The Doll’s House in the Dominican Republic of the 1960s

The Mirabal Sisters, the antagonists in Julia Alvarez’s In the Time of the Butterflies, fight for their rights and the rights of the country’s future generation. Their struggles contradict society and conventional belief as they attempt to achieve what the French and Americans have already achieved centuries ago, the separation from suppressive rule. They are forced to set foot on a steep slope and they know that they would either fall off on the journey or they might actually be able to reach the top and accomplish the paramount objective. There is very little hope of the latter, but it is either success or failure as they lack the possibility of choosing alternatives. Just like the revolutionary theme represented by Henrik Ibsen in The Doll’s House, the four girls must surmount the challenges opposed not only by their brutal dictator, Trujillo, but also the ones posed the male dominant society in which this 1960s “Republic” is stuck back in time. Their struggles are heightened by their femininity and their relentless efforts for the betterment of their young ones’ future.

The “Butterflies” are viewed as an inspirational force by most suppressed fellow sufferers who look up to them in time of despair, but even these influences find it difficult to fight their instincts and continue their freedom struggle. After having been freed from the clutches of Trujillo’s brutal suppressive aid, the SIM, Minerva is not able to summon her strength and almost breaks apart as she continues to pretend her fortitude in front of her husband, “I had put on too good a show for Manolo as
He didn’t know the double life I was leading. Outwardly, I was still his calm, courageous *companera*. Inside, the woman had got the upper hand” (267 Alvarez). She fakes her fortitude while visiting her husband during his term in jail. She comprehends the importance of having someone strong when one is suffering in life, such as the tortures of imprisonment. She fails to constantly fight and is on the brink of surrendering to the overwhelming pressure but understands how important her rigid stance is for supporting not only her husband but also the revolutionaries. These beautiful young girls are able to fight for their independence by the use of this knowledge. The strongest type of force is the resilience when things do not go one’s way. Even Maria Teresa, the youngest of the Mirabals, is forced to argue with herself and finds it heartbreaking to not have her husband return from police custody, “But no, we Mirabals had to set a good example [...] We couldn’t be free unless everyone else was offered the same opportunity” (236). Even when the opportunity to fly free was offered to the “Butterflies,” the pressure of their country falling gradually towards its doom makes them realize that their own lives could not be compared to the greater cause. This Gandhi type non-violent perseverance during a period of hardship helps these strugglers be mentally stronger than all of Trujillo’s forces and even Trujillo himself.

The “Mirabal Sisters” are viewed upon presently by many of Latin America’s residents as even greater freedom fighters due to their ability to overcome their emotions as a husband and a wife, and eventually be able to forget their primary role in society to take part in the more demanding role. Minerva, after returning home from captivity, is forced to remember the fears she had when she first began her fight against the El Jefe, “I had this eerie feeling that we were already dead and looking at the house where our children were growing up without us” (282). It is never easy for a mother to bear the loss of her children and Minerva finds it increasingly painful to imagine the future. Even at this point in the struggle, her instinctive motherly feelings arouse to harness her ability to devote herself solely to the cause. She wants to be in the company of her young children and be able to care for them but at the
same time, she strives to defeat these feelings of love inorder to achieve a better future. Two of her greatest interests in life contradict each other and she is forced to strain her mind and decide between the two. The decision would shape the future, both of the Mirabal Sisters and Dominican Republic. The comprehension of this struggle by the citizens of their country reflects the reason for which such great respect was bestowed in the “Butterflies.” The country’s President after the fall of the dictatorship and the announcements in the local radio station honor the deaths of the three Mirabal sisters and donate their condolences in the form of a preaching, “Rise up, take to the streets! Join my comrades and me in the mountains! When you die for your country, you do not die in vain!” The citizens for whose future the Mirabal sisters gave up their lives realize that it does not depend on social status or gender for one to be successful in the achievement of goals that seem almost attainable at first, all it requires is a strong mentality. Dedé, the only sister to have lived to tell the tale, is consoled by this understanding by the people of the deaths of her sisters. She, like everyone else in the country, has come to realize that one cannot always be thinking about the past or the present, it is invariably important to have an outlook into the future.

The Mirabal sisters, all mothers of young innocent children, finally came to comprehend that in order for their children and the rest of the future generation of their country to be able to live without suppression from their own leader and to lead a peaceful life and not have to suffer in the way that their parents did, they would have to stand up against the challenges they will face when the situation comes and not be held back by the fear of parting from their beloved infants. They are left no choice; it is either the inevitable continuation of the dictatorship into a harsh monarchy or the fall of the monarchy into the development of the true Dominican “Republic.” They have to take a stand against the premier option because of their incapability to imagine their children living under the same circumstance as they are. Men, as portrayed in The Doll’s House, consider themselves to be providers of the family and due to
belief in traditional values, are looked upon as strong forces; Not only mentally, but also physically. It is therefore not as easy for a mother to go to the centre of the battlefield and stand her ground as it is for the man whose main role in life is to fight for the security of his family and is not held back by feelings of maternal love.

As Nora proposes in The Doll’s House, a woman under suppression is forced to stand up against the society even if it requires opposing conventional belief. The woman has to take a stance against such containment as her feelings are always reflective of the love she possesses for her children but realizes that it is for their benefit that she must abandon them to go to the battle and eradicate traditional culture from the society for the betterment of the forthcoming generation. This divine understanding of the society around them, and their ability to perform under such motherly pressures is what inspires the revolutionaries to stand their ground and what will continue to enforce the role of women in circumstance of oppression by any type of force, may it be cultural or dictatorial. Dedé explains her reasoning for being stuck in the 1960s in 1994 to Minou, “I’m not stuck in the past, I’ve just brought it with me into the present. And the problem is not enough of us have done that [...] If you don’t study your history, [How are] you going to repeat it?” (313) It is immensely important to not forget the cause for which the young Mirabals gave up their lives, and it is equally important to realize that it was not under normal circumstances that they were forced to orphan their children. It is vital for the present society to be able to reflect upon the past and understand why March 5th, the date of the death of the three Mirabals, is remembered as the day against suppression of women. May it be the 18th century of the 20th century, women are continuously tested by society and it is their rebellion against contemporary belief that enforces their struggle. The definitely should not be ignored, rather, considered as forces to be reckoned with.