

## **(Dis) locating the “I” of the “Yo” in Julia Álvarez’s *Yo* and Mario Vargas Llosa’s *La fiesta del Chivo***

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“In my familia, fiction is a form of fact”

Julia Álvarez

Latina/Latino literature offers a continual dislocation of time, space, and perspective, fostered by the Hispanic and U.S. cultures they represent. A study of Latina/Latino works also helps to analyze other literatures written outside of a writer’s country of origin about transnational or global topics. These are textual concerns external to the writer’s national sphere, where other cultures interact and play a fundamental role in dismantling the work’s complexity. Such an approach is necessary given the increased numbers of exiles and immigrants, who, for economic and political reasons, have been dislocated from their country of origin and have been forced to reside abroad. In Julia Álvarez’s “Homecoming,” the poetic voice returns to the Dominican Republic to attend her cousin’s wedding to a “burnt face Minnesotan.”<sup>1</sup> The poetic voice travels to a familiar environment, one that she knew as a child. However she observes it from a different perspective, not as a Dominican but as one who is closer to the culture of her adopted country. The time spent in the United States has caused the poetic voice to distance herself from the Dominican culture, and view it as the other. In essence, her new positionality resembles more closely the one assumed by anthropologists who study native societies, but rely on their own culture to understand and contextualize the one under observation.<sup>2</sup>

“Homecoming” is about a return to a familiar past, but it is also about the two cultures the poetic voice embraces, the original one, of her early childhood, and the adopted one, of her present Vermont surroundings. In the poem, the cultures are represented in binary terms:

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<sup>1</sup> “Homecoming,” *Poems of Exile and Other Concerns*, ed. Daisy Cocco de Felippis and Jane Robinett (New York: Ediciones Alcance, 1988), 61.

<sup>2</sup> This idea is implicit in Claude Levi Strauss’s *Tristes Tropiques*. 1955. Trans. John and Doreen Weightman. New York: Atheneum, 1974.

The United States and the Dominican Republic, large and small, English and Spanish, North and South, cold and hot, preservation and destruction. But each culture is also read in terms of the other one. The Minnesotans have burnt faces, and the prosperous dark-skinned uncles marry white women. Though one of the uncles wants the poetic voice to return to her roots, “*Come back from that cold place, Vermont, he said, / all this is yours!*,”<sup>3</sup> the poem suggests that tropical heat will consume all those who inhabit the land: “A maiden aunt housekept, / touching up whipped cream roses with a syringe / of eggwhites, rescuing the groom when the heat / melted his chocolate shoes into the frosting.”<sup>4</sup> By contrast, the cold, represented by a northern winter climate, preserves anything that comes in contact with it: The groom, from Minnesota, rescues the cousin from the Dominican Republic and family, and the poetic voice will return to her “native” Vermont.

North American culture is illuminating for the poetic voice, and offers her a perspective previously not available to her in her country of origin. She now sees and understands class and racial differences evident in her adopted homeland and looks for them in a time and space that does not offer those same insights:

It would be years  
before I took the courses that would change my mind  
in schools paid for by sugar from the fields around us,  
years before I could begin to comprehend  
how one does not see the maids when they pass by.”<sup>5</sup>

Though one would expect maturity and awareness to develop with time, it is probable that in spite of their ages the aunts and uncles still do not see the maids. Rather, growth is associated with geographic dislocation and residency in the United States. The apocalyptic ending of the poem, which alludes to a rebellion and a metaphorical destruction of the ranch and cane fields, refers to the uprising against the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic, a recurrent theme in all of Álvarez’s novels. However, it also gains meaning within the context of the nineteen sixties idea of revolution in the United States, a meaningful time and place that became a significant part of the author’s developmental stage.

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<sup>3</sup> *Poems of Exile and Other Concerns*, 61.

<sup>4</sup> *loc.cit.*

<sup>5</sup> *loc.cit.*

The constant dislocation of time, space, and perspectives is also present in Álvarez' *Yo* and Mario Vargas Llosa's *La fiesta del Chivo*, two works that belong to diverse literary discourses, but center their narrations in the United States and the Dominican Republic. Álvarez's *Yo* corresponds to a Latina/Latino literature written in English, and Vargas Llosa's *La fiesta del Chivo* (*The Feast of the Goat*) forms an integral part of Spanish American literature. In fact, Vargas Llosa is one of the acclaimed writers of the novel of the Boom period of the nineteen sixties, which gave Spanish American literature its international notoriety.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of these differences, there is a conspicuous resemblance between the two works. Each writer is haunted by the past of the Dominican Republic, and relies on the perspective of a Dominican woman, who is forced to leave her country, seek asylum in the United States, and return to her country of origin to reconcile the past from the present.

*Yo* is made up of multiple narrators, family, friends, and acquaintances of Yolanda, and they provide a unique insight into the protagonist, who in turn helps us to understand the other characters.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Emir Rodríguez Monegal, *El Boom de la novela latinoamericana* (Caracas: Editorial Tiempo Nuevo, 1972).

<sup>7</sup> Álvarez' *Yo*, named after the character Yolanda, whom we first meet in *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books, 1991). In each novel the protagonist lives in the United States but also travels to the Dominican Republic to visit her family. Álvarez uses the Dominican past to gain perspective into U.S. culture, and relies on her adopted culture to understand the Dominican past, which causes any fixed signifier to be dislocated and uncover multiple levels of understanding the past and present, and the coming together of the two cultures in her text. Yolanda indeed embodies both cultures. In an earlier study of *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, I made the following observations about the protagonist: "Yolanda is caught between two worlds, the Hispanic and the North American. She is a multiple being. She is both North American and Dominican; she is Carla, Sandi, Sofia, and Yolanda and she embodies the different narrative perspectives their voices represent. She is also Yolanda and not Yolanda. This idea is manifested in the novel by the multiple names used. She is Yolanda, Yoyo, Yosita, Yo, and, last but not least, the English Joe. And above all, she is Yo, the Spanish first-person pronoun, the I of the narrator. Yolanda's return to the island represents her desire to transform herself from the North American Joe to the Yolanda of her family and youth. One of her nicknames is Yoyo, which recalls the toy constantly going up and down, moving from one extreme to the other, from one culture to the other, touching upon both but not remaining a part of either one of them. The protagonist's onomastic displacement will be continuous. It characterizes a search for identity, for a voice that will offer a coherent understanding of her circumstances, but also the impossibility that any one perspective exists that can explain the complexity of her reality. She will always be Yolanda, and someone

Though Yolanda does not narrate any particular section, she is present in all of them. Each chapter describes Yo from the vantage point of the narrator, how that person contributes to Yolanda's well being. But it also describes Yo's efforts in helping that person discover his or her own inner "yo," that is, the "I," or the Yolanda, that lies within. This is certainly the case in the chapter "The best friend," when Tammie insists that the celibate Yolanda date. But Tammie also learns from her Dominican friend, that she should not be so eager to give into men. In "The suitor," Dexter realizes that Yolanda is tied to a different culture, and she understands that he is not for her.

What I consider to be cultural dislocations or disarticulations were already present in Álvarez's first novel, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*. Let us recall that Yolanda returns to the Dominican Republic to visit her family. Against her aunt's advice she ventures alone into the countryside, at night, looking for guavas. Dominicans who encounter her believe she is not Dominican, but a foreigner; a Dominican woman would not go out alone at night, but an American would.<sup>8</sup> In Álvarez's *Yo*, Yolanda shares her newly acquired strengths with her friends, empowering them to take charge of their own lives. In "The Stranger," which takes place in the Dominican Republic, Yolanda meets the illiterate Consuelo, whom she does not treat as an inferior, as her Dominican relatives would, but as an equal. Yolanda addresses the woman as Doña Consuelo, a title more suitably reserved for someone like Don Mundín and Doña Graciela, Yolanda's landowning cousins. Yo helps Consuelo write a letter to her daughter Ruth, who abandoned her country, risked her life crossing the Mona Canal to Puerto Rico, and entered the United States illegally. Yo counsels the mother not to interpret her daughter's situation from her own Dominican cultural referent, which requires Ruth to tolerate her prearranged but abusive marriage. Instead, she frames the same situation within the North American perspective, and advises the daughter to seek help from authorities. Even so, Yolanda's viewpoint is more appropriate. Ruth is Dominican, but she now resides in the United States. Nevertheless, Yolanda's idea to rely solely on U.S. culture and not consider the one of her Dominican past is clearly a cultural imposition.

The cultural dislocation is also present in the United States and evident in the chapter "The Teacher." Garfield, Yo's college professor, recognizes her talents and encourages his student to pursue her academic

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else." See my *Dance Between Two Cultures: Latino Caribbean Literature Written in the United States*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1997), 275-76.

<sup>8</sup> *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, 9-23.

interests, supporting her application for a Fulbright, and post-graduate work in prestigious schools like Harvard and Stanford. The phrase “Once in a career there comes a student,” marks the section and conveys the exceptional position the student holds with the professor. However, unlike many students in similar situations, Yolanda has other concerns and consistently disappoints her strongest supporter. More in line with her “Latina” character, she is emotional and spontaneous, and readily gives into her feelings. She abandons her studies, marries, divorces after six weeks, and joins the revolution in the Dominican Republic.

If the professor attempts to guide his student, it is Yolanda who transforms Garfield’s life. Garfield is a disciplined and dedicated professional. But after his divorce, Garfield discovers his homosexuality, a topic that is more apt to be discussed not in a Dominican but in a North American setting. Through his interactions with Yolanda, Garfield learns to follow his heart. When his lover is diagnosed with the AIDS virus, Garfield invites Mathew to live his final years with him. In the end, Yo realizes that she does not belong in a Ph.D. program. This decision is also liberating for Garfield, who is ready to let Yo and Mathew go.

Álvarez also takes the reader into a journey of discovery of Yolanda’s own inner “yo” or self. If *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* is narrated backwards in search of Yolanda’s origin or identify, which she finds in her childhood in the Dominican Republic, *Yo* reveals the protagonist’s character at the start of the novel, and at the end she obtains a level of heightened awareness. This journey is associated with her family, who opens and closes the novel. The first chapter, “The Mother,” aptly subtitled “nonfiction,” which gives an element of veracity to the narrative, uncovers one of Yolanda’s main traumas. The mother, who represents an origin of sorts, narrates her experiences when coming to the United States. As can be expected with any immigrant or exile leaving her native land, for Mrs. García the relocation was traumatic at best. Life in the United States demanded certain changes, even for the well-to-do García family. Back in the Dominican Republic the maids raised the children, in the United States the mother had to assume her maternal responsibilities; she was thrown into close proximity with Yolanda.

At home or abroad, the mother uses the same scare tactics to control her daughters. One Christmas in the Dominican Republic, the mother dressed up in her fur coat and frightened all the girls except Yolanda. The coat, for the children, represented the Cuco, the Haitian boogeyman who would steal them away if they did not behave. When the mother heard them misbehaving, she wore the coat and made the girls panic-stricken. Yo was not afraid. She had hidden in the closet and found the

fur coat, but also her father's gun, a much more daring discovery, since Yo had a big mouth and a tendency to talk. The gun would have been enough to link Carlos with a real or imaginary conspiracy against Trujillo, placing their lives in danger.

Four years after arriving in the United States, Mrs. García is still unsure on the subject of how to discipline her children. To control their behavior, the mother resorts to past practices, that is, locking them in the closets. Unintentionally, the mother locks Yo in the closet with the fur coat. Though Yo knew that it was only a coat, she is traumatized by the experience. The fear experienced in the Dominican Republic continues to be a part of Yo's life and psyche. Similarly, the coat transports her back to an earlier time, as we shall see later. When the social worker, Sally O'Brien, makes a house visit, the mother encourages the children to behave by threatening them with Trujillo's henchmen, which in some respects replaced the Haitian boogeyman. The children knew that if they were deported to the Dominican Republic, they would be victims of Trujillo's military police. Unbeknownst to the children, the threat was idle; in the present, Trujillo had been dethroned but the mother still considered the threat useful for controlling her children. The woman visits the García household to investigate Yo's stories, " 'Kids locked in closets and their mouths burned with lye. Bears mauling little children' ".<sup>9</sup> The mother acts surprised and claims not to know where Yo got the need to invent stories. Though the answer is not apparent, the mother has traumatized her daughter and suppressed a certain aspect of her past.

The search for Yo's fears and traumas, and answers to the mother's questions about Yo's stories, linger throughout the narration, as Yolanda finds her own voice and becomes a successful writer. But the element of fear is present in the novel, from beginning to end, from childhood to the present. It is most evident toward the end of the novel, in the next to the last chapter, "The Stalker," subtitled "tone," which narrates the pursuit undertaken by one of Yo's admirers. The chapter identifies the fear with one particular individual, but it is not limited to a person or situation. Written in a Joycean manner, the stalker may suggest the voice patterns of a psychopath, but it may also allude to the narrator's own erratic thoughts. If this is the case, then Yolanda does have a chapter in which she speaks. The stalker believes that Yolanda is his soul mate, his doppelganger. The fear, which stalks Yolanda, is indeed her doppelganger.

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<sup>9</sup> *Yo* (New York: Plume, 1997), 33. Unless otherwise stated, all references are to this edition and quotations will appear parenthetically in the text.

The chapter is remarkable in that it contains shifting pronouns that include the “I” of the stalker, his mother, the police, Yolanda’s sister, and Yolanda herself. In fact, the “I” of the narrator shifts back and forth between Yolanda and the stalker. This is visible toward the end of the chapter, in a section marked by double spaces. The section in question belongs to Yolanda, and describes why she was not receptive to the stalker’s advances, but then the “I” and “you” change to incorporate the “I” of the stalker and the “you” of Yolanda as follows:

for to tell you the truth one of the reasons I was so scared of you was that you were facing bravely and openly yes I can see that now bravely and openly a dark and fearful part of yourself that I was too afraid to face unless it was on paper

which is why I write books as my way of giving you yes you my way of saying, take this as maybe it will help for a moment to hold back the terror heal the wound make a brief stay against the confusion—

shut up! I scream, I told you to fucking shut up, lunging from the bed

and putting the blade to your throat and saying, do you think I don’t mean it, bitch, and the sister begging you, please please please, and finally you shut up and I sit back down and cut myself a piece of monterey and wolf it down and I don’t know maybe it is the taste of this cheese rosemarie used to feed me but I start to rock myself and feel the fear and the pain and the old tears (289).

In the above section, the “I” and the “you” trade places. Yolanda’s “I” becomes the stalker’s “I” and the stalker’s “you” becomes Yolanda’s “you”. The stalker allows for her to come to terms with her own fear, which is also a part of her. Though the dash may be a marker for a shifting pronoun, from the “I” of the narrator to the “I of the stalker, similar markers in the same section of the chapter do not have the same significance. And there are other shifts that are not identified by the same marker.

The stalker and Yolanda may be different people, but they share many of the same characteristics. Both are haunted by fear and pain, as described by the stalker at the end of the above quotation, traced to a traumatic experience that occurred during childhood and associated with the mother. From this perspective, one mother’s use of the hose to beat the boy corresponds to the other mother’s use of the fur coat and Trujillo stories to scare the girls. Though there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the stalker may be Yolanda’s subconscious, as a man he may point

to her relationship with her father (in Spanish the subconscious, *el subconsciente*, takes a masculine noun).

The stalker and the father are related. It is not coincidental that the chapter title "The Stalker" precedes the one entitled "The Father." Both chapters are united by the presence of a male and the theme of fright. Trepidation is not unique to *Yo*, and is a constant in Álvarez's works. *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, which shifts geographic settings, from the United States to the Dominican Republic, and narrative time, from the present to the past, associates the terror with the *carbonera*, and the black Haitian servants. *In the Time of the Butterflies*, in which the adult narrator returns to her native country to uncover the past of the Mirabal sisters, relates the horror to the ruthless Trujillo dictatorship, culminating in the death of three of the four sisters.<sup>10</sup> In *Yo*, which moves between the U.S. mainland and the Dominican Republic, the horror is societal but also familial, and is transported back to the United States. In fact, the fear is mainly associated with the father. At the outset of the novel, the father's voice is visibly absent, but his presence gains importance toward the end. As a child Yo liked to tell stories. She crafted one story that unknowingly put the family's life in danger, and for this reason the father beat her without mercy. During General Molina's visit, the child Yolanda told the visiting general that her father was going to kill the dictator and other people with guns. Milagros, the servant, reconstructs the story as follows:

Then this one, she says, my papi is going to kill all of the bad people with those guns. And the general says, what bad people, and this one says, the bad sultan ruling the land and all the guards who protect him in his big palace. And so the general says, you don't mean that, Yoyo. And this one gets like she can get, you know, and gives the general a big serious liar's nod and says, yes, and El Jefe, and maybe you, too, if you don't stop tickling me (305-306).

Those hearing the story were stunned, and recognized immediately the gravity of the situation. If there were any truth to the story, their lives would be in imminent danger. As Vargas Llosa reminds us in *La fiesta del Chivo*, there were many examples of individuals who appeared to threaten the Trujillo regime and lived to regret their actions. Such were the well-publicized deaths of writers Jesús de Galíndez, who was kidnapped and flown from New York to the Dominican Republic and

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<sup>10</sup> *In the Time of the Butterflies* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books, 1994).



executed there; and Ramón Marrero Aristy, Trujillo's Labor Minister and author of *Over*, who was accused of offering anti-Trujillo information to Ted Schulte of the *New York Times*.<sup>11</sup> Trujillo dealt swiftly with his enemies, even if his actions violated the sovereignty of their country of residence, or if the adversary was a head of state, as was the case with Rómulo Betancourt, the president of Venezuela.<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically, the father's reaction against his daughters recalled the same ruthless actions the Trujillo dictatorship used against unarmed, innocent or lesser opponents. To clear the room, the father threatened the children with the use of force. Once alone with Yo, Mr. García and his wife began the interrogation. Yo found herself isolated and defenseless, and her parents threatened her with violence. The mother told Yolanda that her father would give her the beating of her life. The father continues the narration with the same aggression one would use with an enemy:

We took her into the bathroom and turned on the shower to drown out her cries. "Ay, Papi, Mami, no, por favor," she wailed. As my wife held her, I brought down that belt over and over, not with all my strength or I could have killed her, but with enough force to leave marks on her backside and legs. It was as if I had forgotten that she was a child, my child, and all I could think was that I had to silence our betrayer. "This should teach you a lesson," I kept saying. "You must never ever tell stories!" (307).

The description could have been taken from the dark pages of life under the dictator, which is the theme of *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *La fiesta del Chivo*, and modified to meet the present circumstance. The bathroom is the torture chamber, the father is the henchman, and the wife the accomplice. What is clear is that the incident represents the origin of Yo's fears and traumas. A few days later, when the father realized that Trujillo did not pay attention to Yo's story, he entered her room. As she slept, he observed the marks on her legs. His section states: "She must have felt a presence beside her because she stirred awake. Raising her head a little, she focused on me, and what her face showed was terror, not delight. She backed away when I reached for her, and when I forced her to come to my lap, she began to cry" (308). It is now clear why Yo became hysterical when the mother locked her in the closet with the coat, thus reminding her of the gun, the same one the father had to hide when he suspected that the general would have them all arrested.

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<sup>11</sup> *La fiesta del Chivo* (México: Alfaguara, 2000), 87-88, and 111-14.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

The coat but also the gun became constant reminders of that earlier and fearful moment in her childhood.

In spite of the beating Yo received, an adult reader could surely understand that the father acted out of his own fright. He believed that the government had found out he was a conspirator, and his daughter may have been repeating something she heard the family say. The terror may have been even greater because the father belonged to the underground and was actively conspiring against the government. Certainly he was furious with Yo, who liked to tell stories, and one of them placed all of their lives in peril. But the terror Trujillo imposed on the population became the father's fear, which is also a national fear—as we shall see later—, led to the creation of Yo's own trauma, which affected her in a very personal way. Yo's current difficulties with men and her lack of desire to have children may be related to what took place many years before. Bearing a child would have been the ultimate pleasure Yo could have given her father, and perhaps the nation, but she chose not to fulfill her biological potential, possibly as a way of retaliating mainly against the father. In fact, Yo has had difficulties with all men. All of her relationships ended in disaster. None of the men was able to fulfill her expectations.

Motherhood is an important issue on Álvarez's mind. In an essay entitled "Imagining Motherhood," Álvarez explores this topic even further by shifting perspectives, and taking into account both the North American and Hispanic points of view on this important subject, thus continuing to insist on what I have referred to as a dislocated reading of her writings. The issue became even more pressing when Álvarez's youngest sister adopted a child, leaving her as the only childless woman in her family. In her third marriage, Álvarez fell in love with a man with two grown children. Her husband Bill had already reared his children, but he reluctantly agreed to raise a second family to please his wife. Álvarez ultimately succumbed to her husband's way of thinking, but not for the same reasons. She rationalized that in the present her true calling in her life was not motherhood but writing: "The thought of putting aside...what I had always considered my real calling, the writing, putting it aside now in my mid-forties when I was finally hitting my full stride, gave me cold feet. I came to realize with that straight, clear-eyed vision of a writer analyzing her fictional character that I didn't really want to be a mother solely for the sake of being a mother".<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Something to Declare* (New York: Plume, 1999), 98-99.

Álvarez also conceptualizes motherhood from a Hispanic perspective, that is, of a culture that exerts an inordinate amount of pressure on women to marry and have children, and where a childless woman is even more unusual than in the United States.

And if being childless is unusual in rural Vermont, it is mucho más odd in my own Latin culture, where being a woman and a mother are practically synonymous. Being childless—by choice—is tantamount to being wicked and selfish. Marriage is a sacrament for the procreation of children, how many times have my old tías told me that? Even the one family holdout, my maiden aunt who grew orchids and read books and knew Latin, finally married in her thirties and had her one child. “I won’t deny,” she has told me, “that this has been the most significant event of my life.”<sup>14</sup>

The two perspectives find meaning in the culture of her parents and the one of the country she has embraced as her own. One speaks to the Dominican Álvarez, someone who follows traditional Hispanic values, obligating her to be subservient to men; and the other to the North American Álvarez, an independent woman more in tune with gender rights in U.S. culture. However, Álvarez discards the possibility of combining work and motherhood, as many women do in the United States, a tendency prevalent in particular among her university colleagues.

Álvarez confronts her situation by interpreting her Hispanic needs from a North American cultural viewpoint, and accepts motherhood as a loss. She rationalizes not having children by equating the birthing act with not being able to play a musical instrument, or not having the opportunity to work in a particular field, and other losses. She recognizes that her yearning for motherhood is directly tied to writing about it, an idea that came about while talking to a friend. Though good friends often tell us what we want to hear, in her essay Álvarez situates her decision not to have a child within the creative and imaginative process of writing about it. Álvarez’s *Yo* helps to read “Imagining Motherhood,” since it also provides another reason for being childless. Within the context of the novel, to remain childless can be read alongside her childhood traumas and fears, and interpreted as a daughter’s affront to her parents in general, and her father in particular.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 99

Yolanda's fears and difficulty with men, and her decision not to have children is also present in Urania, a character in Mario Vargas Llosa's *La fiesta del Chivo*, about the Trujillo dictatorship. Though Vargas Llosa published his novel three years after Álvarez's *Yo* appeared in print, it is uncanny that both Urania and Yolanda have a cousin by the name of Lucinda, and each protagonist was affected by the Trujillo government.<sup>15</sup> Like *Yo*'s multiple perspectives, *La fiesta del Chivo* is divided into two periods, the present and the past, and three repeating narrations, Urania's reason for returning to the Dominican Republic, Trujillo's point of view, and the mindset of the men involved in his assassination, all of whom were associated with the dictator at one time or another.<sup>16</sup> With the three narrations, Vargas Llosa provides varying perspectives of events unfolding in the same geographic space. *La fiesta del Chivo* decenters Trujillo's discourse, which controlled events in the Dominican Republic for thirty-one years and continues to influence all aspects of Dominican life even into the present.<sup>17</sup> Urania's narration offers a unique insight into the Trujillo dictatorship, from the woman's perspective, the gender most vulnerable to the Trujillo regime. In comparison to the male voices, Urania speaks in isolation about her own marginal condition.

Urania's traumas began at home with her relationship to her father, Senator Agustín Cabral, recalling that of Yolanda and her father. In each situation the dictator impacts the life of the father and the father affects that of the daughter, who leaves for the United States, where she finds salvation. But she also returns to the island to come to terms with the past. The concerns of Vargas Llosa's novel are also captured by Álvarez's "A Genetics of Justice," an essay that considers Trujillo's desire for young women, and highlights the assassination attempts, in

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<sup>15</sup> Vargas Llosa has been accused of plagiarizing ideas from other writers, in particular Bernard Dietrich's *Trujillo: The Death of the Goat* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1978) and Lipi Collazo's *Después del viento* (Santo Domingo: Editora Collado, 1997). While Vargas Llosa may have relied on Dietrich's study for the section on the conspirators, I have not been able to establish a link between *La fiesta del Chivo* and *Después del viento*. While my study uncovers many similarities between Álvarez's and Vargas Llosa's novels, my intent is not to show that one borrowed from the other.

<sup>16</sup> The three repeating narrations continue until Trujillo is assassinated. From chapter XVII, which should correspond to Trujillo, until chapter XXIII, the next to the last chapter, narrate the aftermath of the assassination. Chapter XXIV, the last chapter, focuses on Urania's experience with Trujillo.

<sup>17</sup> After Trujillo was assassinated in 1961, Joaquín Balaguer, one of his ministers and President of the Republic in the final period of the Trujillo dictatorship, ruled the country, directly or indirectly, until his death in July of 2002.

which Álvarez's father was a participant.<sup>18</sup> They are also contained in *In the Time of the Butterflies*, particularly in a scene where Trujillo attempts to seduce Minerva, but he is more successful with one of her school mates, Lina Lovatón, a story also narrated by Vargas Llosa.<sup>19</sup>

As with *Yo, La fiesta del Chivo* proceeds in two directions. Urania's section is narrated in the present, but searches for an earlier time, to uncover the protagonist's painful past while in the company of the dictator. The other two sections pertain to Trujillo and the conspirators and narrate the past, the dictator's final days and those of his assassins. The latter describes each man's motivation for participating in this heroic act, and the subsequent brutal hunt to avenge the death of the dictator. Each of the three sections, with its respective character(s), describes events from his or her point of view, but each also overlaps with the points of view of the others to provide multiple perspectives of the same events.

Urania and Trujillo's sections describe the life of Cabral, Urania's father and president of the Senate, and his fall from grace. Though unaware of his own estrangement, some believed that the dictator held the Senator personally accountable for the Catholic Church's decision not to name him the Church's Benefactor; while others suspected him of conspiring with the U.S. ambassador against the Dominican government and misappropriating public funds. Whether these allegations were real or contrived charges, to be restituted to the privileged position he once enjoyed, Cabral used his daughter as a means of regaining the dictator's favor: he allowed the dictator to seduce Urania, his only child.

Trujillo's lecherous appetite for women and girls, especially virgins, was enforced as if it were part of the national pride and consciousness. Trujillo's words, "Romper el coñito de una virgen excita a los hombres" ("Breaking a virgin's cherry always excites men"), would be engraved in Urania's psyche for the rest of her life. However, Urania's discourse represents a counter-discourse to the one in power. Her intimate description of this traumatic day demystifies the dictator's widespread reputation as an insatiable lover. It dismantles his manhood and reveals him to be a less than potent lover, as he and others have claimed. Trujillo's failure as a man to rape and thus devirginize Urania, and his decision to use his hand as a substitute, still had a profound impact on Urania's psyche. For the unwilling participant, the bedroom became a torture chamber: "Sentía sus músculos y huesos triturados, pulverizados.

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<sup>18</sup> "A Genetics of Justice," *Something to Declare*, 103-111.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, 20-24, and *La fiesta del Chivo*, 32, 157.

Pero la asfixia no evitó que advirtiera la rudeza de esa mano, de esos dedos que exploraban y entraban en ella a la fuerza. Se sintió rajada, acuchillada; un relámpago corrió de su cerebro a los pies. Gimió, sintiendo que se moría.” (“She felt her muscles and bones crumbling, ground to dust. She was suffocating, but that did not prevent her from feeling the roughness of that hand, those fingers, exploring, digging, forcing their way into her. She felt pierced, stabbed with a knife; a lightning bolt ran from her head down to her feet. She cried out, feeling as if she were dying”).<sup>20</sup> The savage description of this incident is only equaled by the torture of those who were believed to be involved in Trujillo’s assassination. Pupo Román, who did not fulfill his commitment to the conspirator, was taken to El Nueve headquarters and tortured for four months. His eyes were taped open and deprived of sleep; his eyelids were sewn shut; and he was castrated with scissors and forced to swallow his testicles. Equally shocking was the case of Miguel Ángel Báez Díaz, who in the same El Nueve detention center, was kept alive after being subjected to sessions of electric shocks, beatings, and burnings, later to be fed a pot of meat that contained pieces of his older son Miguelito. Miguel Ángel died a few hours later of a heart attack (424-26 and 435-36).

Trujillo’s use of force revealed his own weakness. We are told that Trujillo suffers from sphincter and prostate problems, and with Urania he is unable to sustain an erection and experiences temporary impotency; therefore, he uses his hand as a substitute for his phallus, which he introduces into Urania. The finger, which sublimates the phallus, illustrates Trujillo’s advanced age, he was seventy years old, and his refusal to accept the passage of time; he lived fixated on the fantasy of the past. Trujillo’s encounter with Urania can only be described as an abuse of power, a rape, an agonizing torture, and, as can be expected, an event imprinted on Urania’s soul for the rest of her life. “Romper el coñito de una virgen” (“Breaking a virgin’s cherry”) appeared to be Trujillo’s national obligation, but with Urania he fails in his patriotic duty. It is important to observe that Trujillo’s desire for women led to his downfall; his actions were known by everyone and they were predictable. The dictator was assassinated on his way to the Casa de Caoba, to meet another young lady. Trujillo’s assassins, who narrate every third section, anxiously wait for him on the road to San Cristóbal, the location of his

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<sup>20</sup> *La fiesta del Chivo*, 508-09. *The Feast of the Goat*, trans. Edith Grossman (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 396-97. All quotations are from this edition and references will appear parenthetically in the text.

house. When his car passes the conspirators' check point, they follow in pursuit, overtake the car, and gun down the dictator and his driver.

Urania's story depicts Trujillo as an impotent and sickly man, who has sexual relations with under-aged girls. Even though his actions are pathetic, let us remember that there is complicity between Urania's father and Trujillo, that is, between her biological father and the father of the nation. One consented for his child to be deceived into believing that she was attending a party at the Casa de Caoba, and the other used the same event to violate societal laws that protect children from adults. In fact, Trujillo uses his might to overcome a less than formidable opponent. Subsequent to the rape, Urania rejects the physical and symbolic representations of these two men. Instead of returning home, Urania sought asylum with Sister Mary in the Santo Domingo Academy, who was successful in finding refuge for Urania in the United States.

After a thirty-five year absence, Urania returns to her country. As in *How The Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, she does not desire to visit the present time of her country, characterized by a crowded city of one million inhabitants, loud music, and joggers in El Mirador park. She returns as a forty-five year old highly educated woman; she is a lawyer for the World Bank, and a devout student of the Trujillo dictatorship, yearning to uncover the past of her childhood. As can be expected, Urania is not the same person. She lives in New York where Dominican or Hispanic culture seems strange to her, illustrated by noted lack of aggression among Dominican, Colombians, Guatemalan men who in the United States have learned to look at women not as sex objects but as human beings. This is a custom foreign to Dominicans back home. To understand the present, Urania must revisit the childhood moment that was the origin of her fears, a theme further elaborated in Álvarez's *Yo*. Urania returns home to confront her aging father, whose sickness has denied him mobility and a voice. He is a captive audience and consequently has no choice but to listen to his daughter's accusations against the dictator and her conniving father. Cabral abandoned his natural and cultural responsibilities for his own selfish political means.

One can argue, as we have with *Yo's* father, that in light of a possible physical and metaphorical death, the father was justified in asking for his daughter's supreme sacrifice. As her aunt Adelina explains, Cabral suffered under Trujillo's government. Conversely, before falling from grace, the father protected Urania; he had warned her to stay away from Trujillo's playboy son, Ramfis; but his position shifted when the Senator sought to regain his political position. In an act of self-preservation, Cabral sacrificed his daughter. Cabral's willingness to surrender his daughter also reveals the fragmentation, redefinition, and

transformation the Dominican family experienced under the Trujillo dictatorship. Everyone was subservient to Trujillo. This idea is made clear by Antonio de la Maza, one of Trujillo's assassins. As he waited for the car that would take Trujillo to San Cristóbal, de la Maza considered the impact the dictator had on all Dominicans: "It is the fault of the Beast that so many Dominicans turned to whores, drinking binges, and other dissipations in order to ease their anguish at leading a life without a shed of liberty or dignity, in a country where human life was worth nothing" (187). The Benefactor was ruthless and demanded total loyalty, whether it was from a husband or a father. After all, he was the father and phallus of the country.

Despite the fact that Urania became a successful lawyer in the United States, the trauma of the past was so great that she never married or had children. She became cold to men who expressed any desire to be romantically involved with her. In a way that recalls Álvarez's substituting motherhood for writing, Urania interprets what could possibly be considered a sickness for a character trait, like her intelligence, solitude or passion. Urania reveals this aspect of her character to her father:

-Me acordé de Steve, un canadiense del Banco Mundial- dice, en voz baja, escudriñándolo-. Como no quise casarme con él, me dijo que era un témpano de hielo. Una acusación que a cualquier dominicana ofendería. Tenemos fama de ardientes, de imbatibles en el amor. Yo gané fama de lo contrario: remilgada, indiferente, frígida. ¿Qué te parece papá? Ahorita mismo, a la prima Lucinda, para que no pensara mal de mí, tuve que inventarle un amante (211).

("I was thinking about Steve, a Canadian at the World Bank," she says in a quiet voice, scrutinizing him. "Since I didn't want to marry him, he told me I was an iceberg. An accusation that would offend any Dominican woman. We have a reputation for being ardent, unbeatable in love. I earned a reputation for being just the opposite: prudish, indifferent, frigid. What do you think of that, Papa? Just now, for my cousin Lucinda, I had to invent a lover so she wouldn't think badly of me") (160-161).

Urania stops the conversation and changes the topic when she observes that her father indeed hears her, and is visibly affected by her words. After Urania reveals to her aunt and cousins her traumatic night with Trujillo, as with any caring family, they focus on the positive, on her career and successes. But Urania would have gladly traded her situation for their failed relationships. At least they had a family, children, and a



country. Unlike them, Urania confesses that she only had one man and one relationship: “mi único hombre fue Trujillo. Como lo oyes. Cada vez que alguno se acerca, y me mira como mujer, siento asco. Horror. Ganas de que se muera, de matarlo.... A mí, papa y su Exelencia me volvieron un desierto” (513). (“My only man was Trujillo. It’s true. Whenever one gets close and looks at me as a woman, I feel sick. Horrified. I want him to die, I want to kill him.... But Papa and His Excellency turned me into a desert”) (400). While the sexual encounter can be interpreted as a metaphorical incest, there is no doubt that the Trujillo dictatorship has conditioned the political and sexual behaviors of all Dominicans, whether they live at home or abroad.

It is not clear why Urania told her story to her aunt and cousins, perhaps she could no longer carry this heavy burden and wanted to reach out for help. However the story did provide an outlet for something that had been troubling her since she last saw her father and lived in her country. In spite of the shocking story she had just heard, the aunt wanted Urania to put the past behind her and forgive her father, alleging that her naïve brother could have been manipulated by the circumstances, and may not have known the outcome of events narrated. As readers we do not know if Urania will ever forgive her father, but the story has brought her closer to her cousins, and they represent a possible change, a letting go of the pain, and the beginning of a healing process. The novel ends with the following words, “‘If Marianita writes to me, I’ll answer all of her letters’, she decided,” (404), that is, she will break her silence and establish communication with her cousin, family, and country.

The conciliatory aspect of the novel is also reinforced in the other sections of Vargas Llosa’s novel. After Trujillo’s assassination there is a power vacuum that his brothers and sons attempt to fill. Joaquín Balaguer, who recently had been appointed President and is described as an astute politician, also positions himself to take over the government; his was a much more palpable and reasonable alternative to Ramfis, Petán, Héctor or any other Trujillo relatives. In order to do so he convinces Ramfi, as well as Petán and Héctor, to abandon the country, allowing them to take millions of dollars from the Central Bank, a master move that would eclipse any further violence and bloodshed. Though Balaguer emerges as a conciliatory figure, after Trujillo’s assassination he surfaces as the dominant political voice, and the ambition of one ruler recalls that of the other. In fact, I will argue that there has been a continual complicity between the Trujillo government and that of Joaquín Balaguer, who has held or influenced the presidency for as long as Trujillo was in power. Trujillo and Balaguer have been the most powerful rulers of the Dominican Republic in the twentieth century.

After Trujillo's death, Balaguer held on to the presidency for twenty-four years (1960-62, 1966-78, 1986-96), and when not in power he worked behind the political scene to ensure the continuity of his ideas.

In a similar manner, Álvarez's novel also suggests reconciliation with the father. In "The Father," both the narrator and her father revisit the first incident, the one that led to the other's trauma. Yo understands the father's real fears, provoked by the disappearance of individuals and the father's decision to oppose the dictatorship. Though many years have passed, the father's fear is still real:

Under the pretext that I was going to attend to an emergency at the hospital, I drove that gun over to the house of a certain compañero. To this day I persist in my secrecy and do not mention his name. I suppose it is one of those lingering habits of the dictatorship when we censored all our stories. That is what I explain to my Yo. She has to understand her mother and me. When she writes a book, the worst she worries about is that it will get a bad review. We hear beatings and screams, we see the SIM driving up in a black Volkswagen and rounding up the family (307).

Indeed, Yo's father's actions clarify his motivations, but they may also shed some light on Urania's decision to confront her father. Though Cabral is not able to talk to his daughter, for Yolanda it is important to hear her father apologize, for him "to lift the old injunction," and bless her ability to say stories. After all, she was only five years old at that time, and a child so young should not bear any responsibility for what actually happened. In this revision or coming to terms with their past, Yo's father blesses her and asks his daughter to be the official storyteller of the family, so that the children and grandchildren will have a way back to the past. From outside of the fiction, the narrator/author confronts the fear of her past. Whether the story actually occurred in real life or not, as with her other characters, the author allows the father to discover his own voice, his Yo, that is, his first person and daughter, and has him apologize for the terror the character-writer suffered. As if time marched backwards, a theme already present in *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and *La fiesta del Chivo*, the father and author return to the past to rewrite history:

I have promised her a blessing to take the doubt away. A story whose true facts cannot be changed. But I can add my own inventions—that much I have learned from Yo. A new ending can be made out of what I now know.

So let us go back to that moment. Let us enter that small, green-tiled bathroom that will have a fictional hidden closet behind the toilet in stories to come. I am turning on the shower. Her mother sits down on the toilet seat to hold Yo for me. It sounds like Isaac pinned on the rock and his father Abraham lifting the butcher knife. I lift the belt, but then as I said, forty years pass, and my hand comes down gently on my child's graying head.

And I say, "My daughter, the future has come and we were in such a rush to get here! We left everything behind and forgot so much. Ours is now an orphan family. My 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 (308-309).

In the case of Urania, the father cannot apologize because he cannot speak, though he is emotionally affected by his daughter's story.

If Giambattista Vico's *ricorso* is a repetition afforded to the *corso* to revisit the past and correct the errors of an earlier period, in Álvarez's novel the father, or the author for that matter, confronts a painful moment, corrects the mistakes of the past, and allows history to unfold in a natural manner, that is, without any trauma to the character.<sup>21</sup> The author puts into the father's mouth the words of forgiveness that she so desperately needs to hear. The father should never have beaten his daughter, for she was merely an innocent child. Moreover, she wants his blessing in her chosen career, that she has his support to embrace her destiny as a writer. This is what Yolanda has always wanted and waited for, so that she can finally get on with her life. But he should also recognize that Yolanda, or the author, will never provide him with any grandchildren. In that respect, the past cannot be altered. Just as Yolanda has been marked forever, the past will remain the same. Though Yolanda has chosen not to have children, instead she will provide him with the history of the family. Similarly, Urania must return to the Dominican Republic and come to terms with the initial incident that forced her to abandon her family and country. She needs to confront her father, family, and all Dominicans for their complicity with the dictatorship, but also to seek reconciliation and understanding so that history will unfold in a way that is consistent with that of countries without dictatorships. At the end of the novel, Balaguer does the same but in the political sphere.

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<sup>21</sup> *The New Science*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin (London: Cornell University Press, 1975).

There is one further dislocation and relocation of the narrative “I” that pertains to the present time of the narration and act of writing. I propose that the real story of the Trujillo dictatorship can only be communicated to a broad audience from a space outside of the Dominican Republic, even though Dominican writers like Marcio Veloz Maggiolo, René del Rico Bermúdez, Miguel Alfonseca, and Antonio Lockward Artiles have written about the painful past.<sup>22</sup> With the exception of Veloz Maggiolo, many of these writers remain unknown to readers outside of their national boundaries. Writers like Julia Álvarez, who writes in English, and Mario Vargas Llosa, better known as a writer of the Boom period, are recognized even in the Dominican Republic, and have international appeal. Equally important is the geographic displacement of these writers, which allows them to identify values in U.S. culture and seek them in the one under consideration, thus uncovering new meaning where none had been previously available. Indeed the Women’s Movement in the United States has contributed to Yolanda and Urania’s perspectives and provided them, as well as authors and readers, with a privileged space from which to analyze an earlier time. The female victim denounces the real and metaphorical fathers and her narrative projects strength to illuminate the past and correct the present. She emerges as both victim and heroine, and the healer of the nation.

There is another dislocation and relocation of time and space that cannot be overlooked. Just as events in the United States helped Álvarez and Vargas Llosa, by way of Yo and Urania, to understand the situation back in the Dominican Republic, the Trujillo dictatorship allows Vargas Llosa to reflect upon conditions in his own country, and the Peruvian situation in some respects helps to uncover events in that Caribbean country. This part of the study suggests a possible relationship between Trujillo and Manuel A. Odría, whose government has become an obsession for Vargas Llosa and is present in many of his novels, including his famed *Conversación en la Catedral* (*Conversation in the Cathedral*). Vargas Llosa’s description of Trujillo’s dictatorship and massacre of Haitians in 1937, for example, recall that of Odría while in power from 1948-1950, 1950-1956. *Conversación en la Catedral* raises a most fundamental question for understanding the novel and Peruvian history and society: “En qué momento se había jodido el Perú?” (“At

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Aida Cartagena, ed. *Narradores dominicanos: Antología* (Monte Avila Editores, 1969). Also see my “The Short Story in the Hispanic Antilles,” *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, vol. 1, (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994), 203-206.

what precise moment had Peru fucked itself up?”).<sup>23</sup> The country is closely related to the main character: “Él era como el Perú, Zavalita, se había jodido en algún momento.” (“He was like Peru, he’d fucked himself up somewhere along the line”).<sup>24</sup> One possible answer is when Odría came to power, imposed his dictatorship, and suppressed civil liberties, an event that affected Vargas Llosa and members of his generation in a profound manner. In fact, the novel’s fragmented structure mirrors that of the society the author observes. The politically minded Aída denounces Odría as follows:

Un dictador que subió al poder en la punta de las bayonetas, alzaba la voz y accionaba y Jacobo asentía y la miraba con simpatía y había suprimido los partidos y la libertad de prensa y ahora entusiasmado y había ordenado al ejército masacrar a los arequipeños y ahora hechizado y había encarcelado, de portado y torturado a tantos, ni siquiera se sabía a cuántos, y Santiago observaba a Aída y a Jacobo y, de pronto, piensa, te sentiste torturado, exilado, traicionado, Zavalita, y la interrumpió: Odría era el peor tirano de la historia del Perú.<sup>25</sup>

(A dictator who’d risen to power at bayonet point, she was raising her voice and waving her arms and Jacobo was nodding and looking at her sympathetically and he’d suppressed parties and the freedom of the press and now all worked up and had ordered the army to massacre the people of Arequipa and now bewitched and had jailed, deported and tortured so many people that no one even knew how many, and Santiago was looking at Aída and Jacobo and suddenly, he thinks, you felt tortured, exiled, betrayed, Zavalita, and he interrupted her: Odría was the worst tyrant in the history of Peru).<sup>26</sup>

I would argue that Odría’s dictatorship and his ruthless Chief of Security, Cayo Bermúdez, in some ways remind us of Trujillo’s and his lead assassin Johnny Abbes García. Both men had similar histories and moved quickly up the ranks, Cayo Bermúdez over Serrano and colonel Espina, and Abbes García did the same over the well trained Arturo R. Espailat,

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<sup>23</sup> *Conversación en la Catedral* (México: Alfaguara, 1999), 17; *Conversation in the Cathedral*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1975), 3. All references are to these two editions.

<sup>24</sup> Loc. cit

<sup>25</sup> *Conversación en la Catedral*, 94.

<sup>26</sup> *Conversation in the Cathedral*, 68.

a West Point graduate. Moreover, after Odría's fall Cayo escaped to Brazil, and after Trujillo's assassination Abbes García left for Japan. The two men appear to have similar characteristics, even though Cayo Bermúdez had a perverted weakness for certain types of women.

I would further propose that the relationship between Trujillo and Abbes García, foreshadows the one between Odría and Bermúdez but also the Fujimori government (1990-2000), with this president's excessive use of dictatorial power, and Vladimiro Montesinos, Fujimori's right-hand man. Just as Abbes García was instrumental in ensuring, at whatever cost, the success of the Trujillo dictatorship, Montesino did the same for Fujimori. He, for example, has been accused of being the architect of the Barrios Altos massacre of November 1991, in which fifteen people, including an eight-year-old child, were killed when hooded men with silencer-equipped automatic weapons opened fire without warning on a party in a Lima neighborhood.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, Montesinos is responsible for La Cantata University killings of July 1992, in which nine students and a professor were abducted by security forces under his orders. Vargas Llosa describes Abbes García as a "demented sadist but with Luciferian intelligence" (450), a term that can also be applied to Cayo Bermúdez and Montesino. The author's political aspiration for the presidency of the republic and his runoff elections with Fujimori is made explicit in *El pez en el agua (Fish in the Water)*, an account of Vargas Llosa's candidacy for the presidency, which he lost to Fujimori. Since then Vargas Llosa has made his position unambiguous regarding the Fujimori government. In a collection of essays entitled *Cómo Fujimori jodió al Perú*, which in many ways continues the question asked at the outset of *Conversación en la Catedral*, Vargas Llosa writes the leading essay. In "La libertad recobrada" (Liberty regained) he begins by praising the Colegio de Abogados de Lima, one of the few institutions that resisted Fujimori's dictatorship. "Si todas las instituciones de la sociedad civil hubieran actuado de la misma manera, el golpe artero contra la libertad del 5 de abril de 1992 no hubiera prosperado, y el Perú no lamentaría ahora tantos crímenes contra los

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<sup>27</sup> In July of 2002, Montesinos was sentenced to a nine years and four months prison term and fined \$2.8 million. However, he faces additional charges: "Montesinos, once considered a valuable ally in the U.S. anti-narcotics effort in Peru, also faces allegations of drug smuggling, public corruption and masterminding more than a dozen civilian murders during Peru's long war with the Shining Path rebels in the late 1980s and early 1990s." Scott Wilson, "Peru's Ex-Intelligence Chief Is Sentenced; Once-Feared Montesinos Receives Nine-Year Term," *The Washington Post*; Washington, D.C.; Jul 2, 2002, A11.

derechos humanos, el secuestro de la justicia y la libertad de expresión, el desmantelamiento de las instituciones y la corrupción generalizada a cuya sombra Fujimori, Montesinos y los cuarenta ladrones amasaron fortunas que producen vértigo.”<sup>28</sup> (“If all institutions of a civil society had acted the same way, the cunning coup of April 5, 1992 against liberty would not have prospered. And Peru would not have lamented so many crimes against human rights, the kidnapping of justice and freedom of expression, the dismantling of institutions, and the generalized corruption, at whose shadow Fujimori, Montesinos, and the forty thieves amassed fortunes that produce vertigo.”) While Vargas Llosa researched carefully Dominican history in general and the psychopathic mind of Trujillo in particular, his novel also draws on his knowledge of the political climate in Peru, which he knows, and finds correspondence in the Dominican society. Writing about the Dominican dictatorship is another way of expressing thoughts about events in Peru. This analysis suggests that Vargas Llosa, consciously or unconsciously, relied on the political events of his country and found an association of themes in the Caribbean nation. When writing about a dark period in Dominican history, Vargas Llosa was also reading the situation in Peru.

In some respects *Yo* and *La fiesta del Chivo* address the issue of *la dominicanidad*, that is, the Dominican identity, a concept influenced by dictatorship, which promotes physical and psychological violence.<sup>29</sup> This

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<sup>28</sup> “La libertad recobrada,” *Cómo Fujimori jodió al Perú* (Lima: Editorial Milla Batres, 2001), 15. My translation.

<sup>29</sup> Álvarez is a U.S. writer, but she is also a Dominican author. While some may question my attempt to search for an understanding of things Dominican in Álvarez’s novel—they may argue that she is not an authentic Dominican, because she neither writes in Spanish nor lives in the Dominican Republic—, she does write about Dominican issues in her novels. Álvarez considers herself to be a North American writer, but she enjoys more international notoriety than any other Dominican writer in recent memory. Putting to one side linguistic differences, Álvarez may very well be the most widely read Dominican writing today. More importantly, Dominicans on the island have accepted her as one of their own. Unlike Puerto Rican writers on the island who do not welcome their Nuyorican counterparts, or any other Puerto Rican who lives and writes on the continent and does not write in the vernacular language, the Dominican public has embraced Álvarez as their native daughter. Álvarez has brought world attention to her parents’ country in a way few Dominican writers have been able to do. Álvarez is a Dominican author and is recognized as such by her island peers. In her essay “Doña Aída, with Your Permission,” Álvarez explains how she and Aída Cartagena Portalatín, “the grand woman of letters in the Dominican Republic,” shared the same keynote speakers’ platform for a conference in their home country. Much to Álvarez’s surprise, and in front of an open mike, her fellow countrywoman criticized

other perspective cannot be totally focused from within the country's borders. Rather it is derived by dislocating it from the country and relocating it abroad. It also suggests different perspectives, gender discourses, cultures, and political systems. Though Vargas Llosa is not of Dominican origin, the history of the Trujillo dictatorship is vaguely familiar to him and is similar to that of his native Peru. Both novels emphatically state that Dominican identity and consciousness continue to be influenced by the narrated events.

*Yo* and *La fiesta del Chivo* are novels that refer to a country's national theme, certainly there are resemblances between each protagonist's father and the dictator, and the fear that the father imposed on the daughter alludes to the terror the dictator forced on the people of the Dominican Republic. The horror felt by the narrator was not only her father's terror, but also that of all Dominicans who lived under the Trujillo regime and she carried her fears into the present. From this broader perspective, the reconciliation with the father is also a resolution of the country's painful and tortured past. Let us remember that an above mentioned quotation identifies *Yo* in political terms, as a betrayer. *Yo* and *Urania* emerge as single voices against the authority of the father or the dictator, or any other type of oppression and injustice, well before the Mirabal sisters gave up their lives fighting for the same beliefs. In this sense *Yo* and *Urania* become "I" of the nation. In Álvarez's novel, the father, but also the father as a representation of the dictator, apologizes to the country; each protagonist becomes the nation's consciousness. In Vargas Llosa's work, *Urania* shows signs of letting go of the traumatic past, and *Balaguer* emerges as a temporary solution to the country's evil. Resolution is also present in *Conversación en la Catedral*; the bar is a

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the younger colleague for not writing in Spanish and echoed the words her uncle had articulated in "Homecoming": "Eso parece mentira que una dominicana se ponga a escribir en inglés. Vuelve a tu país, vuelve a tu idioma. Tú eres dominicana." ('It doesn't seem possible that a Dominican should write in English. Come back to your country, to your language. You are a Dominican.')

"Doña Aída, with Your Permission," *Something to Declare*, 171. The essay is a respectful response to Cartagena Portalatín's concern. Since Álvarez does not live on the island and does not participate in its daily life and rhythms, she is not a Dominican writer in the traditional sense. However, from abroad she has brought to the fore issues pertinent to Dominicans on the island, most evident with the success of *In the Time of the Butterflies*, and the attention she has given Dominicans living abroad. From this perspective, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* but in particular *Yo*, narrate the Dominican experience in the United States, therefore bringing to light the Dominican family trauma, which is not limited to the republic and includes life on the continent.



sacred space of knowledge and dialogue, which abolishes all differences. In the case of the Dominican Republic it will be the responsibility of each individual to discover her/his inner Yo or "I" and remember the past, so that the same stories will never be repeated.