LANGUAGE AND BORDER CROSSINGS IN THE WORKS OF JULIA ALVAREZ: IDENTITY, HOMELAND, EDUCATION, AND ORALITY

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Literatures and Languages in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2008

This Manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Literatures and Languages in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the full body of works by Dominican-American author Julia Alvarez, whose literary corpus includes poetry, historical-fiction novels, essays, short stories, young adult books, and folkloric-based children's texts.

This dissertation examines the dualities present in the recurrent and intertwined topics of language, identity, and homeland. Particular attention is focused on the manner in which Alvarez stretches the linguistic boundaries of her two languages, as well as the importance this author places on education in her writing, particularly for women and the poor.

The use of *testimonio* and oral literature to relate her own tale as well as those of her characters as a feminine approach to minority literature is explored. Unlike traditional recounting of testimonial accounts, Alvarez inserts elements of her recognizable self into the fictional portrayals of many of her female characters.

Finally, I will demonstrate how, through her use of repeated imagery and characters in unique circumstances in different literary genres, the writer creates a form of "literary migration" with characters and symbols in one of her works

recalling the same in another of her texts. In so doing, Alvarez breathes new life into her literary pieces, interweaving the texts into one interconnected narrative.

Introduction

This work has grown out of my love for languages and literature, and my own brand of bilingualism and biculturalism, which I share with an ever-growing population in the United States. My experience as a professional interpreter has obliged me to always see the word and the world in two perspectives as I negotiate words and cultures to fully communicate ideas. For this reason, I am drawn to the works of Latina writers whose expressivity is always on the border of their two tongues. Julia Alvarez became an author of great interest to me for all of the above reasons.

Her work is greatly popular, minority, feminist literature, yet I believe the corpus of her work, an extensive body of over twelve books, deserves academic attention to study not only the vast amounts of feminist and border negotiating realities her poetry and narrative presents, but also the large quantity of Dominican history and lore she brings with her to “this side” as a teacher and writer.

As the Dominican population continues to grow in the United States, the importance of English language texts to maintain island heritage, lore, and connectedness will become increasingly vital. In this respect, Alvarez’s Dominican-American work is at the forefront of a literature I believe will become more significant as Dominican children are born “on this side” and become primary English speakers and readers.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks go out to my loving father, Simon Blauman, and my fiancé, Dan Sinigallia, who encouraged me through this amazing intellectual experience. Thanks to my committee members and friends, too numerous to name here, who logged many miles in the park and gym listening to my theories. Lastly, to Mom, R.I.P.

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CHAPTER ONE: LANGUAGE NEGOTIATION AND IDENTITY IN THE POETRY OF JULIA ALVAREZ

Language and cultural values have, for centuries, been a matter of ethnic identity assertion in the United States. Language maintenance is practiced in the home and in ethnic communities, and homeland customs are brought to the United States. Nevertheless, acculturation into the American mainstream is highly valued as well, for it is through formal schooling and by following a shared set of prescribed cultural norms that one is able to succeed. Alvarez, in life and in textual character, is a writer-teacher; one of her sisters is a psychologist, in life and in text; and another works as a cook: the sisters have opportunities in this country that they would not have in the Dominican Republic, yet they selected professions that situate them in traditional female nurturing roles. Julia Alvarez's writings feature strong female protagonists, with Víctor and Miguel, two illiterate campesinos, in "Víctor" and *A Cafecito Story*, as the only male protagonists.

Raised with advantages in her education and socio-economic status in the Dominican Republic, Alvarez was nonetheless a girl, and was taught "proper female comportment." This restrictive sense of being comes out in her writing, as does her acknowledgement of privilege. Yet here in the United States, where she found her voice, Alvarez writes about strong women and girls, dark Haitian maids whose voices soothed her childhood pains, literary women's voices from all over the world, and the poetic verses of men and women alike who shaped her teaching and writing voices in English. These rhythms, coupled with the sounds of the great

male Spanish language authors—Cervantes, Borges, and the lone female, Sor Juana—spoke to her. While the first ten years of her life in the Caribbean give the author's voice a tropical lilt, it is through English text and to the English-dominant reader that the author speaks.

Julia Alvarez's Latina literature not only opens the private sphere to public observance, creatively elevating domestic chores from the dreariness of a dirty home to lyrical poetry and narrative, but also places class, race, and social distinctions in the realm of the literary. Domestic chores such as cooking and making the bed are performed not only by her mother and aunts, women of a particular social status, but also by many dark-skinned, Haitian, "blue-black" nannies, servants of their wealthier employers. Thus, even the typically female chores of cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing are exposed to the multiplicity of examinations that divide the female sex into social strata. It is precisely this exposure of the private that enunciates women's writing; these are the mundane aspects which Gloria Anzaldúa urged female authors to detail. In talking about domestic life, men's public life and monetary gains are juxtaposed with the often unsalaried or underpaid yet necessary tasks of cleaning, washing, and tending the young. These are the subjects of Alvarez's book of poems *Homecoming.* When Anzaldúa introduced her groundbreaking Mexican-American "Borderlands" poem in the 1987 volume by the same name, she pointedly set forth multiple societal and cultural values at war within one and the same being. As the last stanza indicates, in order to survive this conflict, the *mestiza* must herself be a crossroads, a meeting place where conflicting value and language systems form a third space:

Borderlands

Cuando vives in la frontera

People walk through you, the wind steals your voice,

You're a burra, buey, a scapegoat…

In the Borderlands

You are the battleground

Where enemies are kin to each other:

You are at home, a stranger,

The border disputes have been settled

The volley of shots have shattered the truce

You are wounded, lost in action

Dead, fighting back…

To survive the borderlands

You must live sin fronteras

Be a crossroads…. (*Frontiers* 4-5).

During the last several decades, women's writing has emerged powerfully. The work of "hyphenated" female authors who tenuously balance the values and languages of both of their cultures on the beam of the hyphen are increasingly finding their way into more mainstream booksellers and personal libraries.[1] No

[1] This term was coined by Cuban American Gustavo Pérez-Firmat to explain the bilingual, bicultural existence of Cubans who came to America to escape Castro's regime but did not relinquish their native language and culture in the hope that soon they would be going home. They nonetheless learned English and established full lives in the United States, living in between the two cultures. This

longer are the hyphenated texts found only in small bookshops and private presses; major publishing houses and mainstream booksellers increasingly seek their authors. As present day society increasingly bears a colored face and accented English, or native English wearing an indigenous skin, the second and third generations of women writers whose path was forged by Anzaldúa and her contemporaries continue to struggle with the same dualities, but are admittedly more at home in English and in the United States than were their predecessors.[2]

The importance of storytelling and of telling stories, particularly for women, who are the traditional receptacles of familial memory, cannot be emphasized enough. Without our stories, we do not know where we came from, and we cannot forge a future without a past. It is this significant contribution to feminist literature and to the body of Latina writing as a whole that Alvarez adds. Most of her work is to some extent autobiographical, unlike that of Cisneros, who admits that many of her advisees' tales became hers and were transferred to the public domain in *House on Mango Street*. It is the representative stories that Alvarez recounts, told in both prose and verse, which mark her as a significant writer in contemporary American literature.

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term also applies to other ethnic minorities who also maintain their cultures and languages while actively becoming part of the American mainstream.

[2] These authors include Nicholassa Mohr who was born and raised in New York City, and therefore wrote and spoke fluent English, much to the distaste of non-hyphenated Island Puerto Ricans. Similarly, Julia Alvarez was born in New York City, lived for ten years in the Dominican Republic and returned to the United States at age ten. She, too, is more at home in English. However, the two distinct countries and cultures Alvarez lived in create a more complex dual self than does the hyphenated life of a Latina raised only in the United States.

In a country as large as the United States, where the lingua franca is English, but where cultural, religious, racial, and ethnic diversity is celebrated, people must find a new space in which to celebrate this identity that is neither solely derived from the country of origin nor entirely U.S.A. American.[3] This newly blended identity, which contains elements of both countries, is a new geocultural space that permits the immigrant, and moreover the immigrant community, to celebrate both sets of values. Language, as an issue of self-definition, of inclusion, or of exclusion, arises in the context of writers who claim identity in more than one linguistic group. These writers may or may not physically travel, but their literature transports the readers over physical boundaries through the language and content of their texts. Writing as a female from a traditionally male-dominated society while living and writing in a more open-minded society provides the Latina with educational and creative opportunities outside of the traditional roles of mothers, wives, or the alternative: prostitutes and nuns. The discursive spaces from which women write are the ones the patriarchal society has allocated to them.

Latinas in America, soon to be part of the largest ethnic minority in the United States, face an additional hurdle as women and people of color who wish to retain their cultural and linguistic inheritance. In a different context, José María Arguedas defined three distinct types of languages: the common or vehicular language, consisting of the national language used for daily communication;

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[3] This is a term I appropriate from the subject-author of this thesis. Julia Alvarez, an American citizen by birth and repatriation, considers herself a Dominican American. Not entirely a U.S.A. American.

referential language, linked to oral or written cultural traditions and thus assuring intergenerational continuity of values; and mythic language, which allows for comprehension of the sacred and inexplicable (Biswas-Sen). Julia Alvarez writes in vehicular English, but a few Spanish referential words remind the reader of her Dominican heritage. Because Alvarez uses English as her literary language, she has become one of the better-known Dominican writers in the U.S. Additionally, because she is a recognizable Latina writing in English, her words take on an even more powerful tone in minority writing as defined by Deleuze and Guattari. Not only is her writing deterritorialized from her oral Spanish, but as a female, her writing takes on the weight of the many who do not publish or openly speak of their Dominican-American and female experiences.

Daisy Cocco de Filippis remarks, "[e]l lenguaje siempre ha sido el espacio habitado por aquellos a quienes se le ha negado un lugar. Para los dominicanos que escriben en los Estados Unidos, la palabra escrita se ha convertido en un instrumento para marcar existencias. El lenguaje les permite a estos escritores tener una biografía y les provee las herramientas necesarias para crear un archivo histórico de sus vidas como seres individuales a la vez que como testigos de una historia por hacer (Cocco de Filippis, *Desde la diáspora* 149; qtd. in *Poems of Exile*, 1988)." Not only do Dominican women writers make up such a small part of the already small number of Latina writers, but their particular exile status, language, and ethnic identity add to the weight of the words these women set to paper.

Pérez-Firmat draws an important distinction between true bilingualism and diglossia. He explains, "[i]f the bilingual is someone competent in two languages,

the diglossic individual is someone whose verbal bilingualism is complicated by a bilingualism of thought or feeling, by the conviction that objects, events, and emotions come with words attached" ("El caso Casey" 439). Julia Alvarez tenuously balances her Dominican heritage on the hyphen she shares with her American English education. Add to that her gender and her feminist literary stance pronounced in poetry, and the hyphen requirement is doubled.

The Spanish vocabulary Alvarez uses is not problematic since the author translates unusual terms in the text itself in paratextual notes, or otherwise uses relatively familiar Spanish words for her English language readership. In contrast, José María Arguedas blends two highly distinct languages, as seen in his title *Yawar Fiesta*; Arguedas readily admits, he writes in this manner both to show affinity with his Quechua speaking brothers and to illustrate the unique culture and language they formed to communicate within the dominant mainstream Spanish culture imposed upon them. Usage of Quechua isolates the Spanish speaker from textual reception while also demonstrating the imperfect way the indigenous Andeans navigate their two linguistic and cultural systems. This approach is distinct from that of Alvarez, whose bilingual-bicultural characters speak perfect idiomatic mainstream English and Spanish. Although her texts are peppered with Spanish sayings and references to Dominican lore and foods, the referential and mythic language bonds Alvarez maintains with her Dominican homeland are most frequently expressed in an eloquent English which she uses to transform her homeland culture into one Americans can try on and taste.

Alvarez's decision to write in English takes on political overtones, as does the decision of some Latinos/as living in the United States of opting to retain Spanish as their writing voice.[4] Professor Kanellos notes that ninety percent of the creative work by Hispanics in the United States is published in Spanish, but those who wrote (write) in English were (are) better known than the authors who wrote (write) in Spanish. (quoted in Cocco de Filippis 147).[5] This makes the relatively small body of available texts, more easily accessible to the English readership, even more enunciative of minority literature.

Alvarez is bilingual in the traditional sense of the word, but her classification as a diglossic is more appropriate since her primary orality and written language of choice are English. Nevertheless, her relatively simple Spanish is more of an oral resource and bonding language with her Dominican heritage. Sociolinguists define diglossia as the use of two varieties of language for different purposes in the same community. The high language variety is generally utilized for scholarly purposes, and the low register is often a spoken vernacular. Authors tend to use the high register for writing, while the low register serves conversational and less formal

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[4] See the essay in *Something to Declare* addressing Doña Aída Portalatín, proclaiming the author's right and need to write in English. See also the reference elsewhere in this dissertation to a similar quandary faced by the New York-born Puerto Rican, Nicholassa Mohr.

[5] Included in the list of renowned Latina Authors writing in English are Cristina García, Rosario Ferré, and Esmeralda Santiago. Ferré admits to having written the rough draft of *House on the Lagoon in Spanish* and to self-translating it into a successful American English novel. Santiago admits that writing her first novel involved hearing words in one language while her fingers typed the text in another.

needs. In seeking recourse to two registers, Alvarez does so in two different languages: one being the vehicular and the other the referential language. By writing in a way that speakers of particular language combinations share with depicted characters, this manner of expression simultaneously inhibits non-bilinguals from capturing the entirety of an elocutionary act, while bonding those who similarly code switch in a metalinguistic referential language. The receptive message estrangement for the L1 reader is not enough to prohibit his understanding of the work, as evidenced by the mass-market appeal of Latino/a authorship. Unlike the extensive conversations of diglossic texts like Arguedas,' whose goal is, in part, the estrangement of the reader, Alvarez merely blips in and out of her Spanish to write an English language text.

The mixing of English with Spanish, called Spanglish, began with Puerto Ricans and Cuban Americans of earlier immigration waves, paving the way for Dominican writers. By overtly claiming their homeland and language preference, many opt for English (Alvarez, Serros and Mohr 98).[6] Unlike Puerto Ricans who are American citizens by birth, and Cuban Americans whose exile status forbids return

[6] Mohr notes, "[a]lthough I was born on the island of Manhattan, I'd always considered myself a Puerto Rican writer. But I was in for major culture shock when, many years ago, I accepted the University of Puerto Rico's invitation to visit the island of my ancestors to speak about my work and my books. Less than halfway through, I was interrupted by shouts: 'Why don't you write in Spanish?' '¡Aquí se habla español!' I was speechless. I endured my embarrassment silently until I felt able to respond. I explained that I had been born, raised, and educated in New York City, and consequently, although Spanish was my family tongue, my language as a writer was English. A pompous professor came forward and, wagging a finger at me, said, "Then don't call yourself a Puerto Rican writer! Libros escritos en inglés no son puertorriqueños."

home, many Latina writers devoid of these two particular migratory statuses face immigration issues and questions of returning to their birth countries. Uncertain of their status in this country, or if imminent return will occur, many Latinas opt to maintain Spanish and English.

Second and third generation women writers, a group that Julia Alvarez belongs to, are increasingly being defined and subdivided into "migrant" and "exile" groups. Whereas migrant literature increasingly accepts the United States (and English) as the place of belonging, the exile text still seems to embody the homeland as the land of origin: the place from which all is derived; the place where answers to the author's commingled values will be untangled and resolved:

> This paradigmatic shift from exile to immigrant literature has important implications for the representational politics of contemporary postcolonial writings…. [T]he shift from exile to migrant literature changes literary criticism's traditional reliance on that experience as the 'basis' of explanation in literary analysis. Instead, it makes us look at exile as a condition that itself requires explanation and ideological analysis" (Mardorossian 16).

By opting to remain professionally and make a name for itself in the United States, literary language is also determined in that space. Mardorossian notes, "migrant literature emphasizes the dynamic relationship between the past and present and the impossibility of return. The discourse of exile tends to focus on what was left behind and the possibility of return (independently of how improbable that return is)" (17).

The mother country, whose values, linguistic systems, and referential and mythical languages the second wave of Caribbean writers tenaciously retain, are seen more as "source countries": places in which their sense of being was formed in another tongue, but upon whose otherness and expression they have the freedom to expound in United States English. In her twelve books of poetry, fiction, essays, young adult novels and children's books, Alvarez explores a "self" who admittedly is more at home in English, the language in which she was educated and lives. Two very different yet elucidating quotes from *Something to Declare* reveal the difference she senses between herself and her Dominican island counterparts. Arguing with an ex-boyfriend, the author protests, "'we're so different.' The comment came out seriously. 'No we're not', he argued back. 'We're both Dominicans, our families came from the same home town.' 'But we left,' I said" (*Declare* 70). Alvarez recognizes that what finally bridged these two worlds for her was writing—and hers is in English.

The author's frequent recourse to Spanish terms of endearment, expressions, and vocabulary belie complete assimilation. By her own admission, she cannot return to live in the Dominican Republic, but continues to visit: to explore from the inside out and the outside in the complex dualities informing her writing. This connection to her Dominican roots underlies the unique transfusing of Alvarez's work.

The "Undercover Poet" Alvarez references in *The Woman I Kept to Myself* is herself. Although a novelist, she notes, in an interview with Dolores Prida, "I always, always return to poetry, especially after finishing a novel. It's a good place

to go after so many words." Referring to her own novels in this poem, from the Balmis expedition in *Saving the World* to the trip from Santo Domingo that her characters endured in *In the Name of Salomé,* she questions, "Why go through the trouble / of describing the house, the doctor, the malady" (6-7); and:

> Why…board a noisy ocean liner, filled
> with characters in conflict, squabbling
> with each other or themselves until
> three hundred pages later they decide
> to change their lives? (13-17)

Regarding the precision and brevity of poetry which has little currency in today's United States' book market, Alvarez notes, "[i]t's not just writing but a 'righting' of my sensibilities, a spiritual exercise. Poems are how the soul sings. It's how we try to express what can't be put in words" (Prida 2). This genre, truly at the bottom of Alvarez's feminist-Dominican-American heart explores many facets of the author's poetry written into the literatures of her two countries.

A study of three of Julia Alvarez's poetry anthologies, *Homecoming*; *The Other Side/El Otro Lado*; and *The Woman I Kept to Myself,* demonstrates the shift from "exile to "migrant" writer, as defined by Mardorossian, as the author more fully establishes herself in the United States and sets down literal and figurative roots in Vermont. Not only will I study the author's language choices as she leaves and returns to the Unites States, but I will examine the poetry from a feminist political stance.

Alvarez's first anthology, *Homecoming,* was, by her own admission, a fierce claiming of her woman's voice, written almost entirely in English except for an occasional titular term of endearment. This anthology explores the life of a wife and homemaker (Alvarez, *Homecoming* 119). The segment of this anthology entitled "Housekeeping" enumerates chores such as dusting, making beds, hanging out wash, and rolling dough, and converts these quotidian tasks into the titles of her first anthology's largest segment. These chores are tasks the author learned at her mother's heels. In poeticizing mundane, unpaid women's chores, Alvarez elevates the importance of these tasks to that of work deserving public review. The clothing is hung out to dry with the care of a mother and wife tending to dear family members themselves:

> filling up the line
> with laundry whose shapes suggest
> loved ones, spotless, rising up
> toward a promised paradise… ("Hanging the Wash" 134-137)

Similarly, the bed must be made with the exactitude of an artist: "[s]he fluffed each pillow up, patted each pucker down, / caught the mistake of the top sheet folded down seam up" ("Making Our Beds II" 25-26). Any small deviation from maintaining a perfect home and care for her family required a shout of "*[t]ake it all out*!" (27). Nonetheless, with the doting love of a mother gently awakening the beds as if her brood still lay therein, "[b]ed by bed, we woke up the house, master bed first, / woke up the trundle beds, the four posters" ("Making Our Beds II" l23-24). The mother's tenderness for her charges and the reason for her precision shine

through. Why are these carefully performed beautifying tasks so unappreciated? In "Dusting," Alvarez remarks, "[e]ach morning I wrote my name / on the dusty cabinet, then crossed / the dining cabinet in script" (1-3) but notes that her mother dutifully erased her fingerprints. Unlike her mother, in writing the private public, she refused to "be like her, anonymous" (18).

Should not the detailed work of a homemaker's arts which allow the splendor of a home to shine be akin to the importance of the outside jobs men perform, but which are completely absent from this anthology? Or, as Alvarez remarks in "Dusting," is the erasure of women to continue? "Rolling Dough" similarly perpetuates women's subservience to men, as the poet's mother recounts popular wisdom:

> I listened
> while she told me how not long ago
> a girl could not marry until she could roll
> her dough so transparent that her beloved
> could read his Bible through it. (26-30)

Alvarez, an admittedly poor cook similarly dismisses the value of chef skills in finding love.

The "Gladys Poems," particularly "Gladys Singing" in Section II of *The Other Side/El Otro Lado,* another anthology discussed in this chapter, reveal how the dark-skinned maid taught the young girl to sing and dance. These spiritually life-enhancing acts are learned, not from the task-oriented, rhythm less upper-class mother, but from the life-embracing lower-class maids in the Dominican Republic:

we sang passionate *canciones,*
anthems or carols in season;
putting aside our brooms,
we danced energetic *merengues*.
I trained my tentative alto
to her silver bell soprano,
until we heard the car
roaring up the driveway,
the click of my mother's heels
metronomic at the entrance,
and we fell silent, knowing the rules,… (31-41)

Alvarez refers to the roles not just of women in society, but to the distinct rules of comportment assigned to women of particular social classes, a theme resonant in this and several other Alvarez works. The darker-skinned yet more carefree women in society, charged with the care of others' young, are the ones who share the lifeblood of country songs and dance, while conduct is managed from above by the elite, upper-class, lighter-skinned females.

The works in *Homecoming* poeticize the expected roles of women in particular social strata; "Heroines" is an ironic subtitle for the second section, because the characters in these poems are really anti-heroines, striving to fit the typical female role of beloved and betrothed. "Against Cinderella" comments on the absurdity of a single shoe fitting only one person in a town, and the search for an idealized love when the most important thing is that we, as women, should stand on

our own. The final stanza poignantly remarks, "[s]ome of us have learned to go barefoot / knowing the mate to one foot is the other" (25-26). The poem "Old Heroines," which ends this section, draws upon connotations of a cowboy riding off into the sunset. Unlike the Western cowboy who is unfettered, however—at one with his horse and nature after defeating his foe—the female "heroine" in this poem rides off in her "jailhouse train," dreaming of the happiness of married women who have found their mates. Unlike her male counterpart, she alternatively rides the iron horse back to an old lover, seeking wholeness as part of a pair. Despite trying on the bold heroine role, the protagonist ponders the length of time she will have to play the part of single maiden/matron.

By addressing the female roles of homemaker and heroine, roles which mark women's enclosure in a private sphere and their dependence on a man to make them complete in such a public forum as poetry, Alvarez takes these roles out of the proverbial closet into a space where they can be openly discussed and subverted. Rather than being erased, in writing themselves down, women are openly talking back to the male canon of comportment and literature.

Homecoming is an openly feminist poetic anthology, but it is also a text which the author acknowledges negates her Dominican self. Much as women are self-abnegating next to their male counterparts, Alvarez negates her "Spanish" self in favor of her English entity. The anthology begins with the poet's "Homecoming" to attend a cousin's wedding. Family members urge her return "home" with gibes that her "meringue had lost its Caribbean" ("Homecoming" 29). "Last Night at *Tía's*" concludes the anthology with the author's goodbyes to her extended

Dominican family before returning to her home and American spouse in Vermont. Notably, this last poem is the only title in the entire anthology that contains any Spanish text. The play on her journey and on the land to which she returns defines this author as more American "here" than Dominican "there."

Homecoming's notable absence of Spanish, a language much more present in her others works, is a conscious decision. By Alvarez's own admission, "I did not address my experience as a Dominican-American woman. Indeed, that earlier voice did not even feel permission to do so, as if to call attention to my foreignness would make my readers question my right to write in English" (*Homecoming* 119). Alvarez's subsequent two poetry anthologies, *The Other Side/El Otro Lado* and *The Woman I Kept to Myself* recuperate the author's diglossia within the texts, with the title of *The Other Side/El Otro Lado* openly and equitably claiming both the author's English and Spanish languages from the outset.[7] The bilingual translation in the volume's title invites a broader, probably bilingual readership through the use of both tongues, but it also prepares the reader to accompany Alvarez on a trip back to the author's Caribbean island. The same cannot be said for *Homecoming*.

By playing with typesets and fonts, the cover depicts a handwritten *The other side/El otro Lado* with varying non-standard capitalization and lower case lettering, along with a pictorial representation of a divided being. The inside title page capitalizes all letters of the title with black and grey shading, providing a

[7] Admittedly, in the writing of this study, I fought with typing the title with correct Spanish and English title capitalization and its many variations over and within the first few pages of paratext, but elected thereafter to follow English language protocol for consistency.

visual corollary for the distinct acoustic sounds of English and Spanish in the title of this volume. Still the Dutton edition registration mark lists the book as *The other side=El otro lado*. Varying lettering styles prepare the reader to hear a multiplicity of voices and tonalities sing out through the poetic structures.

In placing both languages side by side with equivalence, Alvarez no longer subverts her Spanish as she does in *Homecoming*. As if to demonstrate the expressive poverty of language, whether it be a written word or a verbal expression in one or more languages, the first and last poems bookending *The Other Side/El Otro Lado* each articulate the word's inability to verbalize the world.

"Bilingual Sestina," the poem which opens Alvarez's second anthology, treats the poet's conflicted English/Spanish modes of speech while also touching upon the racial and social distinctions prevalent in Latino society. She remarks:

> Some things I have to say aren't getting said
> in this snowy, blond, blue-eyed, gum-chewing English:
> dawn's early light sifting through *persianas* closed
> the night before by dark-skinned girls whose words
> evoke *cama*, *aposento*, *sueños* sin no*mbre*s. (1-5)

Although the poet struggles with matching her English and Spanish nouns throughout the sestina and has an "English /doubling the world with synonyms" (30-31), she evokes the first sentence of the American national anthem with "dawn's early light" in line three of the poem. Is this provocative line a coming to terms with her adopted homeland and language, or a questioning of her displacement? In a

similar language conversion conundrum, Esmeralda Santiago comments on her novel *When I Was Puerto Rican*:

> La vida relatada en este libro fue vivida en español, pero fue inicialmente escrita en inglés. Muchas veces, al escribir, me sorprendí al oírme hablar en español mientras mis dedos tecleaban la misma frase en inglés. Entonces se me trababa la lengua y perdía el sentido de lo que estaba diciendo y escribiendo, como si el observar que estaba traduciendo de un idioma al otro me hiciera perder los dos.
>
> When the editor Merloyd Lawrence offered me the opportunity to write my memoirs, I never imagined that the process would force me to confront not only my monolingual past but also my bilingual present. […] When the editor Robin Desser offered me the opportunity to translate my memoirs into Spanish for this edition, I never imagined that the process would force me to confront how much Spanish I had forgotten. […](qtd. and transl. in Wall v-vi).

As representatives of a large segment of the Latina-American population who enter and exit languages and cultures, causing verbal lapses in themselves, both Alvarez and Santiago become enunciative forces, according to Deleuze and Guattari's definition. These few Latinas representatively speak for the many through their work. This aspect of minority writing is noted throughout Alvarez's literature, not only owing to language and cultural negotiation, but also by means of challenges posed to gender-role assignments and skin color, as discussed in the

poetry above. Santiago's doubling of languages makes her lose them both, while Alvarez's doubling makes her yearn for a simpler time when one language adequately named her world.

Although quite distinct from the multiple lexicons Alvarez contends with in the opening poem, the final poem, entitled "Estel," also treats the inability of language to match the reality of the world. The misnomered deaf protagonist—"*Esther*, in your mother's shy campesino voice/ sounded like *Estel,*" (1-2)—is emblematic of the failure of words to fully capture the world. The narrator expresses: "[w]hatever you pointed at I'd spell / until the paper darkened with your new words" (27-28). She adds, "once or twice I checked to see if the words had taken" (35-36). But the speaker notes:

> You seldom hit, the gulls were *waves,*
> the palms were *fishing boats,* the seashells
> *tennis shoes*, the world misunderstood—
> but your name that wasn't really your name,
> you always picked out when I pointed to you! ("Estel" 34-38)

While these two poems linguistically negotiate Alvarez's opposing shores through the doubling of words, other poems in this anthology physically and emotionally maneuver the author between her Dominican and (ultimately chosen) United States life.

The half of the book entitled "el Otro Lado," Section V, fourth stanza, Poem XIX, reads:

> Two stories, one in the past, the other I was composing

One foot ahead of the other, the way that our lives get written

On the path that's only seen with the hindsight of arrival…

And already I was detouring from the plot I'd set in motion

By settling down in a village where I had no business living.

I was a foreigner in Boca from a country even further

than the USA they could get to with a green card or on a *yola;* [.….] (34-40)

The acknowledgement in the above poem not only refers to Alvarez's bicultural self, but to a more basic recognition of the social class distinction that separates her in an organic way from her own Caribbean people. As if to underscore Alvarez's self-discovered geocultural identity of privilege, when the narrator visits a *santera* in "Poem XX, My Last Afternoon in Boca" upon addressing matters of homeland, the author, as poetic character, acknowledges the United States as her true homeland. When the religious woman advises the narrator to "'prepare to lose your way. / For those born to a *santo* must stay put / to ground that power in the land it loves.' " (18-20), the poet recognizes that there "'used to be a time,' … 'a time I might have come back to live'" (25-27). However, she later flatly states:

....I know

I won't be coming back to live

in my ex-homeland. A border has closed like a choice

I can't take back. And the trouble isn't the new

but the shadow falling across it of the old. (84-88)

Both author and *santera* acknowledge "the words I've chosen / to serve in another tongue, another country" (63-64).

As if to reinforce the abovementioned determination, “Poem XXI” in the anthology sequence commences with the lines “I hear Papito calling that it’s time, / Now is the last crossing before dawn” (1-2); and culminates with the final stanza:

> One half-drawn figure I cannot make out,
> unfinished, outlined in white paint, too white,
> a ghost who came and left
> in search of a happier ending
> than what Boca affords,
> a life of choice, a life of words. (27-32)

A white ghostly outline calls Alvarez back over to the States: to the sphere of freedom of expression where the poet can be the woman she has evolved into on paper.

In his book review of Kathleen Brogan’s *Cultural Haunting* in *Modern Philology,* Rafael Pérez-Torres notes that “Brogan provides an excellent discussion of presence and absence. Ghosts represent historical memories recollected and reconstructed by communities that have experienced a colonized past. These ghosts represent a communal memory, cultural transmission, and group maintenance of a traumatic past (509).” The poet’s forced dislocation from one language and country to another speaks to the reader through still other more esoteric languages and symbolism in some of the final poems in Alvarez’s anthology *The Other Sid*e. These poems collectively enunciate the shared Dominican-American experience of cultural and linguistic modification while conveying the collective experience of their traumatic past under the dictatorship of Trujillo.

Through negotiating and blending the parts of her hyphenated female self, Alvarez poetically narrates both her English- and Spanish-speaking selves in the first person voice. Although both the *santera* and her father express opinions regarding the side of the ocean she should remain on, it is the author's own voice which ultimately tells the reader to which country she is heading and why. In the final poem examined, she heads toward her life of words.

As a minority writer speaking on behalf of many, Alvarez permits the voices of the poor, the "blue-black" maids, the *santera*, and even that of the deaf-mute child to project on paper. It is through this richly non-transparent language that Alvarez explains her nuanced existence and her dual world: a world composed of word-doubles and multiple hybridities. Through particular word choices, Alvarez presents her reality: a world that imitates her artistic use of language as she crosses and re-crosses borders in many works. Acoustic location and spatial crossings help to construct the author's existence on paper as well as in life.

Section V of *The Other Side/El Otro Lado* is subdivided into twenty-one distinct Roman numeral-captioned poems with titles in the section's table of contents; in reality, these interconnected poems act like one long narrative exploring the poet's self and the decision of where to physically and culturally situate herself within the world at large and within the options her family and profession provide.

Six poems from Alvarez's 2004 volume of poetry *The Woman I Kept to Myself* (her third and most evolved volume) explore the relationship that she, at this point really a "migrant" writer, has to her languages and countries. Alvarez squarely places English as her chosen language for writing, but notes the content origin for

her writings. The first poem in the collection, "Family Tree," sets the tone. The poet writes:

> When I was born, my mother wrote me down
> on the family tree, a second bough
> dangling from her branch which was attached
> to a great trunk which sunk down to roots
> sprung from the seeds of Spain and Africa…(1-5)

Despite these extensive roots in the Dominican Republic that reach still further back in time and space to the originary biological heritage of most Dominicans, she notes:

> My sisters and I,
> transported stateside in the sixties, turned
> into tangle-haired hippies, slinging our English slang.
> We clipped ourselves off from the family tree… (18-21)

In spite of Alvarez's desire to "write *New Yorker* fiction in the Cheever style," she comments, "all my stories tell where I came from" *(Family Tree* 29-30).

By communicating her Dominican heritage in English, Alvarez marks herself as a crossover to the North American side. This deterritorialized minority author, much like Deleuze and Guattari's Kafka, writing in a language other than her maternal tongue, simultaneously speaks for the many Dominican men and women, transplanted to the United States, who also use English as their expressive language of choice. Despite acknowledging her origins in well-crafted English style,

"All-American Girl" expresses the author/speaker's desire as a girl to look and sound natively American, rather than immigrant:

> I wanted stockings, make-up, store-bought clothes;
> I wanted to look like an American girl;
> To speak my English so you couldn't tell
> I'd come from somewhere else, …. (1-4)

She worries, "I didn't know if I could ever show/ genuine feeling in a borrowed tongue" (11-12). Yet she notes that long after she had lost her accent, she "couldn't look like anybody else / but who I was: an all-American girl" (29-30). At the end of the stanza, there is a marked acceptance of belonging.

Alvarez's persistent preoccupation with what linguists would call L1 and L2 (first and second languages) is again present in the poem "First Muse." The writer reveals, "[w]hen I heard the famous poet pronounce, / 'one can only write poems in the tongue / in which one first said Mother,' I was stunned" (1-3). She begins thinking of all of the poems she would need to destroy. She writes:

> For months I suffered from bad writer's block,
> which I envisioned, not as a blank page,
> but as a literary border guard
> turning me back to Spanish on each line. (17-20)

Fortuitously, while watching television, her linguistic muse visited via commercial, singing, "*I am / Chiquita banana and I'm here to say…*" (39-40). The intertextual reference to a poet's monolingual stance stands in direct opposition to the life-

affirming multicultural banana tune which confers a lifelong inheritance of duality to the young woman.

Two other poems in this collection indicative of the writer's dual past and present are "Leaving English" and "In Spanish." "Leaving English" indicates Alvarez's "migrant status:" "Even if Spanish made me who I was, / it's English now that tells me who I am" (9-10). The willingness, indeed the desire, to embrace English, which informs the author's existence, creates a fissure within her deep Dominican family tree. The approximation to language as the essence of the speaker's being, demonstrates the grafting of two language branches onto one single human female tree. She writes:

> My family claims that I've deserted them:
> *One thing is learning English, another*
> *to think you're lost without*
> *it, por favor!*
> *You left in exile—that was not your fault.*
> *This passion is a second desertion*. (16-20)

Although Alvarez is admonished by the Grand Dame of Dominican letters, but moreover by her beloved aunts on the island, to return to Spanish, she insists that she is a Dominican-American author mapping out a place that does not exist on the map.[8] Although her language preference change marks the author as being more

[8] See the essay in *Something to Declare* on the metaphysical explanation Alvarez provides to Doña Aída Cartagena Portalatín, defending her use of English as a literary language. The recurrent problem of language is also noted in Yo's

"here" than "there," what Alvarez calls U.S.A. American, the insertion of an expressive *por favor* indicates her refusal to completely abandon her linguistic and familial heritage. In "In Spanish," part of the apparent poetic diptych to "Leaving English," the poet remarks:

> But [hearing] her say it in Spanish goes deeper
> and stirs the sediment at the bottom
> of my heart, so the feeling is stronger,
> more mixed in with everything else I am. (13-16)

Thus, instead of affirming Alvarez's steadfast grasp on English, the poet clings to her formative Spanish, which remains the emotional foundation of her being.

Indeed, both "Regreso" and "Museo del Hombre" lay claim to a rich Dominican linguistic and familial heritage. Notably, both poems are titled in Spanish, when English translations "Return" and "The Museum of Man" would have been more accessible to the English-speaking reader anticipated as Alvarez's principal audience. Instead, by leaving the titles in Spanish, she lays claim to her Spanish heritage, and, to a certain extent, distances herself from her American readership to more fully align herself with the Spanish speaker. In "Regreso," her father exclaims in untranslated Spanish, "*[p]or fin! / mi regreso a mi tierra. Ya yo estoy / cansado de la traducción*" (14-16). In English: "[f]inally, the return to my country. I am tired of translation" (translation mine). Alvarez adds, "Now he… pours his sense /into the deeper cistern of his soul, his native tongue …" (21-22).

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dilemma in García Girls when she "doesn't know which language to love in" ("The Rudy Elmhurst Story").

This is a well of expressive vocabulary which the father, but not the daughter, possesses in Spanish. The reader also senses Alvarez's pride in her Spanish heritage through the uncensored manner in which she allows her father unbridled declaratory speech in this poem.

Similarly, as she explores the *museo* in the Dominican Republic, the poet remarks on the Taíno Indian queen's resemblance to her sister and political figures whose physical traits resemble those of her aunts, her mother, and herself. Inclusion in this long historical trajectory binds the author to the Caribbean island and its people in a way not possible in her newer American home.

References to the linguistic and physical exclusion, as opposed to the inclusion Alvarez sensed as a schoolchild, is noted in the derogatory term Spic and self-appropriation of the term "Spic-chic;" the writer's perception of a blond-haired, blue-eyed American population comes through in the poems "Spic" and "Abbot Academy." The speaker tells us in "Spic" that "when school let out, [she was] trailed by cries of 'Spic!' During recess, they called out "Spic-ball" and threw her lunch in the "Spic-trash." Taking her mother at face value, the author learned to *speak* English well, so that one day, "when I'd learn their language well, / I'd say what I'd seen in America" (29-30). In "Abbot Academy," set in a private school, the poet tells the reader that "ladies/ … learned to act like blondes even if they / were dark-haired, olive skinned spic-chicks like me" (8-10). Although Alvarez could not change her physical traits, language domination as a tool to talk back to the bullying male-dominated American-Anglo society was certainly seen as a viable alternative to inclusion in the United States and to success.

Clearly, Alvarez embraces English and her "home" life in the United States, yet her unwavering ties to Spanish and the Dominican Republic remain a source of pride and heritage for her. The third space alluded to in Anzaldúa's poem is this unique blend of Alvarez's two languages and cultures. It is in talking about the sacred, the profane, and the mundane urged by the Chicana that Alvarez's voice rings out.

This conflict between Alvarez's two languages and two cultures is precisely the hyphenated border issue that brought her writing to the forefront of American literature and history courses. She is aware that her mixed uses of Spanish and English is what marked her success in the United States, but simultaneously marginalized her to Dominicans, marking her as not Dominican enough to her own people. Unlike Dominican authors such as Junot Díaz, who write in a more urban street context, a context arguably more relevant to the many Dominicans who left the island for socio-economic reasons in later waves of immigration, Alvarez's privileged Dominican society origins provide her with a safety net and an extended family home to which to return. The chaotic 1960s flight from the Dominican Republic to New York and the upheaval produced in this transnationalized family created a loss of stability. Fortuitously, the family was able to recommence and reestablish itself firmly in the United States. It is her distinction of both privilege and perfect English which denies Alvarez a degree of acceptance among her own people. Yet in spite of this, her representative story tells the collective one of many Dominican men and women who left their cherished homeland as a result of political upheaval and their search for opportunities in another land.

CHAPTER TWO

POETIC TRANSGRESSION: SAYING IT PUBLICLY AND SPELLING IT OUT

Julia Alvarez's poetic voice is not restricted to the bifurcated Dominican-American self and to speaking on behalf of the poor, dark-skinned underclass; the poet uses her words to speak on behalf of all women as she explores a cancer scare and a bout with an eating disorder. These topics are developed in several poems in *The Woman I Kept to Myself*. These typically female ailments know no language or cultural barrier. In this sense, her words take on a more global significance as she speaks for womankind. Although the poeticized ailments directly affect women, and indirectly affect their male partners and children, Alvarez's commentary opens a discursive space where male and female writers as well as ordinary citizens can discuss female illnesses Dale Spender remarks that:

> females who take up the pen have, at least, the potential to enter the public sphere thereby to cross and confound classification boundaries. This makes the woman writer, like the woman speaker, a contradiction in terms and a contradiction that not only has to be accommodated by patriarchal order, but by woman writers as well. (*Man Made Language* 191)

Public writing and public speech are both real acts of self-determination for women, opening the door for their particular needs and issues to enter mainstream dialogue. In poeticizing female ailments, Alvarez takes private pain public. As Alvarez writes openly for women as well as for men, she openly subverts the public/private,

male/female dichotomies. In an interview with Dolores Prida, Alvarez confides the following:

> *Prida:* There's a poem about breast cancer, another about anorexia. Are they based on personal experience?
>
> *Alvarez:* Yes. I did have a lump, but I was fortunate that it was not malignant. But so many friends are suffering with this disease . . . it's an epidemic. I identify with what they go through; I know how it feels. As a writer, I'm everywoman. I not only speak of myself; I give voice to the obsessions that afflict us all. In my youth I was so driven by those social forces to try to perfect my body. Whenever my world seemed to be falling apart, I'd control my eating. But I overcame that, or more honestly, let's say I transformed that need for control into poetry and vegetarianism ("Being Julia Alvarez" 128).

"Disappearing" and "Gaining Myself Back" both discuss eating disorders, while "All's Clear," "Now When I Look at Women," and "At the GYN" refer to breast cancer scares.

Alvarez writes in "Disappearing": "I have slenderized. I have gotten thin, / Thin as a wafer, as a piece of string" (1-2). It seems contradictory that the loquacious author, who writes much of her personal and family life into the public sphere of written text for public consumption, describes herself in this way: "[u]ndressed of any excess, I blend in, / a blind stitch hidden in the tapestry / Of the generations.…" (4-6). This line is highly atypical of the author, whose narrators and who herself have taken great pains openly to outline the paths of her personal and familial journeys.

Rather than being a hidden entity in her family lore, she has sewn together many pieces of history in clear black print.

"Gaining Myself Back" candidly describes the reconstructive efforts made by the anorexic to regain her physical persona while simultaneously confronting her self:

> Muscle on Muscle, fat layered on fat:
>
> arms, belly, buttocks, hips thighs, legs bulge out—
>
> I'm packing the body for a return to life! (1-3)

The poet recognizes, "I am almost home. / Deep in my self, a light has been left on—/ as if somebody [knew I'd return" (27-29). This light ("luz"), a new vision for her own future, bears similitude to her characters Milly Kaufman and Salomé Camila in *Finding Miracles* and *In the Name of Salomé*, when each of these characters are afforded the opportunity to rediscover themselves and start anew.

Similarly, regarding food intake, the lines "[e]ach bite is scanned, each calorie turned back / as if vigilance over each spoonful could ward off / the bitter taste of an old happiness" (8-10) invoke lines cited elsewhere in this dissertation about restrictions others placed on her language choices. The author's foreign childhood "columpio" was turned back by a teacher while the "literary border guard" turned her back at every line. By controlling her food intake—like so many anorexics—Alvarez seeks, in an auto-destructive manner, to re-control male imposed societal expectations inculcated by women. In openly discussing women's cancers and anorexia in verse, Alvarez invasively enters the highly symbolic male domain of lyric language wherein she discusses the uniquely female. The similar style and word choice used in Alvarez's poetic description of food intake

acoustically recalls these poems in readers' ears and gives rise to the effect men's rules have on both women's oral choices. Alvarez reinvokes her own analogously worded poetry in two distinct oral contexts.

Two other poems which also discuss common, yet private, dark moments of human lives during grieving are "Signs" and "Death Days." The cancer scares in three poems are remarkably bluntly stated. Again, in openly discussing death and dying, the private is publicly exposed for Alvarez's readership. In "All's Clear," the second stanza commences:

> The doctor checks the freckled skin and says,
> Nothing to fret about. He makes a map
> Of all my markings, a constellation
> Not in the sign of Cancer, but to be watched…. (11-14)

"Now, When I Look at Women" discusses the same subject in a similarly straightforward fashion, adding female deformation to the list of atypically poeticized topics. Once again, Alvarez, talking back to the male literary canon, speaks as a minority author by publicly displaying women's body parts for all to view. She writes, "when I look at a woman, I wonder / if a breast is missing…" (1-2). While observing women, the poet sees not only the face of the particular woman she is looking at, but in her, the faces of the many "who didn't make it" (12). Remarking on shared female dangers, she writes, "suddenly, every girl seems vulnerable" (21).

In the darkest of the three "woman's poems," the final stanza of "At the GYN" notes the similar fate all of the patients confront:

> Everyone here except a stray husband
> or pacing boyfriend awaiting the results
> Is one of us — as if the word in which
> we come to know our bodies should be kept
> a place apart where we can catch our breath,
> surrender to our lives and to our deaths. (25-30)

The universality of illness, the female bonding, and yet the simultaneous sense of shared isolation between women at a doctor's office designed specifically for treatment of their female maladies are both comforting and disquieting. It seems most fitting that a hyphenated feminist author should write with such clarity about the fears and losses we all confront when faced with anorexia and breast cancer. In moments when the author could do no more than grieve like the rest of us, she reverts to pen and paper. She rolls up her sleeves and creates. The last line of "Signs" reads, "[d]rink my sad friends, be briefly whole again" (30). The foreboding title of "Death Days" ironically sees the poet rejoice at the five year mark of a friend's survival, yet enumerates a long list of dates of the now deceased. She writes, "[m]y dressy black dress never gathers dust" (19). One need not be Dominican or American to understand the profound sentiments expressed in this series of poems that readers from all countries and walks of life would understand.

Poems about illness may seem a departure from Alvarez's typical branding as a Latina minority author, yet the appeal of writing is its ability to transcend particulars in order to communicate a shared message. The role of poetry as a global communicative tool is demonstrated in several of Alvarez's poems. These insights,

like those of her shared immigrant experience, transmit communal messages. It is fitting that an author who writes about the political strife affecting so many people in the Dominican Republic should focus some of that attention on the land which she has called home since age ten. One of my favorite powerful, yet subtle, Julia Alvarez poems is a play on one of W.H. Auden's much discussed lines, "poetry makes nothing happen." Rather than simply stating this, Alvarez adds a question mark to the poem, co-opting one of her favorite poet's lines and examining the role of poetry in modern American society. The three-stanza poem commences by listing a series of ordinary people going through their daily routines who averted catastrophes due to poetry. An exhausted Mike Holmquist taps to the beat of a Longfellow poem on a long drive home (2-4), while May Quinn reaches for a poetry book instead of a bottle of pills (6-7). Poetry prevented something bad from happening.

The second stanza recounts a young child playing to the sounds of a nursery rhyme, protecting her from the noise and fears of the Afghani war (15-18). Again, nothing happened to stifle a child's simple joys. The final lines of the poem register a scathing "epic" list of politicians who will "swear a poem has never done anything for them" (23).

Another of Alvarez's poetic observations regarding the power of words in the political arena, "The White House Has Disinvited the Poets" is a biting commentary on the state of politics, race, and the power of words to change the world. Like much of Alvarez's work, this poem is mimetic, based on an actual conference convened by Laura Bush entitled "Poetry and the American Voice." When Sam

Hamill recommended the invited poets send him anti-war poetry and statements opposing the invasion of Iraq, the February 12, 2003 conference was cancelled. Rather than listen to the collective expression of American voices as the conference's title clearly stated, the United States government silenced the poets' words. As is the case with much of Alvarez's work, though the reader may or may not have the factual data at hand when reading the poetic content, her many notes to the reader provide enlightenment. This is a poem which, had it been entirely fictitious, rather than based on actual occurrences, would be even more suggestive of the hawkish tendencies of the Bush White House.

"[a]fter the Secret Service got word of a plot / to fill Mrs. Bush's ears with anti-war verse." (3-4), [they disinvited the poets]. "Was she herself afraid / to be swayed [by sweet words of peaceful poetry:] by the cooing doves and live at odds / with the screaming hawks in her family?" (8-10). Rather than have a peaceable event filled with music and the colorful poetry of Langston Hughes, as the poem boldly announces, there will be "[n]o **Poetry Until Further Notice!" /** Instead, the rooms are vacuumed and set up / For closed door meetings to plan an attack (21-23).[9] The powerful words in this poem lance the color and educational barriers of the United States. The maids are Latina; the cook, Black; and "[w]hy, [oh why] does the White House Have to be so White?" (18).

The poet bitterly comments that those who bear the marks of suffering imposed by the White House attacks are "the ones who always bear the brunt of

[9] The bold font reflects the original typeset used by Alvarez.

silencing: the poor, the powerless" and "the ones bearing poems not arms" (25-26).[10]

Other clearly political poems are sonnets sixteen through eighteen in the lengthy unnumbered forty-six part sonnet "33" in *Homecoming.* Although the poems are separate, they are part of an interconnected series written when the author was thirty-three years old. The fifteenth sonnet serves as a segue into the sixteenth poem, and the first lines of the nineteenth note her parents' visit to Germany precisely on her thirty-third birthday, when she decries the cruelty inflicted at concentration camps. The fifteenth poem reads:

> Sometimes the love
> Of another wounded one acts like a salve
> Which soothes the dying self but cannot heal
> our lives. (10-13)

The sixteenth poem employs an acrostic displaying, from A to Z, man's inhumanity to man. Is the suffering of one man who dies under the A of Auschwitz a panacea for the starving in Biafra or the Falklands invasion or Idi Amin's Ugandan dictatorial oppression suffered by his people? No salve cures the wounds and deaths delimited by Alvarez. As she runs her fingers through her cherished alphabet—a tool used for beautification and creativity—not a letter escapes affliction and death. "What is left to spell?" (12), she asks as she uses "an X to mark the countless disappeared when they are dust in Yemen or Zaire" (13-14).

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[10] Extensive examination of literacy and education is conducted elsewhere in this dissertation.

The seventeenth sonnet once again juxtaposes the world's great music, writing, and plastic arts onto the suffering inflicted by man against his fellow men. The poet pits both Hiroshima and Vietnam's bombings against Handel's Messiah; a loudly recited Yeats poem against the death cry screams at Auschwitz and Dachau; and Rembrandt paintings against the killer Genghis Khan. Most resounding is the juxtaposition of two men who sang loudly of themselves: Walt Whitman, an incredibly creative, openly gay man, against the brutality of the egomaniacal Hitler, under whose reign the writer would most probably have perished. Alvarez warns to "never, no never, no matter the Homers, / never forgive them, never, never, never" (13-14).

The eighteenth sonnet questions forgiveness that we as humans should or should not grant to fellow humans, particularly in the cases of the concentration camps. After all, to forgive is human. As Alvarez aptly notes, "[l]ook closely at the evil of the race / in every case it wears a human face" (6-7). It is chilling to contemplate the ways in which we are reflections of those we harm. We are witnesses to their stories. Survivors collectively retain their own memories as well as the memories of the ones who looked just like them, but whom they killed. This segment of difficult poetry uses cherished arts to wipe man's cruelty against one another clean, much as Alvarez's mother rubbed her childhood signature and fingerprint creations off of their furniture in "Dusting," examined in a previous section of this dissertation. Creative arts are simply not enough to undo the brutality inflicted by a relative few powerful people on the majority of mankind.

A kinder play on letters in early Alvarez poetry, “Alphabet” in *JAR Writing Journal*, pictures the author pinning the tail on the Q and lighting her i’s, at a time when:

> my name was full of playmates-
>
> because at that time,
>
> at that size, it was very important
>
> to discover what was taking up space inside me. (13-18)

But the intimate friendship the young Alvarez shared with her letter friends is gone. No longer does she think:

> of the empty bowls
>
> In my childhood’s line of u’s,
>
> Or the little hovels of h’s
>
> Where the silent ones still suffer. (27-30)

She asks the ever-powerful alphabet to:

> Visit [the poor] [and] Let them know
>
> your words and what they stand for…
>
> Let your bread become their flour,
>
> Your house a real place to live in,
>
> Your shirt spread over their back. (52-58)

Celebrating the power of letters which is the mother of all of her thoughts, Alvarez is certain that they too can open up a world of opportunity for the oppressed. This alphabetic exploration is an exaltation of the power of words to transform the world. Although it recognizes the disenfranchised, it is a hopeful poem. Both this poem and

"No Poetry Until Further Notice!" are cognizant of the power of words to transform the world. "Alphabet" goes one step further in making it a better place to live.

CHAPTER THREE: TREE POEMS AND NARRATIVE: SETTING DOWN REAL AND FIGURATIVE ROOTS

Julia Alvarez's contemporary writings, like the poetry of the Romantics, embody the connection the poet can feel with nature and its liberating yet inspirational forces. Trees, like humans, symbolize beings existing between the heavens above and the underworld below. They are firmly rooted in the earth with outstretched branches reaching high and far. Like trees, which start out as small seeds, humans grow to populate the earth and effectuate good. Poets are also grounded on this earth, yet reach to the heavens for inspiration. Within nature itself, certain trees and groves are believed to be endowed with otherworldly presence, while some cultures view the tree as a natural combination of the male and female around which the cosmos is centered.

"Seven Trees," in *The Woman I Kept to Myself,* is an emblematic series of seven poems that urgently displays the author's desire for stability and permanence, a sense of rootedness, through the strength and agelessness of old, sturdy trees. Trees, as female symbols of robustness, sink their roots deep into Mother Earth and shoot upwards to the sky, branching out toward the heavens. Trees furthermore represent property ownership and a permanent homestead. It is such a stability that Julia Alvarez so deeply yearns for throughout her work as she weaves her way between two countries, two languages, and two cultures. Years spent crisscrossing the United States and the Dominican Republic in a variety of temporary jobs, rental homes, and failed romances lend impetus to Alvarez's desire to plant her roots

permanently and thrive like the long-standing trees. Later works show a peaceful acceptance of the United States as her home, with her formative Dominican homeland remaining as a major source of influence in her writing.

The incipient poem of this anthology, entitled "The Family Tree," provocatively calls the Tree of Knowledge and the Edenic Tree of Life to mind. The poem places Alvarez, the second of four daughters, on "a second bough," dangling from her mother's branch of a deeply rooted family tree within a lengthy family succession of Spanish and African heritages (2-5). It is a tree that she and her siblings have been "clipped off of" (21) as a result of her father's involvement in the assassination coup against Leonidas Trujillo and their ensuing need to flee the familiarity of their beloved Dominican homeland. Despite her independence in the U.S. during the hectic sixties, enjoying comparatively many freedoms, Alvarez is well aware that the family tree was merely "transplanted but not totally transformed" (27); the next generation of babies and her writings about her Dominican family reproduce semblances on the family tree from which the girls were displaced, but not entirely cut off.

The other six poems in this section have specific trees marking the author's writing life and establishment of a grounded life in the United States. The samán, oak, elm, maple, arborvitae, weeping willow, and locust trees each connote unique symbolism in accordance with literary and traditional historical significance. This section explores how these particular tree poems treat the poet's sense of permanence as she navigates the soils of her lands in order ultimately to sink real roots in the Vermont soil, where she settles with her American husband.

The flowering samán tree can reach hundreds of feet in height. It lives in warm tropics; the large food- and shade-producing tree evokes Alvarez's childhood memories of the Dominican Republic. This particular shade tree both allows the author to peek at the forbidden behind the family property line while shielding her family from the unsightly invasion of squatters and the military just beyond private family property (10-13). Sadly, on the poet's "last day of childhood," she was left looking from the tree onto the terrible political situation and ruin that had befallen the island.

The third poem, "Weeping Willow," bears a New York1960-1961 italicized dedication, reflective of the poet's incipient years in the United States. The poet equates her strong, stalwart father to the provocatively named, long-lived, stooped tree. As she watches her father cry, "bent over his chair, holding his sides…burying his grief in his handkerchief," Papi's stooped position elicits the same stooped configuration of the weeping tree: a weeping inspired by the safety this land provides, but mostly due to the loss of homeland. Willow tree bark and leaves contain acetylsalicylic acid (aspirin), a painkiller that it is implicitly hoped will alleviate Papi's anguish. More than connoting a simple analgesic, the willow tree symbolically encompasses magic, healing, inner vision, and dreams. One certainly hopes that the aspirations of Papi and his girls will come to fruition in their new homeland (Biederman 383).

The next poem, "Maple, Oak, or Elm?", is reflective of Alvarez's M.F.A. student years at Syracuse University from 1973-75. In it, she questions the love path her life has taken, as the poet admits, "what did I know of love but that I gave /

My body for the chance to play / the happy heroine of a love story?" (*The Woman I Kept to Myself* 9). The narrator questions her happiness and desire for a permanent love as she ponders her life's relationships as compared with these long-lived, imposing natural wonders; she calls upon the great sturdiness and long traditions diverse peoples have attached to the powers of ancient trees in her verse. The use of three relatively common deciduous trees in the Mid-Atlantic and New England states: maple, oak, and elm—calls into play their commonality, yet their deep-rooted traditional values in diverse cultures and religions as part of Alvarez's search for self. The maple tree symbolizes balance, promise, and practicality. The oak, the mightiest of trees, strength and courage (Karlsen). The firmly planted oak tree, a symbol of permanence and strength, was regarded by Socrates as an oracle with divine powers. Ancient Druids believed that, similar to the mighty willow's healing powers, the leaves of the oak tree contained healing power and had the capacity to renew strength. Lastly, the stability of marriage is also represented by oaks, which produce pairs of acorn offspring/mates. As such, the ancient Romans thought oak trees bore a connection with Jupiter and his wife Juno, the goddess of marriage.

The elm tree symbolizes strength of will and intuition, and is representative of the durability of life and resistance to life's feeble, weepy moments. The poet's emotional senses are called into question when one more relationship falls apart, leaving her profoundly bereft and in tears. Elm wood is valued for its resistance to splitting and to decay when wet. Even moist, it is a resilient wood: a solid material with which to build a home and a relationship. Alvarez shakes loose her tears and

ponders “where [she] was going by [her]self / after this heartbreak” (16-17). The sturdiness of the trees she lyrically esteems yet evades her.

The fifth poem in this series, entitled “Arborvitae,” literally translated from Latin, means “the tree of life.” Commonly known as evergreen trees, their English name evokes their durability, as in the poem the shrub-like plants “buffeted by the hard winds of the heartland” (30) outlast a tree disease which kills most of the deciduous plants. It also serves “as a tactful screen” to keep her away from the turmoil of her landlords’ relationship (19). The narrator moved to the heartland after her own divorce and endured the ensuing emotional pain. She, like the trees in line two, resists the winds of destruction and keeps on living. When the couple in the poem separates, she survives their upheaval and moves on, remaining robust like the arborvitae.

“The locust tree,” the subject of the appropriately named, hopeful sixth poem, “Locust,” is symbolic of eternal life. The poet expounds on her newfound love, rootedness, homestead, and life: “[h]appiness surprised me in middle age / Just in the nick of forty I found love, / a steady job, a publisher, a home” (1-3). In a superb example of life mimicking art, Alvarez and her husband plant elms, maples, oaks, and locust trees in which local fauna reproduce and prosper. The trees, too, sprout heartily, reaching toward the sky. Alvarez remarks, “[w]here did I get the idea / that art and happiness could never jive?” (22- 23). She has learned that, like trees that grow from seedlings into robust entities, “we have to live our natures out, the seed / we call our soul unfolds over the course / of a lifetime…” (27-29).

The final poem in this series, "Last Trees," calls forth the dark forest of Dante's *Inferno*. Rather than giving in to fear and darkness, the author races to the line of trees that has defined her then-forty years of existence. In typical fashion, the writer inverts the tree order established in the seven poems of this mini-anthology within *The Woman I Kept to Myself*, leaving the samán tree, the one which marks her original loss of country, as the final word in this section. The author takes possession of all of these roots as she writes and wriggles herself into the firmament of American soil. Alvarez's neatly designed poems, thirty lines each, connect the author to homeland soil; her narrative fiction also uses tree symbolism to outline family origins and connections to the greater world.

Alvarez uses many literary resources to root and connect herself to family and homeland, both linguistically and visually. The García Márquez-like family tree diagram at the commencement of *How the García Sisters Lost Their Accent*s displays pictorially the large intergenerational tree, which includes, like the García Márquez tree, a large number of illegitimate family members of the large García de la Torre clan on a family tree. Serving much the same purpose, although not designed as a family tree, a pictogram of the closely knit family compound in the novel *Before We Were Free* depicts a García sisters' cousin's experience in the Dominican Republic, as opposed to her cousins' collective New York transplantation that was a result of the Trujillo assassination. Designed in a child's hand, it represents the large family's close island, providing visual, extra-textual material portraying living quarters and resultant tight relationships, relationships explored throughout a variety of Alvarez's works. The blueprint-like drawing of the

García de la Torre compound, like the *García Girl* tree, visually permits the reader to better understand the intricate interfamilial connections from which Alvarez and her characters are cut off as they explore their new world in search of new roots. Yolanda García notes that "[t]he dozen or so rich families have intermarried so many times that family trees are a tangle of roots" (*García Girls* 14). Cut off from the extended family described verbally and illustratively in her work, Alvarez finds herself adrift in language and in search of a place to call "home." Alvarez remarks that she finds home on paper (reflecting Czeslaw Milosz's parenthetic quote "[l]anguage is the only homeland"); her remark appears on a page unto itself prior to the contents page in *Homecoming*. The story "The Cousin" in *¡YO!* critiques the author's rootlessness: "[a]nd looking at her, in her late thirties, knocking around the world without a husband, house, or children, I think, you are the haunted one who ended up living your life mostly on paper" (53). At that point in her life, unable to find the kind of roots that family and a steady partner would provide, the writer sought refuge in language and paper (ironically, a tree product). When she does marry, she and her husband build a home in Vermont where they plant many trees which, like her written words, thrive. Daisy Cocco de Filippis mentions, for many rootless Dominicans, writing becomes a way to mark one's place in history.[11]

In addition to several poems and references in novels, several of Julia Alvarez's essays in *Something to Declare* explore her relationship to the Vermont land and her rootedness in the state she calls home. In an essay entitled "A Vermont Writer from the Dominican Republic," Alvarez justifies claiming this cool-climate

[11] See this quote referenced elsewhere in this dissertation.

state as home because of its similarities, both as an agrarian culture and a close-knit community, to the Dominican Republic:

> In an age when everything seems malled in and part of a chain, Vermont is still a place connected to the land and its uses. In my part of the state, almost every town is bordered by working farms. This rural aspect of Vermont reminds me very much of the Dominican Republic, a country which is still primarily agricultural. (192-93)

In defense of claiming New England rootedness, Alvarez notes:

> If we add them up, I've lived in Vermont fourteen years. The longest I've lived anywhere. In fact, fourteen years is four years more than my first ten years in my native country. Surely that adds up to the fact that I am from Vermont, even if my roots are in the Dominican Republic. (191)

Moreover, she adds, "what makes me lay the deepest claim to Vermont as my home state is that this is where I've written most of my books" (*Declare* 191). These seemingly contradictory statements are typical of the boundary negotiations and hyphenated connections to both places the writer calls home. Despite the emotional ties that the above citations claim as connective fiber to both countries, Alvarez's connection to the Dominican island and Vermont are not merely sentimental, but actually have a direct connection to the soil.[12] As a means of belonging to both

[12] Many critics have discussed Alvarez's linguistic and sentimental connection to the Dominican Republic, but I am unaware of any studies revealing physical and monetary contributions to the people of her home island to show actual support of them, as outlined below.

lands, Alvarez invests both time and money in both of her countries. Much as she and her husband purchased Vermont land and planted trees, the couple invested in a coffee plantation in the Dominican Republic where the author watched the trees and the Dominican farmers flourish at the same time. *A Cafecito Story* is the novella about this venture which entwines the importance of a book education with the knowledge required by a savvy farmer. Unlike "Briefly, a Gardener" (discussed further on in this chapter), in which the protagonist is uncomfortable around unskilled labor, this novella demonstrates the reciprocity of the two types of skills being taught and learned to mutual benefit. As Joe, an American teacher, dialogues with the local coffee farmer Miguel, the simple yet wise *campesino* tells Joe the story of growing coffee and instructs him on farming techniques required to produce abundant and healthy land-sustaining crops. In return, Joe, whose name is evocative of one of Yolanda García's (*How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*) American nicknames, is by extension referential to the real-life English professor Julia Alvarez. As a male character from the American Midwestern farm country, it also refers to Alvarez's husband. The intertextuality of the names in the various genres of Alvarez's work creates a cross-referent for the reader of her multiple texts. Familiarity with the author's personal life, noted in interviews, reveals a striking similarity between the author, her farmer-doctor-husband, and her fictionalized characters. In real life, as in the novel, owning the 280-acre Dominican coffee farm physically ties Alvarez to her home terrain and joins the abovementioned land-tending skills of the *campesinos* of the Dominican Republic with her scholarly

strengths honed in the United States. The school on the Altagracia coffee plantation is the centerpiece of the farm. With education, the *campesinos* can take care of themselves, one another, and the land.

The mutual learning curves of Joe and Miguel create a bond while they nurture coffee trees. Miguel and his family recognize that "knowing one's letters and numbers" enhance their life quality and their chances of competing in a global economy:

> When their trees are a foot high, the family has struggled through a sentence. All of them can read a page by the time the trees reach up to Miguel's knees. When the coffee is as tall as little Miguelina, they have progressed to chapters. In three years, by the time of the first coffee harvest from trees Joe has planted, Miguel, Carmen and their children can read a whole book. (24-25)

When members of an oppressed class, receive a formal education, the literate can not only provide for themselves, but spread the prosperity to other members of their family and community. Feminist writing brings these issues to the forefront of world ethics through literature. Through their words, women influence politics and quality of life. Their efforts are more subtle and sustainable than the changing political influence wielded by their male counterparts ("Gender and Food Security"). Concern for the environmental and economic impact large coffee corporations have on the Dominican people and land has led some farmers to harness their efforts into organic cooperatives, just as the mimetic case presented in the novella demonstrates.

The worldly knowledge required by characters (both real and fictional) to create bountiful harvests, the capacity to recognize the harmful and beneficial flora and fauna in our midst, and the importance of naturally sustainable farming are qualities the learned Alvarez admires in the tender of land, but lacks herself. Admittedly, the book lover's interests are piqued to learn more about her husband's gardening passion and the needs of farmers in her native Dominican Republic. The illiterate yet knowledgeable Caribbean forest and land tenders retain a vast amount of undocumented information in their minds that has yet to be committed to paper for posterity. It is with aspirations of providing a formal education to the humble farmers in *A Cafecito Story* as well as to the main child character in "Víctor," a story about the Dominican rainforest (study to follow), that their knowledge can be preserved through written documentation for posterity. Alvarez's acquired appreciation for land preservation and sustainable farming, coupled with her desire to provide education enabling the *campesino*s to write down their orally-transmitted information for future generations, bring us full circle to the chapter on orality in this dissertation. If left unwritten, natural farming techniques and the multiple natural remedies available to safely heal people will be lost for generations. Should the land not be properly preserved, extinction of certain species is a risk, as is the destruction of natural resources. As Alvarez points out, should the *campesinos* remain uneducated, they will have no way of competing in this increasingly globalized economy, and no way of advising the increasingly modernized world about the destruction humans are causing in nature.

Although this particular perspective of Alvarez's literary corpus may seem a departure from the dualities presented in many of her writings, it is not at all. The promotion of education, both to college and specialized workshop students of varying levels in the United States and to her compatriots in the Dominican Republic, is not a departure at all. Saving the land is so important for Alvarez that it lies inextricably bound to education for all. *Saving the World* has, as part of its contemporary story line, the equally important goals of establishing a sustainable farm for the locals, maintaining their health, and promoting general education.

Land husbandry, or farming, is typically deemed a man's job; indeed, studies have shown that in Latin America there is a division of labor among farming households along gender lines. In certain cultures men perform the farming of plots whose crops are sold at market, while the women have "personal" plots on which they grow crops for home consumption ("Gender and Food Security"). They may also have hens or milk-bearing animals to further supplement the family diet and income. Studies have shown that most disposable female income goes toward the home and is family directed, thus allowing purchases of new clothing, furnishings, better food, and books, whereas most male income pays the bills. This separation of the public and the private resonates in Alvarez's writing. If only men involved in the farming industry are taught innovations, and only they are provided with education, important quality-of-life improvements are denied to women and their families. Thus, when formal education and cultivation techniques are taught by international agencies, women must also be included as productive, not merely reproductive, members of society. They, too, must be educated (*Girls' Education International*).

It is this break with tradition that concerns Alvarez and which she takes into careful consideration as she creates educated, adventurous female characters. As a Latina forging new roles for women and girls in English, she is making a doubly political statement through language and literacy. As the novella *A Cafecito Story* demonstrates, education of young women and girls directly affects the entire family system. It provides Miguelina, a young girl, with tools her parents lacked at her age, and with a future for which they could not previously have hoped for their daughter. Ecofeminism argues that women, like the similarly gendered Mother Earth, better understand reproductive cycles and are therefore more in tune with nurturing the land. Nonetheless, the most land-savvy protagonists in the following works by Julia Alvarez are male.

Through "Briefly, a Gardener," *A Cafecito Story*, "Víctor," and her novel *Before We Were Free*, Alvarez attempts to share her male protagonists' "dirty" manual labor jobs. Only the first work, which has the writer's husband as its protagonist, does not question or comment upon the character's literacy level. Similar to Víctor, who does not know his age, Monsito, the small boy who helps Anita's family in *Before We Were Free* negotiate the open-air market, lacks the formal education which would allow him to advance. Anita's father comments, "[e]ducation is the key! Who knows if one of these little *tigueritos* in the *mercado* isn't an Einstein or a Michelangelo or maybe even a Cervantes!" (6). This comment underscores the educational status of the poor and the disparity in educational achievement between the socioeconomic strata in that country; it emphasizes the need for more formal education for all Dominicans. Perhaps if these children could

study instead of work, they too could have successful careers. A similar commentary on education for the poor in *Butterflies* refers to a young girl: "[s]he looks at me not understanding. So she doesn't know directions…. She shrugs. I make a mental note that once I'm back, I'm going to make sure these girls are enrolled in school" (105). She continues, "you know as well as I do that without schooling women have even fewer choices open to us" (105); thus emphasizing the aforementioned points regarding her insistence on education as a tool for improving lives.

The story "Víctor" in *Off the Beaten Path: Stories of Place*, is another lucid example of the distinction between formal and practical knowledge in Alvarez's literary corpus. This account sees a young illiterate boy instructively guide the author-visitor to the Dominican rainforest, a jewel whose natural beauty and treasure Alvarez wishes to preserve in her writing. However, this story presents a case where experience rather than book knowledge is key to survival. This character depicts a jungle-savvy, not street-savvy, illiterate character whose familiarity with the flora and fauna of the Dominican jungle ultimately trumps the educational enthusiasm of the skinny professor whom he toured around the untamed land. Víctor serves as the author's principal information source as he guides her through Dominican National Park. He verbally and manually points out the natural treasures of the Dominican national park, while the excited professor, absorbed in her academic world and often oblivious to the wonders surrounding her, constantly jots things down in her notebook. Víctor shows her a red-eyed bobo: "'look,' he points, "' bobo!'" "'Bo-bo,'" the lady says slowly, writing it down in her little book." She

turns around, but is not quick enough, and the bobo disappears into the dark green curtain of the rain forest (244). Again paying more attention to jotting things down in her book than to the practical information her guide provides, the visitor exclaims, "'[w]ow! Look at that flower!'" The lady points. 'That's a *campana*,' Víctor explains. Careful when you touch it. Wasps love to build in its leaves'" (244). Disregarding the warnings of her young guide, the lady for whom the jungle is a place of wonderment, not a place which follows her orderly scholastic notes, does a little self-exploration, and goes down an overgrown path filled with *campana*s—and masses of wasps. Víctor rushes from behind and snaps off a branch from a nearby guayuyo tree, swatting the bee-repellent branch in the air. He pulls her into the river to escape the self-provoked danger.

Much real information tied to the Dominican rain forest remains orally transmitted. The sagacity and worldliness of the illiterate and semi-literate who function quite well in their world without the benefit of a formal education become evident to the reader. However, like *La Muda* in *Finding Miracles*, if someone does not document the oral lore and in this particular circumstance, usages of nature's flora and fauna before it is destroyed, the medicinal cures and descriptions of many plants will be forever lost to mankind.

The visitor's inability to divorce herself from the teacher-author she is in order to enjoy the countryside without parsing into instructional mode comes through in this story. She is concerned that despite all of his worldly knowledge, her guide is unable to answer simple questions such as the month, his age, how to spell his name, or how to count. During her brief visit to the park, the protagonist tries to

teach her guide these seemingly simple tasks, and he tries to please his teacher-visitor.

During the wasp incident, the professor's notebook, useless in this situation, falls to the ground. Víctor's keen knowledge of his natural habitat, something unknown to the visitor, has him search for leaves of *bejuco de gato* to ease the pain and *oreja de burro* to keep the swelling of her stings down. His father and Don Bernardo, the elders who pass their knowledge of the forest to this humble lad, put *guayuyo* leaves on their arms and faces to keep away the wasps (248). These natural preventions and cures are well known by the less formally educated jungle dwellers whose common sense and judgment permit their daily survival. As if to bear out that Víctor's "unteachable," unwritten information is invaluable, and the reams of written information that can be widely transmitted may or may not be as useful, the story closes with the young guide retrieving the notebook. Trumped by the unwritten, the author pens this story.

Despite her dismay at the poor literacy level of so many of her Dominican compatriots, Alvarez's unabashed respect for the protectors of our earth's natural resources and for agricultural workers starts at home, with her husband. She cannot hide her admiration for him: "[h]e knows about real life, real things, real tomatoes and cucumbers that we can really eat. All I know can be fit between the covers of a book, and it won't feed the hungry or fill the kitchens of the poor" ("Briefly a Gardener" 88). Since Alvarez wishes to better understand and share in her husband's passion for real-life, as opposed to bookish, productivity, she asks that he

provide her with a small manageable gardening task that she cannot "destroy with her ignorance" ("Briefly" 88).

The idea for a small manageable herb garden arose. True to her erudite self, Alvarez selects a series of sonorous herbal names to fill her patch of land. Many of the herbs would have flourished in the warm tropics of the Dominican Republic, but none are hearty enough to survive the harsh Vermont weather. Alvarez readily admits "that she shares in the arrogance of the bookish who believe farmers don't have to be very smart. Nature tells them what to do."(Briefly" 89) Her husband completes the selection and planting process, a task she has already failed.

Shortly after the initial planting, weeds take root in the author's ill-tended garden. To her husband's mirth, she insists that a beautiful weed must simply be a plant she forgot to jot down in her notebook. Only the neatly written journal remains as an indication of the writer's intent to capture a piece of the agricultural world: "[e]verything is running into everything else. But my journal is a jewel of thorough record-keeping and naming" ("Briefly" 92).

Alvarez is confident in her literary world, yet ill at ease in practical situations where book knowledge serves little purpose. As a Western-educated woman, she is too far removed from the *campesinos* of her own humble country to have ecofeminism touch her naturally, though she senses the need to care for Mother Earth and respect nature.

The next two works show how globalization, human interdependence and a common purpose in protecting our earth connect people of all walks of life in all nations. Modern farming techniques have resulted in enormous productivity gains,

but massive terrain destruction has sometimes necessitated a return to humble farming techniques in an attempt to heal the earth and better feed the people. Once again, the tenets of ecofeminism come into play. Those with little access to technology, like women and the poor, are closer to the earth and understand it better. They balance the needs of nature with their own. The tenets of ecofeminism propose an intimate, innate relationship between women, land, family rearing, and vigilance of the oppressed: women, children, people of color, and those with minimal access to the mainstream power structure. Thus, the entirety of a poor *campesino* family falls neatly under this rubric. In fact, some critics remark that any violence against children, women, and disenfranchised men falls within the feminist realm to correct.[13] This unique woman-land-power relationship is attributed to women's understanding of reproduction and nurturing, tasks undertaken to tend to crops, animals, and humans alike. Despite this dynamic, women are traditionally positioned as inferior to men. They are typically paid less and are less well-instructed in almost all societies than their male counterparts. If the nurturing mother is not as well-educated and well-paid as her male counterpart, how can she assist her children in doing their homework, or provide a financial comfort level at which they do not need to work, but can instead attend class? Improved education and living standards for women in turn improve the lot of their children.

Unlike in "Briefly, a Gardener," where there is a clear division of labor with the male successfully performing manual labor tasks and the female educator failing

[13] This idea recalls those posed by Clorinda Matto de Turner and Rosario Castellanos in their indigenous texts.

at her attempt to enter the male-dominated field, Alvarez herself completes only the more pensive act of writing. Empowered by a collective voice as Miguel's and Joe's idea spreads, other farmers also learn to read while joining their manpower. They can read contracts and argue for better prices without the need for an outside scholar to help them decipher terms and conditions. Miguelina, representative of the next generation of *campesino/as*, no longer makes a zero when asked to spell her name (*Cafecito Story* 25). It is this emphasis on literacy, noted throughout Alvarez's entire literary corpus, which Alvarez, a feminist and advocate for education, emphasizes as important to the advancement of young women and *campesinos.* Julia Alvarez's push for education in the more remote parts of the Dominican Republic can only empower the men, women, and children who currently have none of that access. Through literacy, a must for daily survival and success, they will gain a more even footing with those in positions of authority and will influence their own destinies. Without it, they will remain picturesque representations of the underclass. As the cycle of illiteracy is broken, victimization of the oppressed, particularly young women in Latin America, will cease.

Although Alvarez selects the Dominican Republic as the locale for this work, the need for education of the poor and women is universal. A reference to the unschooled *campesino*'s dependence on the literate Yo to assure that they are not being taken advantage of is made by one of the beaus in the story "The Wedding Guests" in *¡YO!.* The narrator remarks, "[t]he villagers kept saying that before they signed any papers accepting our contributions…they wanted to wait for the arrival of this person named Yolanda García." She told them, "[t]hat yes, it was safe, and

they could go ahead and sign their X's on the dotted line" (222). Precisely this illiteracy makes the author believe that the poor are poorer for being unable to conduct their affairs without outside intervention. In an ironic twist in the same "Wedding Guest" story, the maid's daughter, raised in utter poverty in the Dominican countryside, comments on the fine education she went on to receive in the United States. She eventually becomes a doctor. Her unconflicted upbringing and straight line to success lies in contrast to the privilege and confusion of the García girls whose upbringing in both countries had given them the advantages of a first-rate education. She is a fine example of how, when provided with an education, women—in this case, a servant's daughter uprooted from the backwaters of the Dominican Republic—can succeed. This is the goal of feminist criticism: to show the empowerment education provides to women.

Education as an essential part of living is also part of *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Every day, inmates from uneducated prostitutes to political prisoners attend a "little school" where they dedicate a certain amount of time to study. By the time the Mirabals are released, the previously illiterate inmates are able to sign Maté's journal. The power of the pen is literally recognizable in this novel.

The multiple metatextuality and intertextual references in Alvarez's corpus are once again evident when a sustainable farm like the one depicted in *A Cafecito Story* is portrayed in *Saving the World.* It too has the real-life backdrop of a sustainable farm to provide income, jobs to the locals, and naturally grown and supported foodstuffs. Once again, art mimics life: the protagonist's farmer husband was selected to head up a farm in the central mountains of the Dominican Republic:

"[i]t's totally off the grid…. No electricity. Solar panels and wind power" (*Saving the World* 51). The need for basic education and jobs, similar to the educational need noted in the above novella, are the main reason for the catastrophic occurrence that marks the downfall of a potentially successful medical program. The need for AIDS education and basic literacy and math skills is evident throughout the plot of the second of two interconnected, simultaneous narratives contained within this text. Unlike most of Alvarez's "happy ending" narratives, particularly *A Cafecito Story* which so strongly mirrors the Alma Rodríguez, contemporary portion of *Saving the World*, this novel ends disastrously, in spite of the hopes, good will and best intentions to provide education and jobs for the poor locals. One Dominican official points out, "these people, they have no electricity, no schools, no medicines…But they come down to the barras with the cable TV" (223). Drugs, alcohol, and sex become a panacea and a scourge for the poverty-stricken population. Richard surmises, "I guess there's a lot of HIV in the country because of sexual tourism" (92). The remedy for many of these evils was to be offset by the clinic with its eco-friendly sustainable farm, jobs and free medicine to the locals ("Gender and Food Security"). The overpowering sense of injustice at having foreign drug testing and ill people in their midst, coupled with a lack of basic education, precipitates the clinic being overrun and ultimately destroyed by a band of mostly illiterate, angry local men. Reflective of the author's own diglossic style, Mayor Don Jacobo comments in Spanglish to Alma, "El problema is these jóvenes, they can't get jobs, but they can get sick, that is what they worry about. La señorita Starr explained …that they can't get AIDS just because the clinic is here…" (239). As evidence of

the pervasive illiteracy in the town and the great need for education of all types to improve the lot of the townspeople, the mayor admits to Alma, "I am a bruto who never learned letters, but I believe her. La señorita Starr leaves, the money she gives them to help their families until the work starts, they spend it all, and they start fooling with drogas, talking to other elements" (239). The role of education, personified by Alma and studied by governmental agencies cited herein, is critical to unveiling possibilities for the villagers by replacing vices with opportunities.

Assuming the pseudonym of Isabel when things become precarious on the Swan Drug compound, the bilingual/bicultural Alma transfuses her more sedentary academic writer role with that of active interfacing journalist. In so doing, "she feels as if another woman inside her is leading her forward" (243). Alma creates a superhuman self, much as the meek Clark Kent becomes Superman. As the newswoman "Isabel," Alma transmits the demands of the young men to the representatives of both the American drug company and the countries' governments. She actively becomes involved with the men from the *campo,* but not in the "green" sense she thought of sharing with her husband. Alma/Isabel becomes involved in a familiar role: that of writer-instructor—a feminist activist. As a minority writer once again in her native country, she is able to see the injustices visited upon the poorer residents. In this role, she uses letters to try to achieve a peaceful end to a deadly standoff. As an educator, Alma is aware that the group's leader "is the only one who can read, check the time on a clock with hands, check that what Alma writes down is, word for word, their demands" (281). As if emphasizing the extreme illiteracy of this town, Alma remembers, Richard saying "[h]e was glad he brought down digital

watches because nobody knew how to tell time on a clock with hands" (*Saving* 280-281). By writing out the demands of the group, she becomes the literary emissary. Although this is far from testimonial text, the voice of the subordinate class speaks through Alma/Isabel's writing.

When pressed by an uneducated hostage-taker about his fate, she puts on her teacher hat, and like in *A Cafecito Story*, encourages education: "[y]ou might get a better deal if you surrender, use your time of punishment to study, go to school when you get out." She wishes he could read, for "she'd give him the biography of Malcolm X, explain how this black guy at the bottom of the heap, memorized the dictionary in prison, became a great leader (*Saving* 291). She encourages, "[y] ou can become a lawyer, a doctor. There are all kinds of organizations that give money…. Once you can read and write, many doors will open" (292). Nonetheless, she knows this will never occur. Too much has transpired. Typical of the literacy theme that runs throughout many of Alvarez's works, education is key. Illiteracy leaves one with few choices. Education and science, the fortes of the real-life Julia Alvarez and her doctor-husband, are at the forefront of this parallel story line in contemporary times. The characters Alma and Richard are fictional representations of the real people, the parallels difficult for the reader to ignore.[14] Recognizing a metatextual reference to Alvarez and her husband's real-life coffee plantation, and to the novella, *A Cafecito Story,* are similarly inevitable to the consistent Alvarez

[14] Again, much of Alvarez's AIDS storyline is based on many research projects presently ongoing in several parts of the world, including the Dominican Republic.

reader.[15] This reader's understanding of the textual matter draws a connection between the two seemingly disparate literary works by the same author.

The 1800s Balmis mission and the twenty-first century attempt to cure another disease similarly are juxtaposed by the author, who places their stories of female strength, healing and literacy at the forefront. In transforming Alma into an Isabel (yet another onomastic transformation and renaming), Alvarez makes a political statement by giving a modern day woman the character of a much stronger, risk-taking woman of another era at a time when good women were strictly caretakers, mothers or nuns. Isabel is inscribed in a female caretaking role of twenty-two orphan boys, and is adoptive mother to the one named Benito; however, by imbuing her with the fortitude to embark on a perilous, three-year journey around the world, surrounded by male doctors, sailors, and male children, this woman is arguably the strongest character in the entire novel. Alvarez does not place this character outside of societally expected norms. Yet, Isabel is a highly educated woman, capable of reading and writing, a rarity for the day. Isabel's diary chronicles the expedition: "I, Isabel Sendales y Gómez, mean to keep this record of our crossing. Perhaps in a future I cannot yet imagine for myself, I will have to look back upon and collect these nightmare days at sea in the sunny light of memory" (*Saving* 145). And chronicle she does, in the private sphere of diary documentation, as if creating paintings with subtitles as the ship enters and exits ports en route.

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[15] I use this term from Kristeva's concept of intertextuality that states the reader, author and the text are connected to a a text, and that text to the larger body of existing texts.

Throughout the Isabel portion of the novel, a series of verbal portraits are painted by the author, forcing the reader to use her full senses to grasp the magnitude of the journey. These paintings or mental musings of the character are displayed with a variety of distinct fonts to demonstrate the intellectual woman's whimsical yet important documentary views of the world traversed:

> *VENEZUELA-LAST NIGHT IN CARACAS*: a much lighter scene. The great hall filled with guests, ladies and gentlemen lined up for a quadrille. So many bright happy faces. And yet, at the edges of the party one lady has a face covered with—are they scars or letters? How dreadful that she should be so disfigured. We yearn for the artist to provide us with an explanation. (247)

This quotation not only is a reference to paintings and the subtext which explains them, but is also a reminder of the pox that affected Isabel herself as well as people from all walks of life. The beautiful woman is also a mirror-image of the beautiful Isabel character, who at the outset of the novel veils her pock-marked face to hide the scarring. Through her travels, Isabel becomes an adventurous dreamer who paratextually notes, "[w]e have been saved by those who are now enjoying this grand celebration in their honor. We became whole again in Caracas" (247). [16]The Caracas ball not only justifies the sacrifices of Isabel and her boys, but provides her with renewed self-confidence. It is as if seeing other beautiful women (doubles of herself) free to enjoy society, despite affliction with the pox that similarly affected

[16] Paratext generally refers to information which frames the text.

her, allows another part of her self to come out and explore the possibilities the Americas present her with.

It is the confidence and adventurous spirit in Isabel that infuses the flailing Alma's life with courage and daring. As Isabel is made whole again, the strengths she regains pass from her to Alma, providing the modern day protagonist with renewed vigor and hope for her situation. In fact, as Alma steps onto her husband's Dominican compound, "she feels another woman inside her is leading her forward, the woman she once saw out of the corner of her eye, whom she has identified as Isabel because sometimes a story can take over your life" (*Saving* 243). Sometimes that story can save your life.

Isabel's story about the small pox mission is the kernel of women's strength to which Alma and the AIDS mission is subordinated.[17] Similarly, it is Isabel to whom the meeker Alma's daring is compared and whose life is infused by her historic predecessor. The fractured Isabel character, like a broken mirror, whose last name is repeated with a variety of similitudes, is made whole through the correct use of her first name and through the adventures which her travels to the open Americas have exposed her**.** The possibilities the Balmis voyage open to Isabel are of both a personal and professional nature. Still single and nearing the end of her journey, Isabel is asked by Lieutenant Pozo: "'[w]hat are your plans?'" Despite many years of thinking she did not deserve love, Isabel takes great comfort in the

[17] Although some critics may disagree with my ordering of the two stories, it is Isabel's story which takes over Alma's life (*Saving the World* 243).

proposal. Isabel, like Alvarez, finds love late in life; further, she too finds open spaces and opportunities in a new land. Isabel comments:

> I was infected with America. There was a brassy, open, unfinished feel to these territories that invigorated me…. Every place we visited there was talk of new ideas, the rights of human beings. The poor, the powerless, the enslaved were rising up and demanding the[ir] rights…. My boys stood a better chance here, peninsulares, with every advantage (*Saving* 259).

Isabel also believes that "[w]e are saved not because we are worthy, we are saved because we are loved" (260). This seemingly simple line refers not only to Isabel and all of her boys, but to the world at large, saved from illness and disease. The advantages the transplanted boys enjoy in the Americas bears a striking resemblance to the advantages of the García girls, the maid's daughter, and Lucinda, the García cousin, as addressed in other parts of this dissertation. They are free to roam open spaces in a non-restricted way and are provided opportunities they would otherwise not have. Although the García family relations are women whose freedoms are able to be expressed in the United States, and their coming into adulthood was in a more liberal atmosphere than that of the machista Dominican Republic and Isabel's orphan charges are male, the orphan boys similarly would not have had the advantages of education in a country that affords them many possibilities had they stayed in their native Spain. They would have remained members of an underclass, wards of the state. Therefore, although both sets of youngsters, male and female, departed their home countries unwillingly, they

unsuspectingly found better opportunities in their adoptive lands.

CHAPTER FOUR: SELF-REFERENTIALITY IN THE POETIC AND NARRATIVE WORKS OF JULIA ALVAREZ

About the personal and biographical nature of stories, Alvarez states, "[w]e need to tell, and we want to know (don't we?) the secret heart of each other's lives. Perhaps this is why we love good novels and poems—because without shame or without encountering defensiveness or embarrassment, we can enter the intimate lives of other people" (*Something to Declare* 278). This eloquent yet simple statement ignores the complex structural arrangement of Alvarez's works, stories which often mirror her own life through literate, transnational characters like herself. Alternatively, they are strong female protagonists searching for a connection to the larger world while seeking to unify the self. In Yet other cases, the characters in a variety of works reappear, clearly calling their character's representation and the larger text it is found in to mind to the reader.[18]

The interconnected nature of the entirety of Alvarez's works functions as a large hypertextual writing corpus. Even though each book is a complete entity unto itself, transmitted in narrative, poetic, or storytelling format, each work is connected to another through metatextual references, parenthetic paratext, symbolism, and

[18] Otto Rank's classic *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* extensively studies the significance of mirror imaging, ego-cleavage, and ghosting of the soul in European writing. The theme of the double is also prevalent in many of the great Hispanic "Boom" writers such as Borges, Cortázar, and Carpentier. Alvarez and many other Latina writers examine the double in a more contemporary era in the United States where the rupture generally arises from belonging to two cultures with two distinct languages and value systems.

recurrence of themes and characters. [19]Rocío Davis employs the term "short story cycle" as a structural scheme for the working out of an idea, characters, or themes. She notes that the challenge of each cycle is twofold: the collection must assert the individuality and independence of each of the component parts while creating necessary interdependence that emphasizes the wholeness and unity of the work (Davis 65-66). In Alvarez's case, each story, poem, or parallel story within a novel is a complete narrative or lyric unto itself. Yet the multiple stories and poems in a work, and across works, talk to each other as protagonists, step over literary boundary lines to enter into other tales within one and the same text. In yet other Alvarez publications, the characters remain on their printed pages while across additional texts they reappear in different circumstances, albeit recalling their individual tales and relationship with the author-storyteller. The transnational boundary-crossing characters fuse together distinct stories in diverse genres. Much

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[19] Kristeva's notion of intertextuality quoted in Jonathan Culler's *Presupposition and Intertextuality* emphasizes that to read is to place a work in a discursive space relating it to other texts and to the codes of that space.(1382) Particularly germane to Alvarez's code switching style and that of the Latino population, he adds, "the relationship between a text and the languages or discursive practices of a culture and its relationship to those particular texts...articulate that culture and its possibilities." (1383) *Metatextuality* refers to a text or passage of one work which is found within another, which similarly inter-relates the writings inside a hierarchy of levels. My use of this term is loosely based on Genette's notion of *metadiegesis*, as it was articulated in his well-known book *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method* (1980, Cornell University Press). My use of the term paratext, which generally refers to information which frames the text, is based on Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997, Cambridge University Press). *Paratexts* are devices and conventions, within and outside of the book, that mediate the relationship between the book, author, publisher and reader. These are tools which Alvarez uses liberally throughout her writings.

The term *hypertext* comes from the modern cybernetic world of the World Wide Web, where links connect multiple sites and ideas.

like the two protagonists in *Saving the World* merge their lives and minds, the kaleidoscopic multiples of Yolanda seek unity in recombining their multiplicity into the only "I" of this novel, *¡YO!*. Mirror imaging, the existence of parallel stories within a work, and the various readings these give way to, are reminiscent of the döppelganger in Boom writers such as Borges and Cortázar.

Unlike *Rayuela*, where the author provides two sets of reading instructions which may or may not be followed in accordance with the reader's desire, the paratext in Alvarez's work is meant to guide and further instruct the reader by providing additional information to her.[20] Her notes similarly address the reader in direct format, but unlike *Rayuela*, where "the same meaning can be obtained no matter how you read the novel," Alvarez's texts are linear, and are meant to be read in a traditional Western fashion. Although she may recount a story in reverse order, in an experimental fashion of sorts, there is a cohesiveness from one chapter to another within the same book that needs to be followed. The table of contents, diagrams, font changes in tables and text, dedications, and other authorial information are meant as instructive texts to guide the reader. The reader may not, as in *Rayuela*, simply jump about the text to fully "get it." Nevertheless, if the writer is dead and the reader is in control of the text, as Roland Barthes claims, she may elect to ignore some, or all, of the paratext. By doing so, the reader risks losing a

[20] Cortázar tells the reader that he may read the novel from chapters one through ninety-nine, or he may follow an alternate set of instructions. The hypertextual reading of Alvarez's works is not guided by a firm set of instructions, but by the reader herself who notes recurring characters and themes within one text and enjoins them to other sections; otherwise, she may go across texts and genres when she notes the reappearance of characters and themes.

certain amount of information. In these creative texts, the reader's active participation—in looking at pictures and tables; noticing font differences; reading across texts (as discussed above); and traditional textual reading— provides the fullest meaning to her. A text-by-text analysis of the clear divisions Alvarez draws in her work follows.

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents includes a title page, a dedication page followed by a family tree diagram, and a contents page dividing the novel into three Roman numeral-captioned sections. It is only after all of the preliminary paratext that the novel commences. Each of these three sections contains five stories, with only one story title in each section indicating the "foreignness" proposed in the novel. Roman numeral I begins with *Antojos*, a term (explained within the novel) to describe a food craving. When the protagonist, Yolanda, asks, "'[w]hat's an *antojo*?,'" the response is, "'An *antojo* is like something you have to eat'" (9). Alternatively, this term is understood to indicate a man's carnal appetite. The García girls' coming of age in the liberated United States during the 1960s is juxtaposed with the *machista* Dominican society in later chapters of the novel. This very specific term, with no exact English equivalent, is the name of the very first story in *García Girls*. Yolanda's return to the Dominican Republic awakens a craving for guavas. Much like she would do in the United States if she were apple picking, Yolanda sets off by herself to find the fleshy fruit, only to be reminded that island customs do not permit females to wander off alone.

The second story in Part II, "*Daughter of Invention*," marks Mami's much-noted malapropisms in English, and the foreign feel of the English language on her

tongue. By the same token, it is in this story, finally integrating into the United States, that she permits herself inventiveness and creativity: "Laura did not want to go back to the old country where…she was only a wife and a mother" (143). It is also in this chapter that Yolanda discovers Walt Whitman and learns, along with her mother, to "celebrate herself. (142)"

Part III begins with "Blood of the Conquistadores." As a recognizable cognate of the English word conquistadors, this term is familiar to the American reader. The game "the conquistadors" that Papi plays with his four girls traces their roots back to the original Spanish conquerors. While these roots are being traced back to Europe, this particular chapter sees the García family venture forward in another "New World" in the United States. Located in the last section of the novel, this story details the Garcías' urgent escape to the United States. These three uniquely-worded story titles and the events related therein are illustrative of the progressive acculturation the García family endured through fifteen chapters of Americanization.

The novel *¡YO!* is similarly divided into three parts of five stories, a dedication page, and a contents page. The more calligraphic design of this text, with its handwritten letter styling to demarcate the sections of the text, as well as the differential size and bolding of the divisory markings, visually break the novel into sections. The title of each story indicates the narrator, who talks about Yo from a unique vantage point. Each character has an additional literary term next to it, in a different font which prepares the reader for the type of story and content contained therein. Roland Barthes comments in *Image-Music-Text* that "a discourse is a long

sentence, the units of which are not necessarily sentences" (83). Precisely these non-sentence sentences, composed of the diverse elements indicated, serve to provide the reader with plentiful sentential information. It is through this artificial language of discourse in *¡YO!* that a secondary system of language is set forth for the reader to unravel in the novel. There are diverse points of view employed in the sixteen stories told in the novel; it is divided into four sections and a prologue related by Mami about fiction, which sets the tone for the entire novel. Three other Roman numeral-captioned parts consisting of five stories each, fractured parts of the "yo" presumably not shared with the other storytellers prior to this recounting, are presented to the reader. Not even the intimate storytellers of these narratives are entirely familiar with the concepts the other narrators have of Yolanda. Part I's five stories each contain a subtitle relevant to the literary genre: nonfiction, poetry, report, romance, and the epistle to which each story belongs, next to the narrator's label. Part II's revelation, motivation, confrontation, variation, and resolution are all parts of a plot, techniques employed by the writer to flesh out her work. As if setting the scene for a real story line, revelation, indicating a plot line, commences the chapter; confrontation comes midway through the plot; and the resolution, which completes this section as it would the plot of any narrative, is the last of the five stories in this section. Part III's point of view, setting, characterization, and conclusion are all moods and angles the storyteller employs to relate her story. Thus the apparently simplistic series of tales related about Yolanda García by family members, caretakers, and others are told in a selected sequential order which, when collectively read, provide the reader a fuller picture of the "I" this book is about.

Otto Rank comments that "el doble surge como una operación de transferencia en la que están en juego muchas cosas que contribuyen a hacer más completo este motivo: el deseo de la perpetuidad, una manifestación de raigambre narcisista, la exhaltación del yo y, a la vez, su pérdida de estabilidad (qtd. in Rabí do Carmo 171). However, in this novel, "[e]sta vez no hay búsqueda de dobles; hay mas bien, la búsqueda de correspondencia, el deseo de recuperar una unidad originaria, un lugar estable en el mundo, el lugar de la enunciación (Rank, qtd. in Rabí do Carmo 176). This enunciation is the two-letter, emphatic title of the novel ¡*YO*! whose protagonist seeks wholeness in this book. The linear reading of each narrative when vertically integrated with the many other stories in each individual, and later all three sections of the novel, allow for a rejoinder of the pieces of Yo's image.

Yolanda García, a hyphenated Dominican-American, seeks unity. More than just a mirrored "Yo," she is a fractured Yo with multiple facets exposed by each of the tale-tellers of this short story cycle. Laura beat Yolanda for telling stories that could have put the family in danger in *García Girls*. This stops the verbose Yolanda's oral tale-telling, and she begins transferring her words onto paper. In a hypertextual leap, Mami terminates her early chapter on "non-fiction" in *¡YO!* when she informs the reader that "people only know the parts we want to tell about ourselves." Perhaps this is why we fictionalize the truth, or why the reader learns only though Mami's revelation about the beating and the impetus behind Alvarez's writing. In the concluding chapter of this same book of interconnected stories, Papi gives Yolanda's voice back. He reverses the hex on silence Mami placed with a belt years ago and grants the storyteller permission to create: "[m]y grandchildren and

great grandchildren will not know the way back unless they have a story. Tell them of our journey. Tell them the secret heart of your father and undo the old wrong. My Yo, embrace your *destino*. You have my blessing, pass it on" *(¡YO!* 309).

In The Name of Salomé, like the two above structured novels, is similarly divided into sections. Unlike the more autobiographical fictions described above, which testimonialize a coming-of-age and the life of a contemporary Dominican-American woman, this novel is dedicated to *La Musa de la Patria*, Salomé Ureña de Henríquez. Her poems are precisely the chapter titles assigned by Julia Alvarez to each chapter of the novel, with Salomé's in Spanish and italics, and the chapters corresponding to Camila in standard print, in English. Not only the clear parallelism, but also the circularity of the text is foreshadowed in the neatly designed table of contents. The work is divided into two parts, Roman numerals "I" and "II," equally dividing the novel into two sections of four chapters each, with an additional prologue or epilogue per segment. Each chapter title in "I" correlates to its translated equivalent in section "II." While the two women's tales are being told, each in linear fashion, the table of contents indicates a comparable titular translation, circularity, and closure.

Chapters one and eight, two and seven, three and six, and four and five linguistically mirror each other. In fact, if the contents page were folded upon itself, an exact Spanish-English translation would be juxtaposed upon the similarly named opposing chapter. Even the manner in which the tales of these women are recounted is in inverse order. Unlike her mother's ab ovo story, Camila's tale begins *in medias res*. Her story commences with the prologue, entitled "Departing Poughkeepsie,"

upon retirement in June of 1960, and is related in chronologically inverse order to the book's epilogue, entitled "Arriving Santo Domingo" in September of 1973.

Julia Alvarez's contemporary fictional works, based largely on either personal *testimonio* or actual Dominican historical figures, are highly informative texts written to a great extent as first-person narratives. Her instructive texts invite the reader into her unique Dominican-American world. Encased in a fictional cover, the socio-historical information the author delivers in her uncomplicated, quotidian vocabulary provides a wealth of data about real, lived experiences and people of whom most readers would be unaware had these stories not been either fictionalized or related in a poetic format by the writer.

In the Name of Salomé is a historical novel based on the intertwined lives yet distinct life paths of the Dominican poet Salomé Henríquez de Ureña and her daughter Camila. Their separate but interwoven life histories are related in chapters captioned with some of the more famous lines of the real Salomé's poetic corpus. Certain that she wanted Camila to be an independent soul, Salomé says, "I did not want my daughter to carry my name. I wanted her to have her own name, to be loose up and away from the life that was closing down around me" (*Salomé* 299). Thus, she names her only female heir after Camila in Florian's *Numa Pompilius*. This extraordinary, unfettered woman could walk on wheat without bending a stalk or on water without wetting her feet. However, when brother Pedro was asked "'[w]hat shall we name her Pibín?'" he responded "'Salomé'"(299). Thus the mythical name of the wandering Camila was enjoined to Salomé's and the Dominican *patria* for eternity: Salomé Camila.

Despite Salomé's desire to free Camila, who lived most of her life in the United States and Cuba rather than in the Dominican Republic, removed from the political upheaval of the nascent country, the eight chapters of the novel *In the Name of Salomé* each consist of two subchapters of intertwining yet separate plots which treat the biographical lives and the similar professional choices (teaching and writing) of the co-protagonists. The first set of chapters, noted in Spanish and in italics, chronologically recounts the life of Salomé *ab ovo* from 1856 to 1894. Each of these eight chapters principally relate, in first person, the life, personal struggles and development of the poet/ teacher Salomé.

Parallel to each of Salome's chapters is one related by and about her namesake, herself a teacher/poet. Camila muses, "[t]o think, only a few months ago, she was consulting those poems for signs! She smiles at the easy gimmick she thought would resolve the question in her life. Now playfully, she imagines the many lives she has lived as captioned by the title of one or another of her mother's poems. How should this new life be titled, 'Faith in the Future?,' 'The Arrival of Winter,' or why not? 'Love and Yearning?'" (*Salomé* 2). Rather than a gimmick, the titles guide the co-protagonists' life trajectories and the receptor's reading of their life stories. When the poet's poetry is read side by side with the novel, yet another level of comprehension is available to the novel's reader.

Not only is the format a mirror image of the selfsame text, but the content is also related. "Luz" details the difficulties and the great joy Salomé had upon delivering Camila. In spite of tuberculosis, the mother prevailed to give light to another life—and live three additional years. In "Light," Camila decides, "I think it

is time now to go back and be a part of what my mother started" (35). In so doing, Camila reinvigorates her mother's lifework. The quote is significant, for as noted above, one of Camila's last activities prior to retirement was reviewing and cataloguing her mother's correspondence and writings in preparation for handing Salomé's life's history and work to the Dominican Archives. Salomé's writings are thereby symbolically returned to the *patria* whose birth and tumultuous development paralleled her own. Additional light can now be shed on Salomé's poetry by academics and historians. Further study of her work will improve understanding of the role Salomé played in the emergence of the Dominican Republic and women's access to education on that island.

It was at the behest of the great Puerto Rican educator Eugenio María de Hostos, who pioneered "normal schools" (public schools) in Puerto Rico and contingent Latin American countries, that Salomé instructed many of Santo Domingo's young women, who eventually became future teachers of other young women. The light Salomé shed on women's studies as well as the poetry which helped fuel the fight for a *patria* certainly is reflected in the decisions and life choices made by her daughter. Camila duplicates her mother's stance regarding education of the masses, particularly that of girls, and spends several years as a teacher in Castro's Cuba.

In yet another illuminating pair of chapters in *Salomé*, Salomé reveals herself as the audacious poet Herminia, a pseudonym which means "man in the army." The publication of her famous poems dares to challenge the oppressive formative governments of her nascent country. These poems respond to the

country's reversal of fortune. The Dominican Republic, once a colony, had returned to its status as a dictatorship. In the English chapter "Reply," Camila discovers several epistolary replies used by her father as bookmarks. These letters flesh out the full story of her life and the intricate relationships and stories within the Henríquez de Ureña family tree.

Bringing the story of Salomé full circle, "El ave y el nido" tells the story of terrific political upheaval in Santo Domingo, a time which, as Salomé recounts, corresponds to the commencement of her own life, turmoil, and love of country. Salomé states, "[t]he story of my life starts with the story of my country, as I was born six years after independence" (13). She herself was a bird looking for peace in her newborn nest of a *patria.* The corresponding English chapter completes the Henríquez-Ureña story by telling the poetess Salomé's story, thereby keeping her poetry and life alive through letters and diaries sent to the Dominican archives. As both literal and figurative guardian of the family history, in retelling her mother's story and disclosing all manuscripts and written records to the public eye, Camila closely approximates the goal of bearing testimony. Assuredly, Salomé's legacy will be shared with future generations.

The promise Camila and Pibín made to one another on the ship leaving Santo Domingo long ago after their mother's untimely death is fulfilled. Unlike the many who told Camila that her deceased mother was in heaven, Pibín "takes her hand and presses it against her heart. He continues, "[h]eaven is for the dead. We're going to keep Mamá alive, you and I" (320). By keeping her mother alive in her

heart, Camila fulfils her young promise; by preserving Salomé's story, letters, and poetry, she does so for others.

The final chapter of the book sees Camila's return to her native Santo Domingo, where she physically reunites with her family and mother's legacy. The poem "El ave y el nido," which begins and ends this family history in two languages, describes a bird flying away from its disturbed nest. Camila returns to her *patria*, replete with a "giving to light" (*dar a luz*), the Spanish way of saying "giving birth to" of Salomé's legacy to her nieces, and to her people (335).

The Epilogue of the novel not only reunites Camila with her family, but with her full given name, Salomé Camila.

"You always liked going by Camila," Rodolfo reminded me. "In fact, Papancho said you used to get annoyed with him when he called you Salomé Camila. You'd go hide." Of course Rodolfo was right, or partly right. After I realized that she would not be coming back, I hated to be reminded of my mother. But still, I longed for her—a longing that would well up in me in the middle of the night. I learned her story. I put it side by side with my own (334-335).

In death, on her tombstone, Salomé Camila is united with her mother in their homeland for eternity.

Like many of Alvarez's works which touch on the difficult topic of skin color and hair texture in the Dominican Republic, this book both opens and closes with the topic. In spite of most families having mixed racial components, Trujillo's desire to "whiten the race" and its pervasive influence throughout Dominican politics and letters is evident in Salomé. In *UNO: El ave y el nido* Camila reveals to

a student helper who comments on the beauty of a picture of Salomé, "'[t]hat lady is my father's creation. I have the actual photograph somewhere.… He wanted her to be prettier, whiter….' 'You mean your mother was a…negro?' she asks. 'We call it mulatto. She was a mixture'" (*Salomé* 44). Salomé's mother's marriage was likewise met with some hesitance, for although "Gregoria was pale enough…all you had to do was look over her shoulder at her grandmother and draw your own conclusions" (19). Similarly, in chapter eight, "Bird and the Nest," when Camila was on the deck of a ship to Cabo after her mother's death, she knew not to remain outside, for the sun would darken her skin. This perpetual preoccupation with skin tone is like an inheritance passed down to Camila.

In the translation to *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, Claudia Benthien notes that "the hierarchy and value judgments connected with skin complexion, is still largely taboo in American [as well as Dominican] society, despite the fact that skin colors are ubiquitous and obvious " (vii). She adds, "perhaps skin, as the boundary between body and culture, could become the interface where the humanities and the sciences enter into an exemplary –and long overdue –discourse" (viii).

Just as skin-tone issues unite the mother-daughter pair, so too does a cough and an underground refuge. The parallels created in the last chapter recall the moments of Camila's birth and Salomé's death. The final lines of this chapter return both the reader and Camila to an in vitro state "when [she] climbs deep into the belly of the ship to escape the sadness about her. Reminiscent of her mother's tuberculin coughing, she swallows a big breath of air and her lungs explode in a fit

of coughing" (*Salomé* 331). Salomé's cough, the cough that delivered Camila to this earth and left the child motherless, took her life after a lengthy battle. Although in Camila's underground hope "[h]er mother takes her hand and leads her to heaven where they will start a new life together," on this earth, they lead an entangled life of words and teaching.

The above scene is reminiscent of the near-death moment when Salomé gave birth to Camila; it also recalls the dank hole under the house which protected Salomé from the wars outside as she descended into the protective hole of the earth when her nascent country was at constant war. The cries of Salomé and of Salomé Camila are heard in unison as their families call to the young girls who sought underground refuge.

As the two stories of the similarly named women become more interrelated, and the secrets of her mother's past unravel, the desire of Salomé to set her daughter free from the land which took so much from her draws the daughter back to precisely that territory and to that from which her mother wished to free her. Despite the nest being disturbed and in spite of Salomé's prophetic naming of her only female heir, the second to last stanza of "El ave y el nido" asks her "little bird" to return to her nest while she, the mother, goes on to other pastures: "Pobre avecilla! Vuelve a tu nido / mientras del prado me alejo yo" (*Poesias completas*, Salomé Ureña de Henríquez 156).[21]

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[21] As indicated elsewhere in this dissertation, the metatextual reference to "El Ave y el nido" recalls Clorinda Matto de Turner's similarly-named indigenist novel to mind. As is the case with In the Name of Salomé, political upheaval and the loss of a stable home life were suffered by the children of Matto de Turner's novel.

In an ironic twist of fate, it is left to Camila to sort through the family papers and decide which articles will be left to the archives, and which will be destroyed. As the only female heir in a Hispanic family in which women are traditionally the keepers of oral lore, but not the written word, it falls to Camila Salomé, the self-effacing, youngest and least well-known of the Henríquez Ureña family, to determine what the "official" story of not only her mother's life, but that of herself, father, and famous brothers Max and Pedro, will be for the future to behold:

> "I know we have disagreed on many things over the years," Max writes in the letter that accompanies the trunks, "but despite that, it is you and only you whom I can trust with the family papers." She is to sort out what to give to the archives and what to destroy. The irony is not lost on her—she, the nobody among them, will be the one editing the story of her famous family (38).

Curiously, this points to the fine education that both Salomé and Camila received in a land, and particularly at a time, when most girls were taught only manners, sewing and, if lucky, how to read, but not how to write. The dangerous tool in a woman's hand is seen in Salomé's poetic craft under the pseudonym "Herminia" (a.ka. "man in the army") in the beginning chapters of the novel. The late publication in text as a compilation of Salomé's work is indicative of the manner in which women's writing has been treated by the predominately male writing establishment and the relative anonymity Salomé has maintained.[22]

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[22] The Acción Feminista Dominicana's principles required that women be of at least legal age, of good moral conduct, and capable of reading and writing. These

Camila's dedication not to writing, but to teaching the works of others is arguably a further sign of female effacement in literature. The reader of this novel is more omniscient than Camila, for she is able to vertically integrate the stories of the two protagonists into one. Precisely because the reader has access to both women's stories, she is better informed than Salomé's heir about the origins of the contents of the trunk and the literary impact of Camila's job.

Underlying the fictionalized stories of Camila and Salomé are the actual poems of the poetess herself. These verses add yet another textual layer to the intertwined mother-daughter stories. These two Dominican women writer/teachers present an unknown world to the reader and student. Alvarez, a third Dominican-American writer-teacher, narrates their lives.

In a similar onomastically repetitive manner, the family tree at the beginning of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* portrays three of the four girls with duplicitous nicknames: Sandra is Sandi, Sofía is Fifi, and Yolanda is multiply renamed as Yo, Yoyo, or Joe. Despite the multiplicity of names and nicknames the girls go by, and in spite of their distinctive physical traits—ranging from the oldest's dark complexion and hair to the youngest's blond-haired, blue-eyed Swedish looks—they are collectively nicknamed "Cuca" by their mother, who always called

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educated women proposed that women earn their own keep by teaching, collecting rent, or working other blue collar jobs so that they could be independent and provide a stable home for their children. Like many of her sisters who belonged to this group, Salomé espoused many of the same ideals, living by teaching and writing, skills which lay at the core of this group. For more on this topic see *The Dominican People: A Documentary History* by Ernesto Sagás and Orlando Inoa; and Daisy Cocco De Filippis, *Documents of Dissidence: Selected Writings by Dominican Women*.

them “the four girls.” She “still calls them the four girls even though the youngest is twenty-six and the oldest will be thirty-one next month. “She has always called them the four girls for as long as they can remember, and the oldest remembers all the way back to the day when the fourth girl was born” (*García Girls* 40). Their individuality and multiple monikers are thus subverted by Laura. Further addressing the girls as a collectivity and dissolving their unique traits, Laura dresses her girls in identical outfits, the color of their outfits being the sole distinguishing factor: “[t]he mother dressed them all alike in diminishing size, different versions of what she wore, so that the husband sometimes joked, calling them the five girls” (40).

The only designation ascribed to their individuality was a color code, which none of the girls was willing to renounce:

> “[a]s the baby grew older, she cast an envying look at pink…but the third girl was clever and was not persuaded” (41). In an essay, the eldest remarks, “that the color system “had weakened the girls identity differentiation abilities and made them forever unclear about personality boundaries” (41). It is this child alone who has no nickname double in the novel.

The names of other García family members also reflect the duplicitous nature of existence in the large family in this novel. Carmencita’s daughter has a face which bears “a ghostly resemblance to one of Yolanda’s generation” while Mundín is named for his father Don Mundo. Even the girls’ nickname for their beloved maid Chucha is a play on their shared nickname “Chachas.” This derivative is an abbreviation of the collective Spanish word “muchachas” (girls). As one of the

girls remarks, “she always called us that, from muchachas, girls, which is how we ended up nicknaming her a play echo of her name for us, Chucha” (220). Unlike Laura, who employs an expansive English grouping, “the four girls,” Chucha uses a shared Spanish diminutive for the same purpose.

Abnegating individuality on not just a nuclear family level, but on an extended one, cousins were paired off into sets of best-friend cousin partnerships, with Yolanda’s and Mundín’s being the only boy-girl couple (225). Further demonstration of shared identity and identity doubling in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* is well demonstrated when Sandi’s artistic ability is discovered. Rather than nurturing her particular talent alone, she is accompanied by the entire fourteen-cousin clan to art lessons.

While attending these art lessons, Sandi hears a tapping and goes to investigate. She spies a very small man sculpting a female figure that was somewhere between Virgin, Medusa, and Demon. The description of this female figure embodies all from the purest, most desirable female traits of beauty to the most despicable ones of hellish ugliness. In this manner, the statue is not just a mimetic, plastic-arts creation of a woman’s body; her multifarious qualities double and split upon themselves: “[s]harp points came out of her head, the rays of the Virgin’s halo, though they could just as well have been the horns of a demon woman. Her hair coiled in complex curls over her shoulder like snakes. Her head was fully formed, but her face was still a blank” (225).

Much to Sandi’s surprise, these statues are the centerpiece at the Christmas Eve Nativity scene. Moreover, the Virgin’s previously blank face reflects that of her

own. She writes, "I put my hand to my own face to make sure it was mine. My cheek had the curve of her cheek; my brows arched like her brows; my eyes had been as wide as hers" (255). As if emphasizing the role of the double in this novel, Sandi clearly tells the reader that the whole of the crèche and nativity scene was "God going through all of the trouble of self-creation to show us how" (255).

This sense of personal re-creation and self-examination is also evident in several of Alvarez's poems in *The Woman I Kept to Myself*. Rather than being included in a group as in *García Girls*, these poems examine the separateness of the self and its individual parts. Otto Rank notes that an independent cleavage of the ego (shadow, reflection) mentally frames a recollection (Rank 12). Looking at the mirror, in "Intimations of Mortality from a Recollection in Early Childhood," the narrator sees herself: "the roundness taught around the bone, / the smooth youth of the skin, the tiny pores" (2-3). She sees herself as if she were another being—sees pieces of herself, "the hair as if not my own" (3). Treating her body as an entire other self, she invites it to "travel with me through life" (13). Conversely, in "Disappearing," the author recognizes her entire body as her own, but notes, "I have gotten thin, / thin as a wafer, as a piece of string" (1- 2). Cognizant of the efforts to disappear herself, she asks, "what will be left for death if I succeed?" (23).[23] The diptych counterpart to this poem, "Gaining Myself Back," also has the author omnisciently yet autobiographically observe herself coming back to life one body part at a time: "Muscle on muscle, fat layered on fat: / arms, buttocks, hips, thighs,

[23] This doubling and killing of the self is explored in Rank's discussion of Poe and Heinz.

legs bulge out" (1-2). This return to life cheats Death, who would have claimed her in "Disappearing," and returns the reader and the author to a self who observes herself much as she did as a young child in "Recollections from an Early Childhood."

An examination of the design and literary devices Alvarez uses in both her poetic and narrative works helps illuminate not the simple vocabulary she uses, but the complex techniques she engages to instruct her reader. Much like hypertexts in the computer world, metatexts, intratexts, and intertexts extend the flow of information from one work to another (not just intratextually as above), and the "conversation" the author and reader engage in through written media. Like Borges's labyrinthine writing where the reader frequently encounters the old, blind librarian (Borges himself) as she reads one of his texts, the reader of Alvarez's work similarly re-encounters the ever-present author in a variety of her own fictionalized characters in multiple interconnected texts.[24] Titles of poems evoke titles of narratives, which in turn call other writings to mind. Certain characters reappear in several texts, just as particular symbols are repeatedly employed in a variety of contexts in separate works. These representations call forth portions of yet other texts, which in turn bring a different composition to mind.

This interweaving of one author's work into what at times seems like a single large narrative comprised of a series of smaller poems, chronicles, folkloric

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[24] Alma Rodríguez and Yolanda García are slightly built, Dominican-American women with flyaway hair. Both Salomés are Dominican or Dominican-American writers, as are Yolanda and Alma. The entire poetic corpus is arguably self-referential.

tales, stories, and characters recreates her written words in distinct settings. It provides renewed life to the author's own writings. In much the same way, poetry, prose, and diagrams in this writer's work revive and recall one another in an Alvarez chorus. This recreation of one literary passage in another presents an unbreakable connection between the two. A literary "trans-referentiality" runs throughout the body of her works, with one piece evoking another in a different genre, or with a name, theme, or symbol bringing a mexatextual connection between the reader and the multiple Alvarez works.

The title "First Muse" (133), the first essay in the section "Declarations" in *Something to Declare*, references the Great Muse called upon by thousands of artists over the years. It names *The Thousand and One Nights* and Scheherazade, from whose storytelling the author advises she "learned early on that stories could save you." *The Thousand and One Nights* has been the inspiration for hundreds of storytellers over the years and is shared the world over. Through this piece, Alvarez speaks not just to *The Thousand and One Nights*, but to all of the works and authors who similarly derived inspiration from the beautiful young woman's tales. In her adult writings, Alvarez tells the reader that telling stories is what saved her. In this sense, she deviates little from the famous child storyteller who set her on the path of narrative. Calling upon the magic connection to Scheherazade, Alvarez tells us in this essay that she learned that if she wrote things down, "by rubbing the [genie] lamp of language," she could evoke images, smells, and memories of a lost homeland (*Declare* 140), which in effect she does throughout her literary corpus. By evoking Scheherazade in the first essay (in the "Declarations" section), the

author reminds us how Yolanda García of *How the García Sisters Lost Their Accents* depends upon *The Thousand and One Nights* to see a young female of color using tales to save her life. Scheherazade, in turn, inspires Alvarez's storytelling. At the same time as this essay conjures up passages in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, the title evokes the poem with the same name, "First Muse" (39), in *The Woman I Kept to Myself.* This poem discusses not the literary muse who inspired storytelling in a young girl, but the negative input she received at a conference when a famous poet pronounced, "'One can only write poems in the tongue / in which one first said *Mother*'" (2-3). This left the Spanish speaker wondering what to do with all of her "fake poetry." Like Anita in *Before We Were Free* and her cold introduction to English during the gray New York winter months, the protagonist of the poem was visited by the Chiquita Banana television commercial. The cartoon character-muse declares that "she is here to stay" (30). Taking inspiration from the animated character, Alvarez picks up her pen that she feared the "literary border guard" would deny her, and begins writing again.

This poem, in turn, calls to mind two additional works: first, "My English" in the "Customs" section of *Something to Declare,* which, like the above passage, depicts the author's linguistic negotiation doubts. As a young child, she was forced into English. She notes, "[i]t was as if my native tongue was not quite as good as English, as if words like *columpio* were illegal immigrants trying to cross a border into another language" (24).[25] "First Muse" inevitably summons forth the essay "Of

[25] These words recall almost identical wording in a poem cited elsewhere in this dissertation.

Maids and Other Muses" in *Something to Declare*, which credits the many dark-skinned Dominican and Haitian maids whose imperfect Spanish and songs filled the childhood home with music. It also conjures up the maids at Yaddo whose rhythm and songs influenced the minority author's writing.[26]

Because imagery of the maids is called to the forefront of these writings, the entire section of *The Other Side*, called The Gladys Poems—most particularly "Audition" and "Gladys Singing"—permit the reader to listen to the sonorific voice of "a slender girl with a basket / of wrung rags on her head" ("Audition"57-58). The maid swept, mopped and whistled as she worked to a series of typical Latino rhythms: *mangulinas, merengues, salves,boleros,* and *himnos*(3-4). As she worked, she passed on their shared pan-Latina cultural song and dance inheritance to the young Alvarez, imparting the words to *Cielito Lindo*, *La Cucaracha* as well as a variety of local dances. These memories and tunes are a source of later inspiration for the bilingual, bicultural Dominican-American. The important influence the maid had on Julia Alvarez's formation is commented upon in the mother's story in *¡YO!*. She notes, "[b]ack there, that one was mostly raised by the maids. She seemed to like to hang around with them more than her own kin, so that if she had been darker, I would have thought she was a changeling that got switched with my own flesh and blood" (22).

Yet another "muse call" is portrayed in the cousin's story, also in *¡YO!*. Both Yolanda and cousin Lucinda are enamored of Roland Monroe III and strive to be his

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[26] Yaddo is an artists' community located in Saratoga Springs, New York whose mission is to provide artists with a supportive creative environment.

inspirational muse. A variety of well-known poets, from e.e. cummings to Yeats, men who were inspired by the Great Muse of poetry, are also named in this short story. This story recalls the moment in "The Rudy Elmhurst Story" (*How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*) when Yolanda co-authored and inspired her companion's poetry. Although the sought-after males are distinctly named, they are from well-heeled Anglo families, and the situations presented bear striking similarities.

Just as the single abovementioned poem draws in multiple other referents from a variety of the author's own works, and the story mentioned above recalls another one by Alvarez, the poem "Grace" in *The Other Side*) notes that Gladys

> gives the ball a shake.
> A hundred dust motes flutter
> to the cold, cold ground.
> The deer nuzzles in search
> of something it cannot find…." (40-44)

Then the poet:

> pick[s] up the snowy scene,
> give[s] it a punishing shake,
> and the storm again begins. (64-66)

This poem reminds the reader of a passage in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* in which they are forced to pack and flee the country, with each girl permitted only one special item; Yolanda selects her snowstorm-filled crystal paperweight, "a glass dome that you turned over and pretty flakes fell on a little red house in the woods" (213).

This same imagery, with similar wording, appears once again in *Before We Were Free*. Remembering her Aunt Laura's instruction to the girls, "[o]ne special thing each, girls. We can only take ten kilos apiece," Anita helps her cousins decide (6). She climbs onto a chair when her eye is caught by the "snow globe with the deer nibbling the ground. She remarks, 'I can't resist giving it a shake, stirring up the snowstorm until I cannot see the little deer.' 'That's mine,'" Yo cries out reaching for it; "'[t]hat's what I'm taking'" (7).

The snowy crystal ball is not the only image repeated in this author's work; the salience of butterfly imagery, flight, planes, and birds is evident in various texts. Unlike the snowy crystal ball scene that the author has impregnated with meaning of her own, butterfly imagery has a lengthy literary and entomological significance. Generally, butterflies signify hope, rebirth, transformation and transcendence. The quite literal transformation of the caterpillar worm that wraps herself in a cocoon to be reborn as a beautiful, seemingly fragile, yet hearty creature capable of flying extraordinary distances and camouflaging itself for self-preservation amongst predators, encapsulates the most obvious symbolism of this creature. Spring and the association of butterflies with femininity cannot be overlooked as aspects of butterfly symbolism demonstrated in this author's writing, where strong female protagonists predominate.

In discussing butterfly imagery in Danticat's work, Rocío Davis notes that the butterfly, one of her principal images, is a symbol of continuing life and transformation. Unlike the brightly colored butterflies, which bring good news and connote happiness, the black butterfly warns of death (Davis 70-71). Interestingly,

the African butterfly's (*Papilo leonidas*) name and coloring both bear a striking mimetic resemblance to those of dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. This African butterfly is a very dark brownish-black with small white patches (Carpenter 37). The dictator was known to advance the concept of *blanqueamiento* in the Dominican Republic, favoring white over dark skin. He himself used make-up to lighten his own skin and mask his dark complexion.

Entomologists further note that flora and fauna free from competition from the mainland have evolved into and preserved uniquely different species. Trujillo certainly had solid control and a unique physical presence. The butterfly's ability to alter its physical appearance and adapt to new habitats bears a striking similarity to immigrants who fly away from their homelands and develop differently in the United States. Nonetheless, they still maintain a physical tie to the originating country. Entomologists note that any species that is widely distributed over a large area cannot be split up into more than one species (Carpenter 28). So in spite of being distributed in different locales bearing distinctive traits, butterflies, like immigrants, maintain their genetic ties.

The shared butterfly imagery in Danticat's Haitian and Alvarez's Dominican writings adds mythical and physical miscegenation to Hispaniola's American brand of writing. Several of Julia Alvarez's narratives employ butterfly imagery, with the historical novel *In the Time of the Butterflies* as the most obvious. Even the book cover of my edition is enhanced with a variety of multicolored butterflies. The young Mirabal women, code-named "butterflies," evolved into representatives of the Underground movement to unseat Trujillo and saw Dominican women emerge

powerfully in the public world and as self-determining entities in their country's political development. They also became symbols of the horrors perpetuated by dictator Trujillo against his own female citizenry. Both figuratively and literally, they transformed into representatives of a people seeking freedom, education, and a voice in the destiny of their homeland.

These female revolutionaries were forced off the road and died in a tragic "accident." This story is metatextually elicited in both *García Girls* and *Before We Were Free*. The Mirabal sisters, who fought against paternalistic oppression of women, have been invested with a renewed Dominican cultural inheritance of freedom. In both *García Girls* and *Before We Were Free*, the young characters in these novels, who mimetically mirror the real-life characters, learn the concepts of freedom and the use of code language to protect their own well-being. Just as code language was used in the picnic plan that the underground used to oust Trujillo, and a jail code language permitted the incarcerated Mirabals' communications, the young characters navigate a linguistically complex field for their own safety. Reference to the historical accident and cautious word choices in all three of these novels intertextually and metatextually connect the works as if they were a Dominican-American, freedom-seeking, coup-escape novel triptych.

Although many butterflies have the ability to camouflage themselves, thus protecting themselves from harmful predators, the Mirabals were unable to escape the hands of Trujillo's henchmen. Direct reference to this is made in *Before We Were Free:*

> "[o]ne evening when the phone rings, I follow him (Papi) into our living room. I hear him say something about butterflies in an accident…'They're not real butterflies,' he explains softly. 'It's just a nickname for some very special ladies who had an…accident last night'" (18). In a later intratextual reference, Anita comments, "I heard Papi talking about some accident with butterflies. …Shh! Lucinda hushes me. 'Suddenly, I understand.' responds Anita'" (28).

This exchange underscores the tone of fear and shared secrecy due to the calculated plan.

Even Tío Toni, an uncle involved in the plot with a comment obviously influenced by the Mirabal incident, embraces Lucinda and Anita, and tells the teenagers, "I want my two butterflies to take care of each other" (60). The continual reference to flying and butterflies is also apparent in the following passage:

"[r]ecently, she [the maid, Chucha] told me of a dream she had in which Lucinda, Mundín, then Mami and I sprouted wings and flew up into the sky.

'What about Papi?' I asked worriedly.

'Not everyone can be a butterfly,' Chucha replied" (66).

Later in the text, much to Anita's confusion, her father makes her promise to spread her wings and fly (75). Fulfilling Chucha's prophesy, Papi gives his life so that his daughter can once again know freedom.

Reference not solely to freedoms of butterflies and the liberties the girls experience once in the United States where they flourish, but reference to butterfly jewelry is also present in *Before We Were Free*. When allowed only one special

thing to take on her trip to the United States, Carla selects her butterfly pin, as if the impending trip was her ticket to fly free and far.

Moths, first cousin to butterflies, also fly about in Alvarez's work. Unlike the butterfly, whose beauty and soulfulness is greatly admired, the typical moth is a drab, bothersome pest, best known for maliciously eating clothing and farm produce. Reference to this injurious insect is juxtaposed with the butterfly in *Before We Were Free:*

"[s]uddenly a black moth flaps into the room. 'A bat' Lucinda screams, and ducks under the table.

'It's not a bat. It's a black butterfly,' Mundín observes, leaping up to catch it. 'Don't touch it!' Mami cries. We all know from Chucha [the voodoo-practicing Haitian Maid] that a black moth is an omen of death. Mundín stops in his tracks. The moth lifts off and disappears into the night" (*Before* 11).

Once gone, normalcy and preparations resume for the Garcías' flight from the Dominican Republic to the United States.

Negative wing-fluttering imagery is also evident in *García Girls* when Yo is hospitalized for a mental breakdown:

"[h]er stomach hurts. She strokes wide I-am-hungry circles on her hospital smock. But the beating inside her is more desperate than hunger, a moth wild inside a lampshade. It rises, a thrashing of wings, up through her trachea—until Yo retches" (83).

While certainly not unhappy at the moment she is recounting her story, Lucinda in "The Cousin" (*¡YO!*) recounts how she was "ready to spread her wings

and fly," only to be recalled to the Island when her parents discovered her indiscretions while studying in the States: "[s]he was to be an earthbound creature" (52).

In two final, important references to butterflies, one in *Before,* refers to Anita's first winter in New York. The other refers to Mami Laura in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*. In *Before*, the girl cousins gather together to make snow angels in the yard; "[b]ut to Anita, in her newly discovered freedom, they look more like snow butterflies" (163). Similar to the children's spreading of their wings, learning and exploring in the United States, one of the girls notes of Laura: "recently she had begun spreading her wings, taking adult courses in real estate and international economics and business management, dreaming of a bigger-than-family-size life for herself" (116). With this new-found freedom, particularly for women and girls in the United States, a permanent return to the island would "clip" their female wings, just as their earlier arrival had unexpectedly "clipped" them from the family tree. Laura and the girls all found opportunities to free themselves from their traditionally designated female roles. A final reference to butterflies, which is much more oblique than the above, is found in a simple line of *In the Name of Salomé*. Camila says that she had "accepted the Vassar job years ago because her future colleague Pilar gave her a box of scented soaps shaped like butterflies" (34). The teaching job in the United States was, for Camila, a way similarly to escape the turmoil of Dominican political unrest. However, the butterflies are a perennial reminder to readers and characters alike.

Similar to the butterfly as it flutters from one book to another, swan symbolism, impregnated with much ancient significance, floats from one genre of the author's writing to another. *The Dictionary of Symbolism* (Biederman 333) notes that the swan has long been held out as a symbol of purity, with its white plumage and long, graceful neck. Emblematic of female gracefulness, swans often accompanied the Greek goddess Diana. Further otherworldly association with the ancient gods was the presence of the swan at the birth of the god Zeus, hence the bird's gift of prophesy. The swan song, commonly used to define a final moment for humans, is symptomatic of an animal's awareness of its impending death. It emits cries to announce and bemoan its passing. The swan is lastly symbolic of mercury volatility in alchemy. It is in this last context that I suggest that the search for an AIDS vaccine in *Saving the World* aligns with classical swan imagery. Leonard Lutwack notes that the traditional bird symbol of the swan-poet is considered by Yeats in a number of poems:

The conventional praise of poetic achievement is omitted, however, since Yeats uses the swan not to honor another poet but to comment on his own career. He renews the beauty of swan imagery, which had grown rather threadbare over the centuries, but in 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' he is full of self-doubt about his own adequacy as a poet, especially in a 'dragon-ridden' age when many ingenious, lovely things are gone (Lutwack 59).

Alvarez's most recent novel*, Saving the World*, is a story juxtaposing the early nineteenth century Balmis expedition to eradicate small pox through cow pox vaccinations with the search for an AIDS vaccine in the contemporary world. The

current AIDS Investigational Center in the Dominican Republic is run by Swan drug company. Its goal to halt the spread of a worldwide AIDS crisis, a crisis particularly acute on Alvarez's home island. The altruistic attempt of the company is to provide much-needed medication to people who otherwise could not afford treatment, while simultaneously establishing an eco-friendly farm to provide jobs for locals. The AIDS portion of the novel involves the writer Alma Rodríguez, an author suffering from terrible writer's block. Instead of singing a literary tune, Alma, likened to Yeats' swan allusion, questions her poetic ability to create. This character finds herself on Swan's campus where her husband, Richard, is assisting in the farm project. Perhaps this is a swan song situation, for Richard is killed when the compound is overrun by angry locals, and Alma lets out an unbearable wailing noise.

Although beautiful and graceful, the swan is a powerful bird whose muscular neck can crush and kill. Such is the fate of Richard. Lastly, like Odile and Odette, whose fates are intertwined in Swan Lake, the lives of the female protagonists Isabel and Alma (of the smallpox and concurrently related AIDS stories) are interwoven. Swan imagery in this novel is replete with significance and a multiplicity of nuanced meanings. As I have stated before, Alvarez uses simple vocabulary, but enriches herdetailed work in such a way as to impregnate it with multiple meanings and connotations.

Before We Were Free juxtaposes two radio stations: Radio Caribe, the state-run propaganda voice, versus the more truthful, NPR-like Radio SWAN. Harkening back once more to Swan Lake, SWAN is portrayed as the pure, good swan Odette,

while Caribe is depicted as an imposter of truth. Swan's station transmits the real state of events on the island during the *enjuiciamiento* of Trujillo. Lastly, a poem by another feminist writer, "On Not Shoplifting Louise Bogan's The Blue Estuaries," in a small poetic anthology, in *The Other Side*, clearly employs the same duality of swan imagery as in the above-studied works. The swan signifies the pure poetic inspiration of one female voice inspiring Alvarez's own: "I could almost feel / the blue waters drawn / into the tip of my pen" (28-30). Ironically she points out the apparent unimportance of the poetess whose volume depicts "swans posed on a placid lake, / your names blurred under water / sinking to the bottom" (11-13), as if the poet were an insignificant entity. Penniless, she, like the swan's curved, declaratory, note-like neck, questions her desire to appropriate the book. As the swans "dipped their alphabet necks into the waters" (51), she replaces the volume on the shelf. The sheer beauty and honesty the white swans inspire are evidence of the symbolic songs they evoke.

The theme of illness, allergies, rashes and the loss of words runs throughout several of this writer's books as do other symbolic themes. The most evident of them all is the two-part novel *Saving the World* in which the protagonist of the Balmis mission, Isabel, is a disfigured survivor of the smallpox epidemic that wiped out her family and left her concealing her face with a black lace veil. The small amount of cowpox injected into the children carriers do not cause any permanent scarring, just a temporary disfigurement of the injected arm. The counter story to the 1800s Balmis mission to eradicate smallpox is the modern day mission of Richard Heubner, a Health International employee contracted by Swan drug company to

seek an AIDS vaccine. Both illnesses wiped out large segments of the population in their respective time periods.

The temporary rashes and disfigurements of many of Alvarez's female characters occur principally in reaction to an identity crisis and stressful situations. In a creative writing assignment, Milly Kaufman relates two true facts about herself: "I have this allergy where my hands get all red and itchy when my real self is trying to tell me something"; and "my parents have a box in their bedroom we've only opened once. I think of it as The Box" (*Finding Miracles* 5). After Pablo Bolívar, a refugee from a war-torn country moves to her town, the rashes get progressively worse. Her father prescribes calamine lotion, which, she admits, soothes her hands, but she "[feels] itchy inside, as if I was allergic to myself" (26). For weeks Milly ignores the signs and finally accepts:

I was different. I was adopted. I was not blood family. I was still their daughter, Milly, but there was another me. The one who had caught Pablo's eye. The one Happy has left out of her will. The one I had kept a secret, even from myself (*Miracles* 46).

Upon befriending Pablo, and being adopted into his family, Pablo's mother slathers soothing *yerbabuena* ointment onto her hands. Once in her homeland, having discovered much of her historical connection to the past and her biological inheritance, Milly's rashes completely heal. It was as though by melding the two Millys—Milagros, her given Spanish name, with her adoptive English name—that Milly becomes whole, and her symptomatic rash, which now knows the truth, ceases.

Lucinda in *Before We Were Free* similarly breaks out in rashes—not in response to a dual self, but rather to the dictator's well-known taste for pretty girls whom he then takes for himself. When both Lucinda and Anita miss school after the coup attempt, they feign having yet a different rash, chicken pox. Brother Mundín suffers no skin afflictions, but bites his nails to the quick as a nervous reaction to the volatility on the island during this time period. In response to this tension, Anita remarks, "instead of biting my nails or breaking out in hives like Lucinda, I seem to be forgetting words. I'll start to say something, and just like that, I'll go blank over a word. It doesn't even have to be a hard or important word" (58). This loss of words in a dictatorship where neighbors turned on neighbors and cautionary silence and linguistic codes prevailed as a matter of self-preservation is once again seen when young Anita worries if the SIM will torture her if she does not speak if captured: "[h]ow can I explain to them that it's not personal?...That I forget words even when I'm trying not to?" (101).

Similar to Lucinda's nerve-induced neck rash and Anita's word rash, Yolanda García develops a severe case in *García Girls*:

> 'What's love?' Yo asks Dr. Payne; the skin rash on her neck prickles and reddens. She has developed a random allergy to certain words. She does not know which ones until they are on the tip of her tongue and it is too late, her lips swell, her skin itches, her eyes water…" (80).

"'Love', Yo murmurs." Sure enough, like Milly's reaction, the skin on her arm erupts in a rash.

The symbolic loss of words and outbreaks of hives is a theme which, like swans and butterflies, runs throughout the Alvarez books. The desire to become whole and heal visible physical illness is also evident. Both the Balmis expedition and the search for an AIDS vaccine are actual historical events at the center of this fictional novel. MSNBC, Reuters, and other news agencies have reported on the real attempts by NIH, Merck and other drug companies to counsel sex workers and those most at risk for contracting AIDS on preventative measures. This is similar to the Swan intervention in *Saving the World*. The Balmis expedition's veracity is well documented by the Spanish Department of Health as well as other health and philanthropic organizations worldwide. They are also indicated by the author and her publisher in their paratexts.

The extensive work of Julia Alvarez references the real world and its woes in order to try to heal it with her words as she recounts many fictionalized yet real stories to the English-dominant reader, who she connects with her Dominican heritage. She not only draws her reader into her texts through her dualities, but presents the double nature of her bilingual, bicultural characters as she explores a variety of themes and recurrent topics in her lyric and narrative works. These pieces speak to the reader, to each other and to the larger literary world through intertexts, metatexts, and hypertexts.

CHAPTER FIVE: 'THE ANXIETY OF STRUCTURE' IN ALVAREZ'S TEXTS

The author's use of two languages is at the heart of her dual self. However, in this section I will focus attention strictly on the neat, intentional structure of the texts, in particular, on the table of contents and some of the explanatory notes as guidelines for the reader.

The experimental formats Alvarez employs as a female writer of minority literature, in which she uses her own life experiences in both languages to enter and exit the "revolving doors," of language and culture confound the boundaries of them both. "De Man metaphorizes the 'radical disappropriation' of which Gasché writes when he observes that the 'doors' through which an autobiographer enters his work are 'revolving' ones, an image meant to represent the 'motion of tropes' as they turn events into linguistic structures" (qtd. in Paul Jay, 1046). Furthermore, recalling the actantial schema of gamesmanship and opposition in Greimas, as applied to language, "if one is willing to accept that a game is a competition in which two opponents try to gain hold of one object [a ball or a person], and that language is this game, with Spanish and English as the players, a sentence is also a game" (Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* 108). By extension, the titles Alvarez plays with in both Spanish and English—are a game. In toying with the multiplicity of meanings embedded in both languages, and in juxtaposing nuanced Spanish and English definitions against one another, a clear Spanish-English volley takes place on the title page, within the "contents" page, and continues throughout the text. These

revolving doors take the minority writer to her Spanish-Dominican side and return her to her English-American side, repeatedly. They also permit Alvarez to speak of her dual existence in both languages. As many of the titles reflect, the translations and interspersal of Spanish words in an otherwise English text published in the United States have Latina roots. As Alvarez's art imitates life, she paints pictures of the many different types of women of whom she is representative and whom she represents in her mimetic life narratives and poetic creations. The polyphony of represented voices the reader hears as she reads Alvarez's work fleshes out the work in a way that the reader questions the autobiographical veracity versus the creative, fictive content of Alvarez's work. Alvarez's insistence that her novels are fiction based on real life further complicate the separation of authentic versus imaginary characters. Precisely because Alvarez says "she is most who she is when on paper" and tells the reader, "if you want to know more about me, read my books," the reader/receptor is herself caught between the worlds of mimesis and fiction. As a response to this quandary, Roland Barthes in *Image-Music-Text* posits that:

> [s]trictly speaking, there are only personal (I) and apersonal (he) narratives. However, "there are narratives, or at least narrative episodes which, though written in the third person nevertheless have, as their true instance the first person. …It suffices to rewrite the narrative (or the passage), changing from *he* to *I*, so long as the rewriting entails no alteration of the discourse other than this change of the grammatical pronouns, we can be sure that we are dealing with a personal system" (112).

If this strategy is applied to Alvarez's fictional writing, arguably the real and fictive can be sorted out.

Paratext, a term which refers to elements that frame the text, which are not generally understood to be an important part of textual transmission, include the title page, author and publisher names, table of contents, dedication, preface, and epilogues, as well as elements such as illustrations, footnotes, subtitles, and enumeration throughout the text. Just as Alvarez talks to her reader by telling her how to better understand her texts and the author herself with the above-cited quotes, paratext guides the reader through the context-free authorial presence. Through small details such as font distinctions setting off certain information that the author wishes the reader to capture, the author provides the reader with clues as to how to most fully receive her text. In *¡YO!*, bold letters and a variety of font modifications separate the chapters from one another as well as partition these chapters into smaller parts. The contents page's four sections have handwritten letter styling and appear slightly larger than the genre or literary term presented in the title of each chapter. The narrators of each of these stories are presented in standard typeset. In Papi's story there are several sentences set off in italics, marking a particular emphasis the author wishes to place on these lines. In *Saving the World*, the Balmis Mission is presented in standard text, with Isabel's mental musings presented in italics and capitalized italicized letters which graphically describe her view of the distinct people and places she meets in multiple ports around the world. Alma's parallel story is recounted in a different, bolder typeface. Isabel's chapters are numbered in Roman numerals while Arabic numbers separate Alma's story

chapters. The parallel stories of Salomé and Camila in *In the Name of Salomé* are similarly distinguished through font with Spanish and italics detailing the mother's chapters while standard typeset in English characterize those of her daughter. Each of the four chapters of the women has an equivalent translation on the contents page of the novel, further indicating the interconnectedness of their tales.

Unlike oral/ aural communications, in which there is an open exchange between the transmitter and receiver of the story, in written text, the work is created by the writer in isolation from the reader, without the writer's ever knowing her receptor's comprehension and language level. The writer must anticipate the reader's questions and resolve them textually, without ever hearing a single question from the reader. The reader, on the other hand, most probably never meets the author, and like her, reads alone using the paratext provided to best decipher the entirety of a story. In this author's case, several works contain drawings, designs, maps, and wood carving reproductions. These non-text devices provide the reader with visual information about some young and less-schooled characters whose recourse to primitive message conveyance is included in Alvarez's work. As an author who focuses attention on the importance of educating the more humble members of society, these graphics should not be overlooked simply as designs, but as her characters' communicative devices.

In *Before We Were Free*, Anita remains in the Dominican Republic under the repressive Trujillo regime. She draws a pattern of the housing compound she shares with her large extended family. Now that most have gone into hiding or have fled the island, she is largely alone in the vast compound, whose emptiness is sensed

as the reader views the many vacant homes on Anita's map. Woodcuts spread throughout the novella *A Cafecito Story* serve to emphasize the bond the *campesinos* share with their land and animal surroundings. Family, letters, and flora and fauna abound in the woodcuts reproduced in the novella, while the story-picture books *Secret Footprints* and *A Gift of Gracias* beautifully portray the folkloric tales for children and adults alike. *The García Girls* contains a picture of a family tree which not only serves to show the interfamilial relationships among the characters in this novel, but by extension, the relationships to the "Family Tree" poem and the relationships Alvarez narrates in *¡YO!* and *Before We Were Free*. This diagram allows the reader to envision the multiple nationalities and ethnic tongues introduced into the family by marriage and displacement to another country. Full and half-brother relations on the tree show a macho "spreading of family seed." A page-long diagram in *Salomé* similarly outlines a family tree. The diagram contains the names of both of Pancho's families, the Dominican-Cuban side to which Camila belongs, as well as the French branches of the Ureña family tree. Also included are the arrival dates of the three offspring of Salomé and Pancho to the United States, as educators and political envoys. The page even lists their pets' names.

The neatly designed, structured works (the design another form of paratext), most with clear-cut divisions and others marked by distinctive enumeration patterns, divide the books into clearly demarcated parts. The cohesion provided by these divisions is typical of modernist writing. The term "structure" derives from the Latin *structura* out of the verb *struere*, meaning "to heap together, arrange, or as in the English cognate, to *strew*." In *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, Carl Rowe

explains that "[i]n fact, almost every twentieth century theorist who use*s* structure as a key term recognizes the interrelation of time and space as a fundamental to the concept of structurality." (23) He goes on to say that "structure and strew are not antithetical meanings of *struere*, because both demonstrate a conscious concern with *spatial extension*."(23), Not only is synchronic and diachronic structure a matter of structural concern, but, he adds, "it stresses the ways in which a culture develops a stylistic repertoire to express its needs, aims, and problems" (33).

In works as varied as *¡YO!*, *Something to Declare* and *The Woman I Kept to Myself*, there is a progression from the constant, the Dominican "known," of the sisters' and mother's initial stories, to the not as of yet experienced forays into American culture explored in "The Landlady." Similarly, the customs taught by Alvarez's Dominican-turned-American family, presented in the first half of her essay book in the section bearing the title "Customs," include titles such as "Grandfather's Blessing," "Genetics of Justice," and "Family Matters." The "Declarations" made about writing through Alvarez's own literary exploration are discussed in the second part of that same book, bearing that rubric. Among the essay titles in Part Two are: "Ten of My Writing Commandments," "Grounds for Fiction," and "Writing Matters." In the above-referenced poetry volume, the symbolic clipping of Alvarez from the family tree both requires and permits her the liberty to explore her full female self in America. By maintaining that "private self" on paper, yet broadcasting it in print, the author talks publicly about her feminine and female self in the United States, writings that almost certainly would not have been penned

had she remained under the "custom"-ary control of a patriarchal Dominican society.

In spite of commencing each of these works with an intricate attachment to her family, the author evolves away from kinfolk to explore the body, the self, and the larger world in the main corpus of her literary work. However, despite discussing politics, health, and poetry in her volumes, she always returns to the heart of her family and readership in the final segments for approval and affirmation of her efforts. This self-doubt arises from being a minority writer confronting many taboos from her native culture, exposing the private matters of her life and making them public and collective. Alternatively, by investing the mundane with such importance, Alvarez inverts the power structure of male-dominated language where "the important" is public (i.e. politics), and the mundane is private. Rarely does a white male writer seek permission to expose his innermost thoughts and feelings. Nor does he seek permission to expose his inner circle. How often after the writing, moreover, within the wording of the text itself, does he ask if he has succeeded in his literary mission, as Alvarez does in "Did I Redeem Myself?" I believe the responses to these questions in Alvarez's work are literarily resolved within a circular patterning and lie in the writer's gender and Hispanic origins.

Paul de Man insists that "moments in an autobiographical work are not located in history, but are the manifestation of a linguistic structure" (qtd. in Jay 1046). If the defining moments in the closed circuit of Alvarez's works are the stories and poems laid out before us, these are the remarkable moments that the author tells the reader define her personal development.

If the context the author sets forth through paratext and structure in her work guides the reader to the reception of the entire textual performance she desires, then the author, as Barthes suggests, is not dead at all. She is very actively providing instruction to her reader. If, on the other hand, the reader simply reads a given work for pleasure—is a "common reader" as defined by Victoria Ocampo—and does not absorb all of the paratextual information, it is the reader/receptor who is once again in the literary driving seat, reading down the road of his or her choice. If, perchance, the ideal reader, familiar with all of the texts, is the receptor of the author's literary cues, it is she who extracts the maximum information available to this reader. Nonetheless, an informed reader may simply elect, as many of us do in our daily lives, not to follow all of the instructions we are given. She may ignore the literary paratext intentionally inscribed by the author with great precision. In spite of being an informed reader, that particular receptor is once again in the driver's seat, opting which instructions to follow, in spite of the author's vibrant presence.

In her study of the personal and literary communication between Englishwoman Virginia Woolf and Argentine Victoria Ocampo and their work, Bernice L. Hausman comments on their literary mirroring and interplay. Ocampo ironically calls herself a common reader of Woolf's two essay volume *The Common Reader*. The common reader as defined by Ocampo "Differs from the critic and the scholar in that he or she reads exclusively for pleasure and without having to worry about communicable knowledge. The common reader does not have a method, only a passion: reading" (Hausman, qtd. in Valis 215). On the other hand, the informed reader and literary critic bring awareness of distinct writing styles, methodology,

forms, and structures to the reading of text. The informed reader, approaching a work with a wealth of garnered information, is best equipped to examine its entirety. She extracts a much richer meaning from the written work than the common reader, drawing connections and seeing interrelations within and between a given author's work and the greater body of existing works. Although these two worlds at times converge, the transitions Alvarez makes going to and coming from each of her languages and homelands invite a fluid interface between them. Much like computer hyperlinks, which interconnect related bodies of works, a variety of these links are available to the informed reader who can make these conceptual leaps from one of Alvarez's works to another. As Barthes once said, and has since been cited, all works have already been written. It is merely style that sets them apart for re-creation. The structured table of contents as well as the visual and auditory word choices Alvarez makes attempt to create order in a world of transformation and constant flux. At times, the reader is more "over there" (somewhere in Latin America) and at times, more "over here" (United States). The reader can, however, draw connections between the literary artifices in multiple works to see how content and ideas are created and re-created by Alvarez.

Alvarez uses both her Spanish and English to "map out a place on the map" that she is forging by interlacing Dominican culture and Spanish language terminology with the English tongue and American context in which she creates. Quite literally, she is trying to "map out a place that doesn't exist on the map," as she tells Doña Aída Cartagena Portalatín, in defense of her English medium (*Declare* 173). The wide variety of font distinctions, enumeration patterns, listing of

chronological dates in her carefully designed table of contents, and chapter headings organize the texts into sections as two or three simultaneous stories are synchronically related. While each tale is unto itself a complete story with an introduction, a literary body and a conclusion, they are diachronically interlaced with one another within one and the same cover. The horizontal and vertical readings of all of Alvarez's work (save the folktales)—novel, essay, short story, and poetry —provide a much deeper significance to each independent story when they are stitched together into one large interwoven quilt. This feat is accomplished through content interrelatedness and character permeability, as in *Saving the World* where Isabel enters Alma's story; Yolanda García, from *The García Girls,* steps into *¡YO!* in all of the stories. Lucinda, similarly, is in *Before We Were Free* and Yo's stories. The character climbs over the boundary lines of one complete story to enter another, infiltrating the finite composition of one narrative by infusing it with another. The use of both languages similarly expresses the cultural stylistic manner in which Alvarez and many other Latinas encompass the full extension of their bilingual, bicultural selves. Similarly, the characters negotiate a linguistic duality as they go back and forth from English to Spanish and from the United States to the Third World. It should come as no surprise that the captions and titles are similarly expressed in two languages.

The contents page of the groundbreaking novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* is divided into three Roman numeral-captioned parts, each consisting of five chapters or interrelated stories. Both the first chapters in parts I and III contain Spanish. "Antojos," the title of the first chapter of this inversely

chronologically recounted novel, is a Spanish word which connotes a food craving. Unlike the first story in part III, "The Blood of the Conquistadores," whose Spanish word has a similar English cognate, the term which opens the novel has no similar English-language cognate. Although the novel's title prepares the reader for a certain degree of linguistic code-switching, the degree of separation is immediate with the introduction of the word "antojo."

Alvarez's second novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies,* provides vast amounts of paratext and historical data. The contents page, like *García Girls*, similarly divides the novel into three sections captioned by Roman numerals. Each of these partitions contains four chapters, dedicated each to the life and/or struggle of one of the four Mirabal sisters. Notably, the eldest daughter, who died for her country, is Patria. This word (name) translates to "country" in English. The initial dedication page is inscribed to Dédé, the sole surviving Mirabal sister, charged with perpetuating the memory of her siblings, while the following page remembers (*in memoriam*, with the same death date of November 25, 1960) the four young lives killed in the awful car accident: Patria Mercedes Mirabal, Minerva Mirabal, María Teresa Mirabal, and Rufino de la Cruz, their driver. The first story of each section is dedicated to the only living Mirabal sister, Dédé, as are the dedication page and epilogue. However, the three sisters' stories are not told in an equally established manner. The very first page following the publication data is a simple instructional note, apparently from the publisher: "this work of fiction is based on historical facts referred to in the author's postscripts on pages 323-324." The author's postscript concludes the text. In this two page conclusion, she both reveals the factual

information behind her family's escape to the United States, the real-life circumstances that forced the Mirabals to make a dangerous trip over a narrow mountainous path to visit their jailed husbands, and the subsequent fictionalization of these characters whose real lives have been conflated and reduced to English.

By concluding the novel with her personal information, Alvarez ties the publisher's paratextual first page to that of her own. In a two page postscript, Alvarez describes the real life circumstances which comprise her family's escape to the United States and the events which precipitated the courageous Mirabal sisters' trip up a narrow mountainous road to visit their jailed husbands. The author apologizes and explains to Dominicans on the island, in English, for her rationale behind documenting this story in this tongue: "[t]o Dominicans separated by language from the world I have created, I hope this book deepens North Americans' understanding of the nightmare you endured" (324).

Paratextual elements like prologues and notes to the reader allow an author to present contextual information to his readers. Since the written text, unlike the oral text, is composed in a "vacuum" without the input and questions which unravel an oral tale, the notes and paratext are used by the writer to suggest how she would like the books to be interpreted by her reader-receptor.

The young adult books *Before We Were Free*, *Finding Miracles* and *How Tía Lola Came to ~~Visit~~ Stay*, like the above-studied works, also contain detailed paratextual information for the younger reader. *Before We Were Free* consists of eleven chapters and an author's note. Like the note in *Butterflies* which provides a

1960s date for the Alvarez family's escape from the tyranny of Trujillo's rule, the author's note in *Before We Were Free* similarly reveals a 1960s escape date. Again revealing personal information, the author recounts how she repeatedly asked her mother why they had to leave: "[a]ll she would say was, 'Because we're lucky'" (165). Alvarez explains in a note to the reader, "early in 1960, the SIM caught some of the underground. Under extreme torture, they began to reveal names. My father knew that it was just a matter of time before he and his family were hauled away" (165). They were in fact lucky to have escaped. Alvarez writes this particular novel on behalf of those who stayed behind in the Dominican Republic. Thus, the collectivity of the enunciation of this novel, despite the author's primary residence in the United States, speaks not just for Dominican-Americans like herself, and the García girls, but for Dominican islanders as well. Through these two books she shows life on both sides, much as does her poetry volume *The Other Side/ El Otro Lado*. As a foray into pan-Latinismo, the author readily admits that this story could have taken place under the many dictatorships throughout the Americas. The bond between people who have lived under oppressive rulers, regardless of the location of their country of origin, who once again find freedom—or discover freedom for the first time—is one which many who read her texts share. It is for this reason that Julia Alvarez's Dominican-American story resonates. The shared experiences of living under tyranny far outweigh any linguistic barrier. Underscoring the above, this novel is dedicated "to those who stayed."

The contents page of *Before We Were Free* presents the shroud of secrecy and intrigue which invades every aspect of this narrative. Chapter Two's title,

"¡Shhh!," broadcasts the silence that necessarily pervades this time period in Dominican history. Chapter Three's secret part of its title, "Secret Santa" (usually a fun game), causes unnecessary concern about sneakiness during a time of high duress on the island. Anita's mother notes, "there are enough secrets…enough secrets in the world already" (33). Chapter Four, "Disappeared Diary," is a double intrigue, with the first word suggesting a detective type story in the reader's mind. Who would "disappear" (steal, confiscate, erase) a diary? Moreover, who would "disappear" (kidnap, kill…) a person? The title is a play on the Spanish term "desaparecido," a word which implicates murder by governmental forces or involuntary disappearance from the world with no warning. Continuing this wordplay, in response to her mother's request to remain quiet, Anita "disappears" (erases) her entire diary. The need to pick words carefully conveys the air of secrecy that prevailed during the Trujillato and the fear of reprisal if discovered crossing the ruler. Chapter Six and Chapter Seven, with captions of "Operation Maid" and "Lying Policemen," respectively, conjure up secret CIA-type operations and Sherlock Holmes-style detective stories as operatives seek the truth.

The pervasive veil of secrecy is lifted once Anita and her family are taken out of the Dominican Republic to join their García cousins in New York. This young adult novel serves as an in-between link to *In the Name of the Butterflies* and to *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*. Anita and her family, like the Mirabal sisters, remained on the island, enduring Trujillo's rule. Anita, however, was later evacuated to freedom in the United States. In a last minute rush to pack Anita for

her United States-bound trip, recalling the García's rushed exit, the maid stuffs Anita's diary into her clothing bag. Once free, she can open her secrets to the world.

Finding Miracles is another young adult story with a teenage Latina protagonist, but unlike the protagonists who sought to escape their Latin American home countries, Milly Milagros Kaufman returns to her birthplace to discover her origins and biological history. Unlike the de La Torre clan, who are familiar with their home country and know their genealogical place on the extensive family tree, Milly is adopted, and hence bereft of biological ties to her place of birth. As is the case with so many of Alvarez's other books, the table of contents is divided into "part one" and "part two" with all headings written in lower case lettering. The first part's five chapter titles contain only English, while part two combines both English and Spanish in its rubrics. Chapters six and eight, "*el paisito*" and "los luceros" are given only in Spanish. Chapters seven and ten, "a cradle and a grave" and "finding miracles," only in English. Chapter nine, "dar a luz: give to the light," and the unnumbered "one last milagrito," combine both the protagonist's and author's languages. "Dar a luz" provides an equivalent linguistic translation on either side of the colon. The final chapter title is given in "Spanglish." Spanglish is commonly used by Latinas whose code switching existence in the United States reflects their dual heritages. Except for "*el paisito*" which is italicized and "one last milagrito" in a distinct bold font, the balance of the titles are presented in a standard font.

The pairing of each set of odd and even titles in part two is revelatory. *El paisito*, or the little country, is both a cradle and a grave. Not only is it Milly's birthplace but the birthplace of many more who died during the dictatorial reign in

that country. "*Los luceros*," literally, are streetlights. They are symbolic of the unique eyes which are the birthright of Los Luceros residents. When Milly visits that town with Pablo's family, Doña Gloria sheds light on Milly's three sets of potential biological parents, thus enlightening Milly about her past and historical inheritance through stories. "One last milagrito" translates to the English "one last small miracle." It is one more miracle added on to those discovered in chapter ten.

Similar to the titular wordplay in *Finding Miracles*, the novel *How Tía Lola Came to ~~Visit~~ Stay*, with its crossed out "Visit" replaced by "Stay" on the cover, is indicative of the transitory migration trend between the Dominican Republic and the United States, and it mirrors Julia Alvarez's family's initial transition to the United States. The Alvarez family was merely going to stay in the United States until things on the island got better so that they could return home. We know this information through parenthetic author's notes, discussed above. More akin to *Something to Declare* in terms of stretching the linguistic boundaries in the Spanish and English languages, the dedication page of *Tía Lola* is evenly split between the author's American friend, addressed in English and standard print, and her many aunts who helped to raise her on the island. The thanks expressed to her female family members is in Spanish and italics.

Like many of her books, the contents page contains multiple font distinctions and typesets. Italicized Spanish in the chapter titles, such as *bienvenida* and *Nueva York*, are now commonly used words, understood and frequently used even by monolingual English speakers. As such, these "standardized" Spanish words really require no further explanation, and the reader can easily comprehend the captions.

Only "*La Ñapa,*" the tenth chapter, requires a fuller explanation, which the author provides within the text of the novel. The aunt explains, "'a ñapa is the little bit more that comes at the end. You buy a sack of oranges, and you ask for your ñapa, and you get one more orange or maybe a guava or a cashew or a caramelo'" (131). The author sprinkles Spanish text throughout the chapter which she then translates within the dialogue of the characters. Miguel tells his mother, "'*No parecen americanos*' They don't look like Americans" (133). As they sit down to dinner and fill plates with *arroz* and *habichuelas* and *puerco asado* and *ensalada de aguacates*, we learn that they ate rice and beans, roast pork and avocado salad (138). The presentation of Spanish-English translations indicates the bilingual, bicultural exchanges which occur as the children commune with their extended family in the Dominican Republic. It further demonstrates culturally typical foods. The paratextual note in "A Word About the Spanish" explains a bit about the pronunciation and word variants between and among different Spanish speaking countries to the young reader. It also explains a bit about Spanglish and word appropriation from English into Spanish.

Spanglish is variously understood to be a mixing of English and Spanish languages with one predominating language syntax, but with appropriately selected words placed into the elocution. It can also be a calque spelling with different linguistic pronunciation. Both of these techniques are used in this book in which American-born Dominican children learn Spanish to communicate with their aunt and extended family, and in the English which Tía Lola learns in order to communicate when she decides to remain as the children's caretaker in Vermont.

Like the many books studied above, Julia Alvarez's poetry is organized into designed segments with captions, thus instructing the reader as to how to divide the text and interpret the entirety of her exposition. The 2004 anthology of poems, *The Woman I Kept to Myself,* is divided into three sections, with the first division, "Seven Trees," consisting of seven poems. The final section, "Keeping Watch" similarly contains seven poems. By far the largest segment, which bears the same title as the anthology, contains sixty-one poems. The balance of seven poems on either end of the main body of poems is an attempt to create equilibrium. The first and last poems circularly open and close the anthology by writing the tales from whence she came in English. In "Family Tree," Alvarez notes that she and her sisters were both physically and linguistically "clipped" off of the island family tree. Landing in the United States had them start a new family branch developmentally and culturally. The final poem in the anthology, entitled "Did I Redeem Myself?" rhetorically talks back to the poem "Sisterhoods" as she notes that her sisters' initial rejection "is like Adam's expulsion, only worse / as he was promised redemption" ("Sisterhoods" 16-17), while "Did I Redeem Myself?" asks her siblings, "Did I redeem myself, my sisters, for those nights / I kept you up with Chaucer's lullabies? / *My* love poems at your weddings?" (11-13), and asks her parents, "Was I the native child you dreamed up / as you lay in the foreign bed you'd made" (2-3) and culminates by asking her two countries and readership if her English-language writing, mainly about her beloved Dominican Republic, succeeded in placing her bough back on the tree: "But harder still my two Americas. Quisqueya, did I pay my debt to you…telling your stories in the sultan's court" (21-22, 25); "And you, Oh

Beautiful, / whose tongue wooed me into service, have I proved / my passion would persist beyond my youth?" (26-28).

Just as *The Woman I Kept to Myself* is a cycle unto itself, with the poems "talking back" to each other, the anthology, *The Other Side/ El Otro Lado* is similarly divided into sections, with the first and last of the six Roman numeral-captioned segments consisting of only one poem each. The bilingual ponders the dilemma of a world doubled in words of Spanish and English equivalents in the first poem in the book, while the final poem "Estel" treats the word's impossibility to accurately name the world as a deaf child tries to learn written word equivalents for her soundless world. Both poems are emblematic of the word's impossibility to accurately name the world. The balance of the table of contents is divided into Roman numeral captions with rubrics such as "Making Up the Past," "The Joe Poems," and "The Other Side/ El Otro Lado."

The first title is a play on words, which makes the reader wonder if the author is fictionalizing the past, or if she is trying to fix past events. A closer reading of the poem entitled "Making up the Past" more clearly shows that this is a fictionalized portrayal of how the author wished things had been. Alvarez admits, "[t]his never happened and yet I want the memory / so much I have made it true…" (1-2). Through these verses, Alvarez idealizes her real-life antagonistic maternal relationship depicted in many of the works (See "Dusting" as an example of the way her mother "erased" young Julia's imprint in *Homecoming*.) Rather than being the high-class strict mother, the parent in the "made up poem" is a doting mother who watches her children go off to school. Yes, she is creating a past that wasn't.

In the "Joe Poems," comprising the fourth and middle segment of *The Other Side*, passionate, vividly sexual desires are expressed by an adult poet with a deep need for a real mate. This section is about love and love letters, which grope for words to explain the feelings this intense emotion provokes. "Missing Missives," like "Making up the Past," invents a world that does not exist. She warns the reader, "you mustn't trust as fact / since we both know how apt I am / to make my stories up" (12-14). However, this segment of the anthology is the only one which places the poet squarely within the bounds of the United States where her sexual development and coming of age occurred. "Staying up Alone" notes the very real transformation from a child filled with Cinderella stories and grade school fantasies into a real woman (64-66). In this poem, she metatextually cites Lycanthropy:

> (she looked it up
> In your bedside dictionary):
> *a man's ability*
> *to be transformed into an animal*
> *is a common belief,*
> *although what that animal is*
> *depends upon*
> *which is the most powerful*
> *& feared animal*
> *in a particular locality*. (83-93)

The poet notes that the most feared animal is herself:

> transformed

into the most feared and powerful

and lonesome animal

in this locality- a grown woman. (111-115)

No longer the prim virginal Dominican child, Alvarez expresses her powerful claim over womanhood and sexuality. The very physical and emotional love exposed in "Anatomy Lesson" is expressed in a way that both the narrator and her partner hope will be a union of the mind, body and soul. In a clear perversion of the sacred Catholic cross-blessing of the self, rather than follow the traditional head-to-heart, left-to-right shoulder blessing (the cross), the narrator's partner draws a unilateral line from his head to his heart to his genitals. This sacrilegious act eliminates the metaphysical spiritual blessing of the Holy Spirit, and heads straight to man's carnal desire. Nonetheless, the narrator notes:

sadly, I watch your fingers spiderwebbing

the air between us,

knowing that we haven't yet made

that blessed triple connection,

crystallizing all that we are into One…. (29-34)

The poet herself yearns "to feel the one muscle you haven't yet touched on…(112) nor I touched down upon… (114).

"Home Fires," like "Anatomy Lessons," finds two:

middle-aged lovers

Making-what you call-talking love,

Catching each other up

on each one's history

of love and loss…. (47-51)

Although less graphic than the prior poem, this poem also openly talks about sex and love.

In writing female sexuality and desires so overtly publicly, the feminist author writes not only against the private nature of the sex act and intimacy for all women within male-inscribed canonical silences, but moreover, as a Latina of particular social status, these things which typically remain behind closed doors are exposed. In seeking out not just metaphysical, but physical love, Alvarez proactively looks for intimacy on all levels. By expressing her female, carnal desires and activities openly, Alvarez's personal/ private becomes ever public.

Although the "Joe Poems" center on a particular aspect of Alvarez's life in the United States with her present spouse, the other parts of the book enter and exit the author's two homelands, finally leaving the poet stateside. The clear reference to the outspoken Yolanda García character, nicknamed Yo, Yo-Yo, Joe or Joey (*García Girls* 13), as well as to the autobiographical novel *¡YO!*, made up of short stories (about the same character), is cross-referenced in the title of this anthology's chapter heading. Unlike the "Joe Poems" and the Yolanda García character in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, Yo, although the actual author of the stories, has little control over the stories and criticisms of her person that her fictional creations say about her. The stories in *¡YO!* give voice to the vignettes and judgments of characters who have encountered Yolanda García as spouses, students, and acquaintances. Just as Roland Barthes deconstructs "Barthes" into a group of

fragments which are arranged under a series of names, topics and concepts, in recreating her fictionalized representation of self through the Yolanda character in a variety of poetic and narrative works, in numerous voices, Alvarez creates the same kaleidoscopic view of herself for the reader.

Unlike its predecessors which have only page numbers corresponding to each poem, the fifth section of *El Otro Lado* is uniquely demarcated. The section captioned "The Other Side/ El Otro Lado" has individual Roman numerals next to each poem along with their corresponding Arabic page numbers. This enumeration draws attention to the focal point of the text which bears the book's title. Like the two languages which negotiate boundaries throughout this anthology, Alvarez brings the reader back to her privileged Mercedes-Benz rearing in the Dominican Republic in the first poem of this segment, but returns her reader, on a humble *yola*, to the United States side in the final poem of the section.

A careful examination of the poems that open and close this anthology reveals Alvarez's own linguistic negotiation of Spanish into English. The final poem, which marks the poet's return to the United States where she finds freedom of expression, leaves the protagonist of "Estel" in the Dominican Republic to contend with the poverty and lack of verbal expressivity the child will, in all likelihood, always have on the impoverished island. Like *The Woman I Kept to Myself*, *The Other Side/ El Otro Lado* opens and closes as a door fitting into a frame. The largest section similarly bears the anthological title.

The poet's first anthology, *Homecoming*, is likewise divided into segments, with the largest section of poems under the caption "Housekeeping." Like the other

two poetic anthologies studied, the first and last poems of the corpus tie like a neat knot into one another, leaving no open ends. Although *Homecoming* commences with the author's "Homecoming" to the Dominican Republic to attend a cousin's wedding, her final poem, "Last Night at Tía's" reveals that her real home is in the United States where she lives with her husband and writes most of her books. Unlike her later anthologies, which I examined first, the initial poem in *Homecoming* (not the largest portion of this particular book) provides the cover title with its name.

The paratextual afterword of this anthology explains the author's rationale for claiming her woman's voice, using "material of her housebound girl life to claim my woman's legacy" (119). As for not writing in Spanish, she explains, "that earlier voice did not even feel permission to do so, as if to call attention to my foreignness would make my readers question my right to write in English" (119). Certainly now, none of Alvarez's readers question her right to write in English.

CHAPTER SIX:

ORAL CULTURE: FOLKLORE AND TALES IN FOUR OF JULIA ALVAREZ'S CHILDREN'S BOOKS AND YOUNG ADULT NOVELS

Sound forms the basis for all communication. Most people the world over still communicate verbally rather than through written media, although most cultures, despite a possible separation from mainstream society, are well aware of the currency literacy has in the modern world. They remain informed about the world around them through human contact, memory, and words passed between individuals who share information. People do not depend on the daily newspaper or television to maintain awareness of their surroundings. In his text *Orality and Literacy,* Walter Ong notes that:

> language is so overwhelmingly oral that of all of the many thousands of languages—possibly tens of thousands—spoken in the course of human history, only around 106 have ever been committed to writing to a degree sufficient to have produced literature. Of the some 3,000 languages spoken that exist today, only some 78 have literature. (7)

He further comments:

> 'text,' from a root meaning 'to weave' is, in absolute terms, more compatible etymologically with oral utterance than is

> 'literature', which refers to letters etymologically (litterae) of the alphabet. Oral discourse has been commonly thought of even in oral milieu as weaving or stitching—rhapsodein, to rhapsodize, which in Greek means to sew songs together. (13)

Both orality and storytelling require repetition, reiteration, the use of certain visual, memorization, and oral cues through active exchange with the audience; the tales are woven together to render a complete story.

Oral culture was thought to be found in the purest and primary form among those without literacy, that is, among those in the condition of primary orality. Literacy (letters, in the sense of reading and writing) has threatened to displace oral modes of transmission with written and printed texts. However, rather than eliminating orality, as Ong and other critics point out, written text continues to reinform oral transmission as secondary orality. Stories, tales, and folklore which would otherwise have been lost are preserved in written texts which are then retold. I venture an extended definition of secondary orality to include not only the retelling of a printed text aloud to another person (a listener), but to include the reading of a folkloric text aloud to oneself, or even simply "voiced" in the silent reader's mind. In all cases, the text is sounded out and heard.

Noting the importance of oral text transmission—alternatively called traditions populaires, *Volkskunde* and folklore—which refers to the purity of national culture preserved in rural backwaters far removed from the metropolis, Carlos René García Escobar states:

> La palabra oral da cuenta de una conciencia colectiva…también da cuenta de pensamientos colectivos y cosmovisiones que las antiguas generaciones han transmitido a través de los tiempos y que se acrisolan en ese paso, conformándose en los mismos mitos y leyendas o representaciones mentales, a los que luego las mismas generaciones les confieren categoría de realidad. (267)

Märchen, alternatively called folk narratives, encompass stories about the supernatural, hero legends, family stories, and personal experiences. *Leyendas* (legends), which treat religious personae, are often miraculous occurrences. *Sages*, or sagas, also called historical tales, are about a regular person described within a given time and place whose extraordinary deeds merit remembering and retelling.[27] Personal tales also fall within the realm of folklore.[28] Prior to examining the many types of tales in Alvarez's writings, both as literary creations of her own, but also as an inheritance from her primarily oral Dominican society where storytelling is still a chief way to transmit stories from one generation to another, it is helpful to first

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[27] R. M. Hals has surveyed legend as a form-critical term in Old Testament study. One will find in both these contributions the history of the word "legend" (Latin, *legere*, "to read": gerundive neuter plural legen-da, "things to be read", later to become a feminine singular with the same form, legenda, meaning "the story to be read" (cited in John Scullion 331; see page 326 of this same article for the definition of saga I adopt.).

[28] C. W. von Sydow defines *Memorat* as "the narratives of people about their own purely personal experiences which show no signs of poetic re-working or the process of tradition" Scullion 325).

explore the origins of tale-telling and collection as we understand it in modern day society.

The first to collect and create *märchen* were the Germans during their 1812 period of Enlightenment. There are many distinct types of stories told, ranging from the simple common language story to the creative moralistic tale commonly equated with fables and legends. A *volkmärchen* is a simple retelling of a story, while the *kunstmärchen* includes the creative production of tales by literary masters. Tales were cleverly constructed to be passed on as didactic tools, and the *Lehrlingh zu Sais* was an attempt to explain the world around them, much as Tía Lola's Genesis rendition explains how man came to populate the earth. *Märchen* include pedagogical markers where the fanciful tale rendition reveals a deeper message to the listener/ reader. Brentano's subjective tales were localized in his German surroundings, but unlike the Grimms,' who felt that removing a tale from its focal origin caused a story deformation, Brentano felt that relocating tales to new places within other contexts and languages would breathe new life into a tale. In this manner, the story was more likely to propagate more widely, surely with variants, but with the essence of the tale intact. The Grimm brothers compiled the most widely dispersed collection of folk stories now told worldwide, thus disproving the idea that a story cannot be removed from its originary place of creation. The secondary orality that retelling an oral or written tale generates in new languages and new lands is precisely the focus of this chapter.

A distinction between oral and written literatures was made during the latter half of the 19th century when two shifts occurred: first, a move away from a classical

curriculum to a vernacular-based literature; then one that shifted from an oral pedagogy to a reading-based learning method (Kirshenblatt-Gimblet 282). Education then began to privilege readers over non-readers. In its turn, written text became favored over orality, creating a class division which has endured until today.

Oral literature is a term created in 1881 by Paul Sébillot to encompass legends, myths, stories, proverbs, and songs, as well as other types of oral traditions. Stories passed down for generations by word of mouth vary, both in the type of information transmitted as well as the tone and nature of the tale. The tales may relate personal information or pieces of family lore (as in saga); they may be anecdotal folktales; or they may be narratives that convey the underlying belief systems that permeate and unite a society. Alternatively, they can recount fantastic anecdotes about heroic or otherworldly creatures. Adolfo Colombres comments that "el vehículo fundamental de la cultura no es la escritura, sino la lengua. Ella, de por sí, ha sido capaz de permitir la transmisión cultural durante siglos y milenios" ("Oralidad y literatura oral" 41).

Julia Alvarez, best known for her novels, penned several young adult novels and children's books for which she is less well-recognized. This chapter will focus attention on a total of four children's books whose traditional Caribbean lore and orally-based culture is the cornerstone of these texts; *The Secret Footprints* and *A Gift of Gracias* are two stories based almost entirely upon actual Dominican folktales. The boundary crossings that occur are two: first, these tales traditionally told in Spanish to Dominican children are penned in English. As such, the content, specific to the Dominican Republic, is revealed to a readership that otherwise would

not have access to these traditional stories. This readership may include Dominican children raised in the United States (and therefore more familiar with the folklore and fairy tales of this country), or it may include non-Spanish speakers who would otherwise not have any familiarity with these particular myths. They, however, may in turn continue to tell these stories to their children the world over. Thus, the primary orality of story re-telling is informed by a written text. Second, by imparting these tales in English, Alvarez shares traditional oral Dominican legends with an English-speaking audience, thus expanding the audience of these fables. The local adaptation that the Grimms feared but Brentano embraced is demonstrated in the telling of the relocated tale *The Secret Footprints*.

The Secret Footprints is a typical fairy tale in which the unreal becomes the normal and the distinction between the two dissolve. This folktale reveals the mythical, beautiful, golden-skinned, dark-haired *ciguapas,* mermaid-like creatures unique to the Dominican Republic. The feet of these lovely creatures who live in the sea and only visit land by night are on backward so that their origins cannot be traced by humans. Guapa, a particularly precocious *ciguapa* with a nuanced name which means both "bold" and "beautiful" in English, dares to venture out and befriend a human boy, thus challenging the concept of a peaceful coexistence between two different peoples, *ciguapas* and humans.

In his preface to *Plato*, Eric Havelock notes that originality was unthinkable in an oral culture ("Orality." *Columbia Encyclopedia Online*). Folktales are almost certainly derived from the same root, yet evolve to transmit culturally specific values and information. The above-cited mermaid/ *ciguapa* parallel is one such

example. Like Tom Hanks' 1984 film *Splash* in which a mermaid and a man develop an unlikely relationship, Guapa and her male friend do the same. Many variants on this theme exist in Icelandic as well as African literatures. *The Secret Footprints* is a fine example of the universality of folk narrative expressed with unique local and geocultural variants.

Another parable, albeit more closely associated with the traditional religious legend in which personal intervention of saints in earthly events occurs, is *The Gift of Gracias.* María, a farmer's young daughter, shares her leading role as protagonist in *A Gift of Gracias* with the stunning gold-skinned Patron Saint of the Dominican Republic, the Virgin of Altagracia. The inspiration to plant oranges on the family's failing olive grove comes to María in a dream about the Virgin:

> That night María dreamed that she was holding a bowl of orange seeds. One by one, she was placing them in the ground. As she did, she heard Quisqueya's voice whispering in her ear, *Say gracias.*
>
> "Thank you," María obeyed, "*Muchas gracias.*"
>
> Suddenly, as if these were magic words, trees burst out of their ground full of leafy branches heavy with oranges. Under the grove stood a beautiful lady with gold skin and a crown of stars.
>
> "Who are you?" María gasped. "I am called Nuestra Señora de Altagracia," the lady said. "Our Lady of Thanks." (*A Gift of Gracias*, no pagination)

Quisqueya recalls the original name of the Dominican Republic prior to the Spaniards' renaming of the island. The otherworldly voice of the Indian farmhand Quisqueya approves of María's idea and reminds her to say thank you, "*Gracias*," to the Virgin, not forsaking the importance of Godly intervention in daily life. Quisqueya's native Taíno name recalls his country's original name prior to the Spanish renaming of Hispaniola and marks the old farmhand's deep connection to the island. It is as if the land itself is reminding the youngster to give thanks to the Virgin and Mother Earth for their divine intervention and guidance.

It is with much lavished thanks and belief in the divine that the Virgin's assistance helps the grove prosper. The bountiful produce saves the farm and family from ruin. Inclusion of both Quisqueya and the Virgin help root the story in the island's historical, religious, and mythic past.

As noted above, rarely is a mythical tale unique to only one group. A similar tale, called "The Devil's Treasurer," exists in African lore. But, unlike María's humble family, who always gives thanks to Altagracia, the family in this tale becomes so emboldened and so demanding with their increased wealth that their protectress returns them to the humble hut from whence they came. Abnegation of heavenly intervention also has its price.

In transforming these myths into English, the conduit refines culturally specific terms, yet their messages remain intact. Over time, certain words may be changed to reflect the American population the tale now serves, with "pastries" substituting "pastelitos" for the food that the child and *ciguapa* shared and "Striking" replacing "Guapa" in *Secret Footprints*. In *The Gift of Gracias*, the name

of the Virgin may be altered to reflect a more local patron saint, or the listener will simply learn a piece of cultural information that he will inculcate into his daily repertoire of cultural awareness. Alternatively, these foreign words will become common calques in English whose meanings will no longer remain foreign to the English reader. Essentially stasis in storytelling is doubtful since primary orality is how we instruct our young and perpetuate cultural survival in an ever-changing world.

By reducing traditional oral text to writing, Alvarez brushes against the fine line of shared stories that lay in the public domain of her native island and the question of authorship. Does the Alvarez version of these tales become the definitive version? As a response to this dilemma, I offer the following answer: the permanent record of a legendary myth that might otherwise be forever lost, should a written record of it not exist, will remain as a perpetual informant for the many oral variants these tales will generate as they are re-told, in English, Spanish, and any other language venue. The Grimm Brothers' and Hans Christian Andersen's collected tales, originally preserved in the collectors' tongue but shared worldwide, are keen examples of the written word's power to preserve orally recounted stories, with orality maintaining the upper hand in the retelling and reconstitution of the stories in multiple languages. In all three of these cases, the listed "author" is understood to be the collector/ documenter of folkloric tales which remain in the public domain, open to any number of equally valid story variants.

Märchen, and folktales in general, are aimed at a younger readership in our society, but their messages transcend age barriers. In traditional oral societies,

stories *are* the literature and teaching tools that hold people and their values intact. It is the content and way a story is told that allow its survival. Precisely because all oral variants are considered equally valid stories, with no one version—format or language—given greater weight than another, the more languages a myth exists in, the more variants and probability of survival. Richard Dorson, a folklore critic cited in "Folklore's Crisis," notes that "mass culture uses folk culture. Folk culture mutates in a world of technology." But he adds, "rather than displacing folklore, cities and technology harbor it" (qtd. in Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 307). Evidence of precisely this activity is seen in Alvarez's works as the writer preserves these two proverbial Dominican folktales.

Ironically, writing, but moreover print, through what is alternately called 'context-free 'language (Hirsch 1977, 21-23, 26 qtd. in Ong 8) or autonomous discourse (Olson 1980a), may serve to disseminate legend to a much larger population than that which would have been possible in a one-on-one, interactive storytelling context. The written disclosure has been detached from its author (Ong 78). Once that occurs, the reader can examine a text when the author is absent, and may, in turn, retell the story, when the writer is, once again, not present. In so doing, she continues the oral tradition of folklore transmission.

The two young adult novels by Alvarez examined in this chapter, *Finding Miracles* and *How Tía Lola Came to ~~Visit~~ /Stay*, each contain folkloric components related by the novels' female characters. Unlike the two above traditional tales adapted for an English-language public, these novels each contain storytelling metatexts. *How Tía Lola came to ~~Visit~~ Stay,* a fun young adult novel, presents Tía

Lola not only as a caregiver of her niece Linda and great grand-niece and nephew Juanita and Miguel, but also as the bearer of traditional island customs and personal family lore. The crossed-out titular verb "visit," replaced by "stay," is not unusual in immigrant families. Tía Lola's spiritedness belies her age as she cooks up a storm of typical Dominican food, paints the house in lively island colors, and in spite of her limited English, befriends her new neighbors. An intercultural exchange takes place as her English-dominant niece and nephew learn Spanish as well as the stories and ways of the island. In her turn, when Tía Lola decides to stay, she learns English. Through their shared languages, the family matriarch tells a variety of stories. Some are family lore, some pure creation, while others are stories that connect the children to Dominican success stories, both here in the United States and in the Caribbean. The variety of stories unite Dominicans on the homeland island and Dominicans living elsewhere. An example of shared family lore is recounted one late evening:

> Most nights, now that school is out, Tía Lola tells stories, sometimes until very late. The uncle who fell in love with a ciguapa and never married. The beautiful cousin who never cut her hair and carried it around in a wheelbarrow. The grandfather whose eyes turned blue when he saw his first grandchild. (97)

This way, even though Juanita and Miguel are far removed from the Dominican Republic and their large family, they still inherit family legends. After Miguel's baseball practice, Tía Lola invites the team in for *frío-fríos*, Dominican

smoothies, and tells them "wonderful stories about Dominican baseball players like Sammy Sosa and the Alou brothers and Juan Marichal and Pedro and Ramón Martínez (94). Through Dominican food and Dominican stars of "the great American past-time," Tía Lola joins individuals from separate lands.

But far and above all of these tales is the creative kunstmärchen-like one Tía Lola gives to Linda for her birthday. It is proof of folklore's ability to transcend time, language, and physical boundaries while retaining the capacity to relate a message to children of all ages. Tía Lola asks her niece, "Do you remember how when you were a little girl, I would always tell you a special story on your birthday?"(118)

Linda nods her head, to which Tía Lola responds:

> "Today I will tell you that same story but in English."
>
> *"¡Ay, que bueno*!" Their mother kisses her aunt. [Stressing the role of language and heritage, Linda remarks], "It's so important to me, Tía Lola, that you came to Vermont and learned English so you remain connected to us. And so important, she goes on kissing Miguel and Juanita, "that you hear Tía Lola's stories so you can always stay connected to your past." (118-119)

Tía Lola's made up folktale birthday gift is a rendition of the creation myth. It is a metatextual tale that brings to mind the great biblical creation myth.

> *You might not believe this*, Tia Lola begins*, but*
>
> *Once all of the world was warm as summer.*
>
> *Flowers bloomed and birds sang and the weather*

Was perfect all year round.

And our little island was no exception.

"What about Vermont?" Juanita wants to know.

"And Vermont was no exception, "Tía Lola continues.

But people, being people, thought that things were

better someplace else.

Maybe there was more summer farther north? Maybe

the sun was brighter down south. Maybe the birds

sang prettier songs somewhere else? So they set out

for other places to see what they were missing.

People were on the move all over Mamá Earth.

No place was exactly as wonderful as the people

imagined it would be, so they kept wandering around.

Some of these people arrived on an island in the

middle of a warm blue ocean.

"This is better than where we were before," they said,

and they decided to stay.

The myth continues on for several pages, finally terminating with these paragraphs:

Since the island worked so hard holding so many people, she

alone was allowed to keep her perfect summer weather all

year round. But she was such a little island, she couldn't use

> *up so much good luck by herself. So she offered to share this gift with the other islands in her part of the world.*
>
> *But just in case people would all want to move to that part of the world again, the lucky islands decided: "Let's each take a little bit of bad weather. Let's have a few heavy rains every year, and a sprinkle of snow on our highest mountains, and a volcano going off now and then, and the occasional earthquake or cyclone or hurricane. That way people will come for vacation, but not be tempted to sta*y." (119-125)

By means of this fairy tale, Tía Lola explains to her family the weather, the topography, the flora and fauna, and ultimately, how the Dominican Republic became a vacation spot, but not a permanent residence, for visitors and many would-be inhabitants. This interactive narrative, typical of oral transmission, sees Juanita asking a question of her aunt aloud, and analytically pondering some other issues.

The many different types of stories in *How Tía Lola Came to ~~Visit~~/Stay, The Gift of Gracias*, and *Secret Footprints* are the threads which tie our past to our present. Transmission of stories between listener and storyteller occurs in all of these texts, with the reader being a third party to the tales' rendition. Perpetuating a story, whether in English or Spanish, is irrelevant so long as the tale continues to be passed on to future generations. As the Dominican population continues to rise in the United States, and as more Dominicans will, like Miguel and Juanita, be

English-dominant United States citizens, it will increasingly become important for much Dominican lore to be translated in order to transcend the physical and linguistic borders between these two countries.

Juanita and Miguel's interaction with their aunt relating saga-like family information is quite similar to that which Milagros Kaufman and Pablo Bolívar entertain in the final young adult Alvarez novel examined in this chapter, *Finding Miracles.* Similar to the two American youngsters who learn their connection to their Latin American heritage and who will certainly repeat Tía Lola's stories to their children, when the adopted North American protagonist of the young adult novel *Finding Miracles,* Milly Kaufman, goes in search of the connection to her biological, cultural, and family histories, she seeks out the stories that will unite her shared past with her unique North American present. Both of these novels contain mythical lore, recounted through metatexts by older women. Contrary to the belief, typical of highly evolved western societies, that the elderly become disinterested and detached from their communities, the matriarchal women in both of these novels are very much involved with the lives and care of their own biological progeny, as well as the emotional well-being of their extended clan. As the principle repositories of family histories, it falls upon women to pass family chronicles down the generational tree. It is a task both Tía Lola and Doña Gloria perform as an act of love.

Mildred Milagros Kaufman's tale, similar to *How Tía Lola Came to Stay,* contains a variety of stories. The following is a fairy tale-like quote from Mildred, the adopted protagonist of *Finding Miracles*. Mildred is a name which embodies the

entirety of her adopted and biological origins (Mildred for her maternal grandmother; Milagros, her birth name; and Milly, the Americanized nickname of them both), with her adopted surname, Kaufman, and here she reveals the semi-mythical underpinning of her origins within a formulaic representation of her own story:

> What wasn't there to understand? Once upon a time, some parents who had been in the Peace Corps decided to stay an extra year in their host country. They worked at a school teaching English. Their first daughter was born. They called her Kate. One day, the mom visited an orphanage close to where they lived. There she met a beautiful baby who had been left at the doorstep. The mom couldn't resist; she brought the dad over; they fell in love with the baby; they knew that baby was meant for them, and so they adopted this baby. (*Finding Miracles* 81-82)

Milly had always been aware of her adoption and always kept the handmade mahogany keepsake box which had accompanied her from the moment she was left on the convent steps in her native country to her present home. It contained a strand of intertwined, braided, wheat-colored and dark black hair, a coin from that country, baby photographs, and her original birth name tag "Milagros" which was pinned to her before being left on the orphanage steps (92). Yet Milly's interest in the box and its contents had never been piqued enough to go in search of her roots until a new student named Pablo arrived at her school. He asks her in Spanish "¿De dónde eres?" "Where are you from?" "¿De que país?" "From what country?" (12-

13). On another, much more prophetic date, which sets Milly's search for her birth parents into motion, she remarks:

> Pablo was staring at me again with the intense look of his. "I explain why I ask. Your eyes…they are eyes from Los Luceros."
>
> It was a good thing I was sitting down. I felt lightheaded. My hands were tingling. "What do you mean eyes from Los Luceros?"
>
> Moving back and forth, English to Spanish, Pablo told me about a small town high in the mountains of his country. "It is called Los Luceros, *muy remoto, very remote. That is why the revolutionaries hide there. These people from Los Luceros, they all have eyes like yours."* (70)

Although Milly's story may not appear to be a folk narrative within a novel, this genre includes not only classical folktales such as the ones presented at the commencement of this chapter, but also hero legends, family stories and personal experience narratives. The content and structure of a story are the factors which make personal narratives folklore, and Milly's tale involving several interwoven texts belonging to her adoptive parents and her potential birthparents certainly falls well within the parameters of myth. The formulaic phraseology employed by Milly, the journey back to her birthplace, and the mystery surrounding her origins point to just a few of the traditional aspects of lore in this most personal of narratives.

On a summer trip to the island, armed with these pieces of information and her beautiful eyes, Milly accompanies Pablo's family back to their home country. A trip to a convent offers Milly an opportunity to ask the nuns if they knew anything about her parents or La Cuna, the convent she was adopted from. Once again, formulaic, fairy tale language as related by an older female character is used to recall as much information about Milly's personal history as possible. "I remember the day Sor Corita found you. Sor Arabia said, smiling at the distant memory." (*Miracles* 166)

As if emphasizing my comment above, the text reiterates:

> the children had fallen silent, as if listening to a fairy tale. "I remember because it was the feast of the Assumption, Sor Corita's saint's day. …When she heard a knock at the door, she was afraid to open. Imagine, with all the disappearances and raids going on. But the knocking grew desperate. I remember it woke us all up. We were ready to evacuate the children the back way, but when we heard a baby crying, and we knew there was a new orphan in the world. The minute Sor Corita opened the door, a car drove away. Someone had been waiting to see that the child would be saved." She continued, "We didn't know who her parents were, where she was from—*nada*. But though that child came with no history, she came with a name, Milagros. (*Finding Miracles* 166-167)

Sor Arabia's commentary is a historical, even testimonial account within the larger context of Milly's personal story. The folklorist Urszula Lehr notes that "contact with their grandchildren allow the elderly, on the one hand, to reminisce about the past, and on the other hand, to imbue the young generation with the traditional values" ("Old Age: The Memory of Generations" 366). Although technically not the grandparent, Sor Arabia had assisted in Milagros' rearing and imparts the sad history of that country and the orphanage's charge with one she considers her own.

Perhaps the only person who could illuminate Milly's quest is the old blind storyteller Doña Gloria, a resident of the remote mountain village of Los Luceros who remembers the town's collective history in her head. This oracular character reminds the reader of traditional old, blind mythological oracles, far removed from town. Pablo's Tía Dulce remarks, "[t]hank God she was spared or we would have lost so much of our past" (199). After explaining Milly's special history, they await Doña Gloria's performative recitation of three births that could have occurred the year of her birth: One child was the offspring of Rosa Luna, called *Rosa la buenamosa,* and the colonel. His nickname "pelo negro" along with Rosa's light hair lent a possibility to their being her biological parents. A disheartened Milly comments, "[m]y heart fell. My birth mother might have been a prostitute and my birth father a torturer who cheated on his wife." Yet Doña Gloria, imparting historical information about the town along with Milly's personal story, reminds her that Rosa's indiscretion led to the advanced warning of an attack that almost certainly saved many Los Luceros residents (209).

The second child was issue of the wealthy Alicia Moregón and her father's horse groom, Manuel Bravo. His father was a master carpenter, and the hope chest's mahogany wood was plentiful in Los Luceros. Again weaving historical fact and shared village tales with Milly's personal lore, Doña Gloria reveals this couple as alternate parental considerations. The final female child born that year, which Gloria had forgotten about, but whom her mute granddaughter recalled, was that of Dolores Alba. Although she was a real woman, Dolores' actions take on supernatural traits as she breaks customary gender roles to join the underground revolution. The element of heroic saga and local legend surrounding Dolores' tale and the secretive nature of her involvement in the revolution and her whereabouts add an additional layer of myth and mystery to the Dolores birth story. The collectivity of memory is noted as Dulce explains to the children that Dolores came from a long line of freedom fighters. She was the first woman to join the rebels. "On both sides, she was related to Estrella, the founder of our nation…. That was why the family had a custom to carry the peso with their ancestor's picture on it—you've seen those old coins?" (217-218).

As is typical in oral performative recounting of histories and folklores, Doña Gloria gesticulates, touches the listeners, rocks in her chair to a variety of emotionally guided speeds, and lets the moans of her granddaughter direct her. She furthermore adjusts her recital to the questions her listeners ask of her during the interactive, face-to-face exchange of ideas. The interactivity of orality is completely lost in print, where context-free language predominates. There is only linear thought and a set text. Although *Rayuela, El Hablador* and a few other contemporary novels

have tried to mimic orality in novelistic text, written stories are, as a rule, meant to be read linearly. The author/ storyteller of a written text cannot readjust her account in response to a direct question. Walter Ong notes that "[u]ntil print, the only linearly plotted lengthy story line was that of the drama" (133). But I note, a drama is orally presented to an interactive public. Thus, an actor could theoretically alter his presentation in response to audience reaction or feedback.

Reacting to the stories she was told, Milly announces, "[m]y coin! It must have come from Dolores! Of course, the mahogany box could have come from Manuel and Alicia, the locks of hair from Rosa and Pelo Negro" (218). Through the use of abductive logic, Milagros extracts meaning from the three interwoven stories parlayed and assesses her connectedness to each set of potential parents. She evaluates the actions and lives of her possible parents. The appealing part of the uncertainty of Milly's birth parents is that she may pick and choose elements from each story and set of parents with which she may construct her own reality. Milly comments, "[m]aybe I could claim a part of each one—just as there was a little detail from each story that fit into the puzzle of my past" (*Miracle*s 224). She can then write her own story.

A story is only retold if it receives an appropriate response from the audience. Failing a positive response, the story is discontinued, and might be lost forever. But perhaps most importantly, without perpetuating our families and telling our stories to our children, our history dies. The much-quoted saying by Tadeusz Konwicki, "memory is the foundation of our existence," concisely reiterates this last

thought. Doña Gloria bemoans this thought when confronted with what to do with the history of Los Luceros. In a testimonial manner, she comments:

> I was raising this one's mother to remember the stories. That was after I lost my daughter to the bombing in Los Luceros. My granddaughter had become my hope and my future memory. But that was not to be …The *guardia* came and they did their business with my granddaughter, and they cut her throat. This child was there when it happened so she saw what they did. They were merciful. They did not kill her. They cut off her tongue. So she knows the stories, but cannot tell them. (*Miracles* 201)

When they return to their homes in Vermont, Milly reclaims her given name, Milagros. She and Pablo create a fundraiser and raise enough money to send Doña Gloria's granddaughter to school to learn to write down the stories of Rosa, Dolores, and the many that would otherwise be forgotten. This aspect of folklore once again overlaps that of *testimonio*. In all likelihood, if the story, representative of many who suffered the same fate, is not documented, it is lost. Like traditional folklore, testimonial texts, if not repeated and documented, are lost. This brings us full circle to the dichotomy and interrelatedness of orality and literacy. The beginning of the story implanted in Milly, Pablo, and Gloria's grandchild will certainly be preserved in written text. Their stories, both oral and written, are already being handed down by one generation to another.

A person's connection to her homeland is a dominant theme in this author's work. Patrick Mullen notes:

> [f]olklore as an academic discipline is not the study of the past but rather the study of present situations informed by the past. The people who actively bring the past and present together in creative ways are the ones folklorists seek out in a community, and finding them is not hard because most people in the community know who they are. (2)

All four of the above texts have female storytellers, with the two young adult novels having more clearly defined elderly female raconteurs. Clearly, the Doña Gloria character in *Finding Miracles* is the more traditional old, blind oracle, playing the "grandmother role" in preserving a town's stories, with the nuns also playing this role. Tía Lola actively engages her family in a different tone. The role of children as recipients and participants in folklore is also evident. Juanita and Miguel attentively participate in their aunt's stories. Milly, likewise, is an active participant in seeking out her personal history, in retelling it to others, and in the fundraising process to educate *la Muda* so that her shared familial history can be perpetuated. Moreover, her tale in *Finding Miracles* is told in the first person singular, making the text even more testimonial and directed to the reader, overtly limiting the literary distance between the reader and storyteller, as folklore typically does. Even María in the more traditional folkloric tale *A Gift of Gracias* simultaneously tells us her story while participating in the miraculous salvation of her family homestead. Although Mullen notes that "folklore is found in every group,

with elders of the community having an accumulation of traditional knowledge and younger people often aware of the tradition, which they do not actively carry on," this is simply not the case in the above texts (3).

As evidenced in the four works studied, women are the repositories of family history as well as the many types of lore that never make it into the male-constructed, "official" history of a country. Women's role in maintaining stories, lore, and the full corpus of lived lives that evade the "official" version of a country's history is crucial in filling in historical gaps so that we can see the small details, live through everyday life experiences, and listen as oral histories are told. This *contrahistoria* (literally, the counter-history) is a country's unofficial history. Suzanne Oboler notes that:

> [w]omen have long taken on a fundamental role not only in the fight for daily survival, but also in maintaining the historical memory of the silenced in the Americas. For, as in the United States, the official history of Latin Americans has also been written largely as a history of exclusion of various groups based on race, class, and status." (169)

To this I add gender and age. It seems that only a certain portion of the middle-range age group, the part who can read and produce written text, is deemed productive and able to create works that transmit lore.

If children have orality/ aurality as their primary information source, and do not begin reading until the age of five or six in Western cultures, and considerably later or never in primary and secondary oral cultures, storytelling and listening *are*

their means of sharing with and becoming productive members of the world around them. Dominican author Chiqui Vicioso notes that “the African experience has awakened me to the terrible problem of illiteracy in my country; forty percent of the population is totally illiterate, another forty percent functionally so” (Vicioso 232).

Latina literature captures elements of oral text which it commits to paper while simultaneously recording historical and traditional lore in English. This double transition probably occurs for two related reasons: women have traditionally been the receptacles of family history and cultural lore, as well as bearing the responsibility of child rearing. In a new country, with a new language, the old tales that instructed these women are now passed on in English. Furthermore, many unschooled Latinas come to this country with very basic educations. They therefore share their family and cultural lore with their children in spoken English. Thus, new life in a new language breathes life into folklore in a new country.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ALVAREZ'S NARRATIVE AS AUTO-FICTION,TESTIMONIO, AND MINOR LITERATURE

Jean Franco defines the much discussed term *testimonio* in Latino/a literature in what I believe to be one of the most transparent definitions of this literary genre: "[a] testimonial is a life story usually related by a member of the subaltern class to a transcriber who is a member of the intelligentsia. It is this genre that uses the referential to authenticate the collective memory of the uprooted, the homeless, and the tortured, and that most certainly registers the emergence of new classes of participants in the public sphere. The testimonial covers a spectrum between autobiography and oral history, but the word *testimony* has both legal and religious connotations and implies a subject as a witness to and participant in public events. (70-71)

Testimony's singular and collective "I" (eye) permits the storyteller to speak for herself, of the personal; it also permits her to speak on behalf of the group's collective observed experiences. A further investigation of the term testimony by Nancy Saporta Sternbach, reveals that the term "testigo" has not been studied etymologically. She references *Corominas*, The Oxford Latin Dictionary, and Mary Daly in formulating the following observation: "The fact that *testigo* (and *testimonio*) derives from *testes* will not only obviously exclude women both legally and anatomically, but would also tend to confirm that if women and *testimonio* are,

binary opposites biologically speaking, the language of the genre itself manifests women's exclusion from it and from power" (René Jara (1986:1 qtd. in Saporta-Sternbach 92). It is precisely for the reasons of inclusion in history and discourse that women's inclusion as witnesses and writers of history and stories is important. In speaking openly in the public domain, women subvert the exclusion that *testes* implies.

Deleuze and Guattari note that the third characteristic of minor literature is that" in it everything takes on a collective value, [with] "no possibilities for an individual enunciation that belong to this or that master that could be separated from a collective enunciation (17) I believe appropriate to include their further idea in relation to Julia Alvarez which notes, "that if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer to express another possible community and to forge the means for another conscousness and another possibility."(17) This is the map Alvarez is trying to create.

Latina *testimoniadora*s, like Julia Alvarez, the subject-author of this dissertation, often use English for their *testimonios.* Although peppered with Spanish, either to say the untranslatable or to maintain the tight tie to their mother tongue, English allows for a wider dispersion of these histories. Regarding the use of English, Nicholasa Mohr notes, "[n]o matter how foreign these other groups may appear, their writers, when documenting injustices or illuminating accomplishment, all do so by writing in English. Some examples are Joseph Conrad, Vladmir

Nabokov, and Jerry Kozinski; others born and raised here are Maxine Hong Kingston, Philip Roth, and Mario Puzo" (112-113).

Julia Alvarez's decision to write in English, a topic she repeatedly revisits in prose, essays, and poetry, is a decision which she hotly defends. Rather than simply "arriving in English" at the age of ten after her father's involvement in the plot to overthrow Trujillo was uncovered and the family relocated to New York City, the author was born in New York City, but returned to the Dominican Republic with her family when she was only a few months old. While in the Dominican Republic, she was schooled at elite American schools, but did not actually return to live in the United States until she was ten years old. Alvarez notes in *García Girls* that, even on the island, "Mami was raising her girls American style" (202). In one of her poems, she hopes that the BBC or Voice of America radio broadcasts could explain her comfort in a language that was not her "mother tongue" ("First Muse" 11-13). Thus, the position she put forth in essays and interviews—that she came to this country and language at the age of ten in the company of her family—is only partially true. This intricate story, a *tromp l'oeil* of the writer's own creation, lies behind the Alvarez's creative language of choice. While Spanish was the vernacular on the island, her arrival in the United States and her subsequent advanced college degrees in English made this latter language the more obvious language of choice for the author who resides, publishes, and teaches in the United States.

Alvarez's topics are typically "other," reflective of her Dominican roots and upbringing; her language choice is predominantly English with a smattering of Spanish words. Through her languages, in a typically female writing stance, a stance

deemed representative of the collectivity of underrepresented, oppressed people, Alvarez helps tell the stories of women, children, and men like herself. It is through this collective enunciative position, deterritorialized from the Dominican Republic and Spanish, that the author's personal tale—as related in *The García Girls*, her poetry and the collectivity of her twelve texts—becomes testimonial literature, representative of the many displaced Dominicans who now reside in the United States, living a primarily American-English life informed by a Spanish-Dominican heritage. This well-educated woman tells the collective story of the masses who endured the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. As a female American citizen telling her story, embracing the fates of an entire nation, she tells a tale that crosses over both gender and ethnic boundaries. It is in this manner that Alvarez's story, deterritorialized both physically and linguistically from the Dominican Republic, falls into the category of minority literature. Precisely because they are among the few who can retell the collective stories of their people, the lines between autobiography, fiction, and *testimonio* of the erudite Latina must be carefully considered.

The distinction which must be studied between *testimonio* (a truthful rendition of past events recounted in straightforward detail) and autobiography, a conscious recounting of one's life, perhaps with intentional lagunae or fictionalized memories, in the case of erudite Latina females in the United States arises from the fact that they are telling their own stories in a very stylized format. Yet their stories have a minority charge, since they are representative of the entirety of populations, including men and children who are unable to leave their imprints on a written text,

either due to a lack of education or because they have perished in battles that *testimoniadoras* lived through to retell in their work. Lastly, Latinas, as minority members of society in the United States, either by virtue of color, language, or gender distinctions, tell the collective experience through their voices. This is, indeed, the classic definition of minority literature provided by Deleuze and Guattari.

"According to Renza, [a]utobiography, a personal story of the self, unlike *testimonio*, which is implicitly collective in nature, entails a unique act of imagination and self-consciously borrows from the methodological procedure of imaginative fiction" (Renza 2). Whereas the autobiographer knows (and creatively works) his or her past from the limitations of the present self, the *testimoniadora* does much the same through rhetorical repetition, but without the conscious stylization of the lettered woman. Thus the fine line between autobiography, *testimonio,* and writing ones' self into the fictional work is often a very blurred one in today's world where printed words capture primary orality to preserve it.

What authorize the lettered woman to be both her own *testimoniadora* and story mediator? Distance, language, and physical relocation away from the writer's and the recounted story's origins permits such telling. A Latina author's English texts contextually tie her to a land and a place that informs her present, much as oral text (*testimonio* and folklore) does in strictly oral literature in another tongue.

Jean Franco recognizes that a testimonial genre empowers the subaltern in that it gives that class a voice. Unlike Beverly's description, in which *testimonio* is a full-body text, Franco believes that "testimonial embraces a corpus of texts that

range from fragments embedded in other texts to full-length life stories" (71-72). These representative literary passages are illustrated throughout this dissertation as collectively expositive of Dominican, Latina, and feminine experiences. Julia Alvarez not only paints her own life story for the reader through the Yolanda García character in *¡YO!* and *The García Girls*, both highly autoreflective texts, but offers *testimonio* of other characters in these texts. All of them narrate their own first-person stories within *¡YO!*, while Laura provides a testimonial confession in *García Girls* that "she should not have beaten Yoyo for telling stories that time the girl gave them such a scare. But you lose your head in this hellhole, you do, and different rules apply" (202). Furthermore, the first person recounting of Salomé Ureña's life alongside that of Camila in *In the Name of Salomé* is more directly presented to the reader, making her feel that she is the immediate story recipient. In a like manner, the protagonist Alma in *Saving the World* recounts her first person story. This tale of a Dominican-American writer is a near mimesis of Alvarez's real life. Alma resides in Vermont and goes "home" to live authentically among her own people as her doctor-husband works on an international AIDS project. Rather than deem this portion of the novel as historical fiction, the reader can call this section *testimonio* because the mimesis and first-person account of the protagonist so closely mimics the author's own reality. While some might argue that Alvarez's fiction does not mirror history exactly, her works are not memoir, but fiction based largely on real events and documents. As she herself indicates in author's notes, the stories she presents are conflated realities, collapsed in time. The well-researched characters are likewise based on real people, diaries, and historical fact. Diaries, letters, and lived

histories, told from the perspective of the storyteller in novels as diverse as *García Girls, Salomé, ¡YO!*, *Saving the World,* and *Before We Were Free*, are rendered in a conversational voice in Alvarez's work. Alvarez's fiction gives voice to the traditional private domain of women's diary writing which, when openly exposed, subverts the idea of the private. Intentionally written fiction, historical-fiction, and personal accounts reorder and compress information the author provides to her readership. By inserting the voices, names, and actions of these women into the collective memory of readers, Alvarez lets her characters talk their way onto paper and back into history.

Alvarez was herself evacuated with her family from the Dominican Republic to New York City by the CIA and U.S. operatives. Anita's story closely mirrors that of the author; Yolanda's story in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents performs much this same function*. Both Anita and Yolanda, like Alvarez, were whisked out of the Dominican Republic. The principal difference between these two novels is that *Before We Were Free* recounts "in the moment" experiences during the Trujillo dictatorship on the island in an adolescent's voice, while *García Girls* is a *testimonio* told by an adult looking back several years after her formative teenage experiences and her escape from the Dominican Republic under the Trujillo regime. In both cases, Alvarez is the *testimoniadora* using the character to narrate for herself.

Testimonio, like other types of oral transmissions (such as folklore and myth), is circular, redundant, and responsive to second party questions. The multiplicity of stories in the novel *¡YO!*, which overlap one another as the characters

express personal experiences and opinions about Yo, also build upon one another as characters from one story recall situations or individuals presented in prior narratives in the novel. In this manner, rather than presenting a closed print text, much like oral text, the written stories remain open to revision and inclusion from prior and future tales.

Alvarez's polished *testimonio* has been questioned for its' veracity because she is a professional writer-teacher, and not a subaltern woman. Her conscious ability to blend fact and fiction leaves critics and readers wondering if her work is rather auto-fiction as she selectively writes her life events out. She is both the teller and author of her own story. Although Alvarez's texts closely align with the circularity and redundancy of *testimonio*, it is her creative gift that allows her to structure her stories this way. In *García Girls* the mother describes the arrival of the Haitian maids to the Dominican Republic amid the historical backdrop of the 1937 Massacre and tells multiple versions of each girl's coming-of-age story— so many that Sandi admits, "I've heard so many versions of that story,[that] I don't know which one is true anymore." (62) It is precisely this type of auto-fiction Alvarez presents to her readers across texts.

Not only are metatextual stories ever-present in Alvarez's novels, the novels tend to be circular, with the ending talking back to the beginning of the work. Furthermore, the texts talk to each other through the covers of their finite publications. Thus, they act more like open, oral stories, rather than fixed texts. The collective community narratives speak through the author's own. For these reasons,

both the lettered and unlettered testimony of educated and uneducated voices who recount the stories which would forever be lost should be equally treated.

Testimonial literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is presented cleanly, by editing out much of the redundancy of typical oral transmission. Narratives are told in literary formats such as fiction, poetry, diaries and oral recitations within a work by members of the educated elite, or are redacted by them. For this precise reason the reader and literary critic alike question classification as *testimonio.* Nevertheless, these refined stories recount a shared experience of a minority group which needs to be documented for posterity. If female writers, as the few who can express what so many in their native societies endured, fail to speak on behalf of those who continue to suffer harsh conditions, or if they fail to speak on behalf of the "disappeared" who clearly can no longer tell their stories, who will tell? Who else can? Deleuze and Guattari state, "precisely because talent isn't abundant in a minor literature, there are no possibilities for an individual enunciation that would belong to this or that 'master' and that could be separated from a collective enunciation" (17).

The representative work of Latina *testimoniadoras*, educated authors of testimonial literature, unquestionably lived through dictatorships, mass killings, disappearances of fellow countrymen and women, were subjected to physical atrocities, police spying on their families, went into hiding, and endured starvation. *Testimoniadoras* who first-handedly experienced these pains, but who are now professionals and educated academics, are in a unique position to share their personal experiences in a coherent, intellectually informed manner. As

representatives of a minority in the U.S. who have unusual access to the press, survivors of the injustices suffered by Latinas in their native countries, I argue, not only have a *right*, but a *responsibility* to bear testimony.

Does an educated woman have the right to bear testimony if, by definition, a subaltern narrates *testimonio*? The unique status of Latina intellectuals in the United States, women who through their profession can access a wider public, through Spanish or English, complicates this matter. They remain members of a minority group in this country due to their ethno-linguistic background and their gender. Many of the same critics note that working-class women, literate or not, play virtually no part in the conversion of raw material into literature. Thus the role of Latina intellectuals, as the few members of a designated minority have, in my opinion, a responsibility to speak, and moreover to publish, on behalf of the many Latinas who have no ability to do so.

Deleuze and Guattari note that the third characteristic of minor literature is that" in it everything takes on a collective value, [with] "no possibilities for an individual enunciation that belong to this or that master that could be separated from a collective enunciation (17) I believe appropriate to include their further idea in relation to Julia Alvarez which notes, "that if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer to express another possible community and to forge the means for another conscousness and another possibility."(17) This is the map Alvarez is trying to create.

The author's educated voice reechoes those of many. The definition of *testimonio* I will examine for the balance of this chapter more closely follows Jean Franco's understanding of this genre as a component of a literary work.

Through her works *Before We Were Free*, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, *How Tía Lola Came to ~~Visit~~ Stay*, and *Finding Miracles*, Alvarez explores a variety of individual yet collective stories through written and oral texts contained therein. Both *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *Before We Were Free* use the traditionally accepted "private" sphere of diary writing to detail their personal tales under the regime. Both protagonists, María Teresa (Maté), one of the four famous Mirabal sisters, and Anita in the latter novel, employ diaries to document their respective experiences under the Trujillo regime. They too are educated females whose representative words will speak for many who endured similar treatment at the hands of Trujillo and his men. A sampling of the entries from Maté's diary in *In the Time of the Butterflies* details her everyday experiences as a schoolgirl, both before and after her involvement in the assassination plot against Trujillo, "the goat," was uncovered. Similarly, Anita documents her experiences during the Trujillo regime in her own hand in *Before We Were Free*. Anita's life story appears in one diary while María Teresa's appears in two diaries and a notebook. A youthful Maté entertains childish thoughts and does drawings in the notebook, but later considers more serious issues. Fear of reprisal by a member of the Trujillo regime necessitates the interment of this first, purportedly private book. The words, silenced under the watchful eye of mother earth, will speak again when it is safe to remove them from underground cover. The need to bury anti-Trujillista literature—and other books

written during his reign of terror—is not a clever literary invention, but an actual historical fact. Freddy Prestol Castillo wrote a book about the infamous massacre of more than 20,000 Haitian men, women, and children, a book he buried in his backyard until after the Trujillo era. The book, *el Massacre se pasa a pie*, was published in 1973 and again in 1987 in Santo Domingo, respectively twelve and twenty-six years after Trujillo's death (Jaime, no pagination).

As Maté becomes more aware of the political environment around her, a second diary's annotations become heavier, filled with incidents she dare only quietly document in erasable pencil, not permanent ink. A sampling from the three chapters dedicated to María Teresa in *In the Time of the Butterflies* demonstrates the type of information written down in stolen moments of solitude.

Diaries are private writings, not intended for public consumption. Whereas private male writings have a certain importance as historical documentation, women's journal writing maintains its role as a minor literary genre. As *contrahistoria*, or counter-history, women's diaries talk back to the "official" story, and recount events not included or publicly addressed by men. Women's diaries detail minute day-to-day living situations and concerns. They therefore take on an increasingly important role in filling in historical lagunae. As females privately write themselves into historical inclusion, women's writing takes on an increasingly important role. Both Maté and Anita document their personal-political yet collective experiences of daily life in private books. By exposing concealed diary entries, a truer picture of daily survival is revealed to the readership. The everyday

events assume a public stage alongside history. Inclusion of women's private writing in history fills in important blanks of carefully crafted official history.

"One of the most predominant features of testimonial discourse, and therefore its most cited characteristic, is its function as the site of nexus between the much used feminist category of the personal and the political" (Abassi 317). Women's stories tend to focus on particular people and events within a time frame. Therefore, rather than pay *less attention* to women's testimonial literature, paying it lip service as a genre of folksy home tales, historians and literary critics alike should pay closer attention to the content and context of women's recitations and penned stories.

The pervasive fear during Trujillo's reign required thoughts to be quietly documented rather than openly stated. Several entries from Maté's diary, the format which I have tried to maintain, demonstrate the tenuous balance between private documentation as a form of liberation and personal expression and the trepidation Dominicans endured during the Trujillato:

> Sunday, February 24, 1946
>
> Little Book,
>
> The whole school went to the Little Park of the Dead today. Minerva and I had a chance to talk and she told me everything. Now I am worried to death again. (*Butterflies* 39)

> Wednesday, in a hurry@1946

My dearest Little Book, Oh my dearest, Minerva asks if I'm ready to hand you over. I say give me a minute to explain things and say goodbye.

Hilda has been caught! She was grabbed by the police while trying to leave the convent, Everyone in Don Horacio's meeting group has been told to destroy anything that would make them guilty.

Minerva is burying all her poems and papers and letters. She hadn't meant to read my diary, but it was lying around, and she noticed Hilda's name. (*Butterflies* 42-43)

And lastly,

Wednesday evening, December 16

Here I am crying again, ruining my new diary book Minerva gave me…Minerva says writing gets things off her chest and she feels better, but I'm no writer like she is. Besides, I swore I'd never keep a diary again after I had to bury my Little Book years back. (119)

Not only diary annotations, but epistolary writings, another genre of "acceptable women's writing," are included in *Butterflies* as documentation, which exemplify the clear separation between the powerful and powerless. After her father's death, Maté writes a letter on behalf of her mother addressed to Generalísimo Doctor Rafael L. Trujillo. The private epistle becomes a public document in the novel. Although letter and diary writing as a "private matter" was an approved written medium for women, a great deal of personal writings are made public in *Butterflies*.

The overt respect paid to Trujillo through actions and letters, advised in this case by a male family member, was a commonality that protected people's well-being under the dictatorship. Of the discrepancy in treatment of male- versus

female-authored letters and diaries, Dale Spender notes, “he diaries and letters of men—particularly influential men—are not necessarily classified as private, and those of male politicians, for example, have frequently been published, treated with respect and revered as the ‘real facts’” (193). The unequal status of men’s and women’s so-called “personal writing” perpetuates the myth that men control public history while women control private history (family stories and lore).

The following diary entry depicts the unequal education men and women receive in many countries, a condition further preventing women’s inclusion in written history. Noting that family stories and lore, typically orally recounted, still remain in the female domain, the discrepancy is even wider. In an effort to tighten the literary distance between men and women, thereby empowering her semi-literate mother, Maté states in an annotation:

> Late afternoon, December 30
>
> Mamá and I just spent most of the afternoon drafting the letter Tío Chiche suggested she write…Tomorrow I’ll copy it in my nice penmanship, then Mamá can sign it with her signature I’ve taught her to write. (21)

Commenting upon the importance of literacy, the February sixth entry notes, “[s]ince I’m the one who reads all our mail to Mamá, I can leave out whatever Minerva marks in the margin with a big EYE” (21). Maté’s mother’s testimonial presence is evidenced as the literate daughter writes on behalf of the illiterate woman, a woman whose words would never be documented without literate intervention. Through her mediated literary presence, the mother becomes part of documented history. As Maté reads letters to her mother, both oral and written

communication are mediated—and somewhat altered. Remarking upon the importance of a formal education in order to get by on one's own, and the information the illiterate are unable to present or access, Maté says, "I'm probably messing up our whole privacy system because I'm teaching Mamá to read" (21). She is providing her mother with an important tool that grants literary independence.

Santo Domingo had one of the first universities in The New World, and Trujillo embraced the women's educational initiative in the Dominican Republic. Patria Mirabal received approval to study law from the ruler, but is prohibited from practicing it by the same regime. It is this type of sexual-educational oppression that seeks to maintain women as second-class citizens. One of the most important women's empowerment organizations was Acción Femenista Dominicana (Dominican Feminist Action or AFD). The main goal of the AFD was the achievement of voting rights, but it also sought to educate lower-class women by establishing night schools (*The Dominican People: A Documentary History* 183). The apparent discrepancy between the forward-thinking, advanced educational system and the reality of so many semi- and illiterate individuals, or, as in Patria Mirabal's case, educated women who are unable to exercise their knowledge in one and the same society, simply does not make sense. The Mirabal sisters' educated status as opposed to their own mother's illiteracy serves to underscore the intellectual discrepancies experienced by women in the Dominican Republic.

The importance of Maté's diary, which contains many historical facts and actual codes used by the subversive group, rather than simply mundane thoughts,

emphasizes the importance of testimonial women's literature. Maté's diary should be treated as an important historical text, alongside those of male-authored histories. The following brief, seemingly chatty diary entry is an indication of such information:

Manolo and Minerva have explained everything. Everyone and everything has a code name. Manolo is Enriquillo, after the great chieftain, and Minerva, of course is Mariposa. If I were to say *tennis shoes*, you'd know we were talking about ammunition. The *pineapples* for the picnic are the grenades. *The goat must die for us to eat at the picnic*. (Get it? It's like a trick language.) (42; italics in original)

Jean Franco notes that the private in men's and women's literature is quite distinct. Whereas women's testimonial literature inextricably connects the personal-private to the political-public life, the male concept of private is the space of death, fatality and redemption. This is seen in the masterworks of Vallejo (*Trilce*) and Neruda (*Residencia en la Tierra*) (Franco 74). Rather than paying less attention to the content of women's personal histories which contain a wealth of embedded historical data, more attention should be paid to them. Lief Adelson notes, "[l]os *testimonios* orales también complementan información parcial que permite comparar los datos y el punto de vista de los documentos escritos" (63). Historians have written texts based on the same historical events and data contained in Maté's metatextual diary in the fictional novel *In the Time of the Butterflies.*

The poems in *In the Name of Salomé* chronicle the life of the real Salomé Ureña and serve as lifelines for the Salomé and Camila characters. This particular novel is based almost entirely on literature and the importance of education for

young Dominican women. Salomé Ureña was a woman ahead of her time. At the insistence of Hostos, she helped establish "normal schools" for young ladies in Santo Domingo where future generations of teachers were cultivated. Not only did Salomé's students learn to read, but they also learned to write. By placing the pen in women's hands, they were not only figuratively able to write back to their male-dominated society, but were quite literally capable of doing so. Unlike the female capacitation that took place at Salomé's school, students who were educated by the Bobadilla sisters were taught comportment, sewing, and how to read—but not to write. These young ladies were less threatening to a male society as they could not, like Salomé (a.k.a. Herminia), write subversive poems against the government. They could not call the populace to action through their unwritten words, unlike Salomé who did. Although Salomé Ureña wrote poetry that provoked actions and reactions from the populace, Maté's diary is not intended as a bugle call, but merely as documentary evidence of political actions taken by a select few to change the course of Dominican history.

In many ways María Teresa's diary lies somewhere between the political activism shown by Salomé and the simple record left by Anita in *Before We Were Free.* Maté comments, "[b]efore I was able to write things down, I scraped on the wall with our contraband nail. A mark for each day, a line through a week. It was the only record I could keep, besides the one in my head where I would remember things, store them. The day we were brought in here...the men started calling out their code names so we'd know who was still alive. (228-229)

Maté's diary testimonially documents her own voice as well as the collectivity of voices in her jail compound.

Other diary entries detail the cruel treatment the prisoners received and told of shared jail cells with murderers, prostitutes, and other nonpolitical prisoners. Yet all of these women coexisted, even forming a family and sharing their life stories with one another in jail. In telling their stories, these women's lives are also preserved in the diarist's memoir.

The diary in *Butterflies* not only conserves personal and collective testimonial stories, but actual newspaper clippings and published sources, adding a sense of veracity to this historical-fiction novel. The July 23 entry reveals, "the ridiculous book (by Rafael Valera Benítez, published by Editorial Taller) is out ¡Complot Develado! No one here has seen it yet, but we've heard it is an album of all of our photographs with a description of how the movement got started" (250).

Additionally, a newspaper clipping, hidden in Maté's long, braided hair and shared with her fellow prisoners, titled "BETANCOURT ACCUSATIONS UNFOUNDED" (capitalization in original), reads in part, "Betancourt has accused the Dominican government of being involved in the assassination attempt on his life that occurred in the Capital city of Caracas, June 24. The president was injured when a parked car exploded as his own limousine paraded by" (246). *TIME* Magazine's coverage of this event (the magazine Alvarez states inspired her research into the *Mariposa* incident) was published on July 18, 1960. Multiple metatexts with real print dates reinforce the historical-mimetic accuracy of the testimonial diary text.

When the OAS investigates human rights violations in the Trujillo jails, Maté is selected as the female delegate. Stressing the importance of the written word as a permanent record, Maté comments, "Minerva and Sina have written up a statement I must somehow slip to the committee, signed by the Fourteenth of June Movement." For the personal statement, Minerva suggests "tear[ing] out the pages in your journal and put[ting] them in with our statement" (250-251). The importance of chronicling one's story as it unfolds as evidentiary proof, a story which is instantly available and current, is brought forth through Minerva's comment.

Despite verbally indicating just treatment, and refusing to say much, Maté undoes her braid and lets the first of two statements fall to the floor. Upon seeing the note, the interviewer "seemed surprised and went to pick it up. But then he thought better of it and kicked it under the table instead. He gave me this pointed look. I returned him a slight nod" (252).

The kind prison guard, Santicló, meets Maté at the door: "[d]on't worry I said, and I smiled at him. It was actually his blue ribbon that I had used to hold both notes twisted into my braid. I unwound that ribbon just enough so the first note with the statements Minerva and Sina had drafted slipped out…. The second note with my story was lodged further up in my braid.… I decided not to drop the second note" (252). The collectivity of the intentionally written statement was delivered to the OAS, but not the personal day-to-day notes, privately told only to the pages of María Teresa's diary.

It is with unique English verbiage that the nuanced sense of retaining an idea in one's mind rather than openly discussing it, or writing it down on paper, is

revealed as both a means to retain a sense of privacy in spite of overt humiliation and suffering, and a way of bearing witness. Through her silence, Maté returns the kindness to her friend.

The second note which was not dropped addresses the OAS committee investigating Human Rights abuses. It reads:

This is a journal entry of what occurred at la 40 on Monday April 11th, 1960, to me, a female political prisoner. I'd rather not give my name. Also, I have blotted out some names as I am afraid of getting innocent people in trouble. Please don't put it in the papers either, as I am concerned for my privacy. (254)

Maté's diary tells not only of the savagery inflicted upon the prisoners, the criminal sexual acts committed against herself and fellow inmates, but openly discusses sex, lesbianism, bodily functions, contraband dealing, and other delicate matters that take place within the prison walls. By breaking the silence, she opens doors for other women to begin a dialogue about these taboos and typically silenced issues. The role of women's literature is to write the private publicly, to open a space in which candid dialogue can take place. As a final bold act, Maté asks all of the female prisoners to sign her notebook, women who she had helped educate while imprisoned, reminding the reader of the power of the pen, and of documentation.

By throwing off the yoke of subjugation, this novel's strong female characters publicly present the oppression suffered by men and women of many social classes under the dictatorship. Through writing, their collective experience is maintained for posterity and continued conversations. This is one of the chief tenets

of *testimonio* in particular, and the women's movement in general. Dale Spender states, "the most constructive thing women can do in these circumstances is to write, for in the *act* of writing, we deny our mutedness and begin to eliminate some of the difficulties that have been put upon us" (232).

In *Before We Were Free*, Anita de La Torre stages her own form of youthful resistance to the Trujillo regime by documenting her experiences and trying to maintain some semblance of normalcy while under a form of imposed house arrest, much like Anne Frank, a similarly named European teenager suffering under a different twentieth century dictator. The diary entries in Anita de la Torre's chronicle date from June 3, 1961 until July 30, 1961 when she is evacuated from the island. They detail difficulties Anita endures after her family's involvement in the Trujillo plot is discovered and they go into hiding**.** The following annotations demonstrate Anita's attempt to maintain normalcy by following a schedule:

June 20, 1961 Anita de la Torre's Schedule in Hiding

Morning: Wake up, shower and dress, do waist exercises Noon: lunchtime try to keep my stomach from growling before Tía Mari comes back with her hidden lunch bag, try to be nice about the eggplant squashed up with the rice and beans and leftover chicken. Afternoon: free time-write in diary, talk with Mami,

After Breakfast-read a good book, write in diary

NIGHT eat dinner. After dinner listen to Radio SWAN. (121)

Demonstrating the importance of testimonial documentation as representative of the many who are unable to leave their mark, on June third, Anita's mother says, "go ahead, write in your diary as much as you want, we're in

trouble already, maybe you can leave a record that will help others who are in hiding too" (108).

Nonetheless, the June 5, 1961 entry indicates the difficulties borne in documenting this personal-collective experience even in the relative comfort of someone else's home. Anita notes:

I can only write a little bit at a time, as I don't get much privacy around here, even though it's just me and Mami in the walk in closet in the Mancini's bedroom. When the Mancini's lock the door we can visit with them in their room and do things like take a shower. (108)

The June 7, 1961 entry highlights the urgency of Anita's situation by detailing the emergency procedures designed for her own and her mother's protection**:**

The emergency procedure is, if the SIM (Secret Police) start a search or anyone comes to the bedroom (besides the Mancinis), we slip into the bathroom where there are two narrow closets. Mami goes in one and I go into the other, all the way to a crawl space in the back…. (110)

On June 8, 1961, Anita's comment clearly shows that the propaganda spread on the island through State-controlled radio, contradicted by the more veridical SWAN version. National radio CARIBE broadcasts propagandistic information for continued control, while the illegal SWAN station more truthfully relates events. A snippet of such a broadcast, cited in Anita's diary, serves to demonstrate how the personal and political are intertwined in testimonial literature:

CARIBE: The OAS is here to help the SIM maintain stability.

SWAN: The OAS is here investigating human rights abuses.

CARIBE: Prisoners praise treatment to OAS investigation committee.

SWAN: Prisoners complain of atrocities to OAS investigation committee.

CARIBE: Consul Washburn has been recalled.

SWAN: Consul Washburn has been airlifted by helicopters to protect his life.

Both stations agree on one thing: the plot has not worked. (110-111)

The tedium of secrecy and enclosure weigh down on Anita over time. On July 30, 1961, she remarks:

most BORING day so far!...We're in a crawl space- and I'm scribbling down this note by flashlight just in case anyone finds this diary-

-there was a huge roar in the backyard like a plane landing-now crashing at sound at the downstairs door-Oh my god-they're coming through the house!!!! My hand is shaking so hard-but I want to leave this record just so the world knows-…. (137)

Aware of the importance of testimonial evidence, Anita documents not only for herself and her sanity, but also for posterity. On June 5,1961 she writes, "[f]or days, I wasn't able to write a single word. But then I started thinking, if I stop now, they've really taken away everything, even the story of what is happening to us" (24). Anita's brief written account comes to a climax on July 30 when she is truly aware of the importance of her diary. Despite fear and trembling, she insists on memorializing the monumental moment in her personal life while chronicling a difficult moment in Dominican history. Through her private diary, Anita preserves

the shared life experiences of countless Dominicans who remained on the island under the Trujillato.

Both *Before We Were Free* and *In the Time of the Butterflies* have definite historical components whose accuracy can be ascertained though periodicals and history books. The diaries in both of these novels provide firsthand *contrahistoria* documentation, which is not part of the official history of the Dominican Republic, but rather is valuable historical data which completes the voids left by the official state-authored version. By assuming the power of the pen, the Mirabals and Anita use writing, still a tool of the mostly male, educated elite, to sign their names to their own significant female stories. In this manner, traditional patrimony over history is subsumed by women's *testimonio*. Inclusion of female authors and their literatures in Latina studies produces a more complete picture of a populace. Whether told in English or Spanish, here or there, *testimonio* is a crucial means of bearing witness.

The mosaic of stories—male, female upper-class, subaltern; illiterate and literate—whose voices are heard in these novels yields a more complete picture of Dominican history. It is through Alvarez's *Butterflies* that people outside of the Dominican Republic have become aware of the Mirabal sisters. The novel inspired the film version of *In the Name of the Butterflies*. Thus a secondary recounting of the tales of the four real Mirabals is assured through cinematic, historical, and literary accounts.

The two above-studied novels use fiction to assure women's inclusion in history. Fiction, because it is not "real fact" like male-authored history, is an ideal

genre for women to write their stories into the minds and hearts of readers, without provoking outrage over women's intervention into time-honored male literary genres. However, not every *testimonio* has a broad impact and contingent political implications. *Testimonio* can simply be used to relate family lore. Such is the case with *How Tía Lola Came to ~~Visit~~ Stay*. This novel examines the traditional personal feminine spaces of motherhood, the home, childrearing, and family structure. It is about the families people belong to and create. When Miguel asks his mother, "[w]hy didn't Tía Lola ever get married?" she responds, "[r]emember how I told you my mother died when I was only three? …When Mami died, Tía Lola took care of me. Maybe Tía Lola was too busy being my mother to find a husband" (108).

The other "family" Lola creates, besides that of her own biological one, consists of almost the entire Vermont town in which she and her family live. Although Tía Lola comes from a different country and speaks a different language, she, Linda, and the two children form a new kind of family with a very extensive network: "[s]he is the friendliest person Miguel and Juanita have ever known. Tía Lola speaks with everyone" (104). Linda is a working mother, Tía Lola the caregiver, and Juanita and Miguel, the recipients of love from aunt and mother, with frequent paternal visitations.

Arguably this is more of a fictional story with a message than a testimonial tale, yet the shared nature of the experience this family goes through is common, and it explains, as lore does, family stories. The testimonial portion of this book is related to Linda's family heritage which entitles her to tell her own story intertwined within that of her aunt's. Besides her personal story, Tía Lola tells the children

shared family tales about "the uncle who fell in love with a ciguapa and never married, the cousin who never cut her hair and carried it around in a wheelbarrow, and the grandfather whose eyes turned blue when he saw his first grandchild" (91). These testimonial accounts connect the children to their large extended family's history overseas. According to Jean Franco's definition of *testimonio*, book fragments qualify as *testimonio.*

The last novel I will examine in this chapter is entitled *Finding Miracles*. The topic of non-traditional families is again treated. Mildred Milagros Kaufman (Milly) narrates her story in a first person narrative. Milly's search for her biological parents precedes the unfolding of her own tale and exposes her to two other types of *testimonio*: the family-centered affiliation tales which are related principally by the aged Doña Gloria, and the *testimonio* recounted by victims of governmental brutality committed by the dictatorial regime against its own people in Mildred's birth country. Milly learns that her personal history is intertwined with the historical legacy of that nation. As Milly's teacher states, "[s]tories are how we put the pieces of our lives together ."(3)

The reader understands the Dominican Republic generally to be the other society which Alvarez writes about. However, *Finding Miracles* could be about any Latin American or Caribbean nation that endured a harsh dictatorship, rebellions, and military purging of male citizens. The protagonist could just as well be any child adopted from one of these strife-ridden countries. Intercultural and transatlantic adoption is becoming more common during this century, as is the search for one's personal connection to the world. Certainly Milly's testimonial

story in *Finding Miracles* is reflective of many displaced children. Lucky ones like her find new homes elsewhere. Through a variety of storytelling methods, she has the rare opportunity to search for her biological past and voice her own story.

Alvarez notes that:

[i]n a country that is still basically oral, storytelling is a way to tell the facts. The writer Alistair Reid, who spent many years living in a small *vecindad* on the north coast of the Dominican Republic, recounts that for most of his neighbors who cannot read or write, their mode, their natural wavelength is to put themselves in story form. They have saved their personal history in the form of a set of stories. (*Something to Declare* 124)

While Milly certainly can read, she too preserves what little she knows of her adoption in story format.

Although Milly's adoption was public within her immediate family, it was a secret outside of it. When Pablo Bolívar, a new student at school, took notice of Milly's eyes and commented that they looked like eyes from Los Luceros, a remote town in his native war-torn country, she reveals her personal *testimonio*:

I told him the little I knew. The orphanage in the capital my parents had visited about four months after Kate was born. The sickly baby they found there. The decision to adopt. The paperwork. The final Okay. The bringing me back. How I'd tried to keep it a secret so as not to feel different from Kate or Nate. (*Finding Miracles* 73)

The brief phrases with which this tale is recited more accurately portray an oral rather than an artistically written account.

A summer trip to Pablo's country affords Milly the opportunity to visit the town of her likely origins. The unique eyes by which Pablo had identified Milly in Vermont are her birthright in Los Luceros. Nonetheless, the only concrete clues to her parentage are a small mahogany box filled with old photographs, a coin, a braid of interwoven light and dark hair, and a name tag marked "Milagros."

As Milly listens to the stories that the old village storyteller Doña Gloria keeps in her head, she learns about the town, the struggles its people faced, and of three sets of potential parents who had female children approximately sixteen years ago. She listens carefully for hints of their connection to "The Box." The third child, initially unwanted was born to Dolores. She had confided, "Compañera Gloria, a child is a luxury I cannot afford right now. I need to get rid of it" (222). However, underscoring the importance of oral transmission, Gloria had scolded her, saying, "[w]ithout our children, we lose our stories. Our dreams die" (223). Not only does Milly get treated to oral *testimonio* with family affiliation themes, but she is presented with the harsh reality of political *testimonio* as well. The Bolívars sit for hours in front of the television watching *testimonio.* Milly comments, "I don't know how the Bolívars could sit there, hour after hour listening to this horrible stuff. But it's like they needed to do it. As a way of bearing witness, that's what Pablo called it" (*Finding Miracles* 182).

In the few short weeks she spends in Los Luceros, and what she now calls her birth country, everything had changed. Through stories, Milly finds a connection to a home town, if not to specific parents. She also comes to realize that the Kaufman family, whose stories she has been part for almost her entire life, is her

real family. Milly is able to find her place within the shared histories of all of her real and potential family members.

The two types of *testimonio* the protagonist learns about firsthand while on her summer visit are family histories and political accounts. *Testimoni*o bridges the public-private domain by openly sharing the personal and communal. One anthropologist notes, "[f]athers told stories with stronger achievement themes, and mothers told stories with stronger affiliation themes" (Fiese, et al. 763). This certainly seems true in this novel, although arguably the personal tales Gloria relates are inextricably tied to the fight for freedom by women and men alike in Los Luceros. These two types of stories need to be retold so as not to lose the history of a people. As more of the population dies or moves away, the need to tell and retell *testimonio* becomes more pressing. Milly's personal narrative takes on aspects of them both just as the Mirabals' storyline does too.

As a segue into the importance of literacy and formal education for girls,(discussed above) with the goal of retaining shared cultural history, and the importance of writing for preserving the oral word, although *La Muda* (the mute one) knows all of the town's stories, she is unable tell them, for her tongue had been cut out by Trujillo's soldiers during a siege on Los Luceros. As such, the elderly Gloria hands the responsibility of keeping Los Luceros' stories alive to Pablo and Milly as they leave her home. When they return to their school in Vermont, Milly and Pablo share their stories with the other students: "[t]he spark gets passed down to Em and Jake and Dylan and the kids at Ralston this fall who'll raise enough money so that Doña Gloria's granddaughter can go to school and learn to write

down the stories of Rosa and the colonel and Alicia and Manuel and Javier and Dolores. And on and on, the spark gets passed" (*Finding Miracles* 263).

The concept of the reader-listener is articulated by Berry-Brill in discussing contemporary American Indian children. She notes that "American Indian children are far more informed by their oral storytelling cultures. As such, their writers expect a far higher interactive participation from their readers" (333).

Writing is undoubtedly the way in which we preserve stories. The most curious aspect of the orality we seek to preserve is achieved through literature. Ong notes, "we are all born into orality, none of us into literacy, yet the written word has become the means through which we preserve our *testimonio.* Literary studies orders words into coherent thoughts, and preserves our stories for future generations." (*Orality* and Literacy 9).

The written text of the shared history of Los Luceros descendants will be preserved in print text for future generations of story tellers, much like folklore and purely testimonial text is safeguarded in print for posterity. As the powerful alphabet provides yet another female character a place in storytelling and preserving the past for future generation, *La Muda* will, like other female authors, literally leave her mark on paper.

CONCLUSIONS

Through an extensive body of texts, Alvarez transmits a vast amount of Dominican history, lore, traditions and personal stories, to the English-language reader anticipated as the primary recipient of her work. By documenting and communicating traditional Dominican history and tales, many of which are still only orally transmitted from one generation to the next in Spanish on the island, this transnational author leaves these stories for posterity in print, giving them a new life in a new country with a new language. In so doing, secondary orality and the retelling of stories is assured, with the written text remaining as a constant print informant for the many oral variations these tales will generate as they are told and retold in numerous languages by multiple narrators.

While admittedly English is Alvarez's language of choice, her stories and poems have their origins in her Dominican homeland and native Spanish tongue. This unique blending of her two cultures and of her possibility of language choice are a frequent source of friction for other lettered Dominican women and family members who urge the author's return to the Dominican Republic and to Spanish. It is also a problematic topic for the author herself who, throughout her multiple works, revisits language and boundary (country) issues, with hotly disputed justifications for remaining "here" or "there", in English or Spanish. This language

and homeland neogotiation is seen in much of Alvarez's poetry and in the blending of English and Spanish within one and the same text.

The hyphen Alvarez balances herself upon performs double duty as she speaks not only as a Dominican-American whose story origins lie in the Caribbean, but as a feminist urging the education of women and girls to offer them greater possibilities than the traditional gender roles assigned to them in their native lands. The importance of literacy for women and more humble members of society, a tool the author is certain will provide them with better opportunities, is noted throughout her literary corpus. As a feminist author, Alvarez openly subverts the silence forced on her female self as she narrates her own story publicly. As she discusses female ailments such as anorexia and breast cancer, she writes openly about private female pains for both male and female readerships.

The approximation of much of Alvarez's work to minority literature calls into question the right and responsibility of an educated woman to bear *testimonio*. As a survivor of the Trujillo dictatorship, she has a right to tell her own story, for through it, the shared voices of many whose stories resonate within her own are heard. Therefore, although Alvarez is an elite, well-educated woman, both in the United States and in the Dominican Republic, her story, deterritorialized from the Caribbean and told in English, tells the collective story of many. Through Alvarez's English language texts, the atrocities committed by Trujillo against her own, and other families, are better understood.

Alvarez's personal and collective Dominican-American story is depicted in quotidian language for those here in the United States and others still on the island,

in highly structured texts. Her recourse to both of her languages, font and stylistic variations, and a structured table of contents guide the reader and relate multiple stories within one and the same book. As Alvarez has physical and metaphysical roots into both United States and Dominican Republic soils, she frames her two homelands with large amounts of paratextual information to assist the reader's comprehension of her works.

Although her experimental works are meant to be read linearly, and not like *Rayuela*, jumping about the text from chapter to chapter at will, the works speak to one another across finite book covers and well-defined story beginnings and endings. Titles of poems evoke titles of other poems or recall parts of another Alvarez text to the reader's mind. Similarly, characters step over their defined story lines in one book and infuse another story or character with recognizable traits and monikers of the originary text. In a similar manner, multiple images, including of butterflies and swans migrate from one text to another, interweaving and connecting them as a stitch in an Alvarez quilt.

Certain word combinations used in distinct situations also unite apparently dissimilar works in a large hypertextually interwoven literary corpus. Through the repetition of these symbols, words, and characters, one work evokes another, creating a kind of "transreferentiality" with one narrative or poem calling to mind another, possibly in a different genre and text, thereby reinvigorating one passage with the other. What authorize the lettered woman to be both her own *testimoniadora* and story mediator? Distance, language, and physical relocation away from the writer's and the recounted story's origins permits such telling. A

Latina author's English texts contextually tie her to a land and a place that informs her present, much as oral text (*testimonio* and folklore) does in strictly oral literature in another tongue. What authorize the lettered woman to be both her own testimoniadora and story mediator? Distance, language, and physical relocation away from the writer's and the recounted story's origins permits such telling. A Latina author's English texts contextually tie her to a land and a place that informs her present, much as oral text (testimonio and folklore) does in strictly oral literature in another tongue.

Lastly, the recurrent characters of well-educated female Dominican and Dominican-American authors, who frequently, like Alvarez, are slim with fly-away hair: (Alma-*Saving the World*; Salomé and Camila Salomé - *In the Name of Salomé;* Yolanda García in both *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* and *¡YO!* are self-reflections of the author-teacher, Julia Alvarez. These multiple Alvarez "yos" help to flesh out the entirety of stories the author tells her reader through her interconnected, structured, feminist, Dominican-American poetic and narrative corpus.

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