard Dietrich, "Trujillo grew impatient when he learned his agents had not carried out his orders by November 22" (69). This was rectified on November 25, 1960 when, as Dietrich explains, the women were dragged out of the car and killed with clubs. Their bodies were placed in their Jeep that was driven to the edge of a precipice and hurled over (71). The three sisters, along with their driver, Rufino de la Cruz Disla, were found dead near their wrecked Jeep, at the bottom of a 150-foot cliff in the northern part of the country. Today the chassis of the Jeep is displayed defiantly outside of Dedé Mirabal's ancestral home in Ojo de Agua. She is the only surviving sibling.¹⁹

The sisters' death had a profound effect on the Dominican psyche. According to Dietrich, this particular assassination "did something to their machismo. They could never forgive Trujillo this crime" (72). Similarly, José Rafael Vargas notes, "Pero esta muerte conjunta

¹⁸ Manuel, known as Manolo, was fighting the remnants of Trujillo's regime when he was shot and killed in 1963. At the time of his death he was the leader of the 14th of June Movement.

¹⁹ For additional biographical information on the Mirabal sisters, see Minerva Mirabal: historia de un heroína (1982) by William Galván. For historical studies of Trujillo's regime see Robert Crassweller's, Trujillo: the Life and Times of a Caribbean Dictator (1996) and Frank Moya Pons' The Dominican Republic. A National History (1998).

despertó la ira del pueblo que sintió en ese crimen los latigazos de un régimen vergonzoso” (231). Additionally, Valentina Peguero-Danilo de los Santos notes, “La muerte de Patria, Minerva, y María Teresa Mirabal provocó un resentimiento antitrujillista en todos los sectores sociales” (365). Some historians maintain that the murder of the Mirabal sisters precipitated Trujillo’s own assassination. As Etzel Báez explains:

El final de las hermanas Mirabal no es triste. El sacrificio de sus vidas no queja ajusticiado. El gesto de las heroínas contribuyó a remover los cimientos de la tiranía de Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, quien fue ajusticiado el 30 de mayo del 1961, a los seis meses de ocurrido el horrible asesinato de Patria, Minerva y María Teresa, el 25 de noviembre del 1960. (39)

Tragically, it is as a result of their death, that the martyred sisters’ are victorious. As Vargas observes, “Las Mirabal, a partir de ese momento, se convirtieron en un símbolo de resistencia contra una dictadura que entraba en crisis” (231). More specifically, they became symbols of feminine resistance and today throughout Latin America and the Caribbean November 25th is observed as the National Day of Observance of Violence against Women. The sisters’ posthumous victory can be seen in a monument that today stands in their honor. After a trip to Washington D.C. Trujillo built a replica of the Washington Monument (considered by some to be a phallic symbol) in honor of himself and placed it on George Washington Avenue in Santo Domingo. Not surprisingly, Dominicans called the obelisk, “the male monument” (William Krehm 167). Today, the 137-foot obelisk, which once paid tribute the autocrat, is adorned with a mural of the three Mirabal sisters titled, “A Song to Liberty”, by the Dominican artist Elsa Núñez. The image of the three sisters on Trujillo’s “male monument” reflects the conversion of the obelisk from one that pays homage to the dictator to one that memorializes the Mirabal sisters. This conversion recognizes women’s role in history and symbolizes the sisters’ posthumous victory over Trujillo. Such a monument also serves as a place for public veneration and as a type of altar, thereby contributing to the conversion of the sisters into icons. In contrast,

less than six months after his father's death, Trujillo's son Rafael L. Trujillo Jr., known as Ramfis, proposed the elimination of his father's name from all public places. As reported by The New York Times (13 Nov. 1961), "the proposal followed the recent removal of virtually all statues and busts of the dictator . . . from public places and buildings through the country" ("Trujillo Would Remove Fathers' Place Names"). Additionally, Dietrich explains that on "May 4, 1962 it became a crime to praise the dead tyrant in writings, speeches or art in the Dominican Republic" (252). The disdain Dominicans had for Trujillo extended to his family and after his assassination, the family was expelled for life from the country (Moya Pons, The Dominican Republic 382).

In addition to public monuments, narratives such as Ferreras' Las Mirabal elevated the sisters to martyrdom by turning what was a political assassination into a noble sacrifice. Furthermore, Ferreras encourages women to follow the Mirabal sisters' example. He presents the text to:

[Al] pueblo dominicano y a sus mujeres: para que abreen en la pristina [sic] fuente del ejemplo de sacrificio y martirologio sublimes, de estas tres monstruos del amor a su pueblo y a sus semejantes de toda la humanidad.

By specifically mentioning Dominican women, Ferreras reiterates the need for their involvement in the political system.

Las Mirabal: A Dominican Interpretation of the Sisters

The Dominican novelist, poet, and journalist Ramón Alberto Ferreras, commonly known as "El Chino", was one of the Dominican Republic's most prolific writers, with 36 publications to his name. He was also an enemy and harsh critic of Trujillo. Not surprisingly, he was frequently imprisoned during both Trujillo's dictatorship and the subsequent Joaquín Balaguer presidencies. Ferreras narrated his, and others, experiences as a political prisoner in several books titled Preso (1962), Cárcel (1966) and Políticos presos (1969). However, he is best

known for editing a newspaper titled Patria. During the “War of April 1965” both national newspapers, El Listín Diario and El Caribe ceased publication.²⁰ In the absence of these two newspapers, Patria was launched in 1965, with Ferreras as the editor. It served as a voice for Dominicans who were fighting against the United States and who supported leftist leader Juan Bosch, the exiled founder of the “Partido Revolucionario Dominicano” and who for years had lived in exile. The newspaper denounced the remnants of the old Trujillo army and the occupiers (the United States Marines) that supported them. Ferreras would later publish a book on the intervention and the ensuing civil war, titled Guerra patria (1966). Previously, in 1961-1962, Ferreras had written for a newspaper titled 1J4 for the 14 of June Revolutionary Movement. The newspaper was highly critical of the remnants of Trujillo’s government that remained even after the dictator’s assassination in 1960. Additionally in 1981, Ferreras published a book about the failed 14th of June invasion titled, Recuerdos de junio 1959.

During one of Balaguer’s presidencies, Ferreras published in the Dominican Republic, Media Isla III: Las Mirabal.²¹ The timing is important because, as previously mentioned, Balaguer frequently imprisoned Ferreras. Undaunted by his numerous ‘visits’ to La Victoria prison, Ferreras condemned both Trujillo and Balaguer in this text. Of Balaguer he wrote that he is the president of, “el régimen neotrujillista que ahora desangra a las juventudes dominicanas [. . .]” (475). Las Mirabal is the third book in a series of four, titled Media Isla. His narrative

²⁰ On April 28, 1965, the United States military found itself in the Dominican Republic for the fourth time in 58 years (1903, 1914, 1916, 1965). President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered in forces that eventually totaled 20,000, to secure Santo Domingo and to restore order. The intervention, which claimed the lives of 27 U.S. soldiers, ended on September 21, 1966.

²¹ A lawyer by trade, Balaguer had held various political posts under Trujillo. He served as vice president from 1957-1960 and assumed the presidency in 1960 when the dictator’s brother, Hector Trujillo resigned. Power rested, however, with the dictator until his assassination in May 1961. Unable to control the chaos following the assassination, Balaguer was ousted by the Dominican military in January of 1962. The United States occupation (1965-1966) would return Balaguer to the presidency. He was president from (1960-1962, 1966-1978, and 1986-1996). Ferreras was imprisoned by Trujillo for 4 months in 1960 and was imprisoned 12 times during Balaguer’s various presidencies.

Chapeo (1973), the first in the series of historical-testimonial novels, was recognized in the “Testimonio” category by Casa de Las Américas, in Cuba, in 1973.

Las Mirabal is the first narrative written about the Mirabal sisters. The text, which can be considered a fictional biography, provides the reader with the history of the Mirabal family. It begins with its origin in 19th century Spain and ends with the murder of three of the four Mirabal sisters by Trujillo in 1960. In it, Ferreras hopes to provide the reader with historical information on the heroines’ family. To this end, it offers information such as the height of several of the Mirabal family members (28) and the length of time Minerva’s mother, Doña Chea, nursed her children (110). He observes “todos mencionan y alaban [a las Mirabal], pero pocos conocen . . . sus orígenes, vidas y proyecciones” (back cover). The narrative is also highly critical of United States foreign policy in the Dominican Republic, which is clearly responsible for this family’s misery. The Mirabal family is representative of other Dominican families who fought against oppression and, as a result, suffered imprisonment, torture, and politically motivated murder.

In the Time of the Butterflies: The Voice of the Dominican Diaspora.

Julia Álvarez, in Something to Declare (1998), states that she views herself as a Dominican-American writer (173). Yet, she frequently understates her Dominican heritage. The first thing she states on her website is “I guess the first thing I should say is that I was **not** born in the Dominican Republic”. The emphasis on ‘not’ is hers. In an article for American Scholar she provides insight into her upbringing. She writes, “Although I was raised in the Dominican Republic by Dominican parents in an extended Dominican family, mine was an American childhood” (71). As a child, she viewed the United States not the Dominican Republic, as home. She explains:

All my childhood I had dressed like an American, eaten American foods, and befriended American children. I had gone to an American school and spent most of the day speaking and reading English. At night my prayers were full of blond hair and blue eyes and snow

and just such a plane ride as this one. All my childhood I had longed for this moment of arrival. And here I was, an American girl, coming home at last. (85)

Despite her self-description as “an American girl,” some literary critics have accepted Alvarez into the Dominican literary cannon. Bruno Rosario Candelier, an important Dominican literary critic, considers Butterflies an important national novel, ranking it with such titles as Enriquillo (1882), by Manuel de Jesús de Galván and Escalera para Electra (1970), by Aida Cartagena (27).

However, not all literary critics agree with this judgment. For example, Andrés L. Mateo explains in an interview with Eugenio García Cuevas that literature produced by Julia Alvarez is:

[U]na literatura norteamericana producida por dominicanos que incorpora experiencias válidas de la identidad dominicana y que las hace colar por vía de un circuito comercial con características propias de la mentalidad del lector anglosajón. (27)

Silvio Torres-Saillant simply describes Alvarez as “la célebre escritora anglófona de padres dominicanos” (Yolas 207). In 2006 in commemoration of November 25th, Alvarez invited Dedé and Minou, Minerva’s daughter, to Vermont. It is telling that, as Margaret Michniewicz observed, Alvarez needed Minou to translate “my questions and Dedé’s answers” (“Legendary Butterflies: The Mirabal Sisters’ Legacy of Resistance,” Vermont Woman).

Alvarez, the Dominican with an American education, writes in a language that from a Dominican viewpoint can be seen as imperial. Some critics such as Lynn Chun Ink have found this to be problematic. She maintains that, “By giving primacy to the English language and to a United States readership, Alvarez reaffirms American hegemony” (“Remaking identity, unmaking nation: historical recovery and the reconstruction of community in In the Time of the Butterflies and The Farming of Bones”). Additionally, her “American childhood” is also problematic because it alters her view of the Dominican Republic, a country she is clearly does not know well. She inserts herself into Butterflies as the *gringa dominicana* (3) interviewer. In a phone conversation, the *gringa* asks at what time she can meet with Dedé Mirabal, the only

surviving sister, who thinks to herself, “Oh yes. The gringos need a time” (4). Additionally, when she speaks with Dedé, she mangles the Spanish language. She is also unable find to her way around the Dominican Republic. For these reasons the interviewer behaves much more like *gringa*, or a foreigner, and very little like a *dominicana*. Perhaps, it is for this reason, that Dedé considers her to be an, “American woman” (5), and not a ‘gringa dominicana’. The interviewer’s lack of familiarity with the Spanish language and the Dominican Republic highlights a comment made by Roberto González Echevarría:

Had Julia Alvarez concentrated more on her dialogue with Dedé she would have produced a better book. It would have had the touch of irony provided by the realization that the *gringa dominicana* would never really be able to understand the other woman, much less translate her. (“Sisters in Death”)

In conclusion, the author of this study agrees with Alvarez’s self assessment as an “American girl” and maintains that she is an American of Dominican descent.

Butterflies is Alvarez’s second novel. Similar to Las Mirabal, this narrative is a fictional autobiography. Alvarez acknowledges reading Ferreras’ Las Mirabal, of which she says that, in conjunction with other Dominican narrative and poetry, “were especially helpful in providing facts and inspiration” (325). Therefore, Butterflies could also be read as a re-writing of Las Mirabal. While in her first novel, How the García Girls Lost their Accents (1992), Alvarez deals with issues of identity and with the difficulties experienced by the García girls upon their arrival in New York City, in Butterflies she takes a step backward, back to a more distant past, one which explains the reason the García girls ended up in New York City in the first place.

Las Mirabal and In the Time of the Butterflies: Providing Testimony

Seven years after the publication of Butterflies, Alvarez published the young reader book Before We Were Free (2002), which she dedicates to, “all those who stayed.” In an “Authors Note” at the end of this novel, Alvarez explains to her young North American reader:

There is a tradition in Latin America countries known as *testimonio*. It is the responsibility of those who survive the struggle for freedom to give testimony. To tell the story in order to keep alive the memory of those who died. . . . it is a fictional way to keep my promise. To give testimony. (166-7)

She continues to write “[m]any of the most moving testimonies of the Dominican dictatorship have not been written down” (166). Yet, unlike a traditional *testimonio* in which John Beverly notes a narrative is “told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real life protagonist or witness of the events her or she recounts” (2), Alvarez recreates the Mirabal sisters and in doing so offers her reader ‘fictional’ or ‘imagined’ testimony. Both Alvarez and critics, such as Ciria Concepción Bados, maintain that the narrative is a testimonial account (414). However, I agree with Ignacio López-Calvo, who sustains that Butterflies is not a *testimonio* because “[t]he fact that she ‘took liberties’ would exclude her narrative from the testimonial subgenre” (113-4).

Interestingly, López-Calvo maintains that Las Mirabal is a perfect example of Dominican testimonial narrative published after Trujillo’s death. He explains:

Rather than creating memorable and psychologically developed characters, these texts concentrate on the description and denunciation of sociopolitical injustice and corruption, as seen by witnesses or the intellectuals who provide a voice. (113)

Since many of the characters in the text are deceased historical figures, the testimony they provide is fictional and created by Ferreras. While he does not alter history to the extent that Alvarez does, his is also a fictional *testimonio*.

In a similar sense to Ferreras, who wrote a series titled Media Isla, Alvarez’s narratives could be seen as a series in the sense that How the García Girls Lost Their Accents documents the lives of those who escaped and survived, Butterflies and Before We Were Free, document the sacrifice made by those who stayed, in the first case the Mirabal sisters, in the later an uncle and cousin of the García girls. Instead of fleeing, the Mirabal sisters and the relatives of the García

girls stay in the Dominican Republic and fight for freedom. Consequently, Trujillo's henchmen assassinate them. Both Ferreras and Alvarez speak on behalf of the murdered victims.

Before Butterflies, narrating the Trujillo era had been the domain of men. Women have frequently been categorized as "the other" in political, social and literary incursions, and this is, in part, what makes Butterflies unique. It is the first time the story of the Mirabal sisters has been interpreted by a woman. Additionally, all of the narrators are not only women; they are the voices of the three murdered sisters and their surviving sister, with the exception of the thinly disguised *gringa-dominicana*, which is Julia Alvarez. From this female viewpoint, Alvarez describes the place of women in dictatorships, in that they suffer a double oppression, one socially (patriarchy) and one politically (dictatorship). In an interview with Heidi Johnson-Wright, Mario Vargas Llosa explains that, "' Women were the worst victims of the dictatorship', because they were also often victims of machismo" ("January Interview with Mario Vargas Llosa," January Magazine).

Resisting the Reader in In the Time of the Butterflies.

In contrast to Ferreras, who writes for a Dominican reader already familiar with the Trujillo era and, to a certain extent, personally experienced, Alvarez writes for a North American audience unfamiliar with Dominican history. As she explains, "I hope this book deepens North Americans' understanding of the nightmare you endured and the heavy losses you suffered" (324). Alvarez, like her reader, is also distanced, both temporally and geographically, from the events she narrates. As if to remind her reader that she is writing about a foreign country, she often code-switches, incorporating Spanish words into her narrative. Doris Sommer points out "[t]o switch codes is to enter or leave one nation for another by merely releasing a foreign sound, a word, a grammar tic, slipping into an always borrowed and precarious language" ("Introduction," 7). These Spanish words are also exclusionary. As a result, Ellen McCracken

notes “monolingual English readers are partially incompetent decoders of the text” (7). González Echevarría criticizes the “Hispanisms” found in Butterflies as he feels they are unnecessary. (“Sisters in Death”). Unlike the García sisters in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, the Mirabal sisters do not lose their accents in Butterflies.

In addition to not offering translations for the words in Spanish, Alvarez also doesn't provide any information to explain her historical references. For example, María Teresa writes in her journal “[s]he [Minerva] reminds me it's going to be a hard crowd to address after this Galíndez thing” (136). No explanation of who Galíndez is offered. This additional obstacle means that not only are monolingual English readers incompetent decoders of the text, but so are those who are unfamiliar with 20th century Dominican history.

Given that Alvarez's self-identified North American audience is unfamiliar with both the Spanish language and the period of history she is recreating; she creates a narrative that intentionally resists, excludes and places at a disadvantage the same reader she is targeting. However, Sommer in “Resistant Texts and Incompetent Readers”, explains that foreign words can also be “read as invitations to work at extracting meaning, to assimilate oneself to the Other's culture” (526). This may be Alvarez's way of encouraging her North American audience to learn more about the Dominican Republic. Alternatively, according to Sommer, it could also be the method she uses to remind the reader that she is culturally different from him or her, creating a boundary between the self who writes and the other who reads (“Resistant Texts” 533). The added coding narrows the competent reader who can decode her text to bilingual English – Spanish speakers who are familiar with 20th century Dominican history; someone much like herself.

Narrative Structure in Las Mirabal and In the Time of the Butterflies

Las Mirabal and Butterflies challenge 'official' history in both content and form. They share a similar and complicated narrative structure with multiple narrators, one of which is Minerva herself. The authors, aware that no single perspective is adequate for the representation of reality, use a multitude of narrators to tell the story. This polyphony of voices allows the reader to benefit from many different visions of Minerva, as different speakers at different points describe her in time, both present and past. These different narrators also perform a similar function as an omniscient narrator, which allows the reader to see events from different points of view. Additionally, in Butterflies, the deceased sisters are their own biographers as they are also the narrators. An omniscient third person narrates Dedé's memories. In Las Mirabal, the only sister to narrate is Minerva, when the reader is given access to her journal. Allowing the characters to relate their own stories allows the reader to know the characters more intimately. It also makes the narrative more dramatic since all of the characters narrate their own experiences in the first person. However, the complicated narrative structure in Las Mirabal is often confusing, as it is difficult to keep track of which character is narrating. In contrast, Butterflies is much easier to follow because, as González Echevarría notes, Alvarez "is skilled at narrative construction" ("Sisters in Death").

Both authors also incorporate several different literary forms into their text, such as diaries, letters and drawings. Ferreras includes a chapter in which Minerva communicates via her journal. Similarly, María Teresa in Butterflies, narrates through her diary. The use of the written word allows the narrator to express her inner thoughts. Also, Mark Currie explains, "We are more likely to sympathize with people when we have a lot of information about their inner lives, their motivations, their fears, etc" (19). Moreover, the present tense used in this type of writing creates, in the reader, a sense of immediate involvement and anticipation while providing a direct

record of the experience that is not altered by later reflection. Unlike Ferreras, Alvarez includes diagrams of things, such as Minerva's house and a homemade bomb.

Las Mirabal is divided into 15 chapters that focus on the Mirabal family dating back to their Spanish ancestry and their arrival in the Dominican Republic in the 19th century. In this text there are several examples of older Mirabal family members orally passing on history to the younger Mirabals. For example, an uncle of the Mirabal sisters narrates the second chapter, in which he describes the United States occupation of the Dominican Republic of 1916-1924.

Butterflies is divided into three sections, an "Epilogue", narrated by Dedé who serves as the backbone to the entire story, and a "Postscript". Each section contains four chapters; one dedicated to each of the four sisters and each beginning with Dedé. The first section covers the years 1943-1946, the second section 1948-1959, and the third section the year 1960. The "Epilogue" brings the reader back to 1994 where Dedé describes the trial of her sisters' murderers. Both texts switch from present to past, neither following the linear time preferred by historians.

By including actual documents, each text also blurs the line between fiction and history. For example, Ferreras includes Pedro Mir's poem about the Mirabal sisters, "Amén de Mariposas", in its entirety as well as parts of actual newspaper articles. He combines these documents with narrative techniques such as dialogue and mosaic narrative. These 'real' documents remind the reader of the contemporary historical references of the narrative. He is very concerned with historical accuracy and uses narrative techniques as a tool to describe the Mirabal family. In contrast Alvarez, self admittedly, is not concerned with historical accuracy. She explains, "The actual sisters I never knew, nor did I have access to enough information or the talents and inclinations of a biographer to be able to adequately record them" (324). She

consciously distorts history through omissions and exaggeration. As González Echevarría notes, “I find no connection between the specific dates Ms. Alvarez gives to mark periods in the Mirabals’ lives and either Dominican or broader Latin American history” (“Sisters in Death”). Yet, she is not interested in portraying these famous historical characters accurately or to use her word, “adequately” (324). She uses the sisters to illuminate the experience of living under the Trujillo regime. As she defends her lack of interest in history by explaining that, “A novel is not, after all, a historical document, but a way to travel through the human heart” (324).

A Matter of Perspective

Both Ferreras and Alvarez had a personal connection to Trujillo. Ferreras had been involved with a group who sought to remove Trujillo from power. With the assistance of the Venezuelan President Rómulo Betancourt and Cuban President Fidel Castro, a group of Dominican exiles with leftist tendencies departed from Cuba for the Dominican Republic with the intent of deposing Trujillo. Trujillo was informed and all were either captured or killed. Although the invasion ended poorly, it would serve as inspiration for a clandestine group, calling itself the 14th of June Movement that would continue to plot to depose Trujillo.²² Ferreras, a founding member, was imprisoned upon Trujillo’s discovery of the group. He has also written extensively on the human consequences of historical events, mainly the United States interventions/invasions (depending on the viewpoint) and the Trujillo regime.

Likewise, Alvarez’s own father was also a member the group. The Alvarez family, knowing the danger they were in, escaped to New York City. Alvarez explains in Something to Declare that:

²² For more information on the 14 of June Revolutionary Movement see Roberto Cassá’s Los orígenes del Movimiento 14 de Junio: la izquierda Dominicana (1999).

Patria, Minerva, and María Teresa were members of the same underground he [Alvarez's father] had bailed out of in order to save his life. These three brave sisters and their husbands stood in stark contrast to the self-saving actions of my own family and of other Dominican exiles. Because of this, the Mirabal sisters haunted me. (198)

Butterflies reflects her own thoughts of her father and other Dominican exiles as she views their abandonment of the Dominican Republic as “self-saving” (Something 198). Upon finding out that her friend had left the country, Minerva in Butterflies says “[s]o Sina had abandoned our struggle” (270). Why she thinks this of Sina and not of her friend Virgilio Morales, who leaves for Venezuela, is unclear. Exile does not mean abandonment of the fight, as seen in Virgilio who plans to continue the fight from exile. He justifies leaving by explaining, “If I leave my country, it’s only to continue the struggle. We can’t let Chapita [Trujillo] kill us *all*” (73). Furthermore, she also explains on her website “[a]s much as there is ever a definitive ‘reason’ for writing a book, being a survivor placed a responsibility on me to tell the story of these brave young women who did not survive the dictatorship”. Thus, as Ilan Stavans notes, “Her novel is a wonderful examination of how it feels like to be a survivor, how it feels to come from a society where justice and freedom are unwelcome” (“Las Mariposas,” The Nation).

A Cure For Historical Amnesia

Two days after their death, El Caribe (27 Nov. 1960), the official newspaper of the Trujillo regime, reported the deaths of Minerva, Patria, María Teresa and their driver, Rufino de la Cruz, as an accident that occurred when Rufino lost control of the vehicle (Domingo Saint-Hilaire). It failed to mention the sisters’ anti-Trujillo activities. It also neglects to mention that there is a surviving sister. Alternatively, The New York Times (9 Dec. 1960) reported, just weeks after the report in El Caribe, that the three sisters “were tortured before being murdered, according to information deemed reliable by diplomatic sources here” (“3 Dominican Sisters Reported Tortured”). In each narrative, Minerva, posthumously, informs the reader of the circumstances

of her and her sisters' death. In each, she points to Trujillo's henchmen as her assassins. These narratives, written after and inspired by her death, grant her the opportunity to challenge the 'fiction' of official discourse, which claimed that her death had been an accident.

In addition to challenging the 'official' record, these two authors, having survived Trujillo, are fighting historical amnesia. Both Ferreras and Alvarez believe strongly in the power of the written word and each has taken on the responsibility of giving testimony. Ferreras has extensively narrated both the Trujillo experience and the effects of political oppression; yet he wonders if, “¿están cayendo también estas tres heroínas, mártires y ejemplos para la sociedad dominicana, en el mismo saco del olvido en que han caído otros numerosos héroes y mártires . . . ?” (478).

Likewise, Alvarez dedicates Butterflies “[t]o Dominicans separated by language from the world I’ve created, I hope this book deepens North Americans’ understanding of the nightmare you endured and the heavy losses you suffered – of which this story tells only a few” (324). In addition to providing testimony, Alvarez also believes in the power of the written word to affect change. In Homecoming (1984) she writes, “[t]hese ten poems speak of the healing art of talking, of the power of the word that can topple dictatorships or name the world” (120). In an essay titled, “I Came to Help: Resistance Writ Small” she states, “I want to posit the small, sometimes invisible way but utterly powerful way that we can be a force for change” (Jennifer Browdy de Hernández 212). Alvarez is not alone or unique in her mission. Guiseppe Bellini notes that Alvarez is not the only writer denouncing political oppression and that they usually are “mujeres que se han refugiado en los Estados Unidos y escriben en inglés, los ojos y el alma vueltos hacia la tierra que han dejado que en sí llevan la huella permanente de la persecución” (135).

Having been personally affected, these two authors are very close to the events they are narrating. They are by no means detached; the history they are narrating is, in part, their own. It should, therefore, not be surprising that the author of each text inserts him or herself into the narration. Ferreras makes reference to himself in the final pages of his narrative as he explains that the Mirabal sisters' assassins, despite a 30 year prison sentence, were allowed, not only to leave prison but to leave the Dominican Republic. He explains, "por medios dolorosos que el autor de esta obra le ha sido materialmente imposible averiguar" (451). In Butterflies, Alvarez appears in the first page of the narrative as the '*gringa dominicana*', who interviews the surviving sister Dedé Mirabal.

Narrating the Dominican Republic

Las Mirabal and Butterflies differ sharply in their image of the Dominican Republic, home to Ferreras and former home to Alvarez. As Timothy Brennan notes, "We live in a world obsessed with national pride, and rampant with boundary wars, with nationalism on the banner of countless parties, no matter how conflicting or destination" (45). The national pride he speaks of is evident in Las Mirabal, but not in Butterflies. For example, of the Canca River Ferreras writes, "se las considera entre las mejores del mundo, o de América, por lo menos" (67). On another occasion, Minerva remarks that the fields surrounding her house "son los más bellos del mundo" (130). Aside from having the best rivers and fields in the world, Ferreras in Las Mirabal, mentions that the Dominican Republic is a country in which even the rural areas have been modernized. He describes:

En el último tercio del siglo XX, . . . ya las zonas rurales están repletas de casi todas las comodidades de la edad contemporánea, incluidos la radio, la televisión, el agua corriente, la refrigeración, la rapidez de la transportación y el contacto con el resto del país y del mundo occidental, al través de las comunicaciones habladas, escritas, televisadas o cinematográficas, y la alfabetización masiva de todos los que asisten a las aulas de escuelas y colegios urbanos y rurales. (36)

The Mirabal family in Las Mirabal is also very patriotic. Doña Chea asks her husband if they can name their first born child Patria, “[. . .] por resumir en su nombre el anhelo de todo un pueblo entonces sojuzgado por la bota invasora yanqui [. . .]” (109). Later, when asked by a nun for Patria’s birth date, she proudly responds “[v]eintisiete de febrero de 1924, tres meses y trece días antes de que los americanos se fueran de este país, el 12 de julio de 1924” (141).

Additionally, Minerva writes in her journal, “Creo que el patriotismo por estos contornos viene por idiosincracia [sic], en la sangre de los naturales, porque nuestros viejos nos lo han transmitido como una herencia” (163).

Butterflies contradicts Las Mirabal’s modern vision of the country. It describes a Dominican Republic in which the streets don’t have names because most of the *campesinos* can’t read, so it wouldn’t do any good (4). Additionally, Dedé re-lives her happy memories because, as she states, “I have no television here” (7). Dedé also mentions that even Dominicans are surprised that she drives. She explains, “They are always so surprised. And not just the American women who think of this as an ‘underdeveloped’ country” (172). It also portrays a country in which women, at least in Minerva’s time, had few legal rights. Thus, Butterflies portrays a Dominican Republic, which at the end of the 20th century is poor, underdeveloped, machista and illiterate.

Dominican Men: Too Afraid to Fight Tyranny?

Silvio Sirias maintains that Alvarez in Butterflies, “explores the theme of machismo. . . . The concept of machismo connotes a man’s strength, bravery, power, and importance” (79). He provides examples of machismo, such as Jaimito, Dede’s husband, who maintains “[i]n his house, he was the one to wear the pants” (177). He also believes that “many of the male characters in the novel are domineering, including Trujillo himself” (79). I suggest that a closer reading of Butterflies reveals weak, demasculanized men (including Trujillo). It is Las Mirabal

in which the men, with the exception of Trujillo, while strong, are not good examples of machismo.

In Las Mirabal, Ferreras writes of men who are brave but not necessarily machistas. As he describes, “los patriotas y hombres humildes de estos campos, que prefirieron morir tirándoles tiros, a vivir lamiéndole las botas a los yanquis” (187). Despite their fear they fight the United State Marines and they plot against Trujillo. The text also states that, “no parece posible que este régimen tan insensible esté gobernando un país con un pueblo como este, tan rebelde y tan viril” (300). Similarly, towards the end of his dictatorship, Ferreras notes that:

Trujillo mostraba debilidad y estaba un poco desmoralizado por la cantidad de elementos ‘representativos’ que se encontraban presos, muchos de ellos hijos de sus colaboradores más cercanos. (355)

At the time Minerva and her sisters were fighting for freedom, so were many of their fellow Dominicans, both men and women.

Alternatively, in Butterflies it would seem that Minerva and her sisters are, for the most part, alone in their fight. The men, for the most part, are too afraid to stand up to Trujillo. Therefore, Minerva in Butterflies blames men like her father for Trujillo’s regime, describing them as “scared *fulanitos* who have kept the devil in power all these years” (179). Her statement is sexist in that she makes no mention of women, such as her mother Doña Chea, who also silently and passively endured the tyrant without doing anything to remove him from power. Furthermore, Alvarez overlooks that Sina, a fellow revolutionary mentioned by Ferreras, was also imprisoned with the Mirabal sisters. Ferreras writes that when Trujillo’s men came looking for María Teresa, “Ya Sina Cabral estaba en La Victoria [a prison], porque a ella fue la primera a quien hicieron presa” (323-4). Also present in Las Mirabal but absent in Butterflies is the imprisonment of Doña Chea. In the jail where the sisters are sent, they are the only revolutionaries. The other women they share the cell with are prostitutes and lesbians. In short,

Alvarez omits the other female revolutionaries while she harshly criticizes men, sparing women, who did nothing to remove the tyrant from power. In contrast, Ferreras does the opposite. He highlights Sina's revolutionary activities and imprisonment, blaming only the United States for Trujillo.

Alvarez's text reflects Vargas Llosa's belief that Trujillo accumulated power, "fueled by 'the complicity of the people' and by 'the abdication of the right to resist'" ("January Interview with Mario Vargas Llosa," January Magazine). His thought echoes Patria in Butterflies. She states:

I don't know, I wanted to start believing in my fellow Dominicans again. Once the goat was a bad memory in our past, that would be the real revolution we would have to fight: forgiving each other for what we had all let come to pass. (222)

Both Alvarez and Vargas Llosa partially blame the Dominican people for the Trujillo regime. This culpability or complicity of the Dominican people is not evident in Las Mirabal in which Ferreras emphasizes the strength and brutality of the marines and the impossibility of defeating them, despite the heroic efforts of the 'gavilleros'.²³

The "scared *fulanitos*" (179) in Butterflies are also weak and unable, or unwilling, to fight tyranny, even when their own daughter's honor and safety are at stake. These weak males forced women to be strong. Unlike Minerva's father, Don Enrique, who offers up Minerva when the police come looking for her, it is her mother who stands up for her. Doña Chea, in Butterflies, insists, "If she goes, I go" (103). In contrast, Minerva observes of her father, "I have never seen him so scared" (103). Minerva notes, "I was stronger than Papá, Mamá was much stronger. He was the weakest one of all" (89). Thus, Minerva begins her political activism out of a need for

²³ From 1917 to 1921, the United States forces battled a guerrilla movement known as the *gavilleros* (Knight 328). Many Dominicans viewed as revolutionaries as fighting for their country's sovereignty. Trujillo fought along with and in support of the United States and against the *gavilleros* – in essence his own countrymen and women.

survival. The men in her life are simply unable to protect her from the tyrant. She learns of 'Trujillo's secret' from her friend Sinita who tells her that, "Trujillo is having everyone killed" (19). It is obvious that the men in Butterflies are incapable of stopping him. Not surprisingly, of both her father and uncle, she says they are "good-for-nothing" (88,116). It is the Mirabal women, Doña Chea included, who display the type of bravery one would expect from men in a machista society. For this reason, Minerva, in Butterflies, sees herself as superior to "my poor, trapped countryman" (107).

In Butterflies, Minerva often views men to be small, both literally and figuratively, reflecting her overall view of most men. Of a fellow revolutionary, Dr. Viñas, she says, "The genial little man" (272). She describes Trujillo as, "much smaller than I had imagined him" (27). On another occasion she notes that he is a, "little man" (96). When referring to her husband and brothers-in-law she says, "'The boys', I began, 'we believe they're all about to be killed.' I heard myself strangely demoting our men to the mere helpless boys. Another diminutive – and from me" (273). The men, having been reduce to 'boys' by historical events, mainly United States imperial practices, are helpless and need women to save them.

The United States Military and Trujillo: The Weakening of the Dominican Male.

In addition to the humiliation suffered at the hands of the United States Marines, the men were also demasculinized by Trujillo. Torres-Saillant explains that, "Estamos ante un varón feminizado con respecto al líder" (Yolas 239). He further explains that Dominican men were unable to measure up to Trujillo's projected manhood. He states, "Pues de su identidad de macho mayor se desprendía el poder fálico que doblegaba a sus aliados masculinos, convirtiéndolos en hombres-hembras con relación a la potestad viril del caudillo" (Yolas 242).

In Alvarez's narrative, the men have not only been weakened, they have been demasculinized. Their masculinity has been stripped away by the United States military, which

did as it pleased in the Dominican Republic. As Ferreras explains, “Lo que se les tenía a los americanos no era miedo, era terror, pánico. . . . El peor era Bock Law, un bárbaro que acabó con media humanidad por estos contornos” (121). However, for Ferreras this fear does not mean that the men were in any weakened. In Butterflies, the United States military also clearly dominated and humiliated the Dominicans. Patria explains, “Of course, I sympathized with our patriots. But what could we do against the Yanquis? They killed anyone who stood in their way. They burnt our house down and call it a mistake” (57).

The demasculinization of the Dominican men, referenced by both Alvarez and Torres-Saillant, is not evident in Las Mirabal. With the possible exception of Ferreras’ historically accurate physical description of Trujillo, where he notes that he wore make-up (in an effort to whiten his skin), there is no evidence of male weakness or demasculinization in his text. To the contrary, many examples of strong men are evident. For example, Patria’s husband Pedrito briefly considers giving up the fight but changes his mind. He thinks to himself in prison:

No, no voy a hacer eso, sería indigno de mí después de haber estado con tanta gente preso, incluídos [sic] el doctor Manuel Tejada Florentino, distinguido cardiólogo, . . . a quienes ya ultimaron en La 40 a fuerza de electricidad o de sogas por el pescuezo. Los huesos se le moverían en sus tumbas si abandono la lucha por la liberación de este pueblo digno de mejor suerte. (423)

Their inability to overcome United States imperialism and Trujillo is not due to lack of bravery or intent. Dominicans were convinced that eliminating Trujillo would lead to another U.S. invasion. They were simply unable to defeat the United State Marines.

However, the demasculinization of the Dominican men, in Butterflies, can be seen symbolically in Don Enrique’s inability to produce any male children. Minerva is aware of the importance of producing a male. Upon finding out her father has a mistress she asks of her half sister, “‘Do you have a brother?’ . . . It was a delicious revenge to hear them murmur, ‘*No señora*’” (86). His inability to produce the much-desired son also reflects his lack of power in

society. In contrast, Las Mirabal notes that Don Enrique did indeed have a son, “¡por fin, un varón!” (359), with another mistress. While Alvarez mentions the mistress with whom Don Enrique produces an additional four daughters, she omits the one who produces a son for Don Enrique. Moreover, Jaimito, the most macho of the sisters’ husbands, has his power usurped. After years of submissiveness, Dedé, the most passive of the Mirabal sisters, stands up to her husband, who, to her surprise, backs down. The reader is told, “Jaimito blinked in surprise at her sharp tone. Was it really this easy, Dedé wondered, taking command?” (183). His weak and passive response demonstrates that Jaimito wasn’t really a strong macho person after all.

Additionally, Minerva’s husband, Manuel, in Butterflies is demasculinized by his inability to provide for his family financially. Minerva’s house is described by María Teresa, in her journal, as a “little *shack* . . . I suppose it’s the best Manolo can do, given how broke they are. I tried not to look too shocked so as not to depress Minerva” (138-9). Alternatively, in Las Mirabal Manuel has no problems financially providing for his family. The reader learns that “Minerva se instaló en una casona [con] un ambiente acogedor y cómodo en ella, agradable a la vista” (260). Dominicans during the Trujillo era, in Butterflies, are weak and scared, rendering them incapable of defending themselves against the tyrant. Men and women have responded differently to oppression and it is the women who seem less afraid and more likely to stand up to Trujillo.

Racism in the Dominican Republic

Race in the Dominican Republic is very important signifying both nationality and religion. Blacks are Haitian and practice Voodoo; whites and *indios* are Dominicans and practice Catholicism. It is inconceivable, to Dominicans, that they could be black. As Michelle Wucker explains, “Today, mulatto and black Dominicans call themselves *indio*, and they say that their color is dark like the Indians but different in quality from African skins. They can identify with

Enriquillo because he was Christian” (Why the Cocks Fight 66). Trujillo’s regime was based on white European supremacy. Franklin Knight explains that “until the 1960’s, contrary to appearances, Trujillo would promote the Dominican Republic as a white Hispanic society” (225). Additionally, Torres-Saillant explains that:

That historical context has given Dominican ruling classes occasion to construct a nation-building-ideology primarily on self-differentiation from Haiti; including the area of racial identification And insofar as Haitians are seen as homogeneously black, anti-Haitianism manifests itself also as a declared contempt for blackness. (“Dominican Literature,” 54-5)

Ferreras’ text is not immune to this national ideology and reflects an importance on race. He often makes reference to the color of the characters’ skin. For example, Pedrito, Patria’s husband, in describing his friend Roberto, says he was a “mulato de profundo mirar” (405). In this description of Roberto, Ferreras acknowledges an Afro-Dominican presence. He also mentions the Haitian presence in the Dominican Republic and notes that the poor working conditions of that Haitians were “traídos a los centrales azucareros a trabajar en forma casi esclava . . .” (235). The conflict between Dominican and Haitian cultures is evident in a conversation Minerva has with Uncle Tilo who tells her:

Se formaba pleitos masivos entre los obreros cuando los muchos haitianos que habían traído para la obra se ponían a bailar su ‘Judú’ [sic] y los dominicanos les tiraban piedras porque parece que les hacían poca gracia el baile de aquella gente. Claro, al sentirse agredidos, los haitianos repostaban la agresión. Aquel baile era muy alegre. . . . Decían que era con muertos que bailaban los haitianos. Por eso causaban una mala impresión el baile entre los dominicanos. . . . (62)

In Las Mirabal, Minerva learns of the 1937 massacre of Haitian migrants by overhearing adults talking about it. She writes in her journal that:

Para ese tiempo, siendo apenas una niña, oía a mis padres y a algunos vecino de cierta edad y de mucha confianza en mi casa, cuando hablaban de la matanza de los haitianos. Y yo me decía para mis adentros, sin comunicárselo a nadie, ¿y por qué los matan si también son seres humanos? ¿Acaso no tienen derecho a la vida por no haber nacido más acá de la frontera? (163)

The fact that she doesn't mention her thoughts on the massacre to anyone, reflects Dominicans complicated and contradictory relationship with Haitians. On one level, they feel guilty for the poor treatment of Haitians. However, they go to great lengths to differentiate themselves from Haitians, who they view to be black and synonymous with lack of civilization and everything backward. Candito, a family friend, refers to the massacre in Las Mirabal as, "[las] masacres haitianóforas del año trágico de 1937" (165). In his description of the massacre he says:

Ahí [el Monte de los Melones] mataron muchos haitianos, casi todos los haitianos que trajeron o que vivían por estos alrededores en 1937. Hay muchas piedras y arbustos pero uno va y encuentra los huesos que los puede recoger por camionadas. (165)

Candito also personalizes the massacre. He tells Minerva, ". . . mataron a Carlos y a Ana, su mujer que eran dos haitianos realengos" (165). After hearing about the massacre, Minerva thinks to herself, "Que tragedia espantosa vivieron esos infelices haitianos que hoy tienen tantos descendientes dominicanos viviendo en algunas regiones del país" (166). Her comments recognize the Afro-Dominican presence that Trujillo, along with other Dominican intellectuals, pretended didn't exist. Interestingly, Candito mentions that the government, without naming Trujillo, ordered the killings.

Alternatively Alvarez's narrative, much like Trujillo's vision of the Dominican Republic, ignores the Afro-Dominican presence in the Dominican Republic. Alvarez identifies black and non-Christian with Haiti and European with Christianity. The Mirabal's Haitian domestic worker is the only black character in the narrative. Fela is described as an "ebony black sibyl" (63). The only Spanish character in the text is Don Bernardo. Minerva describes him as "our next door angel disguised as an old Spaniard with an ailing wife" (214). When no one else, out of fear, would help the sisters, Don Bernardo fearlessly comes to their aid. With these two characters, Fela the Haitian "sibyl" and Don Bernardo the Spanish "angel", Alvarez duplicates Trujillo's image of the nation.

Aside from race, the cultural conflict between the people of African descent and those of European descent is evident in Butterflies in the relationship the family has with Fela. María Teresa writes that she wants to learn “spells from Fela (I better not tell Mamá!)” (42). It is obvious that her mother would not approve of her daughter learning about another religion. After the sisters’ death Fela “started going wacky” (63). Dedé, upon discovering that “Fela had set up an altar with pictures of the girls cut out from the popular posters that appeared each November” (64) gives her an ultimatum. She tells her to either leave the house or dismantle the altar. Fela refuses to give up her altar and instead chooses to leave. When Minerva’s daughter Minou asks about her, Dedé explains, “It was disrespectful to your mother’s memory. She was Catholic, Minou, a Catholic!” (64). Her view of Fela’s religious practices as “wacky” and her unwillingness to let her keep the altar, reflect the conflict between the African religion and Catholicism, both of which are practiced in the Dominican Republic.

The 1937 massacre of Haitians is mentioned in Butterflies, but more abstractly than it is in Las Mirabal, where the names of Haitians who died are mentioned. Patria in Butterflies states, “thousands of Haitians massacred at the border, making the river, they say, still run red - ¡Ay, Dios santo! (53). The description offered here is general and not individual. In similarity with Las Mirabal, this text neglects to mention that Trujillo ordered the killings. The social position of Haitians in the Dominican Republic is evident in Dedé’s criticism of a project created by her husband and Manolo, Minerva’s husband. The project, according to her, consisted of “growing onions in some godforsaken desert area where you couldn’t even get Haitians to live” (187).

Dominican Nationalism and United States Imperialism

By showing how Trujillo was kept in power with support of the United States, each of the two texts studied challenges Milton Eisenhower’s claim that “[w]e [the United States] deplore dictatorship in any form” (78). Consequently, a central theme to these narratives is anti-

imperialism. United States foreign policy also contributed to Dominican nationalism. The Dominican Republic endured multiple invasions by the United States, which generated a strong sense of nationalism, uniting Dominicans of all classes. Knight explains that when the marines in 1924 were imposing orders:

A powerful anti-American sentiment stimulated a new xenophobic nationalism that temporarily brought together the wealthy and the poor, the rural and the urban, the guerrilla opponents and the respectable classes into a recalcitrant opposition to foreign military rule. (223)

Faced with a common threat, Dominicans set aside their economic and social differences to band together. This sense of nationalism explains how these economically privileged women became revolutionaries. Additionally, this foreign influence is noted in the narratives to differing degrees and is responsible for a certain degree of anti-yankism.

The characters in Las Mirabal use various terms to describe the United States Marine Corps Occupying Force in the Dominican Republic, e.g. “yanquis”, “americanos”, “norteamericanos”, “invasores”, “demonios”, and “bárbaros en figura humana”. The most wrenching testimony provided by characters in Las Mirabal are not the crimes perpetrated by Trujillo but the crimes committed by the United States Marines. Minerva’s uncle Tilo provides testimony of some of the atrocities committed. He states:

Con el pretexto de perseguir ‘gavilleros’, los yanquis acabaron con medio mundo. A Rita Campos le quemaron su casa y le mataron sus hijos, ella era muy pobre, pero muy trabajadora. . . . Y a las madres les mataban los hijos en su presencia. (102-3)

On another occasion he tells Minerva that the Marines treated the ‘gavilleros’ and their families brutally. He explains:

. . . los habían torturado bárbaramente, llegando en algunos casos a provocar que según caminaran pisaran sus propios intestinos, los cuales les habían sido echados fuera por la tortura de las marcas de fuego en sus respectivos vientres. . . a veces amarraban los hombres a la cola de los caballos y echaban éstos a correr a todo galope, hasta que la víctimas morían desgarradas al ser arrastradas por las bestias echadas a correr con sus lastres humanos detrás. (185)

He also tells Minerva:

Los americanos fusilaban mucha gente por estos montes y buscaban gente de la cercanías a quienes ponían a cavar las fosas comunes donde enterraban a los fusilados. Dondequiera que mataban uno, allí lo enterraban, para que medio se borrarán las huellas de sus innumerables crímenes. (183-4)

However, despite these crimes, Tilo says that publicly people were cautious. However, “en la intimidad se hablaba mucho contra los yanquis y en lo posible, todo el mundo ayudaba a los guerrilleros en su lucha contra el invasor” (185). Ultimately, Las Mirabal blames the United States, not Trujillo, for the problems the country faces. Doña Chea describes, “Antes de venir los yanquis vivíamos pacíficamente por estas zonas, muy tranquilamente” (209). The Mirabal family, in this text, has been both witness and victim of the crimes committed by the marines and is a harsh critic of the United States.

While the characters in Las Mirabal use a variety of pejorative words to describe the United States Marines, Butterflies' characters use the Spanish terms “yanquis” and “gringos”. According to Shara McCallum, “This diction supports Alvarez’s substantial condemnation of the United States’ involvement in and occupation of the Dominican Republic” (110). Additionally, while Las Mirabal focuses on the atrocities suffered by the Dominican people at the hands of the United States military, Butterflies personalizes the occupation for the Mirabal family. In Las Mirabal, Doña Chea, in her narration of the burning of her mother’s house, mentions that she is not sure who was responsible for the incident, since earlier in the day as Dominican revolutionaries known as ‘gavilleros’ had stopped by asking for money. When their request was denied they threatened to return and burn down the house. Doña Chea says, “Yo no acuso a nadie de habernos quemado la casa, pero la cosa quedó en el misterio” (102). Butterflies also narrates the burning of the family home, yet in this text, Doña Chea says that “[t]hey burned our house down and called it a mistake. They weren’t in their own country so they didn’t have to

answer to anyone” (57). Thus, in Butterflies she accuses the United States for an incident in which, according to Las Mirabal, no one really knows who was responsible.

This condemnation of past United States foreign policy places the North American reader in an interesting position; one in which they see themselves as the perpetrator of the sisters’ murder. In her criticism of the United States, Alvarez forces the reader to realize that they are in some way responsible for the suffering and killing of Dominicans. With the exception of Minerva and the ‘Movimiento Revolucionario 14 de Junio’, most Dominicans were incapable or unwilling to do anything about it, as they feared for their lives. This fright is seen in Don Enrique and Jaimito, Dedé’s husband. Predictably, it is the brave who are killed and the fearful who survived the Trujillo era.

By means of Dedé, in Butterflies, the reader gets a glimpse of what Dominicans similar to her thought of North Americans in 1994 – the time of her interview. The familiar stereotype of the loud, violent, American, who is punctual, appears in the narrative in the form of the ‘*gringa dominicana*’ who is really Alvarez’s alter ego. The *gringa* arrives to her meeting with Dedé, startling her and prompting her to think to herself, “But really, this woman should shut car doors with less violence Any Dominican of a certain generation would have jumped at that gunshot sound” (5). The image of the violent American is also present in Patria’s nightmares. She describes “the Yanquis were back, but it wasn’t my grandmother’s house they were burning – it was Pedrito’s and mine. My babies, all three of them, were going up in flames” (52). By means of the deceased Mirabal sisters and Dedé in 1994, Butterflies offers the North American readers insight into how Dominicans, throughout the 20th century, have viewed them. It is not a flattering picture.

Both Las Mirabal and Butterflies express disappointment with the post-Mirabal sisters' Dominican Republic. Minerva and her sisters gave their lives fighting for freedom. And yet, Ferreras notes that at a service held for the martyrs, "Un escaso número de amigos íntimos de la familia, . . . asiste a los oficios religiosos" (478). Furthermore, although Minerva and her sisters fought to overthrow Trujillo's regime for years his death did not lead to the society they had envisioned. As a result, Dedé in Butterflies is disillusioned with the post-Trujillo Dominican Republic. She says "[w]e are now the playground of the Caribbean, who were once its killing fields. The cemetery is beginning to flower Was it for this, the sacrifice of the butterflies?" (318).

Resisting Patriarchy in the Dominican Republic

Feminism and Patriarchy in the Trujillo era

In Las Mirabal, the Dominican Republic is portrayed as a feminist society. Trujillo, recognizing that it could be used a method of control, supported the creation of a feminist organization and passed legislation to support women rights. He gave the women the right to vote in 1942 – much earlier than in other Latin American countries, such as Mexico (1953) and Columbia (1954). At the time, only Ecuador, Cuba, Uruguay had already granted women the right to vote (Esperança Bosch Fiol, et al. 135-6). It is ironic that an autocrat who was fraudulently elected would grant women the right to vote. Additionally, women are free to study and even become lawyers – even during the Trujillo era - something Minerva has to fight for, a historical inaccuracy, in Butterflies. As narrated in Las Mirabal, women were already in law school when Minerva applied. Furthermore, Trujillo was in Spain during Minerva's application and first year of law school and posed no resistance (238).

In contrast with Las Mirabal, which largely ignores patriarchy, it is a main theme in Butterflies. Kelly Oliver observes "[w]hile these women [the Mirabal sisters] were fighting

against the national patriarch, Trujillo, they are also fighting against their own local patriarchs at home” (243). These observations reflect Minerva’s thoughts in Butterflies. Finally out of the house and away at boarding school she realizes, “I’d just left a small cage to go into a bigger one, the size of our whole country” (13).

The first level of patriarchy usually manifests itself in the private sphere with the girl’s father. Las Mirabal portrays a father and daughter, Don Enrique and Minerva, who are both opposed to Trujillo and creates, in Don Enrique, a father who is loved and respected by his four daughters. Uncle Tilo explains, “Cuando mis cuatro sobrinas vieron lo que ocurría con su padre, se hicieron enemigas mortales de Trujillo” (48). As the reader discovers, Don Enrique “era un padre más o menos condescendiente, que nunca les pegaba por cualquier cosa” (126). Also out of respect for her father, Minerva refused to challenge his authority. As Doña Chea points out, “A veces como que quería rebelarse a Don Enrique, pero se sofrenaba” (152). Don Enrique, in this text, is not at all a controlling father. To the contrary, he is generous, a man who gives his daughters liberty. Minerva writes in her journal, “. . . vivimos como nos da la gana, coreteando y jugando todo el día por estos floridos campos” (130). While this makes Minerva happy, Doña Chea complains, “Don Enrique es un consentidor y, por complacer a mis cuatro hijas, las deja ir a todos los sitios que ellas quieran” (196). It is Doña Chea who takes her job of protecting her four daughters’ morality very seriously. Minerva tells the reader that, “Mamá nos mandaba acompañadas a lavar para que nos respetaran más” (118). When Doña Chea wanted her daughters to be educated beyond the fourth grade, which was the highest offered in Ojo de Agua, their hometown, Don Enrique agrees, as this was common among wealthy Dominicans.

While Don Enrique is not a controlling, dominating figure in his daughters’ lives, in Las Mirabal, he attempts to be so in Butterflies. Minerva explains:

The four of us had to ask permission for everything: to walk out to the fields to see the tobacco filling out; to go to the lagoon and dip our feet on a hot day; to stand in front of the store and pet the horses as the men loaded up their wagons with supplies. (11)

Minerva is yearning for freedom and education, both denied by her father. However Doña Chea, who is illiterate, understands the importance of educating her daughters. Don Enrique initially is opposed to sending his girls off to school, since he does not see the need for women's education. It is Doña Chea who convinces him to let them go away to study, arguing that they "needed education to go along with our cash" (12). Unlike in Las Mirabal where the education of women was tied to class and economic status, education in this text is seen as means of liberation for women.

Butterflies also creates a Don Enrique that is so afraid of Trujillo that he is unable to protect his family. Minerva says, "I have never seen him so scared . . . Papá looks like he'll agree to anything" (103). On another occasion, Trujillo's men tell Minerva that she has been invited to sit at his table. Don Enrique passively says "[i]t is really quite an honor . . . Go on, my daughter. You are keeping Don Manuel waiting" (94). Minerva looks back at him angrily and wonders, "Has he lost *all* his principles?" (95).

Additionally, the relationship between Minerva and her father in Butterflies is disturbing due to its seemingly incestuous nature. Minerva, who is 23 years old at the time says, "Papá discouraged boyfriends. I was *his* treasure, he'd say, patting his lap. . . . One time he offered me anything if I would sit in his lap. 'Just come here and whisper it in my ear'" (84). Instead of refusing her father's odd request, Minerva uses the opportunity to ask for something she wants, to go to law school. Minerva, on some level, realizes the oddity of the situation and describes, "And here I was, a grown woman sitting on my father's lap" (85).

In addition to portraying Don Enrique as someone machista, who strictly controls his daughters whereabouts and questions their need for education, paradoxically in Butterflies he is

the only male and the weakest member of the family. Minerva states, “I was much stronger than Papá, Mamá was much stronger. He was the weakest one of all” (89). By making Minerva stronger than her father and every other male character in the novel, including Trujillo, Alvarez subverts the patriarchal structure. Moreover, it is not only Dominican men who are criticized in Butterflies, but men in general. Doña Chea notes, “You’re right, they’re all scoundrels – Dominicans, Yanquis, every last man” (57).

In Las Mirabal, a few days after the Discovery Day Dance, Trujillo’s men came looking for Minerva because “dizque que era comunista” (45). After questioning her and searching the house for communist books banned by Trujillo, they left. However, in Butterflies Don Enrique is arrested for leaving the Discovery Day Dance before Trujillo. He left the dance early at the request of his son-in-law Pedrito. Minerva states, “Papá lifts his shoulders and lets them fall. ‘You young people know what to do’” (101). His body language is that of a person who has been defeated representing a much different image of Don Enrique than seen in Las Mirabal, where he is ordering his family to leave. It begins to rain so he decides to leave Trujillo’s party early. He says, “ya nosotros cumplimos, está por llover, cualquiera se va. ¡Vámonos hombres!, y regresó con su familia a Ojo de Agua donde vivía” (45). Alvarez’s recreation of Don Enrique is that of a weak, defeated and powerless male.

While both recreate Don Enrique, Las Mirabal portrays a father and daughter who are opposed to Trujillo and creates a Don Enrique who is loved and respected by Minerva. In her words he was “tan bueno, tan amable, tan visionario que es mi padre” (166). He is the type of father who has given his daughter an education and freedom. In short, he is a poor example of someone who is controlling and machista. In contrast, the reader’s first introduction to Don Enrique in Butterflies is when he is drunk on rum, burping and “slurring his words” (9) and

needing the help of his daughter to climb the stairs (10). This drinking continues throughout the novel. As Minerva notes, “He was drinking too much” (91). Moreover, Minerva has little respect for her father. Of him she says that he is a, “good-for-nothing father” (88). In creating a Minerva who is superior to her father, Alvarez subverts the private patriarchal structure.

Trujillo, The Dictator: The Second Level of Patriarchy

The second level of patriarchy is found in the public or, in this case, political sphere. From the very first pages of Butterflies, the reader becomes aware of the oppression the country is under. The Mirabals, enjoying a summer evening in their yard, become aware of the danger of saying the wrong thing. As the reader learns:

Suddenly, the dark fills with spies who are paid to hear things and report them down at Security Words repeated, distorted, words recreated by those who might bear them a grudge, words stitched to words until they are the winding sheet the family will be buried in when their bodies are found dumped in a ditch, their tongues cut off for speaking too much. (10)

The challenge to public patriarchy in Butterflies is seen in Minerva’s relationship with Trujillo. From the very beginning, Minerva reveals that she, as a woman, considers herself superior to Trujillo. After Sinita, her childhood friend, proclaims that, “Trujillo is a devil” (24), Minerva responds, “No, he is a man. And in spite of all I’d heard, I felt sorry for him. ¡Pobrecito!” (24). The use of the diminutive shows condescension. Additionally she says of Trujillo, “This regime is seductive. How else would a whole nation fall prey to this little man” (96). By means of Minerva’s comments, the reader comes to understand the erotic power of this charismatic tyrant. However, describing the tyrant as a ‘little man’ reflects her feeling of superiority.

These two texts reposition Trujillo as the ‘other’ in that it is not he telling the story but rather his victims and, therefore, it should be kept in mind that the view is not objective. Butterflies adds little to the physical description of Trujillo already found in Las Mirabal in which Trujillo is described as “[a]quel hombre, rosadito, pintado todo de pan-ca-ke (sic),

entorchado con su bicornio de plumas, saliendo de aquel patio español, con una concha acústica detrás. Era aquello una cosa de novela” (225). Similarly, in Butterflies the reader learns that Trujillo goes to the United States to “buy elevator shoes, his skin whiteners and creams, his satin sashes and rare bird plumes for his bicorn Napoleonic hats” (96). Both describe a tyrant who is slightly effeminate, which is in sharp contrast to the cruelty of his personality, which Ferreras describes as “el más grande arrancapescuezos nacido en la América Latina” (445).

In each text, Trujillo himself is but a minor character, with Alvarez dedicating much more narrative space to him than Ferreras. As Sirias notes:

In the novel, Rafael Trujillo exists somewhere between a theme and a character. As the later, his appearances are brief and his characterization is kept deliberately low-key because the *idea* of Trujillo is more important than the man himself. The dictator appears infrequently in the novel, and his character, rather than being well-developed, is more of a caricature. (75)

Trujillo appears four times in Butterflies. In Alvarez’s reconstruction of him, like Ferreras’, the reader does not have access to his inner thoughts. Upon seeing Trujillo for the first time, Minerva observes that, “. . . he looked much smaller than I had imagined him, looming as he always was from some wall or other” (27). She sees him years later and notes that “[h]e looks younger than I remember him from our performance five years ago, the hair darkened, the figure trim” (95).

Ferreras all but silences Trujillo, who is barely mentioned in Las Mirabal. He is referenced to by the characters in the text, but only speaks in a first person voice twice. And, while Butterflies attempts to explain how Trujillo maintained power, in part through seduction or perhaps even charisma, Las Mirabal limits itself to narrating political oppression and does not say anything positive about Trujillo. It places the responsibility for his control over the Dominican people squarely on the shoulders of the United States government, who supported

and maintained him in power. Américo Lugo shares this view noting that “la fiera del imperialismo yanqui ha saltado sobre el suelo quisqueyano” (30).

In each narrative, the cruelty of Trujillo’s regime takes backseat only to the cruelty demonstrated by United States Marines against the Dominican nationalists. This can be partially explained because Dominicans view Trujillo, who fought with the marines and against his own countrymen, as belonging to the United States imperial machine.

The Heroine and the Tyrant

In Las Mirabal, Minerva first attracts Trujillo’s attention at the now infamous Discovery Day Dance, in which Trujillo becomes aware of Minerva’s defiance. As Dedé explains:

Lo cierto fue que él como que le insinuó que iba a mandar a sus súbditos a que se la trajeran o se la conquistaran y ella le contestó: “¿Y si yo voy y me los conquisto a ellos? . . . Trujillo se dio cuenta de que la actitud de Minerva fue muy altiva . . . desafiante. (227)

Even before her exchange with Trujillo at the Discovery Day Dance, according to Ferreras, “se decía que Minerva Mirabal era comunista y enemiga de Trujillo” (25). In Las Mirabal, Trujillo makes it clear that he physically desires Minerva. While her father is imprisoned, Minerva refuses to visit Trujillo saying, “Si yo he de ir al Jaragua [a hotel] me tiro por unos de estos balcones” (235). Doña Chea supports and defends her daughter. She explains, “para nosotras, la moral vale mucho, vale más que nada. . . Preferimos la muerte a ser deshonradas” (236-7). After 10 days, Trujillo releases the family.

Butterflies also recounts the Discovery Day Dance. However, Alvarez replaces Minerva’s political defiance with sexual rejection. Furthermore, the relationship between Trujillo and Minerva is more physical. As Minerva explains, “He yanks me by the wrist, thrusting his pelvis at me in a vulgar way, and I can see my hand in an endless slow motion rise – a mind all its own – and come down on the astonished, made-up face” (100). Consequently, Alvarez adds an element of sexual tension between Trujillo and Minerva that is missing in Ferreras’ retelling of

the Discovery Day Dance. Before Trujillo's slap, Minerva states, ". . . he draws me close to him, so close that I can feel the hardness of his groin" (100). When Trujillo offers to free her father in exchange for a 'private' visit, Minerva responds much as she did in Las Mirabal, by saying, "I'd sooner jump out that window than be forced to do something against my honor" (111).

Additionally in Butterflies Minerva is also attracted to Trujillo. Even she, his most ardent critic, cannot resist his attraction. As a school girl she explains, "I think we were all falling in love with the phantom hero in Lina's sweet and simple heart" (22). Later, as an adult, Minerva describes, "He rises from his chair, and I am so sure he is going to ask me that I feel a twinge of disappointment when he turns instead to the wife of the Spanish ambassador" (96). She continues to explain, "I see now how easily this happens. You give in on little things, and soon you're serving in his government, marching in his parades, sleeping in his bed" (99). Minerva's character in Butterflies is both attracted to and repulsed by Trujillo. Her comments reflect an observation made by Laura Frost who maintains that, "simultaneously embracing and resisting the fascist beast is an erotically-charged fantasy that recurs throughout feminist discourse" (40).

This "erotically-charged fantasy" is absent in Las Mirabal. Minerva in this text does not express any positive feelings towards Trujillo. While both Las Mirabal and Butterflies document the attraction Trujillo felt for Minerva, Butterflies, some would argue, exaggerates the sexual attraction Trujillo had for Minerva, leading the reader to believe that Trujillo ordered her murder because she had rejected him. However, Vargas explains that the three sisters had been persecuted by Trujillo for years, "no por aparentes motivos pasionales como se ha dicho, sino por sus ideas políticas y sus convicciones antitrujillistas" (225).

Minerva Mirabal: Narrating A National Heroine

The Mirabal Family

In Las Mirabal, Ferreras describes the Mirabal family origins dating back to the 19th century. He writes of a family, who as a whole, was opposed to Trujillo's regime. The narrator explains:

José, natural de Salcedo, fue involucrado en el complot del coronel Leonicio Blanco, vejado, torturado, masacrado y fusilado. . . . A este Mirabal lo fusilaron en el cementerio de Camunguá, lugar de destino de los muchos dominicanos viriles que entregaron la vida en aras del ideal de libertad que Trujillo no permitía. (25)

Thus, Minerva and her sisters are not the first Mirabals to die at the hands of Trujillo. Like many members of his family, Don Enrique is an antitrujillista. As Ferreras explains, he is imprisoned by the dictator for refusing to buy a book praising Trujillo from a traveling salesman. Tilo explains that the salesman:

. . . estuvo aquí, tratando de vender a Enrique por RD\$20.00 un libro alabando a Trujillo. Enrique no quiso comprarlo . . . El tipo se fue y no volvió, lo que vino luego fue la averiguación de por qué Enrique Mirabal no había comprado el libro que alababa a Trujillo. Y la verdad fue que lo aprisionaron por no haber otra cosa de qué acusarlo. (46)

It is during this imprisonment that Don Enrique succumbs to an illness that would cause his death barely a month after his release. His sudden illness and death prompts his family to believe that the injections given to him in prison, supposedly to help him, were really intended to kill him. Tilo explains that “[d]esde antes de soltar a Enrique se decía por aquí que le estaban poniendo inyecciones para matarlo.” (48). In Butterflies, this brave defiance, which resulted in his early death, is omitted and Don Enrique is imprisoned for simply leaving a party before Trujillo. Ferreras notes that Trujillo views the family, not just the sisters, as problematic. He writes that “. . . él [Trujillo] solamente tenía dos problemas que resolver aquí, en el país. Uno es el de los ‘falduces’, o sea, los curas, la iglesia, y el otro, la familia Mirabal, no dijo Las Hermanas, sino ‘la familia’. Eso salió publicado en El Caribe” (334-5).

The names chosen for the sisters provides insight into the Mirabal family. It also allows the reader to see that Ferreras' description of it is more accurate historically. Fernando Valerio-Holguín mentions that the names of the sisters themselves are paradoxical given the patriarchal society in which they were born. The name Patria means Fatherland, and Minerva, the most politically active of the sisters, is named after the Roman goddess of wisdom. Ferreras also notes that Patria was born during the first American occupation (1914-1924) of the Dominican Republic. She was named Patria in defiance of said occupation. Patria, in turn, would continue this family tradition by naming her youngest son Ernesto in honor of Che Guevarra.

Alternatively, in Butterflies, the Mirabal family, with the sole exception of Minerva, her sisters and at times her mother, is petrified of the dictator. The women have less fear of the tyrant than the men do. As previously mentioned, this fear weakens Don Enrique to the point that he is unable to protect Minerva and fearful, he offers up his own daughter to the oppressor.

Las Mirabal gives the reader the sense that Minerva was a strong leader among many other revolutionaries. As noted, “entre los presos había representativos de todos los sectores sociales de la República” (328). Similarly, Peguero-Danilo de los Santos observes that “[h]acia 1960, las cárceles dominicanas estaban repletas y el asesinato público llegaba a su paroxismo con la muerte violenta de las Mirabal . . . que realizaban un activismo abierto y disidente” (365). She was a leader amongst a strong and defiant people, who were not only fighting for freedom from Trujillo but also the United States. Minerva was unquestionably brave, as noted by a friend, who tells her “Tu valentía escasea en el país” (298). Yet, it is not this bravery that keeps her from fleeing the country when given the opportunity. It is her imprisoned husband that keeps her in the Dominican Republic as Vargas explains, “Minerva sospechaba los intentos del dictador, pero

sus sentimientos de solidaridad para con sus esposos no permitió la vacilación ni el miedo” (229).

Motherhood and Love of Country

As defined by Hans Kohn, “Nationalism is a state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due the nation-state” (9). In Las Mirabal, Minerva displays a strong sense of national pride, seen in her deep love for her country. This would cause her problems, as she loved the Dominican Republic and not Trujillo. Trujillo, who thought that he was the nation, insisted that loyalty to him come before love of family or friends (Howard Wiarda 129). Instead, Minerva is deeply patriotic. As Benedict Anderson explains, “. . . nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love” (141). This self-sacrificing love is more important to Minerva than motherhood. It is a love of country that is often repeated in Las Mirabal. For example Minerva states, “Yo quiero a mis hijos y a mi familia, pero quiero más a mi pueblo” (298). When asked by Dedé who would raise her children in the event that she was killed by Trujillo, she replies:

A mí no me importa que me maten, pues no voy a ser la primera ni la última. . . . No importa [quien criará a mis hijos]. . . el pueblo dominicano me los cría. . . . Lucho por los infelices . . . Hay demasiado [sic] hambre y miseria. (429)

She feels more loyalty to her country than to her children. She continues to say, “Si para liberar a este país se necesita la sangre de muchos dominicanos y entre esa sangre yo tengo que dar la mía, pues, estoy presta a entregarla” (434). On another occasion, she remarks:

. . . siempre consideraré que este es un pueblo [sic] digno de mejor suerte, que siempre debió merecer un gobierno menos malo que el de Trujillo. . . . El pueblo dominicano tiene que liberarse en alguna forma de este tirano sanguinario. . . . Siempre he aspirado para mí, como el más grande logro de mi vida ayudar a liberar a mi pueblo de la tiranía. (160)

In Las Mirabal, up to the very end of her life, Minerva is brave, never relenting her goal to eliminate tyranny, which, for her, is more important her own life. For this reason, she has

become a symbol of defiant Dominican nationalism, in that love of country was greater than her loyalty to Trujillo.

In contrast, motherhood is more important than nationalism to Minerva in Butterflies. After a stay in prison she says, “How lovely to be called mother again. . . .” (258). Minerva, after being imprisoned, seems to give up, to be broken down. She explains, “All my life, I have been trying to get out of the house By then I couldn’t think of anything I wanted more than to stay home with my sisters at Mamá’s, raising our children” (257). Towards the end of the narrative, Minerva seems to have lost her desire to fight against tyranny. She becomes agoraphobic and is unable to display the strength she once showed. She knows she has changed and says, “I had been so much stronger and braver in prison. Now at home I was falling apart” (258). In this representation of Minerva, love for her children is stronger than fighting for her country’s freedom from tyranny. She wants to confess to an old friend that “. . . I didn’t feel like the same person as before prison. That I wanted my own life back again” (265), but can’t. Essentially, she has been defeated by Trujillo.

The Mythification of Minerva

In both narratives, Minerva underestimates Trujillo. In Las Mirabal, she believes that “[m]atarme a mí sería de los más grandes escándalos del mundo” (428). Comparably, in Butterflies, she says, “Trujillo was not going to murder a defenseless woman and dig his own grave. Silly rumors” (199). And while this may have been the case, it didn’t keep Trujillo from ordering her assassination.

While in Las Mirabal the death of the Mirabal sisters is narrated three different times by three of the murderers who admitted to killing each one of the sisters; the actual killing or murder of the sisters is not mentioned in Butterflies. It appears in the “Epilogue,” narrated by Dedé. This reflects her lack of preoccupation with how they were murdered. During the ensuing

trials of the supposed killers, Dedé went to Puerto Rico and later the United States to avoid being exposed to it (“Personal Interview”, Mirabal).

Their bravery and subsequent brutal assassination lead to the mythification of the sisters and of Minerva in particular. Ferreras makes no claim to demythify the sisters. Despite saying of the deceased sisters, “¡Que en paz descansen los despojos mortales de aquellas tres ejemplares mujeres que entregaron hasta la vida por la revolución dominicana!” (478), it is his text that demythologizes the sisters. Minerva, in Las Mirabal, is a much more believable than in Butterflies. In Las Mirabal she is one of many revolutionaries. Moreover, she does not see herself superior to others. She is not an anomaly within the Mirabal family, which had other “antitrujillista” members.

In contrast, Alvarez stated intent is to demythologize the Mirabal sisters. She explains that “by making them myth we lost the Mirabals once more” (324). Additionally, she notes that “. . . such deification was dangerous, the same god-making impulse that had created our tyrant” (324). In demythologizing the deceased sisters, Alvarez hopes to remove the fiction that goes with the myth exposing more authentic Mirabal sisters and showing that their courage is possible “for us, ordinary men and women” (Butterflies 324).

Despite her expressed intent, Alvarez ultimately fails to demythologize the sisters and Minerva, in particular. She recreates the myth she is hoping to dispel by making Minerva in Butterflies, unequalled. She writes, “Manuel de Moya shakes his head. ‘Minerva Mirabal, you are as complicated a woman as . . . as . . .’ He throws up his hands, unable to finish the comparison” (111). In other words, she has no equal, or at least not a male one. On another occasion, Minerva imagines that her and Trujillo are even. She says “[f]or a moment, I imagine them evenly balanced, his will on one side, mine on another” (115). Minerva, realizing the dice

are lopsided, outwits Trujillo and wins her father's release from prison. Thus, Alvarez does not resist the temptation to glorify Minerva. She also exalts Minerva by informing the reader of how other Dominicans view her. Minerva explains, "My months in prison had elevated me to superhuman status. It would hardly have been seemly for someone who had challenged our dictator to suddenly succumb to a nervous attack at the communion rail" (259). Alternatively, Ferreras resists this temptation and does not use words such as "superhuman" to describe, and therefore elevate to mythical status, Minerva. To the contrary, as previously mentioned, he wants to encourage women to participate in the political process by showing them how Minerva, who while brave, was not 'superhuman'.

Additionally, Butterflies inadequately documents the suffering of the Mirabal sisters. The reader learns of the sisters' experiences in prison through Mate's diary entries. Her entries mention her lesbian affair with Magdalena (a fellow prisoner), her miscarriage and her constant hunger. The pages recording the worst of her experiences, the ones she refuses to talk about, were ripped out and are inaccessible to the reader. Yet, the sisters' suffered terribly in prison. As Robert Crassweller states, "They had not had an easy time of it. Trujillo bore a particular resentment against them, and their experiences in jail had included all the indignities heaped upon female prisoners" (402).

Las Mirabal also glosses over the suffering of the Mirabal sisters in prison. Ferreras writes that "[t]res meses pasaron allí las tres [Minerva, María Teresa, Sina], torturadas con el solo hechos de tenerlas en solitaria y comiendo la porquería que les daban como ración" (332).

However, he does document the suffering endured by the sisters' husbands. He writes:

El mismo Manolo decía muchas veces en confidencias a su cuñada: 'Dedé, eso era lo más doloroso, un golpe encima de otro, una herida sobre otra a medio cicatrizar. Esto es, cuando ya una herida está por cerrarse, viene la otra tunda de golpes a volver a reabrirla.'

Al final de las torturas, las espaldas de Manolo parecían un gigantesca parilla de esas de asar carne que se usan en los barrios humildes de la ciudades dominicanas. (325)

Thus, despite minimizing the suffering of the sisters, the cruelty of the prison experience is recognized.

The glossing over of violence in Butterflies is not limited only to their prison experience. It is also evident in the deaths of the sisters. Dedé in Butterflies says, “But I do not think they violated my sisters, no. I checked as best I could. I think it is safe to say they acted like gentlemen murderers in that way” (303). However, historians disagree. According to Kai Schoenhals the sisters were “raped, beaten to death and then thrown into an abyss” (xxviii). Additionally Crassweller contents the sisters were “taken into custody, and fresh abominations were practiced upon them, followed soon by the assassinations” (402). In omitting the worst of the sisters’ suffering, Alvarez to a certain extent dehumanizes and idealizes the experience of living under Trujillo. As Lucía Suárez writes, “Alvarez tries to recuperate the Mirabal sisters from mythification, only to mythify them further, blurring further the violence of Trujillo’s dictatorship” (22). Furthermore, Ink believes that:

Although Alvarez claims to write the Mirabals’ story to convey the reality of their involvement, the details she does provide fail to convey the extent of the abuse the sisters endured under Trujillo. The conditions under which they are kept are deplorable, but prison life is generally idealized . . . Most important, the narrative of the torture is the only missing portion of the diary . . . The result is a sense of mystery that renders the women more legend than flesh and blood. By leaving out details that would humanize their story, the text creates the Mirabals as examples. (“Remaking identity, . . .” Callaloo)

Alvarez overlooks the worst of the suffering the sisters endured. Consequently, she recreates a Trujillo was more benevolent towards the sisters than he actually was. In fairness, it should be noted that Las Mirabal also rejects the idea that the sisters were raped. Ferreras writes “[n]o había señales de que los cuerpos de la Mirabal fueron objeto de violación sexual . . .” (454).

Alvarez also fails to demythify the sisters because their fictional characters are poorly developed and each one closely resembles a stereotype. As Isabel Zakrzewski Brown contends:

These [stereotypes] include: the pious one, Patria; the pragmatic one Dedé; the rebellious one, Minerva; and the innocent one, Mate. The four come together to form a perfect whole: the now legendary Mirabal sisters. Alvarez thus is unable to avoid the mythification process she has professed to elude. (110)

Additionally, Ink reasons that “Alvarez . . . undermines her own claim to de-mythologization.

What she establishes in place of the Mirabal of fact or legend is another national myth”

(“Remaking identity . . .” Callaloo). However, Ben Jacques disagrees; he argues, “By creating fictional characters for the national heroines, Alvarez demythologizes them. She brings them back to life not as saints, but as ordinary, yet extraordinary women who respond to oppression out of their personal values and character” (“Real Flights of Imagination,” Americas). Given Alvarez’s stated lack of interest in the biography of actual Minerva, it is not surprising that her recreation would be just as fictional as the mythical Minerva she is attempting to de-mythify.

Conclusion

Both Ferreras and Alvarez set out with a similar intent: to keep the memory of the Mirabal sisters alive, to ensure that history (not just the Mirabal sisters) is not forgotten. Ferreras mentions that the contributions of many other women have also been forgotten. He explains:

Las damas y mujeres del pueblo mencionadas en lo que va de este trabajo, . . . no fueron las únicas que actuaron en aquellos apacibles o bravos días en que nuestras féminas tenían que, en muchos casos, ‘dormir con un ojo abierto’. . . De aquellas que acompañaron a sus hombres en las luchas por la libertad y por el bien de la República, de esas quedaron casi en su totalidad sus nombres en el tintero de nuestros historiadores, y sólo buceos más profundos en fojas y documentos arcaicos podrán en el futuro próximo o lejano, decir algo de lo mucho que merecen que de ellas se diga en los fastos gloriosos de nuestra historia nacional. (Historia 138)

Additionally, Ferreras hopes to encourage women to be feminists by showing them feminists can be positively viewed by Dominicans. He writes:

Ellas, a quienes el pueblo dominicano conoce hoy y reverencia como Las Hermanas Mirabal, fueron feministas de primera línea, aunque nunca militaran en una de las llamadas agrupaciones feministas que proliferaron el país. (Historia 138)

The feminist groups to which he references were little more than pawns of Trujillo. Ferreras' narrative shows a strong Minerva who, along with her fellow countrymen and women, fought oppression. In this text, Minerva's struggles are more collective. She is the leader of a much larger group. Ferreras explains that "había muchas células del movimiento" (325). Most importantly, she is never broken down, never afraid and never regrets her actions. Minerva was recognized for her intelligence, bravery and leadership skills among people who were also strong and brave; not weak and uneducated. And although fighting tyranny is more important to her than motherhood, Minerva, the historical figure, is not mythified in Las Mirabal. Therefore, it is the older, Dominican text, written by a man, which portrays a much stronger and feminist Minerva Mirabal without, as one might expect, projecting on her a masculinized version of heroism. She is simply a mother, who after seeing her beloved father die as a result of his unjust imprisonment, decides to fight for a better future for her children.

Unlike Ferreras, Alvarez is more concerned with creating the sense and feel of the Trujillo era. In re-writing the older version, written by Ferreras, she creates a very different Minerva. In her interpretation Minerva is much less of a feminist. The women in Alvarez's novel, Minerva included, are portrayed as victims of a machista, phallogentric, patriarchal society. The fact that there was a brutal tyrant in power appears only as a secondary oppression. The women are first oppressed by the men in their lives, husbands, fathers, etc., and secondly by Trujillo. Alvarez inverts the traditional patriarchal society and places Minerva at the top of the hierarchy, displacing even Trujillo from power, who she outwits. Yet, this displacement and feminization of power makes Minerva's character hard to believe.

Alvarez, in her attempt to make Minerva seem strong among weak women and even weaker men, misrepresents the Dominican people and diminishes Minerva's role. She also discredits the Mirabal family. Dedé, as the surviving sister, has become the guardian of her sisters' memory and Alvarez goes to her seeking information about her sisters. Yet, she quickly discredits Dedé by informing the reader that she has lied to her. The text claims, "Dedé lies to the voice" (4). Later, the narrator informs the reader that Dedé is dishonest, "'Not at all', she [Dedé] lies" (4). Additionally, the reader's first introduction to Don Enrique, the sisters' beloved father, is when he is drunk. Her sister María Teresa commits adultery with another woman while in prison. Finally, Minerva ends up agoraphobic.

These two texts offer a very different visions of the Dominican Republic, Trujillo, and Minerva. Ferreras describes a modern, feminist country in which women have full access to education, while Alvarez portrays a much more backward, machista, stereotypical Third World country. Ferreras reveals Dominicans, both men and women, who are strong and who fight political oppression, from the United States and Trujillo's regime. In contrast, Alvarez writes of a country in which the women, with the exception of a few, are passive and the men are weak and powerless on several levels.

Since Alvarez was able to write about the Dominican Republic from the United States, she was able to write from a position of greater safety than Ferreras, who had been repeatedly imprisoned by President Balaguer, who was in power when Las Mirabal was published. Yet, it is his text that is most harshly critical of the Dominican political situation.

Alvarez, who writes in English and has access to large publishers, also writes from a position of greater power. Of the two narratives it is Alvarez's that has eclipsed that of Ferreras and her voice has overshadowed his in the Dominican national consciousness. Even from abroad

and writing in a foreign language, she has the ability to influence how Dominicans view themselves and how others view Dominicans. Roberto Marcallé Abreu, a Dominican journalist and author, finds this influence problematic. He writes:

Nuestra literatura, en sentido general, y es lo que creo, está al margen de la que hoy día se produce en el mundo. . . . y nos debe llenar de vergüenza que vengan de fuera a explotar temas locales con una repercusión internacional que ningún escritor nuestro ha logrado. (419-20)

Specifically, he is referring to Mario Vargas Llosa's La Fiesta del Chivo (2000) and Mayra Montero's Del rojo de tu sombra (1993). He continues to explain that Dominicans do not read Dominican literature because there exists a “desprecio de las letras nacionales” (409). Therefore, narrative written by ‘outsiders’, even about that whose topic is Dominican history, is much more widely read by both Dominicans and non-Dominicans alike.

Alvarez's narrative has been translated into 13 different languages and is the one that is for sale in the Mirabal Museum. Yet, in this author's personal interview of Dedé, it became apparent that Las Mirabal offered a much more accurate description of her family. (Dedé has read neither narrative.) This success leads me to wonder what effect her narrative, which offers a negative view of the Dominican Republic, has had on how Dominicans view both themselves and their country. There has been a Dominican response to her narrative, yet for abovementioned reasons it hasn't really received the attention hers has and so the Dominican voice has not been heard.²⁴ In short, the commercial success of Alvarez's novel has allowed her voice (that of the American girl with the American education who writes in an imperial, as Dominicans see it, language) to overshadow Dominican narrative (voices), which also seeks to interpret and document the past. Alvarez's ability, from abroad, to affect how Dominican view

²⁴ See Miguel Aquino García's. Tres heroínas y un tirano. La historia verídica de las Hermanas Mirabal y su asesinato por Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. Santo Domingo: Editora Corripio, 1996.

themselves reflects what is also happening politically in that Dominicans-Americans are allowed to vote in Dominican elections. So important is their vote – and their dollars - that political candidates actively campaign in New York City. Torres-Saillant notes that the power of the diaspora can have a positive or negative effect on the country of origin. He observes:

. . . having representation of the Antillean world in the hands of diasporic intellectuals who do not root themselves culturally or politically in ‘the region’ may lead to their strategic use of their privileged position . . . to continue the work of upholding the humanity and the historical groundedness of their people. . . . But, they could also, wielding greater might than their counterparts in the region, resort to the deployment of ‘borrowed eyes’ to look at their parents’ homelands, adding to the long tradition of inimical representation that the Caribbean has endured for over five centuries. (“Intellectual” 252)

It is through the comparison of the Dominican and diasporic text that the ‘inimical representation’ that Torres-Saillant writes of becomes most evident in Butterflies. And while it may have achieved its goal of “[deepening] North Americans’ understanding” (324) of the Trujillo era, a laudable achievement, it also inadequately and erroneously portrays the Dominican Republic, its history and its people. As previously mentioned, Alvarez is not concerned with these inaccuracies. She explains, “I sometimes took liberties – by changing dates, by reconstructing events, and by collapsing characters or incidents.” (324). However, not all novelists share her lack of concern for history. The novelist Virginia Brodine asserts “I believe writers of historical fiction should be held accountable by historians” (208). While Butterflies is not a historical novel because it includes the author’s lifetime, Alvarez believes that as a survivor it is her responsibility to give testimony and to keep the memory of those who died (Before 166-7). For this reason, even if Alvarez could not avoid due to her American education and upbringing viewing the Dominican Republic through the eyes of an “American”, Butterflies could have at least offered its reader a more accurate representation of Dominican history.

CHAPTER 4
PORTRAIT OF A DICTATORSHIP: “THE ERA OF TRUJILLO” IN CEMENTERIO SIN CRUCES AND LA FIESTA DEL CHIVO

Monumento a los gloriosos héroes del 30 de mayo de 1961. Hombres de acero, que esa noche luminosa ajusticiaron en este lugar al dictador Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina, poniendo así fin a la tiranía más horrenda de toda la historia latinoamericana. Honrar a los que luchan por la libertad, nos ayudará a no olvidar sus ideales.

- Fundación Héroes del 30 del Mayo 1999²⁵

Soy uno de esa América Latina de rostro marcado de profundas huellas de dolor, que recuerdan el destierro, la tortura, la prisión y la muerte de muchos hombres y de sus mujeres. Soy uno de esa América Latina cuya geografía aún exhibe regímenes totalitarios que avergüenzan a la humanidad entera.

- Oscar Arias Sánchez, Nobel Lecture, December 10, 1987

Introduction

More than 30 years of tyrannical rule came to an abrupt and violent end on the night of May 30, 1961 when Rafael Trujillo was ambushed and shot to death. However, the era of Trujillo did not end with the death of the tyrant. Robert D. Crassweller explains that the plot to kill Trujillo consisted of two groups; an Action Group and a Political Group. The Action Group, made up of eight men, was responsible for planning and carrying out assassination. Many of the men involved in the killing that night were part of Trujillo’s inner circle. Two separate cars were involved in the ambush. In the first car, an Oldsmobile, was Huáscar Tejeda and Pedro Livio Cedeño. In the second car, a Chevrolet, rode Antonio Imbert Barrera, Antonio de la Maza, Amado García Guerrero and Salvador Estrella Sadhalá. The only member of the Action Group

²⁵ These words are inscribed on a plaque marking the place of Trujillo’s death. Interestingly it commemorates the assassins and not the victim of the assassination.

to survive was Antonio de la Maza. The others were quickly rounded up and killed, most suffering a death much worse than Trujillo's. Upon Trujillo's death, the Political Group was to take over the government. For various reasons, including simple fear, the Political Group never fulfilled its role (Crassweller 436). A Time article reports:

The only thing out of keeping about Trujillo's death was the aftermath. Instead of serving as a signal for revolution to sweep down the hills into the capital, the assassination was followed by stupefied silence among his 2,900,000 subjects. ("End of the Dictator")

Eduardo García Michel offers insight into the Dominican mindset after the death of the tyrant and explains the silence mentioned in the Time article:

Después del 30 de mayo de 1961 una atmósfera de tensión y descreimiento arropo a la población. ¿Sería cierto que Trujillo está muerto? Se preguntaba la gente. Parecía demasiado fácil que tantos años de terror desaparecieran en tan sólo un soplo. Muchos creyeron que la noticia de que Trujillo había sido ajusticiado era un 'gancho', para poner en evidencia a sus enemigos. Cuando se convencieron de que sí, de que había muerto el tirano, hubo luto, real, pues la ignorancia es ancha, pero también hubo luto fingido, puesto que la maquinaria represiva estaba intacta y el miedo persistía. (291)

The fear that seemed to paralyze some members of the Political Group is understandable for Joaquín Balaguer notes that, "Trujillo no sólo sojuzgó la voluntad, sino el pensamiento mismo de sus ciudadanos. La vida nacional, durante más de 30 años, fluctúa totalmente en torno a su nombre y obedece a las directrices de su carácter absorbente" (73-4). Also adding to the fear was the presence of Trujillo's son, Ramfis. The day after the assassination, he arrived from Paris by charter flight and assumed control of the country. In the days following the assassination, Time reports, "1,000 suspected opponents of the regime were rounded up." (End of the Dictator). On Nov. 18, 1961, the captured assassins were killed, execution style. The following day, Trujillo's immediate family was expelled from the country for life. (Frank Moya Pons 382).

While Dominicans were surprised by Trujillo's death, it did not come as a surprise to the United States, which for 30 years had been supportive of the dictator. Six months before Trujillo's assassination, The Nation reports:

The United States hovers over the Dominican Republic these days, waiting, eagerly for a reward. The reasoning is simple: Everyone sees that the regime of Generalissimo Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina is tottering; everyone knows the State Department nudged it a bit: surely, after the crash, the new regime will embrace the nudger. (Stanley Meisler)

After Trujillo's death, Dominicans democratically elected Juan Bosch, who had been a strong critic of Trujillo and had been the leader of Dominican opposition in exile. Founder of both the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD) in 1939 and the Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) in 1973, he did not embrace the United States. Requena had been hopeful that the United States would

The texts analyzed in this chapter, Cementerio sin cruces: novela del martirio de la República Dominicana bajo la rapaz tiranía de Trujillo (1949), by Dominican author Andrés Requena (1908-1952) and La Fiesta del Chivo (2000), by the well-know Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa (1936) provide a general view of the Trujillo regime. Silvio Torres-Saillant notes that Requena was part of the Dominican diaspora living in the United States in the first half of the 20th century and included authors such as Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Camila Henríquez Ureña, and Manuel Florentino Cestero (29). Although it was written in the United States, for the purposes of this study, Cementerio sin cruces, is included as providing an inside view of the Dominican Republic because Requena writes from memory. Dominican literary critics such as Frank Moya Pons (Bibliografía de la Literatura Dominicana) and Joaquín Balaguer have also included the novel in studies on Dominican literature. As an active member of the Trujillo regime, Requena was in a position to provide first hand knowledge and insight. In this respect, he is unlike Julia Alvarez and Edwidge Danticat, who also live and write in the United States and who, in the works analyzed earlier in this study, In the Time of the Butterflies (1995) and The Farming of Bones (1998) respectively, narrate events they did not directly experience.

Published 51 years apart, Cementerio sin cruces and La Fiesta del Chivo, seek, albeit through very different means, to dismantle the mythology surrounding Trujillo's regime and illustrate the effect of the era of Trujillo on the Dominican people. Additionally, La Fiesta del Chivo, written almost 40 years after the death of the dictator, provides the reader insight into the frame of mind of the group of men who assassinated Trujillo. Like the authors previously analyzed in this study, both Requena and Vargas Llosa rewrite and subvert official history while giving voice to marginal groups that have been silenced or forgotten.

Both Cementerio sin cruces and La Fiesta del Chivo can be classified as political novels. Joseph L. Blotner describes the political novel as, "a book which directly describes, interprets, or analyzes political phenomena" (2). Yet, a novel can be both political and historical. Seymour Menton in his study of what he calls Latin America's new historical novel, defines it as, "[. . .] novels whose action takes place completely (in some cases, predominantly) in the past – arbitrarily defined here as a past not directly experienced by the author" (16).²⁶ Thus, a novel based on political events experienced by the author would be a political but not a historical novel. Requena directly experienced the era of Trujillo and therefore Cementerio sin cruces, can be considered a political novel, but not a historical novel based on the previously given definition. Alternatively, Vargas Llosa, born in Peru in 1936 lived during the era of Trujillo, but did not directly experience the event. Therefore, La Fiesta del Chivo, published 39 years after the death of Trujillo, is both a political and historical novel. It should be mentioned that Vargas Llosa would disagree with this classification of his work. In an interview with Raymond L. Williams the Peruvian author mentions:

Recabé así un material muy rico a partir del cual escribí una novela que no es un libro de historia disfrazado, que no es un reportaje disimulado, sino eso, una novela, una historia

²⁶ Because Requena uses ellipses often, I have placed my ellipses in brackets to distinguish between the two.

donde hay más invención que memoria y en la que incluso los personajes y los hechos históricos están tratados con la libertad con que un novelista escribe sus historias. (90)

In another interview he reiterates, La Fiesta del Chivo, “[. . .] no es una novela histórica. Si se hiciera una estadística, hay mucha más invención que historia . . .” (“Cuando Vargas Llosa mató al chivo [sic]”). However, Vargas Llosa does believe that novel, though fictional, represents the ‘human truth’ of the dictatorship” (Nesmith).

Although these narratives recreate the era of Trujillo and narrate the experience of living in the Dominican Republic during the era of Trujillo, they are not dictator novels as the dictator is not a main character in either text. However, since his presence is strongly felt and the novels narrate the experience of living under extreme oppression, both narratives can be classified as novels of dictatorship. Carlos Pacheco notes that the use of literature as a means to fight tyranny began in Latin America with the Romantic literary movement. He explains:

El espíritu romántico, [. . .] justiciero, liberal, ciudadano, europeísta, se muestra incapaz de soportar en silencio la opresión tiránica. [. . .] La oposición al tirano será frontal e irreducible. Y la literatura vendrá a ser un arma en este combate a muerte. (55)

Cementerio sin cruces is the only text in this study that was written and published during the trujillato and is an example of literature as means to confront tyranny.²⁷ The narrative brazenly offers a harsh critique of Trujillo, while the dictator is still in power. As Franklin Gutiérrez, et al. note, Requena “ridiculiza y caricaturiza al dictador” (13). This criticism would lead to the author’s death on the October 2, 1952 in New York City.²⁸ That Trujillo would order killings within the United States without negative consequence is telling of the U.S. support he enjoyed.

As Alan Block notes:

²⁷ The era of Trujillo (1930-1961) is also known as the ‘trujillato’.

²⁸ According to the New York Times article “50 Attend Funeral of Trujillo Enemy.” (7 Oct. 1952) the FBI had been aware that Trujillo had placed a bounty on Requena’s head but had done nothing to stop it claiming that they did not have jurisdiction.

[. . .] carrying out a political assassination in a country like the United States “requires precision, care, and a mix of foreign and domestic operatives. It is also important to be able to manipulate congressional and public opinion. (186)

The foreign killings also illustrates the extreme to which Trujillo went to eliminate anyone he considered an enemy. Sadly Requena’s death highlights the dangers of fighting tyranny, even if the weapon of choice is a fictional narrative.²⁹

For several reasons, these narratives are emotionally challenging for the reader. Both narratives dedicate many pages to the detailed description of the torture and subsequent death inflicted on political prisoners during the Trujillo era. A large portion of La Fiesta del Chivo describes the fate of the captured conspirators. In particular, the description of the torture General Román endured is unimaginable, brutal, and gut wrenching to the point that the reader is relieved when he is finally and mercifully killed. The torture is so horrific that the Vargas Llosa had to minimize it so as not to shock the reader into incredulity. He explains in an interview that:

Lo pasé muy mal, fueron muy difíciles de escribir, pero no podía soslayarlos. He tenido incluso que suavizar el material con el que contaba, porque la desmesura de la violencia lo hacia inverosímil. La represión y la tortura de la Era Trujillo llegaron a unos extremos de vértigo, que no son creíbles: un caso típico de cómo la realidad supera a la ficción (“Cuando Vargas Llosa mató al chivo [sic]”)

²⁹ Requena was not the only person murdered by Trujillo’s men outside of the Dominican Republic. Howard Wiarda documented, “The long tentacles of the Trujillo regime covered most of Central America, the Caribbean, and the United States and reached out to include Dominican exiles, other Latin American, opponents, and United States citizens. Mauricio Baez, a prominent Dominican labor leader who was forced into exile, ‘disappeared’ in Havana in 1950. Andres Requena, novelist and editor of an anti-Trujillo newspaper, was shot in New York in 1951. Eduardo Colón y Piris, a Puerto Rican youth who has spoken disrespectfully of Trujillo while touring the Dominican Republic, vanished and was never heard from again. Charles R. Barnes, an Episcopalian clergyman, was found dead in the Dominican Republic after smuggling accounts of the 1937 Haitian massacre out of the country . . . Jesús de Galíndez . . . disappeared from New York in 1956 and the suicide of a pilot who worked for Trujillo” (58).

Rewriting this part of history proved to be challenging for the author. In interview with Tulio Demicheli Vargas Llosa states that this book, “es uno de los que más me ha costado escribir en mi vida [. . .]”.

Writing to Correct a Wrong: Andrés Requena

Andrés Requena differs from the previous Dominican authors analyzed in this study, in that he is not well known in his own country. Requena wrote three novels; Los enemigos de la tierra (1936), Camino de fuego (1941) and Cementerio sin cruces. He also authored: Romancero heroico del generalísimo (1937), a book of essays titled Un paladín de la democracia: el generalísimo Trujillo Molina (1938), and a book of poetry titled Romance de Puerto Trujillo (1940). Requena was not an author by profession. At the time of his death, the New York Times notes that he had been working as a tailor (“50 Attend Funeral of Trujillo Enemy”). Like many Dominicans, Requena had been a supporter of Trujillo and had held several political positions within his regime. After his appointment to the Dominican embassy in Chile, Requena became disenfranchised with the Trujillo regime. He resigned his post and fled to Cuba and then to the United States. In 1944, he joined the U.S. Army and served for two years. It is during this time that he becomes a U.S. citizen. Like José Martí, who founded the newspaper title Patria (1892), Requena also founded the newspaper title Patria (1946) in New York City. Both newspapers advocated freedom for the founders’ respective homeland: the first Cuba’s independence from Spain, the latter the Dominican Republic’s freedom from tyranny. Requena’s Patria is harshly critical of Trujillo and serves as a prelude to the novel Cementerio sin cruces (1949) published in Mexico just 3 years after the newspaper’s founding. The novel offers an inside view into

Trujillo's regime and is a harsh critique of Trujillo. This criticism would lead to his death on the October 2, 1952 in New York City.³⁰

Very little has been published about Requena. Furthermore, some of what has been published contains erroneous information. For example in the introduction to the 2001 edition of Cementerio sin cruces, Diógenes Céspedes writes that Requena was killed in March of 1952 (11). Official reports indicate that he was murdered in October. Furthermore, Requena was born in 1908, not 1922 as Céspedes mentions (12). He is not alone in his confusion. Bernardo Vega in Almoína, Galíndez (2001) mentions that Requena was killed, "en septiembre de 1952" (62-3). It is worth noting that Requena is absent from Joaquín Balaguer's Historia de la literatura dominicana published in 1955 while Trujillo was alive. However, Requena does appear in Balaguer's memoir titled Memorias de un cortesano (1988) and published more than 20 years after the death of the tyrant. The author describes Requena as a "novelista y político" (445). He also lists the titles of Requena's works and the date, but not the cause, of his untimely death (445).

Prior to the 2001 edition of Cementerio sin cruces published by the Comisión Permanente de la Feria del Libro in Santo Domingo, the novel was not easily found in the Dominican Republic. Céspedes explains "[h]oy entregamos a los lectores quienes duele nuestra literatura, esta obra que sólo figura de nombre en las historias literarias, sin que el grueso de los dominicanos y dominicanas la hayan leído" (15). The literary critic Giovanni Di Pietro mentions that it took him some time to find a copy of the 1949 edition of Cementerio sin cruces published in Mexico. In an essay dated 1999 he explains, "[t]odavía hoy, después de 35 años del

³⁰ The author was shot to death at 10 p.m. in the doorway of an apartment building in lower Manhattan.

ajusticiamiento del tirano, parece que se la considera - para así decirlo - una ‘novela non grata’” (161).

Dictators and Cowards

According to Di Pietro, the 1949 edition includes a “Nota del autor” which is absent from the 2001 edition published in Santo Domingo.³¹ He quotes Requena who explains his reasons for writing the novel. He tells his reader that within him, “late el corazón de un hombre que se equivocó y que después, con el sacrificio del exilio, trató desesperadamente de enmendar su error” (166). Requena feels that his support of Trujillo was a mistake and Cementerio sin cruces is his way of absolving the guilt he feels for having support the tyrant. He further believes that continued support of the tyrant would be cowardly and explains to reader:

Mas pienso que, equivocarse con la excusa de tal inexperiencia, puede acaso ser perdonable, pero continuar apoyando a tal sátrapa, cuando se conocen sus reales ‘hazañas’, y los años y la razón nos hacen imperativo de un examen de conciencia, es algo que no tiene nombre por lo cobarde y servil. (167)

He describes Trujillo’s supporters as cowards, describing one of Trujillo’s generals as, “tan cobarde como corpulento [. . .]” (191). In addition to the author’s note, Requena mentions cowardice in the dedication of Cementerio sin cruces where he writes:

A la juventud que en el interior del país despertó la conciencia popular con sus actos de heroico civismo en 1946-19477, y que hoy, con desacostumbrado valor - y antes que claudicar - se gana la vida vendiendo carbón y ,<<frío-frío>>, frente a la aterrada admiración de una sociedad acobardada (180)³²

The author dedicates the book to Dominicans, who much like himself, are brave enough to stand up to the dictator. Vargas Llosa also mentions cowardice in an interview with the Spanish newspaper, El País. When asked if people suffering from tyranny are, in some way, responsible

³¹ As of the time of this writing, I have been unable to obtain a copy of the 1949 edition.

³² Camino de fuego and Cementerio sin cruces were published together in the same edition. The first page of Cementerio sin cruces is page 173.

for their situation he responds, “Creo que sí. Con escasas excepciones hay siempre una responsabilidad en los pueblos que por ingenuidad, confusión y a veces cobardía, aceptan las dictaduras” (“Desarrollo integro del foro con Vargas Llosa”). In other words, Dominican’s acceptance of Trujillo whether through action or inaction, to a certain extent, allows them to be held responsible for his regime. This idea completely overlooks the fact that Trujillo was in power with the support of the United States. As Requena explains:

Y lo peor de todo era que sus labios tenían que permanecer cerrados porque protestar era considerado como un acto de violencia contra los intereses forasteros, de los cuales la tiranía era armado vigilante que defendía a sangre y fuego de las pretensiones de los exasperados esclavos nativos. (224)

Furthermore, many Dominicans believed that removing Trujillo from power would result in another U.S. invasion.³³ Requena’s willingness to speak out against the dictator, knowing it may cost him his life, reveals both his bravery and his unwillingness to show support, by any means, for Trujillo.

Unable to accept the conditions under which Dominicans are living and feeling guilty for his participation in Trujillo’s regime, Requena in Cementerio sin cruces provides testimony in hopes that will precipitate change. He notes in the text:

Ahora, sin embargo, la fortaleza era el mejor símbolo de la forma terrible en que se ejecutaban las persecuciones políticas. Detrás de sus gruesos barrotes, y frente al mar Caribe sobre cuyas olas creció la niñez del continente nuevo, sufrían hombres y mujeres indignidades en que a veces la muerte misma era deseada como una liberación. ¡Y lo mejor sería ir a ver y a oír las quejas de esas gentes, por cuya suerte parece que el mundo está ciego y sordo! (309)

This need to expose the truth behind the Trujillo regime was more important to him than his own life. Requena was undoubtedly aware that Cementerio sin cruces could cost him his life and that Trujillo was unlikely to forgive such an act of defiance, especially from someone who had

³³ History would prove Dominicans correct. In 1965, the United States, fearful of another Cuba, invaded the country and placed Trujillo’s figurehead president Balaguer in power. (Skidmore and Smith)

previously supported his regime. He also knew of Trujillo's ability and willingness to kill in the United States. In the same novel that cost him his life, he mentions the murder of Sergio Bencosme by Trujillo's men in New York City (221). He also notes "[e]n otras ocasiones, la mano del tirano persiguió sin piedad a exilados en diversas partes del mundo, asesinando a sus enemigos [. . .]" (222). In the final pages of the narrative a government official warns a family leaving the country. He tells them ". . .Y, sin rodeos, les advirtió que, donde quiera que se encontrase, debían abstenerse de hablar mal del gobierno, 'porque el brazo de Trujillo tenia medios para llegar a todas partes' . . ." (378). Although Requena understands the danger he is placing himself in, he believes that "alguien debía arriesgarse para tratar de cambiar el curso siniestro de la suerte dominicana [. . .]" (319). In addition to placing himself in danger Requena's family was also placed in jeopardy. He explains, "A las familias de los lideres en el exilio se les maltrataba si salían a la calle, y bis bienes eran confiscados y campos y fincas incendiadas y destruidas" (356).

Requena's Cry for Help: Cementerio sin cruces

Cementerio sin cruces recreates a recently lived event and describes horrors and humiliations suffered by Dominicans during the first 19 years of Trujillo's dictatorship. He dedicates the novel to Dominicans who have lost their lives fighting against the dictator. The narrative consists of two parts, with only a few months separating the each. The first part begins with the funeral Rafael Moreno, a poet, who after being falsely accused of insulting an Archbishop, was shot to death by Trujillo's henchmen. Requena describes Moreno's death, "Le dieron como cinco balazos, a quemarropa, mientras el pobre muchacho iba paseando con un libro debajo del brazo . . ." (194). The violent death stands in stark contrast to Moreno's personality. The description of his death also illustrates the complete absence of a judicial system and the spineless methods used by Trujillo's police force.

In response to the unjust and cowardly killing of the poet, Dominicans are defiant. Usually people did not attend the funerals of Trujillo's victims for fear of being associated with anyone who was an enemy of Trujillo. As the narrator explains, "En tales casos, lo mejor era no hablar mucho del asunto, y evitar que le vieran a uno cerca del velorio" (182). However, many Dominicans bravely and disobediently attended the poet's funeral. On the first page of the narrative Requena writes, "Frente a la casa de madera del ancho y descuidado Callejón Ozama, se iban congregando visitantes en número desacostumbrado para la modestia de quien había sido muerto a tiros hacía poco más de cuatro horas" (181). Attendance of the wake was a rebellious act. He explains "[a]quello era ya un abierta manifestación contra el gobierno [. . .] porque era una osadía muy grande el manifestar cualquier sentimiento de piedad hacia alguna de sus víctimas" (194-5). Requena, in beginning the novel with an open act of defiance against the government, illustrates that the dictator does not have total control and that Dominicans are willing to defy him. Additionally, the printing press owned by Moreno's godfather is also falsely accused of printing anti-Trujillo propaganda. The text mentions:

[e]l servicio secreto sabe que en este aparato están sacando propaganda contra el gobierno, y especialmente insultos contra el mismo presidente y su familia. . . Es inútil que siga negando, porque todos ustedes están embarrados(249)

Trujillo's lack of control is seen in his regime's inability to stop the anonymous letters criticizing the Archbishop from reaching him and in its inability to stop anti-Trujillo pamphlets from being printed and distributed throughout the capital. Trujillo's inability to control Dominicans is also evidenced by "las declaraciones de los líderes en el exilio pasaban de boca en boca por todo el país, y el gobierno nada podía hacer para callar a la gente" (340).

While Dominicans' attendance of the wake was courageous, Requena also describes how even brave Dominicans can be intimidated. He describes, "[. . .] dos compañeros llamados José Robles y Pepe Lira, ambos ya muy entrados en años, entraron al ventorillo. Venían pálidos y

nerviosos. A José Robles que no era hombre cobarde, le temblaba la voz [. . .]” (232). The idea is repeated again in his description of Miguel Perdomo, who “no era hombre cobarde, pero se daba cuenta de que al correr de las horas se iba asustando como pocas veces había sentido temor en su vida” (245). Even the dictator’s brother Satán is afraid of his brother (261). Fear on a national level can be seen in the treatment of Moreno’s family, who is also affected by the false accusation. His godfather sees a sharp drop in customers at his printing business. The narrator describes:

Más tarde, la misma viuda Moreno le aconsejó que se abstuviera por un tiempo de visitarla, pues temía que ello pudiese perjudicarlo.

Pronto don Pedro se dio cuenta de que afectaba al negocio de su imprenta tal actitud suya, cuando viejos clientes le confesaron que era debido al rumor de que él estaba ayudando a la madre de alguien que había sido asesinado por el gobierno, el que ellos le retiraran trabajos que ya habían sido ordenados. Porque nadie quería ganarse, ni indirectamente, la mala voluntad del dictador ayudando a una persona que osaba no tener en cuenta su enemistad. (197)

Requena later describes that the fear of association with anti-Trujillistas the is known to Dominicans as “la lepra” (230). However, cowardice is not limited to the victims of Trujillo’s regime and even the dictator is ashamed of his cowardice. Requena mentions after beating “un viejo indefenso” the dictator “se avergonzó de su cobardía, especialmente cuando estaba en vísperas de recibir una medalla de oro que le designaba como el <<primer héroe de la patria>> . . .” (289).

While perhaps not evident in Cementerio sin cruces, Requena had some talent as a writer.

Manuel Rueda observes that Requena:

[. . .] quiso ser escritor y casi lo logra. Talento y condiciones para la tarea no le faltaron, pero sí preparación, pudiendo decirse (si es posible establecer tales diferencias) que fue más novelista que escritor. (132)

By all accounts his best work was his first novel Los enemigos de la Tierra which tells the story of a peasant who moves to the city. Luis Alberto Sánchez notes that:

Andrés Requena, . . . sobresale entre todos los contemporáneos de su patria. Tanto en *Los enemigos de la Tierra* . . . como en *Cibao* (que leí el manuscrito, hacia 1942) . . . Requena se muestra como un vigoroso narrador (246)

In contrast with Los enemigos de la Tierra, published while Requena living in the Dominican Republic and still a supporter of Trujillo, Cementerio sin cruces was written with the sole intention exposing the abuses of the regime and ousting Trujillo from power. Carlos Pacheco observes:

Se escribe para derrocar al tirano, para despertar, acrecentar y galvanizar una fuerza de oposición contra él. La novela es concebida y utilizada como un arma política e ideológica y su autor resulta obviamente afectado por la violencia represiva del régimen. (56)

Sánchez notes the text is a “[t]remendo alegato, disfrazado de novela” (432). However, Requena’s talent and narrative ability, evident in his first novel, is absent from Cementerio sin cruces leaving his ideology exposed as seen in the following quote.

Estos son pueblos pobres, y la política de aquel gran país está regida por hombres que están sentados en tronos de oro, de petróleo y de acero. Nuestras naciones tienen que comenzar por respetarse ellas mismas, como, en cierto sentido, México y la Argentina, para ser respetadas. Aquí tienen voz principal los inversionistas de los ingenios, y sólo exigen que haya un hombre fuerte que les garantice su dinero. No importa que sea un asesino o un malhechor. La democracia la vive el hombre humilde del pueblo yanqui, que está de nuestra parte, pero ellos no llegan a ministros de Estado . . . Por eso es que Norteamérica no comprende por qué desconfían tanto de ella en densos sectores de la América nuestra, y siempre será así, mientras que sus diplomáticos tratan de vender por el mundo la palabra democracia con el charlatanismo e insinceridad con que van sus vendedores ambulantes de casa en casa ofreciendo utensilios de cocina. . . . (366)

Missing is the ‘disfrazado’ part mentioned by Sánchez. In other words, the disguise needed for it to succeed as art, in this case a novel, is absent. Jorge Castellanos and Miguel A. Martínez explain:

Al novelista panfletario lo mueve un propósito extra-literario: más que artista se considera un combatiente, cuya obra no tiene finalidad estética, sino que es un instrumento de lucha contra la tiranía. [. . .] El producto final se parece más a un libelo inflamado que una novela. (80)

Sánchez also notes the pamphlet quality present in the text and observes, “Amarga y fuerte, la obra de Requena tiene más de panfleto que de novela, pese a que su maestría en el género no permite ninguna flaqueza en el relato” (433). Requena’s strong dislike of Trujillo results in a narrative that is more propaganda than political novel. Blotner notes that the political novel “has described and interpreted human experience, selectively taking the facts of existence and imposing order and form upon them in an esthetic pattern to make them meaningful” (1). The difference between literature and propaganda is the author’s ability combine ideology with form. Cementerio sin cruces is missing form. Additionally, according to Manuel Rueda, what is missing from Cementerio sin cruces is “la matización psicológica, la profundización de las ideas y la mano del escritor avezado que conoce el secreto de las palabras y que hace que cualquier otro elemento quede supeditado a ellas” (132). When ideology becomes more important than form, literature becomes propaganda. As Raymond Gonzáles explains, “The successful political novelist is the one who selects the appropriate style to express the content in as close a balance between form and theme as he can achieve” (110). Requena’s inability to provide form is evidenced in the following quote that reads more like a description:

Cuando se propalaba que a alguna familia le había caído «la lepra», era porque se estaba en pública desgracia gubernamental, y si miembros del ejército intervenían al hacer un registro, entonces tal desgracia era total y significaba abierta persecución por estar bajo la terrible sospecha de algún crimen político. Las víctimas quedaban en tal caso, desamparadas de toda ayuda de familiares y amigos. Los mismos abogados no se atrevían a inquirir siquiera por su suerte en forma técnicamente judicial, porque con toda probabilidad el jurista intruso iría a hacerle compañía a la cárcel o a la tumba.

Si la acción de la llamada justicia trujillista se tomaba entonces tiempo en materializar su persecución en nombre de la ley, o por voluntad directa del tirano, «la lepra» mantenía constantemente el aislamiento sobre la víctima. En calles y plazas le era negado el saludo por los amigos más íntimos, y su casa o negocio, no eran visitados por cliente o persona alguna, temeroso de contagiarse en la desgracia sin remedio. (198)

Ultimately Cementerio sin cruces fails to achieve this balance between form and ideology and according to Fernando Valerio Holguín many Dominicans consider it, “una novela fallida” (Presencia de Trujillo 161).

Cementerio sin cruces: Providing testimony

Despite its narrative shortcomings as a novel, the text does succeed as a fictional testimonial. Di Pietro explains that the narrative is a:

[. . .] testimonio de la lucha antitrujillista. Porque, para decir verdad, la presente novela no posee casi nada que la recomendaría en términos estrictamente novelísticos, pues la trama, los personajes, las situaciones, el mismo texto, etc., se quedan todos cortos al respecto [. . .] Donde la novela funciona, es en su denuncia de lo que Requena quería denunciar con ella, o sea, la dictadura de Trujillo. (162-4)

Furthermore, Requena’s shortcomings in narrative ability do not negate its content or message.

As Carlos Esteban Deive notes, “Requena no es un narrador de altos vuelos, pero escribe bien y, sobre todo, importa a los lectores dominicanos por lo que cuenta” (10).

Cementerio sin cruces is much more than a simple criticism of Trujillo; it is a call for justice as seen in the dedication of the text. The author dedicates his work “[a] los miles de dominicanos asesinados por Trujillo, y cuyas muertes tiene que ser cobradas, inexorablemente”. Requena differs from the other Dominican authors previously studied in that he wrote Cementerio sin cruces from a position of exile, although self-imposed, and his audience was not Dominican. Ana Gallego Ciuñas notes that the narrative was a “texto sin destino” since books criticizing Trujillo were banned from the country (45). However, Estrella Betances de Pujadas maintains that the ban did not prevent Dominicans from reading the novel as Dominicans traveling outside of the country would read the text (66). Requena had little need to expose Dominicans to a reality they were experiencing and knew all too well. Thus, the novel written for non-Dominicans or Dominicans living in exile, was a plea to the international community for help. However, it is not a plea for himself; he was safely in the United States and had already

obtained U.S. citizenship. Requena's concern was for Dominicans still living in the country under conditions he believes:

[. . .] no tienen antecedentes en la revoluciones criollas este largo e interminable sufrimiento de un pueblo en cuya opresión se han empleado los últimos métodos de aniquilamiento y opresión que las más diabólicas tiranías han podido inventar para perpetrarse en el poder a través de los tiempos. (310)

Requena's cry for help, poorly disguised as novel, would go unanswered until 1961 when a group of men who like Requena had been supporters of Trujillo, assassinate him.

Pablo Neruda in an introduction to La tragedia dominicana (1946), which like Cementerio sin cruces was during the Trujillo era and seeks to expose the horrors of the regime, writes:

Todos o casi todos protegen hechos como la siniestra pandilla nazi argentina, la servidumbre de Bolivia entregada a algunos audaces aventureros fascistas, y cuando se habla de atacar las cuevas de la tiranía, todo se vuelve hipócrita sustentación de principios que no vienen a cuento, todo se vuelve papeleo y excusas, y el rostro completo de la libertad americana continúa atravesado por estas siniestras cicatrices. Nadie interviene. Los abrazos continúan, y las condecoraciones del muladar se ostentan en el banquete de las naciones libres. Mientras tanto los muertos, los martirizados, los encarcelados, los desterrados de la República Dominicana hacen preguntas mortales a toda nuestra América, y estas preguntas deben, alguna vez, ser contestadas. (vi-vii)

Cementerio sin cruces highlights the hypocrisy Neruda mentions and makes it difficult to use ignorance as an excuse for inaction.

An Outsider Looks In: Mario Vargas Llosa

Like Requena, Vargas Llosa does not write fiction merely to entertain the reader. He has repeatedly mentioned that literature should serve another purpose and believes:

el efecto político más visible de la literatura es el despertar en nosotros una conciencia respecto de las deficiencias del mundo que nos rodea para satisfacer nuestras expectativas, nuestras ambiciones, nuestros deseos, y eso es político, esa es una manera de formar ciudadanos alertas y críticos sobre lo que ocurre en rededor. (Literatura y política 53)

Vargas Llosa also thinks “. . . la literatura es un manera de superar a los Trujillo, al horror.” (Cuando Vargas Llosa mató al chivo [sic]). In 1975 Vargas Llosa spent 8 months in the

Dominican Republic. It is during this time that he got the idea for La Fiesta del Chivo.³⁴ The novel, consisting of several interlocking stories, is largely told in the third person and from three main points of view; Urania Cabral's, Trujillo's and the seven men who killed Trujillo. It examines the thoughts and lives of important politicians revealing their insecurities and fears: Trujillo, the figure head president Joaquín Balaguer, intelligence chief Johnny Abbes García, and each of Trujillo's killers. The narrative structure is complex prompting readers to often ask Vargas Llosa who is the 'tú' the narrators refer to in the text, as it is not immediately obvious. He explains it is the narrators speaking to him or herself using the pronoun "tú" (Literatura y política 92). In other words, the reader experiences the narrator speaking to him or herself. Adding the complexity, the novel has many narrative voices and different narrators sometimes describe the same event. The polyphonic narrative challenges the monologic power of Trujillo's regime and it is in this way that the narrative is subversive of power. Adding to the complexity, the chapters are not in chronological order and the narrative moves back and forth in time.

The commercial success of La Fiesta del Chivo in the Dominican Republic reveals that Dominicans are interested in reading about the era of Trujillo. The Dominican editorial company Editora Taller underestimated interest in the subject. The first edition of 2,000 rapidly sold out and a second edition of 20,000 was printed. The book sold quickly 12,000 copies, a "récord nacional" (Manuel Jiménez). Despite its commercial success, Dominican reaction to La Fiesta del Chivo has been mixed. Susan Nesmith notes that Antonio De la Maza's relatives were unhappy with how he was represented in the novel, believing that it would confuse younger generations who didn't live through 'the system that asphyxiated us.'" In an effort to counter

³⁴ The novel was adapted into a theatre production in 2004. It was also made into a movie in 2005. Luis Llosa, Mario Vargas Llosa's cousin, directed the film.

Vargas Llosa's representation, the family placed an advertisement in the newspaper Hoy.

Bernardo Vega in an interview with Nesmith explains that:

The families are not happy with the book because he treats them as humans who get drunk and cheat on their wives and have human weaknesses, rather than as the heroes we read about in history books.

The families of the conspirators were not the only upset Dominicans. Ramón Font Bernard, director of the Dominican National Archive where Vargas Llosa did extensive research for the novel, describes it as a: “paquete de chismografía y alcantarilla de inmundicias” (Juan Jesús Aznárez). Furthermore, when Vargas Llosa visited the Dominican Republic to promote his book he was:

protegido por un cuerpo de seguridad privado, y dotaciones policiales se estacionaron en los accesos del hotel o los lugares visitados. El temor a una agresión no es gratuito [. . .] se dispuso la contracción de matones para darle tal paliza ‘para que no pudiera volver a escribir jamás’. (Aznárez)

Carlos Francisco Elias, a literary critic, in an interview explains the negative reaction

Dominicans had to the La Fiesta del Chivo, “The iron curtain that we have covered ourselves with for decades has been broken” (Nesmith). Nesmith also notes “[t]his book has left many in this Caribbean nation of 8 million people feeling a little exposed, a little embarrassed.” Some of the embarrassment comes from the questions La Fiesta del Chivo has generated. Aznárez writes:

José Israel Cuello, ‘La obra está siendo leída masivamente por los jóvenes, generando en ellos preguntas a sus padres, a sus abuelos o a sus bisabuelos; entre ellas: ¿Dónde estabas tú?’

- La mayoría estaban con el déspota, con el dueño absoluto del Estado . . . quien, de grado o fuerza, comprometió a toda una generación.

By providing the reader access to the character's thoughts, La Fiesta del Chivo attempts to answer the question, “¿Dónde estabas tú?”. To this end, Vargas Llosa does not place the Trujillo era in context with other world leaders and events. Valerio Holguín observes:

En esta novela, la dictadura de Trujillo queda totalmente excluida del contexto de las dictaduras latinoamericanas y del rol hegemónico de los Estados Unidos en cuanto a la creación y sostenimiento de dichas dictaduras. (Presencia de Trujillo 212)

In other words, the novel looks inward at the psychological aspects of tyranny, not outward toward the external factors, such as U.S. imperialism, that facilitated it.

Re-imagining the Dominican Republic during the era of Trujillo

Few dictators have ruled as harshly as Trujillo. According to Franklin Knight, “Trujillo completely dominated the state in every way, providing a modicum of social and economic reforms at the expense of human and political rights” (224). The journalist Herbert Matthews makes a similar observation. He writes in The New York Times:

Every individual, including those in the family, is subject to the Generalissimo’s every whim. He can and does make and break men overnight, whether they are foreign ministers, army generals or hotel chefs. . . . no one can deny that he has rule with a thoroughness unsurpassed by any other totalitarian regime. (“Dominicans Thrive at Cost of Liberty”)

The effect of living under such oppression is narrated in Cementerio sin cruces where Requena repeatedly compares the country to a prison. He describes Santo Domingo as, “una larga madeja de celdas de un inmensa prisión, la que no se sabe donde comenzaba ni donde iba a terminar. . .” (234). He also describes his country as a “país amado pero ahora convertido en una enorme prisión colectiva” (379). The Dominican Republic is also often compared to a concentration camp. The text states that dictatorship has converted the country into an, “. . . enorme campo de concentración” (320). It later reiterates, “campo de concentración en que él tiene convertida la república” (353). Requena is not the only one to make this observation. Pericles Franco Ornes, a well-known anti-Trujillista also makes the same comparison in his work titled La tragedia dominicana (1946), published while Trujillo was in power. Franco Ornes states, “La República Dominicana es una inmensa cárcel, un vasto campo de concentración” (13). The title Cementerio sin cruces appears several times in the narrative. Requena writes that, “todas las

ciudades dominicanas, eran un largo, ancho y desolado cementerio sin cruces. . ." (308). This comparison is also made by Jesús de Galíndez who in his doctoral dissertation titled La era de Trujillo (1956) describes, "En apariencia ese orden es perfecto; pero es el orden de los cementerios" (298).

Considering the oppression Dominicans were living under, it is not surprising that Cementerio sin cruces portrays a country that is, to a certain extent, hopeless. The feeling of resignation is evident in Requena's portrayal of Ramón Espinosa who works in a print shop. He writes:

Para Ramón Espinosa aquel era otro día más en su dura lucha por la vida. Se levantaba bajo el monótono fatalismo que era común en los trabajadores del país. Como todos los demás, él tenía la impresión de que rodaba en un círculo vicioso, del cual era imposible fugarse. (223)

Understandably, the narrator notes that Dominicans were "aterrado por veinte años de feroz tiranía" (182). During that time they lived in what the narrator describes as a "podrido ambiente" (199). He also informs the reader that the years under Trujillo's rule have been "años terribles" (198). Adding to the sense of hopelessness, Dominicans have come to the realization, "al pasar los años Trujillo parecía estar dispuesto a seguir, a sangre y fuego, con las riendas del poder entre sus garras" (200-1).

Dominicans are not only oppressed in Cementerio sin cruces; they are also, for the most part, poor. As Requena writes, "La vida cotidiana no es realmente un lecho de rosas para el noventa y nueve por ciento de los habitantes de la ahora infortunada República Dominicana" (221). Food is scarce and people do not have money for clothes. As the narrator describes, "Aquella vida miserable no parecía tener fin. La ropa convertida en harapos y la comida escasa; la atención médica debían pedirla como limosna, si no tenían para el médico, que acaso estaba

tan necesitado como ellos mismos .” (224). While people were struggling to buy food, Trujillo’s wealth was growing. Osgood Hardy explains:

Trujillo’s enterprises and taxes helped drive up living costs, while the generalísimo’s [sic] personal monopolies - including salt, tobacco, employe [sic] insurance, rice, and peanut oil, the last two prime necessities in the life of the common people - enable him to enjoy an enormous income. (414)

Cementerio sin cruces documents how Trujillo became wealthy at the expense of Dominicans mentioning, “Impuestos sobre el arroz y otros granos necesarios sólo alcanzaban para hacer una comida escasa” (341). Additionally, jobs were scarce. The narrator explains the difficulty Miguel Perdomo, one of the characters had in finding employment, “[. . .] para cada trabajo que encontró con que en la capital había por lo menos dos hombres listos a desempeñarlo” (245).

While the situation was bad for everyone, women suffered the most. The narrator notes, “para la mujer - y sobre todo para la mujer pobre - la existencia es un verdadero infierno” (257). In addition to political oppression, women also faced machismo. Requena describes that women, “[s]i obtienen empleo, tienen que encara el problema del dueño mismo del trabajo, que se cree con derecho, casi siempre, a poder dormir con ellas, por el solo hecho de dejarlas ganarse unos cincuenta centavos diarios en su negocio” (257). Women in rural areas also faced an additional threat, the dictator’s brother Satán who, “gozaba lo que casi equivalía a un derecho pernada sobre la aterrada población femenina . . .” (260).

In addition to poverty and oppression, Requena describes the cruelty inflicted on Dominicans suspected of being against the government. Several of the characters are falsely accused of printing anti-Trujillo pamphlets. The narrator describes the almost inhuman condition in which these political prisoners were kept. He describes, “Ni sábanas ni almohadas se conocían en las celdas en donde encerraban a los enemigos políticos del régimen” (307).

Additionally, Trujillo's direct involvement in the torture of prisoners is described. Requena writes,

- Yo creo que nos han roto todos los huesos del cuerpo. . . Al pobre Pepe Lira casi lo mataron a palos . . .
- Trujillo viene para acá, ahora mismo.
- Él fue quien nos interrogó ayer . . .
- ¿Y les pegaron delante de él mismo?
- Cuando trajeron a Arroyito, él, le rompió casi todos los dientes, pegándole con una pistola. . . . (274)

At a later point a prisoner says, "Trujillo no pudo interrogarnos, cuando vino, porque estábamos medio muertos, de tantos golpes . . ." (275). Even more painful than the torture is the feeling of despair experienced by the former print shop workers who are now prisoners. Requena writes that they felt, "totalmente desamparados, sin tener a quien recurrir. No podían invocar la majestad de la justicia criolla y menos aun las leyes internacionales [. . .] Porque la ferocidad de Trujillo estaba por encima de toda esa hueca palabrería. . ." (281).

The Dominican Republic portrayed by Requena is a country that is poor, oppressed, fearful, and hopeless. Interestingly Dominicans are both submissive and subversive. Requena writes that years of harsh political rule have converted "a nuestro pueblo trabajador en un rebaño de gente sumisa." (353). However, Dominicans in Cementerio sin cruces are also subversive as seen in their willingness to attend Moreno's wake. Furthermore, the narrator also explains, "la gente se escondía para no tener que doblegarse ante él, en un saludo ceremonioso y cortesano, que era obligatorio y cuya desobediencia costaba golpes y cárcel" (304). He also states that, "El pueblo está listo para secundar la revolución, y sólo un milagro ha de salvar al gobierno ahora" (321). However, like Trujillo's assassins, who expected the revolution to occur immediately

upon Trujillo's death, Requena underestimates the Trujillo regime. The revolution he mentions would take years to occur.

In contrast with Cementerio sin cruces, where the reader learns how average Dominicans viewed their country, La Fiesta del Chivo allows the reader to see the Dominican Republic through the eyes of Trujillo. Whereas Cementerio sin cruces, portrays a poor country, Trujillo in La Fiesta del Chivo believes that he has converted the country into “un país moderno y próspero” (105). He also resentful because Dominicans ungrateful and not appreciative of all he has done, citing as an example “la dócil Lina Lovatón [. . .] a la a que sacrificó también por este país malagradecido” (157). He also believes that Balaguer is ungrateful. He tells him:

[n]o me diga que no sabe cómo se consigue la paz. Con cuánto sacrificio y cuánta sangre. Agradezca que yo le permita mirar al otro lado , dedicarse a lo bueno, mientras yo, Abbes, el teniente Peña Rivera y otros teníamos tranquilo al país para que usted escribiera sus poemas y sus discursos. Estoy seguro que su aguda inteligencia me entiende de sobra. (304)

In an internal dialogue, Trujillo describes the Dominican Republic as a:

[n]ación de malagradecidos, cobardes y traidores. Porque para sacarlo del atraso, el caos, la ignorancia y la barbarie, se había tenido de sangre muchas veces. ¿Se lo agradecerían en el futuro estos pendejos? (97)

At another point talking to himself he says that it is a, “país ingrato, gente sin honor” (510).

Trujillo sees himself as the country's savior and believes that without him, the country would be, “el paisito africano que era cuando me lo eché al hombro” (154). This way of thinking is common among dictators. George Blanksten explains, “[i]n his own view, the *caudillo* is an indispensable man. He normally feels that he is the only figure on the national scene who can ‘save the country’” (500). This can also lead to the sense of loneliness expressed by Trujillo in La Fiesta del Chivo. He thinks to himself that if he had someone he could trust, “No se hubiera sentido tan solo, a veces, a la hora de tomar algunas decisiones” (97). This loneliness also contributes to his feeling of “desmoralización” (98).

Trujillo in La Fiesta del Chivo clearly is unwilling to entertain the thought of leaving power. Upon hearing that his wife, fearful that his regime may end unexpectedly, has put money in a Swiss bank account, he thinks to himself:

A la Prestante Dama tendría que reñirla esta tarde y recordarle que Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina no era Batista, ni el cerdo de Pérez Jiménez, ni el cucufato de Rojas Pinilla, ni siquiera el engominado general Perón. Él no iba a pasar sus últimos años como estadista jubilado en el extranjero. Viviría hasta el último minuto en este país que gracias él dejó de ser una tribu, una horda, una caricatura, y se convirtió en República. (158)

This refusal to leave power under any circumstance is also expressed in Cementerio sin cruces and is one of the reasons why Dominicans felt hopeless. Requena describes “al pasar los años Trujillo parecía estar dispuesto a seguir, a sangre y fuego, con las riendas del poder entre sus garras” (200-1).

Despite years of tyrannical rule, Franco Ornes maintains, “A pesar del terror y de la demagogia trujillista, el pueblo no está postrado ni se ha dejado engañar por el régimen tiránico” (39). The defiance displayed by Dominicans in Cementerio sin cruces and mentioned by Ornes is not evident in La Fiesta del Chivo. Valerio Holguín notes the absence and writes:

Asimismo, no aparecen en ninguna parte de la novela referencias a los movimientos políticos, focos de resistencia, invasiones, apresamientos, torturas, desapariciones y asesinatos de muchos dominicanos. A lo sumo, parecería que el complot de los que mataron a Trujillo se debe a ‘única y exclusivamente’ a razones personales. . . (157)

The role of women during the era of Trujillo

It is well documented that Trujillo used sex as an instrument of power to humiliate and degrade his collaborators, sometimes openly sleeping with their wives. Cementerio sin cruces tells the story of a college professor who was forced to tolerate “que el dictador se acostara con su mujer mientras él tenía que quedarse haciéndole compañía a los oficiales que esperaban a la puerta. . . (204). He describes, “Su caso era tan triste que hasta los mismo compañeros se compadecían de la vergonzante posición en que el hambre sexual del tirano le puso” (204). After

Trujillo slept with his wife the husband experiences “una sensación de vacío, de humillación y de vergüenza” (207). The wife returns after spending the night with Trujillo “pálida y como enferma” (209). In his memoir, Joaquín Balaguer describes the extent of humiliation suffered by Dominicans. He writes:

Pero nadie que no haya vivido en el país durante la ‘Era de Trujillo’, puede medir en su exacta dimensión lo que significó moralmente para los dominicanos aquel periodo de nuestra historia. El hombre, en esa época, se rebajo hasta el punto de convertirse en un títere. El sentimiento de la dignidad ciudadana desapareció totalmente. (103)

In addition to being a means to humiliate, Trujillo also used sex to gain power. As Howard Wiarda explains, “There is, in fact, little doubt that Trujillo was driven by the urge to dominate. He uses money, wealth, people, even sex to that end” (39). Crassweller also notes that:

In the attitudes and usages which he brought to sex, however, Trujillo was entirely masculine. His huge enjoyment of it and the heroic scale on which he practiced it were quite remarkable. . . . But there was another side, and this, while it certainly cannot be identified as the usual feminine attitude toward sex, nevertheless is probably encountered more frequently among women than men. It is the use of sex for other purposes than sex itself, the use of it as a lever. In Trujillo’s case it was employed at times as an instrument of power. (79-80)³⁵

Additionally Lauren Derby also observes in The Dictator’s Seduction, “Trujillo’s power was based as much on the consumptions of women through sexual conquest as it was on the domination of enemies of state” (1113). Vargas Llosa notes that Trujillo’s use of sex as a method for staying in power is not common to all dictatorships. He explains:

Ése es un aspecto [austeridad en materia sexual] de la dictadura latinoamericana que no se da mucho en las dictaduras, diga-mos [sic], más elaboradas. La de Hitler, por ejemplo, la del propio Mussolini, a pesar de ser italiano, no vinieron acompañadas de es desborde frenético de la sexualidad que pasa a ser un ingrediente fundamental del sistema autoritario. Eso ha ocurrido en todas las dictaduras latinoamericanas, con algunas pocas excepciones. Pero en la de Trujillo, sí; allí el sexo pasó a ser un ingrediente fundamental de lo que es el sistema autoritario, de control, de humillación, de castigo. (Felipe González 21)

³⁵ Despite the sexist ideology, Crassweller’s text is an important study of this dictator.

Trujillo used sexual conquest to enhance his macho stature and his appetite for sex was well known. Requena, in Cementerio sin cruces describes the “desenfrenada hambre sexual del tirano” (202). This placed parents of attractive girls in a difficult situation. Derby also observes the same and writes that, “parents went to great lengths to prevent their daughters from being noticed by the dictator, since refusing his attentions carried a high price and could even cost a girl’s father his job” (1114). Protecting daughters from Trujillo was difficult as Ramón Alberto Ferreras writes:

Para una familia con hijas atractivas la alternativa era intentar recluirlas, cosa difícil de llevar a la práctica en un territorio reducido, o tratar de abandonar el lugar y establecerse en otra parte, lo que también envolvía anunciarles. La última solución era la de amoldarse al sistema, como hizo la mayoría. (170)

However, not all families attempted to protect their daughters from Trujillo. Valerio Holguín notes that, “El vasallaje de todos los dominicanos se maniFiesta principalmente a través de la sexualidad: padres que le entregan a Trujillo sus esposas e hijas” (Presencia de Trujillo en la narrativa contemporánea 155). Ferreras also tells the story of a mother who “soñaba con que una de sus hermosas hijas fueran amante o querida de Trujillo” (Trujillo y sus mujeres 107). Vargas Llosa also mentions that “[. . .]muchos ciudadanos le llevaban a sus hijas y no era para conseguir favores, sino porque lo tenían por un semidiós” (Xavier Moret) Other Dominicans, hoping to impress Trujillo, presented him with girls, in essence prostituting them. Crassweller writes, “His friends and those who sought to advance in his favor by this means, were always proposing females for his many beds.” (79). Balaguer also explains that Trujillo was a “hombre de aparatosa vida sexual, a quien la adulación o el interés ofrecían diariamente las mas variadas bellezas núbiles [sic], en bandeja de plata, (198). The problem was that the older Trujillo got, the younger he liked the girls. Crassweller explains:

Only in his final years did his taste turn strongly to very young women. . . Those he selected came sometimes from a relatively high social level and sometimes from modest backgrounds. They were almost always virgins. (79)

If the girl was resistant, Cementerio sin cruces notes that “se presionaba a la muchacha para hacerla caer en las orgías sexuales de Trujillo” (247).

Cementerio sin cruces tells the story of María del Carmen, who agrees to sleep with the dictator in exchange for her father’s and boyfriend’s release from prison. She also negotiates with Trujillo to have her family leave the country. He agrees on the condition that she stay behind. The actual encounter between Trujillo and María del Carmen is not narrated. Upon hearing the news of her sacrifice, “Algunos bajaban la cabeza, avergonzados, como si en vez de María del Carmen vieran en su puesto a hijas o hermanas que antes que sufrieron igual deshonor” (388). According to the narrative María del Carmen’s sacrifice:

[e]ra como un símbolo de la dolorosa humillación del país, que tenía que seguir tolerando el oprobio de una tiranía en la cual el crimen estaba primero que la ley, y bayonetas y ametralladoras imponían la voluntad absoluta de un asqueroso señor de horca y chuchillo. (388)

However, for María del Carmen the sacrifice of her body, “aquello que llamarían deshonor de su cuerpo, era un precio pequeño, pequeñísimo, comparado con lo que obtuvo en cambio . . .” (381).

Women in Cementerio sin cruces are stronger than men. While Trujillo is beating an elderly man in the presence of other male prisoners, Palmira, the only female prisoner is the only one who dares to come to the victim’s rescue. The text states that Trujillo “en pocos se encontró pegándole así a un viejo indefenso, frente a una mujer que desafiaba su cólera para atender a su víctima” (289). Afterward, she tells the dictator, “Si no lo llevan pronto al hospital se muere aquí mismo . . .” (289). Trujillo responds by ordering medical care for the victim. (289). The power of women during the trujillato is also seen in the dictator’s wife, doña María, who in many

ways is similar to the tyrant. The text notes, “la llamada <<primera dama de la república>> ejercía un poder omnipotente, que ella gozaba con la siniestra impudicia del marido mismo” (191). She is described as “cruel e implacable como el marido mismo” (216). Also like Trujillo, she is “casi analfabeta” (218). Doña María is not only openly defiant of the dictator but she dominates him. Clearly not intimidated by him, she publicly calls him “Chapita” (215) in front of his advisors. Furthermore, the narrative explains that:

Trujillo se prometió a si mismo que lo primero que haría, como saludo, sería mandarla [his wife] al infierno, para que los hombre que estaban escuchando se dieran cuenta de que él era quien realmente llevaba los pantalones en la familia, en el patriarcal sentido criollo. (215)

She would later, “llenarlo de insultos sin que el dictador tuviese tiempo de meter la cuna de una sola palabra entre el atropello de frases soeces que le dirigía. . . .” (215).

As in Cementerio sin cruces, La Fiesta del Chivo also tells the story of a girl who sacrifices her body to Trujillo, only in this story the girl does not do so willingly; it is her father who sacrifices her. The novel begins and ends with Urania Cabral. Her story is interwoven with story of the dictator’s assassins and Trujillo’s final day. After years in exile in the United States, Urania, a 49 year old Harvard graduate and attorney at the World Bank, returns to the Dominican Republic in 1996 to visit her ailing father. Her father, Senator Agustin, had once belonged to Trujillo’s inner circle. In 1961, he is inexplicably expelled from Trujillo’s inner circle. According to Urania’s aunt the Senator’s fall from grace, “Era lo más grave que había ocurrido en la familia, más todavía que el accidente en que murió tu mamá” (260). It had also left the Senator, “<<Al borde del suicidio>>” (285). An article in the The New York Times helps to explain the Senator’s despair. It states, “A major fall from grace meant complete retirement from public life and real difficulty in gaining any sort of living” (“Trujillo Wielded Absolute rule; Ran country as a Baronial Fief”).

In an attempt to regain entry to Trujillo's inner circle, Urania's father offers her as a sexual sacrifice to Trujillo. She is 14 years old at the time. She goes to Trujillo's house thinking that she has been invited to a party. Upon realizing that she has been invited for something else, she thinks to herself, "¿El senador Agustín Cabral la enviaba, ofrenda viva, al Benefactor y Padre de la Patria Nueva? Sí." (424). The experience, narrated in detail, permanently traumatizes her and left her "remilgada, indiferente, frígida" (211). She later explains to her aunt and cousins, "Más nunca un hombre me volvió a poner la mano, desde aquella vez. Mi único hombre fue Trujillo [. . .] A mí, papa y Su Excelencia me volvieron un desierto" (513). Not surprisingly, she never marries telling her father, "Tu hijita se quedó para vestir santos" (65).

In an effort to understand how Dominicans could have allowed Trujillo to treat them so poorly, Urania while studying in Cambridge, "contrajo el <<hobby perverso>>: leer y coleccionar libros sobre la Era de Trujillo" (204). Speaking to herself she says:

Hay muchas cosas de la Era que has llegado a entender; algunas, al principio, te parecían inextricables, pero, a fuerza de leer, escuchar, cotejar y pensar, has llegado a comprender que tantos millones de personas, machacadas por la propaganda, por la falta de información, embrutecidas por el adoctrinamiento, el aislamiento, despojadas de libre albedrío, de voluntad y hasta de curiosidad por el divinizar a Trujillo. No solo a temerlos, sino a quererlo, como llegan a querer los hijos a los padres autoritarios, a convencerse de que azotes y castigos son por su bien. (75)

However, she does not understand why intellectuals, many educated in the United States would support Trujillo. Again speaking to herself she acknowledges:

Lo que nunca has llegado a entender es que los dominicanos más preparados, las cabezas del país, abogados, médicos, ingenieros, salidos a veces de muy buenas universidades de Estados Unidos o de Europa, sensibles, cultos, con experiencia, lecturas, ideas, presumiblemente un desarrollado sentido del ridículo, sentimientos, pruritos, aceptarían ser vejados de manera tan salvaje (lo fueron todos alguna vez)[. . .]. (75)

She asks her father how men could have accepted Trujillo sleeping with their wives:

¿Cómo era posible, papá? Que un hombre como Froilán Arala, culto preparado, inteligente, llegara a aceptar eso. ¿Qué les daba, para convertir a don Froilan, a Chirinos, a Manuel Alfonso, a ti, a todos sus brazos derechos e izquierdos, en trapos sucios? (75).

She knows as she asks it that her question will go unanswered, as her father, who has suffered a stroke, is unable to speak. Her question is the same one that young Dominicans are now asking their elders.

Urania is one of the few fictional characters not based on a historical person in the narrative. She is also the only main character who is still alive at the end of the novel which explains why her story is the only one told in the present tense. Her story is psychologically centered and the least convincing. It is also structurally awkward as the narrative itself seems to forget her story and includes 142 consecutive pages with mentioning her. Valerio Holguín is critical of Urania, maintaining that, “Vargas Llosa tuvo la necesidad de incluir un personaje que fuera medio extranjero (turista) para apoyar su propio punto de vista externo, . . .” (159). He also believes, “Vargas Llosa/Urania se apropia del discurso primitivista europea y lo reproduce con respecto a los dominicanos para construirlos como el Otro-Primitivo” (159). Vargas Llosa explains in an interview, “Me inventé el personaje de Urania porque no quería que la novela se contara sólo desde el interior de la dictadura” (Xavier Moret). Furthermore, Vargas Llosa notes that women suffer from double oppression because in addition to political oppression, they also suffer from machismo. He maintains:

Más todavía en el caso de un régimen como el de Trujillo, que utilizó el sexo como un instrumento de coerción, de avasallamiento de la sociedad. Esto hizo que la mujer fuera realmente un objeto maltratado, brutalizado de una manera terrible durante esos años. (Literatura y política 91)

Urania illustrates the double oppression women faced. She also provides the reader with a contemporary view of Trujillo and represents someone who has not been able to heal from the trauma. She describes her night with Trujillo to her aunt and cousin. It is the first time she has spoken about it with anyone. Yet, speaking about it does not seem to help Urania. Upon returning to her hotel room she encounters a tourist who says to her, “*May I buy you a drink,*

dear lady?” to which she responds, “*Get out of my way, you dirty drunk*” (518).³⁶ Thus, it would appear that Urania will remain alone for more time to come.

Both María del Carmen in Cementerio sin cruces and Urania Cabral in La Fiesta del Chivo illustrate women's suppression and mistreatment at the hands of Trujillo. They also show the reader how Trujillo used sex and humiliation as a way to stay in power. The narratives differ in that María del Carmen used sex to obtain her families freedom while Urania Cabral was offered to the dictator as a sacrifice. Additionally, the shame and dishonor Dominicans associate with having slept with Trujillo mentioned in Cementerio sin cruces is absent in La Fiesta del Chivo where Urania thinks, “¿Qué hizo mi mama? ¿Se resignó? ¿Se alegró, orgullosa de ese honor? Ésa era la norma verdad? Las buenas dominicanas agradecían que el jefe se dignara tirárselas” (70).

Portrait of a Dictator

Requena offers an unflattering and overly simplistic image of Trujillo. He portrays the image of a person who suffers from megalomania as evidenced by the, “milésimo busto de mármol en su honor, pagado por una aterrorizante recolección hecha por los miembros del partido oficial” (205). Requena also writes that Trujillo is like a “[. . .] César de opereta en cuyo pecho no cabían más medallas y en cuyas manos no cabía más sangre, paseábanse con insolencia desconocida hasta entonces en países civilizados” (308). He is poorly educated and didn't have “mucha confianza en el valor de los hombres que perdían su tiempo leyendo libros” (362). He is also motivated primarily by money and sex. Frustrated, Trujillo in Cementerio sin cruces, thinks to himself, “!Si solo sus enemigos le dejaran tranquilo, acumulando oro y gozando de sus

³⁶ The use of English and italics is the author's.

orgías!” (220). The text also challenges the myth of Trujillo’s penchant for cleanliness mentioning that:

[e]l tirano estaba sin afeitarse, y sus facciones ordinarias aparentaban diez años más de los que tenía. . . . con los dedos llenos de pesada sortijas, daba la sensación de una mandarín chino transplantado a la vida sofocante del trópico en la burlona alucinación de una pesadilla criolla. (219)

Physically Trujillo described as a “hombre pequeño y obeso, su rostro mulato bien oscuro y el gesto omnipotente de un rey de opereta, . . .” (211). Requena’s portrayal of Trujillo is simplistic and does not explain how he achieved and maintained power.

Both Cementerio sin cruces and La Fiesta del Chivo document Trujillo’s unbridled sexual drive and use of sex as a means to humiliate. José Almoína explains:

el proceso mental de Trujillo [es] primitivo, prelógico, complicado. Esto explica que guste de que adulen su ‘machismo’ y para seguir demostrándolo, no trepida ante el uso de afrodisíacos, pues no en balde discurren los años. (79)

Cementerio sin cruces portrays a dictator who needed to, “tumbar mujeres en la cama para convencerse de su virilidad” (129). La Fiesta del Chivo illustrates the tyrant’s reaction to his impotence and describes his inability to deflower Urania. Trujillo is devastated by this inability for he believes that his ability to maintain an erection represents, “un macho cabal, un chivo con un güevo todavía capaz de ponerse tieso y de romper los coñitos vírgenes que le pusieran delante” (507-8). Vargas Llosa also explains:

El poder sexual de alguna manera simboliza el poder político también. Eso en el caso de Trujillo fue muy claro. Y por eso la humillación suprema para él fue esta enfermedad final que recortó tremendamente su potencia, digamos, viril. Algo que a él lo humillaba, lo ofendía, lo vejaba, y que trataba desesperadamente de ocultar porque inconscientemente, quizá conscientemente, tenía la sensación de que si eso se sabía se le iba a restar autoridad. Se le iba a perder el respeto. (González 22-3)

Facing impotence, Urania tells her surprised cousin that the tyrant:

Empezó a llorar [. . .] por su próstata hinchada, por su güevo muerto, por tener que tirarse a las doncellitas con los dedos, como le gustaba a Petán . . . Parecía medio loco, de

desesperación. Ahora sé por qué. Porque ese güevo que había roto tantos coñitos, ya no se paraba. Eso hacia llorar al titán. (509-10)

The dictator is further demythified in Urania's description:

Procuraba no mirar su cuerpo, pero, a veces, sus ojos corrían sobre el vientre algo fofo, el pubis emblanquecido, el pequeño sexo muerto y las piernas lampiñas. Este era el Generalísimo, el Benefactor de la Patria, el Padre de la Patria Nueva, el Restaurador de la Independencia Financiera. (510-11)

The surprise expressed by her cousin illustrates the demythification of the tyrant in La Fiesta del Chivo. She simply cannot image the all-powerful tyrant crying over his inability to maintain an erection. In addition to demythifying Trujillo's sexual prowess, Trujillo is portrayed as someone who, "Podía dominar a los hombres, poner a tres millones de dominicanos de rodillas, pero no controlar su esfínter" (165). Aging and unable to control his body Trujillo urinates on himself. The narrative mentions, "Se le había salido otra vez. Pasaría por la horrenda humillación al ponerse de pie de que los Gittleman y algunos invitados notaran que se había meado en los pantalones sin darse cuenta, como un viejo" (233).

In addition to his failing body, Trujillo is disappointed in his family. He states his family is a, "una familia de parásitos, inútiles, badulaques y pobres diablos" (229). He describes his wife as a "vampiro insaciable" (166). His sons are "exitosos fracasos" and "nulidades con nombres de personajes de opera" (32). He also believes that, "El error de mi vida ha sido mi familia" (159).

In sharp contrast with Cementerio sin cruces where Trujillo is a much smaller character, in La Fiesta del Chivo, Vargas Llosa writes in detail the subjective interiority of Trujillo, describing his secrets, fears, insecurities, offering the reader insight into both the public and private Trujillo. This view makes Trujillo seem very human and sympathetic. Vargas Llosa's depiction of Trujillo and his disappointment in his family and in his own physical deterioration almost makes the reader sympathize and feel pity for the aging dictator. Vargas Llosa notes that, "Lo terrible

de los dictadores es que no son demonios, sino seres humanos” (“Vargas Llosa”). However, the 100 pages following his death narrates in detail the torture endured by the conspirators and serves to remind the reader of the inhumanity of the Trujillo regime, which was so firmly entrenched in Dominican society that it continued after the dictator’s death.

Conclusion

Although admittedly these Cementerio sin cruces and La Fiesta del Chivo are fiction, they allow the contemporary reader to experience the era of Trujillo. As David Carr observes:

To be sure, fictional stories do not *represent* reality because what they portray by definition never happened. But it is often thought that stories can be *life-like* precisely by virtue of their *form*. That is, they capable of representing the way certain events, if they had happened, might have unfolded. (13)

Cementerio sin cruces narrates the experience ordinary Dominicans had living during the era of Trujillo while La Fiesta del Chivo offers insight into the thoughts of important Dominicans, including Trujillo. Also, by means of Urania, it shows that effects of tyranny last for many years after the tyrant is removed from power. Interestingly, both texts narrate the role of women in the era of Trujillo and show how for women, the experience was much different than for men.

The era of Trujillo illustrates the difficulty in recreating or reimagining actual events. In particular, the fictionalization of a historical character such as Trujillo is not easy. For Requena it means fictionalizing a character that is still alive. For Vargas Llosa, the character is further removed. For this reason he explains, ““Me he documentado lo más posible sobre él, su época y los acontecimientos, pero no para ser fiel a la historia. Las novelas no tienen la obligación de decir la verdad, sino de decir la verdad a través de las mentiras”” (Fietta Jarque). Carlos Fuentes expresses the difficulty Latin American authors, in particular, face. He writes:

Ya hemos indicado algunos de los desafíos tradicionales para nuestra literatura: nuestra historia ha sido mas imaginativa que nuestra ficción; el escritor ha debido competir con montañas, ríos, selvas, desiertos de dimensión sobrehumana. ¿Cómo inventar personajes

mas fabulosos que Cortes y Pizarro, mas siniestros que Santa Anna o Rosas, mas tragicómicos que Trujillo o Batista? (95)

Additionally, an article in The New York Times notes, “Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina was like a character out of an historical novel. He ruled the Dominican Republic as a baronial fief with an absolutism seldom rivaled in modern history” (“Trujillo Wielded Absolute rule; Ran country as a Baronial Fief”). Despite the difficulty in re-imagining someone like Trujillo, who had he not actually existed, would be unbelievable and difficult to image, Miguel Collado notes that, “Trujillo - como una sombra, como un fantasma tal vez - aparece constantemente en la narrativa dominicana: tanto en la narrativa de corto aliento (cuento y relato) como en la de largo aliento (novela)” (12).

Cementerio sin cruces and La Fiesta del Chivo offer sharply different representations of Trujillo, or versions of reality. While Cementerio sin cruces, in an attempt to illustrate the tyranny Dominicans were living under, sharply attacks Trujillo, La Fiesta del Chivo offers a more sympathetic, to not say pathetic, view of the tyrant. Vargas Llosa’s narrative reveals Trujillo as a broken down man disappointed with his family and his aging and failing body. He is also disappointed in his country, which in his mind has taken his efforts and sacrifices for granted. Whereas in Cementerio sin cruces Dominicans are hopeless, La Fiesta del Chivo shows how the tyrant also experiences “desmoralización” (98).

Both Cementerio sin cruces and La Fiesta del Chivo are political novels. Luís Alberto Sánchez further classifies the Latin American political novel into three categories:

1) el de ataque o defensa de un caudillo, dictador o tirano; 2) de conspiraciones, intrigas, conjuras y revoluciones propiamente dichas; 3) de prisión y destierro. . . . hay países en donde la política invade casi absorbentemente la novela, y suele ser aquellos en donde no se ha logrado un equilibrio institucional o se ha logrado recientemente. (427)

Cementerio sin cruces and La Fiesta del Chivo fall within the first category. However, while Cementerio sin cruces clearly attacks the dictator to the point where the novel resembles

propaganda and not literature, in La Fiesta del Chivo the attack is not so evident and narrative's intent appears to be the humanization of Trujillo.

Both authors fictionalize history and use the novel as an instrument for questioning, subverting, rewriting and reinventing official historiographic discourse. However, some historical events during Trujillo's regime exceed the imagination and would be unbelievable had they not actually happened. In such cases, the author in his or her version of the event must remove the 'unbelievable' elements so that the reader will find the event credible. It is in this way that history is lost. Valerio-Holguín notes:

El trujillato se convertido en mercancías que se venden en forma de novelas, estudios sociológicos e históricos, anecdotarios, testimonios, películas, teatro, pintura, y fotografía. Este mercado ha pasado de local a internacional con las últimas producciones de artistas y cineastas extranjeros. Pero, , , la mercantilización no rescata, en muchos casos, la memoria histórica, sino que la borra . . . Está claro que 'el pasado como pasado' significa el 'pasado como memoria histórica', porque el pasado que se vende es un pasado despojado de las brutalidades y convertido en nostalgias con el propósito de venta para el consumo masivo. (Presencia de Trujillo 210-11)

Paradoxically, the effort to demythify and denounce the dictator by means of fiction can lead to a loss, on some level, of historical knowledge.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

And here we come back to memory. We must remember the suffering of my people, as we must remember that of the Ethiopians, the Cambodians, the boat people, Palestinians, the Mesquite Indians, the Argentinian “*desaparecidos*” – the list seems endless. . . . Mankind needs to remember more than ever.

- Elie Wiesel, Nobel Lecture

The idea for this project came from an article written by Neil Larson, titled “¿Cómo narrar el trujillato?”. Supporting his argument with political and economic facts Larson believes that Dominicans have not been able to effectively narrate the era of Trujillo. This is surprising since many Dominican authors have recreated Trujillo in their work. As Miguel Collado explains, “Trujillo - como una sombra, como un fantasma tal vez - aparece constantemente en la narrativa dominicana: tanto en la narrativa de corto aliento (cuento y relato) como en la de largo aliento (novela)” (12). The fictionalization of a dictator is common in countries where freedom of expression has been limited. Luis Alberto Sánchez notes in *América: novela sin novelistas* that, “. . . a nación libre y democrática menor novela política; a nación sujeta a despotismo, mayor novela política. Cuando la tribuna y el diario disfrutan de libertad, la política se refugia en ellos, no necesita los disfraces de la novela, alusiva, sino ocasionalmente” (211-2).⁴² Fernando Valerio Holguín, in a response to Larson, provides *In the Time of the Butterflies* as an example of a Dominican novel that has effectively narrated the era of Trujillo (“*En el tiempo de Las Mariposas* de Julia Alvarez: Una interpretación de la historia”). However, for reasons explained in Chapter 3, this study did not consider it a Dominican novel and therefore it does not serve here as a counterargument to Larson. Thus, this project set out to explore how era of Trujillo has

⁴² Emphasis is author's

been perceived and recreated in Dominican and non-Dominican literature. It also explored how the narratives written by Julia Alvarez, Edwidge Danticat, and Mario Vargas Llosa engaged and challenged earlier accounts of the same event, written by Dominican authors (Ramón Alberto Ferreras, Freddy Prestol Castillo, Andrés Requena). All of the authors studied fictionalized history and used narrative as an instrument for questioning, subverting, rewriting and reinventing official historiographic discourse. In their reinterpretation of Dominican history, these authors also created an image of the Dominican Republic. In Determinations: Essays on theory, Narrative and Nation in the Americas (2001) Larson defines the nation as, “nothing but a narrative, a fiction, produced by, among others, these very fictional narratives themselves” (84). Parting from this definition, this study also focused on how the Dominican Republic was represented in the selected narratives.

While the works of Alvarez, Danticat and Vargas Llosa are clear examples of a fictional novel, the works of Ferreras and Prestol Castillo defy literary classification. Parts of Las Mirabal reads like a novel, others read like a history book. Furthermore, Ferreras directly inserts himself into the text. The same is true for El Masacre se pasa a pie, where Prestol Castillo, eyewitness to the 1937 massacre, recreates the event. The narrator is not clearly defined and it is impossible to determine when it is the author himself and when it is a fictional character. At times, the narrator seems to disappear altogether. The narrative is part autobiography, part novel. The hybrid nature of these two narratives and the incomplete fictionalization of the lives of the Mirabal sisters and the 1937 massacre make it difficult to classify these two narratives.

Unlike Las Mirabal and El Masacre se pasa a pie, Cementerio sin cruces reads like a novel. However, the fictionalization of the event is not complete and while Requena, unlike Ferreras and Prestol Castillo, does not directly insert himself into the text, his ideology is clearly evident

causing the text read more like a political track than fictional narrative. This is surprising because Requena had previously shown he had talent and narrative ability. Initially Requena had been a Trujillo supporter. During this time, he wrote a novel titled Los enemigos de la tierra, which describes the trials and tribulations of people migrating from the countryside to the city of Santo Domingo, and illustrates Requena's talent as an author. Yet, this narrative ability is absent from Cementerio sin cruces, which was written during Requena's exile in the United States and is a harshly critical of the Dominican dictator. The objective of Cementerio sin cruces is not to tell a story as it was in Los enemigos de la Tierra, but to denounce Trujillo and to inform readers of cruelty and oppression Dominicans were experiencing during the era of Trujillo. It is the change of objective and change in Requena's attitude towards Trujillo that helps to explain the text's shortcomings.

The era of Trujillo illustrates the difficulty in recreating or reimagining actual events, in part because some historical events during Trujillo's regime exceed the imagination and would be unbelievable had they not actually happened. Carlos Fuentes notes this difficulty and writes:

Ya hemos indicado algunos de los desafíos tradicionales para nuestra literatura: nuestra historia ha sido mas imaginativa que nuestra ficción; el escritor ha debido competir con montañas, ríos, selvas, desiertos de dimensión sobrehumana. ¿Cómo inventar personajes mas fabulosos que Cortes y Pizarro, mas siniestros que Santa Anna o Rosas, más tragicómicos que Trujillo o Batista? (95-6)

Although admittedly these narratives are fiction, they allow the contemporary reader to experience the Trujillo era. As David Carr observes:

To be sure, fictional stories do not *represent* reality because what they portray by definition never happened. But it is often thought that stories can be *life-like* precisely by virtue of their *form*. That is, they are capable of representing the way certain events, if they had happened, might have unfolded. (13)

However, these authors in their use of historical figures, historical documents, and references to actual historical events, blur the line between history and fiction. Thus, it is important to note

that the authors studied do not offer objective recreations of history. As Rosalind Coward maintains, “there are no neutral conventions in novelistic writing’ all accounts of reality are versions of reality” (55).

For the Dominican authors in this study, the reality they are recreating is a lived reality. Converting these lived experiences into art has been particularly difficult for them. The Dominican authors in this study, Ferreras, Prestol Castillo and Requena, had varying reasons for revisiting such a painful and traumatic part of their history. Both Prestol Castillo and Requena had been active supporters of the Trujillo regime. With time, they come to regret their involvement with the Trujillo regime and become strong critics of the dictator. They fictionalize the experience in an attempt to both explain their participation and alleviate feelings of regret. Furthermore, their narratives express the cowardice and the guilt caused by their participation in the regime. In contrast, Ferreras writes to keep the memory of the Mirabal sisters alive, which explains why his text contains many historical facts and figures, making the text cumbersome to read. All three authors bravely criticized Trujillo, at great personal expense. Both Trujillo and Balaguer repeatedly imprisoned Ferreras and Trujillo’s henchmen assassinated Requena. To help put the era of Trujillo into perspective, in 1946 Albert C. Hicks notes “if the Dominicans murdered by Trujillo total three thousand - a modest figure - the same proportion of persons killed in the United States for political reasons only would be well over 300,000” (227). If Trujillo did not kill anyone else from 1946 to 1961, when he was assassinated, and accounting for a doubling of the U.S. population, the figure today would be 600,000 people.

Ferreras, Prestol Castillo and Requena’s painful and direct experience with the dictatorship limited their ability to fictionalize the event and ultimately their narratives fail to convert the reality they experienced into art. Some authors were unable to mask their ideology adequately.

For example, Manuel Rueda observes of Cementerio sin cruces that, “se nota la prisa del autor por hacer pública su denuncia de la dictadura, deja al desnudo sus habilidades y carencias” (132). Other authors are unable to hide the effects of trauma. This is especially evident in the form and content of El Masacre se pasa a pie, which in its repetitiveness and stream of consciousness quality of writing seen throughout the narrative, clearly illustrates the trauma endured by the author. In short, the Dominican authors have been unable to mask their pain and their emotions; anger, frustration, humiliation, and guilt among others, are clearly visible. Vargas Llosa explains in La historia secreta de una novela that:

Escribir una novela es una ceremonia parecida al strip-tease. Como la muchacha que, bajo impúdicos reflectores, se libera de sus ropas y muestra, uno a uno, sus encantos secretos, el novelista desnuda también su intimidad en público a través de sus novelas. Pero, claro, hay diferencias. . . Las experiencias personales (vivas, sonadas, oídas, leídas) que fueron el estímulo primero para escribir la historia quedan tan maliciosamente disfrazadas durante el proceso de la creación que, cuando la novela esta terminada, nadie, . . . puede escuchar con facilidad ese corazón autobiográfico que fatalmente late en toda ficción. Escribir una novela es un strip-tease invertido y todos los novelistas son parabólicos (en algunos casos explícitos) exhibicionistas. (11)

Ultimately the Dominican narratives studied here fail as novels. The reverse strip tease remains incomplete and in the end the author is still naked, his motivation for writing evident. However, this failure does not necessarily diminish their merit as testimonials. These narratives serve as a public record, documenting violence and terror of the Trujillo regime thereby challenging official discourse.

In contrast, the non-Dominican authors, Alvarez, Danticat, and Vargas Llosa, did not directly experience Trujillo’s dictatorship. Their position as outsiders places them in a privileged position as they do not directly experience the ongoing effects of Trujillo’s dictatorship Larson mentions in “¿Cómo narrar el Trujillato?”. For varying reasons, they have recreated and reinterpreted the era of Trujillo. Alvarez and Danticat wrote to inform their audience of a historical event that is largely unknown to them. Additionally, Danticat believes that literature

can help heal the wounds of the past. For this reason she does not blame Dominicans for the 1937 Massacre. Moreover, while she places the blame for the massacre squarely on Trujillo's shoulders, she is careful to not demonize the Dominican Republic and describes how Haiti has also endured a cruel dictator thereby illustrating that the phenomenon is by no means exclusively Dominican. She also makes it a point to show how Haitians, like Dominicans, have been willing to kill family members in the name of nationalism. Similarly, Vargas Llosa believes in the healing power of literature mentioning in an interview with the Spanish newspaper Expansión that "la literatura es una manera de superar a los Trujillo, al horror" ("Cuando Vargas Llosa mató al chivo").

All of the authors analyzed in this project fictionalize different aspects of Dominican national history and utilize the narrative as an instrument for questioning, subverting, rewriting and reinventing official historiographic discourse. To this end, they resuscitate the voices of the marginalized and the deceased, allowing them to tell their story. Paradoxically, this is both an act of remembrance and of historical amnesia. When truth is in reality stranger than fiction, truth is altered so that the reader will believe it. Vargas Llosa explains that "[I]a desmesura de la violencia en la Era Trujillo fue tal que parecía inverosímil y no tuve mas remedio que suavizarla" ("Cuando Vargas Llosa mató al chivo"). Thus, the effort to demythify and denounce the dictator by means of fiction can lead to a loss, on some level, of historical knowledge.

In the process of recreating the era of Trujillo, the authors create an image of the Dominican Republic. Some of the narratives studies offer contrasting and opposing literary manifestation of the Dominican Republic and its people. Alvarez presents a stereotypical Latin American Third World country: uneducated, poor, and machista. Vargas Llosa allows the reader

the see the country as Trujillo sees it; a modern and prosperous country. In contrast, Ferreras presents a modern, feminist country, in which women have full access to education. Both Prestol Castillo and Danticat misrepresent the border area before the massacre, using anti-Haitian ideology as a catalyst for the slaughter when in reality it was used as justification for the massacre (Robert D. Crassweller 149). Furthermore, Prestol Castillo describes a country that is suffering from harsh political oppression where Dominicans are forced, under the threat of death, to carry out nonsensical orders. Unable to cope with reality, many resort to alcohol; thers suffer from mental breakdowns. Like Prestol Castillo, Requena portrays a country that is ruled harshly and where there is a complete and total lack of freedom. He repeatedly likens the country to a cemetery or a concentration camp. Yet, despite this heavy oppression Trujillo does not have complete control of the country. In an open act of defiance, every morning anti-Trujillo pamphlets litter the streets of Santo Domingo.

Although the Trujillo era is recreated in each of the narratives, Trujillo is not a primary character in any of the narratives studied. He appears as a secondary character in In the time of the Butterflies, Cementerio sin cruces, and La Fiesta del chivo. Las Mirabal, El Masacre se pasa a pie, and The Framing of Bones barely mention him, however his presence is felt throughout each narrative. Of the narratives studied, Vargas Llosa offers the most intimate portrait of the dictator, allowing the reader access to the tyrant's inner thoughts. Interestingly, he also portrays the dictator as physically weak, an old man who can no longer control his bladder, suffers from impotence, and is overly preoccupied by his inability to deflower girls. Emotionally, he deeply disappointed in his family and feels that Dominicans have taken his considerable talents for granted. However, Vargas Llosa describes in great detail the torture endured by political prisoners. In contrast, Alvarez portrays a dictator that is charming and seductive. In an effort to

demythify the Mirabal sisters, she glosses over the torture they endured in prison and instead describes a lesbian affair between one of the Mirabal sisters and another female prisoner.⁴³ In Cementerio sin cruces, Trujillo is portrayed as poorly educated, cruel, and motivated primarily by money and sex. While this narrative is most critical of the dictator, it offers an overly simplistic view of Trujillo that does not explain how he achieved and maintained power.

The role of women in the era of Trujillo is a common theme in all of the texts studied. Women living under dictatorships can suffer from a double oppression, one socially and one politically. Yet, despite this double oppression in each text there are examples of women who are strong. In El Masacre se pasa a pie, Angela, the narrator's girlfriend, is much stronger than the narrator. Despite great pressure, unlike the narrator, she never succumbs to Trujillo and rather than live under oppression flees the country. Señora Valencia in The Farming of Bones bravely stands up to her husband. Although she is married to an Army officer, during the massacre she bravely hides Haitians in her house. Paradoxically, she does not condemn her husband for his involvement in the massacre. Ferreras dedicates Las Mirabal to women, reiterating the importance of their involvement in the political system. Both Ferreras and Alvarez further mythify the Mirabal sisters. Additionally, in In the Time of the Butterflies the Mirabal sisters are much stronger than men who appear to have been demasculinized by Trujillo. As an example, Minerva's father is unwilling to protect her from Trujillo and, out of fear, offers her to the dictator. The same happens La Fiesta del Chivo where Urania's father, in hopes of regaining entry to Trujillo's inner circle, offers her as a sexual sacrifice. In contrast, Cementerio sin cruces describes how María del Carmen willingly sacrifices her body in exchange for her father's freedom. Unlike Vargas Llosa, Requena does not describe the sexual encounter. The

⁴³ The sexualization of the Dominican Republic and its history is also mentioned by Trenton Hickman who notes the sexualization of coffee production in Alvarez's short story titled Cafecito Story.

novel ends with María del Carmen in a long, black car headed toward one of Trujillo's many homes. Also, Requena and, to a lesser extent Alvarez, describe the shame and dishonor Dominicans associate with sleeping with the dictator. However, Vargas Llosa presents sleeping with the tyrant as an honor, something that good Dominican women viewed as a privilege.

In terms of narrative ability, Alvarez, Danticat and Vargas Llosa are masters of their art as evidenced by the use of multiple narrators and the complicated narrative structure found in In the Time of the Butterflies, The Farming of Bones and La Fiesta del Chivo. Their position as outsiders places them in a privileged position, as they do not directly experience the ongoing effects of Trujillo's dictatorship Larson mentions in "¿Cómo narrar el Trujillato?". Alvarez, Danticat and Vargas Llosa, also have access to major publishers. Their works are immediately translated into many languages, thus they write from a position of great power. The commercial success of their work has allowed their voices to overshadow Dominican narrative voices. These Dominican voices also offer their interpretation of the era of Trujillo yet they have a difficult time being heard. Diógenes Valdez observes difficulty Dominican authors have in being heard and the impact that these international best sellers have on them:

La aparición en nuestro medio de la novela *La Fiesta del chivo*, del insigne escritor peruano Mario Vargas Llosa, ha impactado nuestro ambiente cultural en varias vertientes, algo que debe mover a preocupación a los intelectuales nacionales. Sin restar méritos de ninguna clase a la obra de Vargas Llosa, en nuestro medio el tema de la dictadura de Trujillo ha sido trabajado con envidiable acierto por varios novelistas, sin que lograsen despertar el revuelo que ha levantado *La Fiesta del chivo*. Más que un asunto de calidad, la diferencia estriba en la innegable dimensión social internacional del autor peruano, pero del mismo modo se evidencia, que a los autores nacionales se les lee con poca atención y peor aún, con poca buena fe. (431)

It is important to remember that Ferreras, Prestol Castillo and Requena recreate a lived reality.

In contrast, Alvarez, Danticat and Vargas Llosa are outsiders who must imagine how

Dominicans felt living under Trujillo regime. Yet, the success of their work provides Alvarez,

Danticat, and Vargas Llosa with the ability to influence Dominican national consciousness, also

influencing how Dominicans view themselves and how others view Dominicans.⁴⁴ This is not only true of the Dominican Republic. Martin Munro notes that Danticat is “Haiti’s most widely read author” (35). Their status as outsiders can lead to misconceptions and misunderstandings. In an interview with the Spanish newspaper, El País Vargas Llosa was asked if he believes that people suffering from tyranny are, in some way, responsible for their situation he responds, “Creo que sí. Con escasas excepciones hay siempre una responsabilidad en los pueblos que por ingenuidad, confusión y a veces cobardía, aceptan las dictaduras” (“Desarrollo integro del foro con Vargas Llosa”). In other words, Dominican’s acceptance of Trujillo whether by action or inaction, to a certain extent, allows them to be held responsible for his regime. However, Rueda disagrees and believes that such thinking reveals ignorance. At a conference in 1980 he explains:

Con alguna frecuencia oímos decir que un pueblo tiene el gobierno que merece, frase determinista que no viene avalada por un estudio profundo de la realidad de los pueblos avasallados. El pueblo nunca es responsable por su miseria, la que le llega siempre de lo alto y que esta determinada por un tipo de sociedad en la que trabajo y beneficio no son correspondientes y en la que el poderío de unos pocos se basa en la explotación de los más. (114-5)

Rueda’s statement illustrates how authors, such as Vargas Llosa, risk making erroneous assumptions. If as Doris Sommer notes in Foundational Fictions “literature informs a national consciousness by articulating it” (20), we should be concerned when talented authors such as Alvarez, Danticat, and Vargas Llosa skillfully disguise misconceptions in their narratives and mass produce it for both Dominican and non-Dominican consumption. Their access to major publishing houses creates the opportunity for Dominican and Haitian national identity and consciousness to be affected by an author who did not fully understand the historical event he or

⁴⁴ As evidence of this, In the Time of the Butterflies is for sale at the Mirabal Museum, although Dedé Mirabal, who runs the museum, confided in a personal interview that she has not read Alvarez’s novel. Ferreras’ work, which is much more accurate historically, is notably absent.

she was fictionalizing. For this reason, the novelist Virginia Brodine states, “I believe writers of historical fiction should be held accountable by historians” (208).

I partially agree with Larson’s claim that Dominican’s have not been able to effectively narrate the era of Trujillo, as it relates to the three Dominican texts studied. Admittedly, these narratives fail as novels. Yet, despite their narrative shortcomings they succeed because they allow the contemporary reader to experience the historical event. Furthermore, the shortcomings have not prevented Dominicans from buying the works of fiction. In a country where an initial print run is usually 1000, El Masacre se pasa a pie sold 34,000 copies. (David Howard 140). The pain and humiliation Dominicans and Haitians suffered is clearly expressed in the Dominican texts, making them particularly difficult to read as they can trigger trauma in the reader. For the North American reader who is familiar enough with history to know that the United States supported Trujillo’s dictatorship these narratives can also trigger feelings of shame and guilt. In fact, the library at the University of Florida is named after one of Trujillo’s supporters. Because of his relationship with Trujillo, in 1961, President John F. Kennedy sent Senator George A. Smathers (1913-2007) to the Dominican Republic with the sole purpose of convincing Trujillo to retire. His refusal to willingly relinquish power resulted in his assassination soon after. In 1991, after receiving a 26 million dollar gift from Senator Smathers, the university renamed its library system after him.

In El tema de la dictadura en la narrativa del mundo hispánico, Giuseppe Bellini distinguishes between Latin-American and non Latin-American authors of novels of dictatorship. According to Bellini the great divide between a novel such as Tirano Banderas (1926) by the Spaniard Ramón María del Valle-Inclán and La sangre (1915) by the Dominican Tulio Cestero, is a direct experience with political repression. Bellini writes, “Se trata de una aproximación al

problema desde una posición externa; falta una experiencia directa” (14). While most literary critics agree that Tirano Banderas is one of the best written novels of dictatorship, Bellini states, “El lector sigue con interés la narración, pero inmediatamente percibe que a Tirano Banderas le falta algo que tienen El Señor Presidente y las demás novelas hispanoamericanas que denuncian las dictaduras: una experiencia directa de dolor” (22). While the non-Dominican narratives studied here clearly succeed as novels and have enjoyed great commercial success, Bellini’s observation of Tirano Banderas holds true for In the time of the Butterflies, The Farming of Bones, and La Fiesta del Chivo, what is missing from these novels is the author’s direct experience of living during the era of Trujillo. In contrast, as Larson has observed, the texts by Ferreras, Prestol Castillo and Requena fail to convert reality into art. However, they do allow the voice of the marginalized and oppressed to be heard and succeed in describing the experience of living during Trujillo’s dictatorship. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, they serve as memorials for Trujillo’s victims.

The Trujillo dictatorship continues to interest authors. In 2007, the Dominican-American author Junot Díaz published The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao. The Pulitzer Award winning novel moves back and forth in time and place between modern day New Jersey and contemporary Santo Domingo and the country during the Trujillo era. In his narrative Díaz engages, contradicts, and rewrites the earlier narratives by Alvarez and Vargas Llosa, who are both explicitly mentioned. To cite an example, unlike Senator Cabral in La Fiesta del Chivo, Dr. Cabral, one of the main characters in The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, does not offer up his daughter to the dictator. This refusal leads to his arrest and torture and is the reason the Cabral flees the Dominican Republic and ends up in New Jersey. However, Díaz’s narrative is similar to the six studied here in that while the era of Trujillo looms over and overshadows the

text, Trujillo is not a major character. Perhaps it is because as the author explains in a footnote, “. . . his power was terminal in ways that few historians or writers have ever truly captured, or I would argue, imagined. He was our Sauron, our Arawn, our Darkseid, our Once and Future Dictator, a personaje so outlandish, so perverse, so dreadful that not even a sci-fi writer could have made his ass up” (2).

Despite their considerable ability, none of the six authors studied here have allowed Trujillo to be a primary character, focusing instead on the experience of living during the era and allowing the voice of his victims to be heard. Yet, I am hopeful that Trujillo will appear as a primary character in a Dominican novel. It may take time for Dominicans are still recovering from the era of Trujillo. As Lola in The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao describes, “Ten million Trujillos is all we are” (324). However, when he appears it will be a sign that the county has finally come to terms with a painful part of their history.

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Christina Stokes was born in Madrid, Spain. She attended The Ohio State University where she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1992. After graduation she worked as a Financial Analyst for NCR and Eaton Corporation. She later pursued her Masters of Arts degree in Spanish at Cleveland State University. Beginning in 2000, she continued her graduate studies at the doctoral level at the University of Florida. Her major field of study is 20th century Dominican literature. She received a Doctor of Philosophy degree at the University of Florida in August of 2009