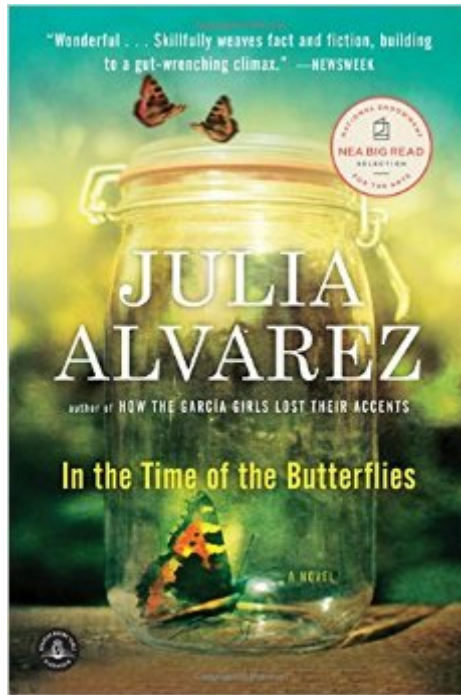


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In The Time Of The Butterflies



Synopsis

It is November 25, 1960, and three beautiful sisters have been found near their wrecked Jeep at the bottom of a 150-foot cliff on the north coast of the Dominican Republic. The official state newspaper reports their deaths as accidental. It does not mention that a fourth sister lives. Nor does it explain that the sisters were among the leading opponents of Gen. Rafael Leonidas Trujillo's dictatorship. It doesn't have to. Everybody knows of Las Mariposas—the Butterflies. In this extraordinary novel, the voices of all four sisters—Minerva, Patria, María Teresa, and the survivor, Dedé—speak across the decades to tell their own stories, from hair ribbons and secret crushes to gunrunning and prison torture, and to describe the everyday horrors of life under Trujillo's rule. Through the art and magic of Julia Alvarez's imagination, the martyred Butterflies live again in this novel of courage and love, and the human cost of political oppression.

Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Algonquin Books; Reprint edition (January 12, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1565129768

ISBN-13: 978-1565129764

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.9 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (478 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #2,982 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #4 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > United States > Hispanic](#) #43 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Political](#) #174 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Contemporary](#)

Customer Reviews

As a Dominican who lived under Trujillo's dictatorship until his overthrowing in 1961, I was very taken by Ms. Alvarez' book. Her portrayal of Dominican family life is accurate and lifelike. I remember the trial for the murder of the Mirabal sisters--it was the first televised trial in the history of the D.R. I am also a niece by marriage of General Federico Fiallo who is portrayed in the book, and although as an adult I know he committed heinous crimes under Trujillo's orders, I also want to say that in his private life he was a kind man to his nieces and nephews. He committed suicide when they came to arrest him at his home. All around me when I was a child was the specter of Trujillo and his spies and enforcers. The terror we citizens endured was quite real although we managed to live normal

everyday lives. His hand was everywhere. Ms. Alvarez book put into perspective many things that from the point of view of a child you see but fail to digest.

By means of the sharpened scalpel of fiction, Julia Alvarez carves and shapes the central characters in this difficult and delicate novel as subversive agents who see themselves obligated by fate to participate in the ultimate demise of an oppressive regime. Minerva, Patria, María Teresa, and Dede, each one in her distinct fashion, break through the tyrannical grip that holds sway over an entire island population for thirty-one nightmarish years. Alvarez is at her absolute best here, far surpassing the previously successful *HOW THE GARCÍA GIRLS LOST THEIR ACCENTS*. Even the more recent *SALOME*, in my view, doesn't come across as powerfully (especially for those readers unfamiliar with Dominican cultural history). *IN THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES* is a masterful work that illustrates the perniciousness of political oppression in every aspect of a society, written in a language of turbulent calmness. As a Dominican myself who experienced first hand the unspeakable horrors of the Trujillo Dictatorship, I admit honestly that Alvarez has presented brilliantly the case of repression and heroism more formidably than any other writer. She has officially immortalized las hermanas Mirabal as national heroines.

Julia Alvarez does a brilliant job blending fact and fiction. The story of the Mirabal sisters is brought to life by Alvarez's extraordinary style of writing. I just can't find the right words to describe this book. It kept me on the edge of my seat, unable to put it down, wanting to read more and more. At times it is humorous and delightful, at others sad and horrific. It is written from the perspective of each sister: the pious and religious Patria (the oldest), the strong and feisty Minerva (I love her best), the sensitive yet willful Maria Theresa, and Dede - the one who lived. The one who realized her strength and independence despite her doubts. Even though it is Dede who was not killed in the ambush on "the lonely mountain road," it is really all four women who are survivors; Patria, Mate, and Minerva lost their lives, yet their spirits and their courage live on. Through Dede they live on. Perhaps that is why she was not killed - to live to tell her sisters' stories as well as her own. Dede has always wondered why she escaped death, why she wasn't killed; interviewers always ask her that, yet she does not know why. But I believe that is the reason: she could tell their story. It is interesting how different and diverse the four sisters' personalities are, yet I see a bit of each one in every woman. Patria, the hopeful; Minerva, the feminist; Maria Theresa, the giver; and Dede, the unsure yet strong. What's more I learned of the dictator Trujillo and what was like to have lived under his regime. I never knew about him, never even heard of him until I read this book. This made me want

to read and learn more not only about the Mirabal sisters, but about Trujillo ("El Jefe"). I love to read a book of fiction and learn about historical events - about people who actually existed and made a difference despite everything going against them. I learned of a period of history in a country that I knew nothing about (The Dominican Republic [I wonder why it's called that?]) as well as a dictator I never heard of. For that, I thank Julia Alvarez. This is one of the best books I have ever read, and I recommend it highly for everyone - men and women, Dominican and non-Dominican, young and old. It is an inspiring read.

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