

Cages, Diaries, and Dreams: A Book Review of *In the Time of the Butterflies* by Julia Álvarez

*In the Time of the Butterflies* by Julia Álvarez is a historical fiction novel that shares the story of the four Mirabal sisters, who lived in the Dominican Republic during the Trujillo dictatorship. It is told in alternating points of view, with three chapters from three different eras of their life told from each of the four sisters' perspectives. The significance of these narratives written in this form can be better understood through the lens of "Goats Die, Butterflies Fly: Portrayals of Dominican Dictator Rafael Trujillo (1891–1961) in Historical Fiction and Non-Fiction," where Jocelyn R. Brown argues:

“Although he never formally authored works of literature, Rafael Trujillo would become the defining storyteller of his era. Under his authoritarian regime, named the Trujillato, Trujillo ventured to be the only author of his era. Speeches, books, and news articles written by his supporters, both at home and abroad, all had to receive Trujillo’s stamp of approval” (Brown, 1).

Decades later, literature like *In the Time of the Butterflies* tries to reclaim authorship by highlighting other possible narratives from people who not only lived during that era, but also actively tried to fight against Trujillo’s regime. Among the Mirabal sisters, the fight looked different for each of them; for Dedé, it meant keeping her sisters’ stories alive after they passed, for Maria Teresa, it meant keeping a diary about her experience in the revolution, and for Minerva, it meant daring to dream of freedom for herself and others when everything pointed against it.

In telling these stories, Julia Álvarez attempts to “reclaim the power of storytelling from [Trujillo]”, which Brown argues is significant because Trujillo’s official narrative “was not

original; it was simply a continuation of colonialism” (Brown, 1). This framework allows us to analyze the varied voices or counter-narratives featured in Álvarez’s novel as also anti-colonial.

In her analysis, Brown argues that these stories with their various voices destroy Trujillo’s official narrative; regarding the narrative and stylistic choices made throughout *In the Time of the Butterflies* specifically, “each narrative style is different to help represent the sisters’ individual personalities” (4). I argue that while this is true – the very existence of each of the sisters’ narratives is an example of anticolonialism – Maria Teresa’s narrative in particular serves this purpose, not just through its existence and content, but specifically through its format as a diary.

Dedé’s chapters are all written in the third person – with the exception of the epilogue where it could be argued that the shift to the more personal first-person point of view is representative of Dedé finding her voice and pursuing her own desires instead of continuing to cater to the needs of those around her. In her first three chapters, we see her first trying to appease and fulfill her father’s needs, then her husband’s, and then her sisters’. This entire narrative being told in the most impersonal and distant perspective parallels the distance between Dedé and her own desires, as well as the distance Dedé tried to set between herself and the revolution. It is difficult for the reader to know exactly what Dedé is feeling or thinking, but it is implied that perhaps Dedé herself does not know what she wants, she is just as distanced from her feelings and desires as the reader. Even with this distance, the existence of her narrative is important and anti-colonial because it defies Trujillo’s “insistence on history as a single story” (Brown, 5). Still, the format and narrative style does not pose an additional threat to the objective of preserving a single story.

Meanwhile, Minerva's and Patria's stories are written in the first-person perspective. This closer, more intimate perspective provides further insight into the reality of the lived experiences of those living under the dictatorship. The reader can see closely the exact feelings the dictatorship provoked, the varied motives that led people to join the revolution, and the impact of the regime on a very personal level. In that capacity, these perspectives are able to diminish the power of the idea of a single, official history. Even then, the format is not as anti-colonial and revolutionary as Maria Teresa's. In being expressed as a diary, Maria Teresa's narrative becomes tied to a physical object – a physical object that even within the narrative is treated as life-threatening. Numerous times throughout her chapters, Maria Teresa references the diary, breaking the fourth wall by demonstrating exactly how difficult it would have been for people living under the dictatorship to keep their experiences in writing, much less publish them as an opposing history to the official history and propaganda of Trujillo. She is conscious of and actively documents the ways in which writing down her experience in this journal is dangerous. In fact, the journal that comprises her first chapter in part I of the book must technically be destroyed because her experiences, the things that she has heard and known and documented would be enough of a reason to incarcerate several people in the eyes of the regime. "Minerva is burying all her poems and papers and letters... She says we have to bury you [the diary] too" (43). The dangers of documenting her experience are once again highlighted when she writes while in the jail cell, "Valentina just went by on her sneaky feet. I better put this away and not try the devil twice. To be continued" (Álvarez, 248). "As for the book itself – Santicló is going to smuggle it out for me", she continues once they are about to be released (Álvarez, 253).

The perilous act of writing and documenting under such an oppressive regime mirrors a broader theme that threads through the novel: the tension between cages and freedom. This

theme appears in distinctive yet somewhat unifying ways for each of the sisters but I will focus on its implications for Dedé's story specifically.

While the most obvious cage for Dedé is her marriage, upon closer inspection it becomes clear that she is trapped by her desire to serve and fulfill expectations in her relationships with those close to her in general. The most evident of these constricting relationships is with her husband. The note she intends to leave for him when she works up the courage to leave him reads, *"I feel like I'm buried alive. I need to get out. I cannot go on with this travesty"* (Álvarez, 180). Through her description of feeling "buried alive", her metaphorical coffin becomes a type of cage. The caveat in her situation is that she seems to have chosen this particular cage because even when she knew she did not love him, choosing Jaimito as her husband seemed safer than the risk that came with real love. "She was afraid, plain and simple, just as she had been afraid to face her powerful feelings for Lio. Instead, she had married Jaimito even though she did not love him enough" (Álvarez, 184). Her story exemplifies how a cage can seem like a nest in the sense that it appears to offer safety, especially against the alternative of taking flight. It is hard to know when you first step into it just how difficult it will be to leave when the security blanket begins to suffocate you. It could be argued that she steps into the role of her sisters' memory keeper in much the same way. Not quite trapped in the past, but certainly in the memory of them, wanting to ensure that the reality of them is preserved, not just the ideal. Similarly, it seems the safer choice – not necessarily easier, but safer – to continue to be surrounded by them, even if in memory, than to move forward completely.

Although I can relate to Dedé's need to seek security more than I can relate to Minerva's willingness to take risks, Minerva is still the character I most identify with due to her love for education, hunger for more, and desire for freedom (both for herself and others, even when it

seemed impossible). When she described herself as always having her nose in a book and begging her father to be able to go to the university, it was like watching myself in fourth grade asking for books for Christmas or being in 7th grade again worrying about getting into the right college even though no one in my family had ever gone to one (Álvarez, 84). Moreover, Minerva's passion not just for learning but also for teaching others can be seen through Maria Teresa's chapters as well as her own. In fact, we see this as a consistent character trait of Minerva's through Maria Teresa's journal entries across decades. She recounts Minerva gifting her her first journal encouraging her to write to "get things off her chest" in December of 1945 (Álvarez, 30) and then in March of 1960, she describes how Minerva insisted on having "little school" with their cellmates even though they were trapped in a jail cell (Álvarez, 233). As someone who used to force her younger siblings to "play school" and do worksheets in the summer so they wouldn't "fall behind", it's easy to see how Minerva's love for learning would bleed into her interactions with her younger sister. More importantly, I can understand how holding on to poetry and literature and trying to stay informed and alert would serve as a defense mechanism and lifeline during a time when it seemed like very little else was within her control.

Her ambition, along with her fear of feeling limited, is also a characteristic that remains consistent even after she officially joins the revolution. Like me, Minerva sometimes finds it difficult to articulate what exactly she's running after, but even with this uncertainty hanging in the air, her desire to run, her hunger for more, is certain. "I'd jump in the Jeep and roar off into the countryside, my foot pressing heavily down on the gas as if speed could set me free," she says after she's been at home for three years too many after her graduation from Inmaculada (Álvarez, 85). Staying in the same place for so long made her restless, especially when she felt stagnant in the pursuit of her dreams and the life she had envisioned for herself. Even when her

dreams felt too big for reality – her desire for both romance and revolution – too impossible upon meeting Lio, we see that this does not stop her from pursuing them regardless. When she finally gets married, “settled down” is hardly a term that could be attributed to her. “When Manolo and I started the underground, I traveled back and forth from Monte Cristi to Salcedo, connecting cell with cell. I couldn’t stand the idea of being locked up in any one life,” she wrote (Álvarez, 257). She decided to pursue both romance and the revolution, and even then felt that there were more lives for her to live. Again, I doubt that in her circumstances I would dare to be so courageous, but I can understand the fear of one life not being enough to accomplish your dreams and also live a happily-ever-after with the love of your life. It feels almost greedy to want both, but then again, it seems wasteful, to not at least try.

#### References

Alvarez, Julia. (1995). *In the Time of the Butterflies*. New York, Plume.

Brown, Jocelyn R. (2023) "Goats Die, Butterflies Fly: Portrayals of Dominican Dictator Rafael Trujillo (1891–1961) in Historical Fiction and Non-Fiction," *Ramifications: Vol. 3: Iss. 1*, Article 1. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/ramifications/vol3/iss1/1>

“The four of us had to ask permission for everything: to walk to the fields to see the tobacco filling out; to go to the lagoon and dip our feet on a hot day; to stand in front of the store and pet the horses as the men loaded up their wagons with supplies. Sometimes, watching the rabbits in their pens, I’d think, I’m no different from you, poor things. One time, I opened a cage to set a half-grown doe free. I even gave her a slap to get her going. But she wouldn’t budge! She was used to her little pen. I kept slapping her, harder each time, until she started whimpering like a scared child. I was the one hurting her, insisting she be free. Silly bunny, I thought. You’re nothing at all like me.” (Álvarez, 11)

“And that’s how I got free. I don’t mean just going to sleepaway school on a train with a trunkful of new things. I mean in my head after I got to Inmaculada and met Sinita and saw what happened to Lina and realized that I’d just left a small cage to go into a bigger one, the size of our whole country.” (13)

“So Trujillo shipped Lina off to a mansion he’d bought for her in Miami where he knew she’d be safe. She lived all alone now, waiting for him to call her up. I guess there was a whole other pretty girl now taking up his attention.” (23)

“I felt my breath coming short again. At first, I had thought it was caused by the cotton bandages I had started tying around my chest so my breasts wouldn’t grow. I wanted to be sure what had happened to Lina Lovaton would never happen to me.” (23)

“Even being born, I was coming out, hands first, as if reaching up for something. Thank goodness, the midwife checked Mamá at the last minute and lowered my arms the way you fold in a captive bird’s wings so it doesn’t hurt itself trying to fly. So you could say I was born, but I wasn’t really there. One of those spirit babies, *alelá*, as the country people say. My mind, my heart, my soul in the clouds. It took some doing and undoing to bring me down to earth.” (44)

“It’s a hard city to keep straight though, so I don’t go out much unless Minerva or one of her friends is with me.” (130)

***“I feel like I’m buried alive. I need to get out. I cannot go on with this travesty.” (180)***

“Captain Victor Alicinio Peña received me right away. Maybe it was my nerves, but his office had the closed-in feeling of a jail cell, metal jalousies at the windows and fluorescence the only light.” (216)

“I couldn’t stand the idea of being locked up in any one life.” (257)

## **GRIEF**

“The slamming of a car door startles Dedé. When she calms herself she finds she has snipped her prize butterfly orchid. She picks up the fallen blossom and trims the stem, wincing. Perhaps this is the only way to grieve the big things – in snippets, pinches, little sips of sadness.” (5)

“And slowly I began coming back from the dead. What brought me back? It wasn’t God, *no señor*. It was Pedrito, his grief so silent and animal-like. I put aside my own grief to rescue him from his... His grief hung on. He never spoke of it, but I could tell.” (53)

“Sometimes Dedé worries that she has not kept enough from the children. But she wants them to know the living breathing women their mothers were. They get enough of the heroines from everyone else.” (64)

“I’m sitting in my bunk, writing my last entry in the space left, and sobbing in the quiet way you learn in prison so you don’t add to anyone else’s grief.” (253)

## COURAGE

“The presence of Lio gave her the courage to go further with Jaimito than ever before. But without a plan Dedé’s courage unraveled like a row of stitches not finished with a good, sturdy knot.” (76)

“‘Ay, Lio,’ she said at last, weary with so much hope, so little planning. ‘Where is it you get your courage?’

Why, Dedé,’ he said, ‘it’s not courage. It’s common sense.’” (77)

“My months in prison had elevated me to superhuman status. It would hardly have been seemly for someone who had challenged our dictator to suddenly succumb to a nervous attack at the communion rail. I hid my anxieties and gave everyone a bright smile. If they had only known how frail was their iron-will heroine.” (259)

“One of them, just as scared, but back to her old habits of pretending there was nothing to fear, as *el señor* Roosevelt had said, but being afraid.” (284)

## **B. Which character do you most identify with? Why? Describe a character providing examples from the book to describe him/her and how you relate to their character.**

### MINERVA

Although I do not consider myself as brave as Minerva, she is still the character I most identify with due to her love for education, hunger for more, and desire for freedom (both for herself and others, even when it seemed impossible). When she described herself as always having her nose in a book and begging her father to be able to go to the university, it was like watching myself in fourth grade asking for books for Christmas or being in 7th grade again worrying about getting into the right college even though no one in my family had ever gone to one (Álvarez, 84). Moreover, Minerva’s passion not just for learning but also for teaching others can be seen through Maria Teresa’s chapters as well as her own. In fact, we see this as a consistent character trait of Minerva’s through Maria Teresa’s journal entries across decades. She recounts Minerva gifting her her first journal encouraging her to write to “get things off her chest” in December of 1945 (Álvarez, 30) and then in March of 1960, she describes how Minerva insisted on having “little school” with their cell mates despite the fact that they were trapped in a jail cell (Álvarez, 233). As someone who used to force her younger siblings to “play school” and do worksheets in the summer so they wouldn’t “fall behind”, it’s easy to see how Minerva’s love for learning would bleed into her interactions with her younger sister. More

importantly, I can understand how holding on to poetry and literature and trying to stay informed and alert would serve as a defense mechanism and lifeline during a time when it seemed like very little else was within her control.

Her ambition, along with her fear of feeling limited, is also a characteristic that remains consistent even after she officially joins the revolution. Like me, Minerva sometimes finds it difficult to articulate what exactly she's running after, but even with this uncertainty hanging in the air, her desire to run, her hunger for more, is certain. "I'd jump in the Jeep and roar off into the countryside, my foot pressing heavily down on the gas as if speed could set me free," she says after she's been at home for three years too many after her graduation from Inmaculada (Álvarez, 85). Staying in the same place for so long made her restless, especially when she felt stagnant in the pursuit of her dreams and the life she had envisioned for herself. Even when her dreams felt too big for reality – her desire for both romance and revolution – too impossible upon meeting Lio, we see that this does not stop her from pursuing them regardless. When she finally gets married, "settled down" is hardly a term that could be attributed to her. "When Manolo and I started the underground, I traveled back and forth from Monte Cristi to Salcedo, connecting cell with cell. I couldn't stand the idea of being locked up in any one life," she wrote (Álvarez, 257). She decided to pursue both romance and the revolution, and even then felt that there were more lives for her to live. Again, I doubt that in her circumstances I would dare to be so courageous, but I can understand the fear of one life not being enough to accomplish your dreams and also live a happily ever after with the love of your life. It feels almost greedy to want both, but then again, it seems wasteful, to not at least try.

**"For one thing, my nose was always in a book. Love was something I had *read* would come." (84)**

**"I want to go to the university, Papa, please." (84)**

**"Three years cooped at home since I'd graduated from Inmaculada, and I was ready to scream with boredom... I'd jump in the Jeep and roar off into the countryside, my foot pressing heavily down on the gas as if speed could set me free." (85)**

**"Now when I asked myself, *What do you want, Minerva Mirabal?* I was shocked to find I didn't have an answer.**

**All I knew was I was not falling in love, no matter how deserving I thought Lio was. So what? I'd argue with myself. What's more important, romance or revolution? But a little voice kept saying, *Both, both, I want both.* Back and forth my mind went, weaving a yes by night and unraveling it by day to a no." (86)**

**"It seemed suddenly that I'd missed a great opportunity. My life would have been nobler if I had followed Lio." (87)**

**"*Ay, m'ijita,*" she says. "You're going to fight everyone's fight, aren't you?"  
It's all the same fight, Mama,' I tell her." (108)**

**"Minerva always says writing gets things off her chest and she feels better." (118)"**

**“All my life, I had been trying to get out of the house. Papa always complained that, of his four girls, I should have been the boy, born to cut loose. First, I wanted to go to boarding school, then university. When Manolo and I started the underground, I traveled back and forth from Monte Cristi to Salcedo, connecting cell with cell. I couldn’t stand the idea of being locked up in any one life.” (257)**

“I had been so much stronger and braver in prison. Now at home I was falling apart.” (258)

“‘People look to us to be an example, we’ve got a responsibility,’ I spoke so fiercely, they looked a little sheepish.” (261)

**C. Include reference to at least one literary analysis or historical/political essay/book, aside from the novel, and provide a list of reference(s) at the end. Length: 5 pages, double spaced, 12” font, typed. Due week 4- Email by 9:00am, bring hard copy and be prepared to discuss in class**

In "Goats Die, Butterflies Fly: Portrayals of Dominican Dictator Rafael Trujillo (1891–1961) in Historical Fiction and Non-Fiction," Jocelyn R. Brown argues that Trujillo’s official narrative was not original; it was simply a continuation of colonialism (10). If this is the case, then the varied voices or counter-narratives featured in the novel are anti-colonial. While the very existence of the narratives of each of the sisters is an example of this, Maria Teresa’s in particular serves this purpose, not just through its existence and content, but specifically through its format as a diary.

Dedé’s chapters are all written in the third person – with the exception of the epilogue where it could be argued that the shift to the more personal first person point of view is representative of Dedé finding her own voice and pursuing her own desires instead of continuing to cater to the needs of those around her. In her first three chapters, we see her first trying to appease and fulfill her father’s needs, then her husband’s, and then her sisters’ memories. This entire narrative being told in the most impersonal and distant perspective parallels the distance between Dedé and her own desires. It is difficult for the reader to know what exactly Dedé is feeling or thinking, but it is implied that perhaps Dedé herself does not know what she wants, she is just as distanced from her feelings and desires as the reader. Even with this distance, the existence of her narrative is important and anti-colonial because it defies Trujillo’s “insistence on history as a single story” (5). Still, the format and narrative style does not pose an additional threat to reality of only preserving a single story.

Minerva’s and Patria’s stories are written in the first person perspective. This closer, more intimate perspective provides further insight to the reality of the lived experiences of those living under the dictatorship. The reader is able to see closely, the exact feelings the dictatorship provoked, the varied motives that led people to join the revolution, the impact on a very personal level of the regime. In that capacity, these perspectives are able to diminish the power of the idea of a single, official history. Even then, the format is not as anti-colonial and revolutionary as

Maria Teresa's. Maria Teresa's narrative, in being expressed as a diary, becomes tied to a physical object – a physical object that even within the narrative is treated as not only dangerous but life-threatening. Numerous times throughout her own chapters, Maria Teresa references the diary, in a way breaking the fourth wall. She is conscious of and actively documents the ways in which writing down her experience in this journal is dangerous. In fact, the journal that comprises her first chapter in part I of the book must technically be destroyed because her experiences, the things that she has heard and known and documented would be enough of a reason to incarcerate several people in the eyes of the regime. “Minerva is burying all her poems and papers and letters... She says we have to bury you [the diary] too” (43). The dangers of documenting her experience are once again highlighted when she writes while in the jail cell, “Valentina just went by on her sneaky feet. I better put this away and not try the devil twice. To be continued” (248). “As for the book itself – Santicló is going to smuggle it out for me”, she continues once they are about to be released (253).

#### Works Cited

Brown, Jocelyn R. (2023) "Goats Die, Butterflies Fly: Portrayals of Dominican Dictator Rafael Trujillo (1891–1961) in Historical Fiction and Non-Fiction," *Ramifications: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 1*. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/ramifications/vol3/iss1/1>

Much like Maria Teresa's diary keeping at a time where she was writing could put their lives at risk

In "Goats Die, Butterflies Fly: Portrayals of Dominican Dictator Rafael Trujillo (1891–1961) in Historical Fiction and Non-Fiction," Jocelyn R. Brown analyzes how numerous authors, Julia Álvarez included, “attempt to reclaim the power of storytelling from him” (1). In her analysis she argues that these stories with their various voices destroy Trujillo's official narrative and that regarding the narrative and stylistic choices made throughout *In the Time of the Butterflies* specifically, “each narrative style is different to help represent the sisters' individual personalities” (4). While this is true, I argue that beyond that,

“I wanted to join... But I masked it in front of Minerva. I was afraid she'd get all protective... I don't want to be babied anymore. I want to be worthy of Palomino” (142). -Mate

- **“Although he never formally authored works of literature, Rafael Trujillo would become the defining storyteller of his era. Under his authoritarian regime, named the Trujillato, Trujillo ventured to be the only author of his era. Speeches, books, and news articles written by his supporters, both at home and abroad, all had to receive Trujillo's stamp of approval.” (1)**
- Literature like *Butterflies* tries to reclaim authorship by highlighted other possible narratives from people who lived during that era.
- Main Idea: **“To understand how authors are portraying Trujillo and his regime, attempting to reclaim the power of storytelling from him, I centered my discussion around three accounts: Trujillo: The Death of the Dictator (1978) by Bernard Diederich, The Feast of the Goat (2000) by Mario Vargas Llosa, and In the Time of the Butterflies (1994) by Julia Álvarez. These texts all explore the idea that, although Trujillo was certainly a force to be reckoned with, he also built his**

dictatorship by extending the legacy of colonial rule.” (1) and “I will analyze the narrative and stylistic choices of each text below that allow them to reflect the era of Trujillo through his victims, shattering Trujillo’s official narrative.” (3)

- Counterargument: **“Each narrative style is different to help represent the sisters’ individual personalities.” (4)**
- Each narrative styles not only represent each of the sister’s individual personalities but also, the different types of revolutionaries they each represented. With **“Trujillo’s insistence on history as a single story is not the only area where he reflected the processes of colonialism.” (5)** by amplifying the numerous narrative voices, it also serves as a fight against colonialism. Especially if we think about Maria Teresa keeping a diary during this time. Writing down her experiences under a dictatorship was in itself a revolutionary act.
- **“The fifth and final authorial voice, present in Dedé’s chapters in 1994, is the woman interviewing her. Only referred to by Dedé as the “gringa dominicana,” Katherine Lashley observes that she is “representative of—yet not a reflection of—the author herself,” as Álvarez also lives in the United States and chooses to write mostly in English (188). This framing device is Álvarez’s way of recognizing that, in her role as the “foreign” intellectual taking Dedé’s testimony, the least she can do is publish the story in English so the wider world recognizes the Mirabals (324). Álvarez also recognizes, invoking White’s idea of a relationship to authority, that Dedé’s comfort and willingness to share is what truly legitimizes Álvarez’s account (Latorre 9)**
- Conversation: Alvarez herself states, **“History, I was learning, is the story we tell ourselves about what really happened.”** put this in conversation with that one reading from WAC about what history truly is and how there’s no such thing as objective history because if history is the story we tell about what happened and not really just what happened, then is Butterflies history? But also, it still needs to be based (whatever that means) on fact, and it’s Dedé’s testimony and willingness to participate in this book being put together that gives the story validity.
- **“Through the unique narrative tools provided by historical fiction and non-fiction, these authors are revealing that Trujillo’s official narrative was not original; it was simply a continuation of colonialism.” (10)**

**Jennifer Harford Vargas, *Forms of Dictatorship. Power, Narrative, and Authoritarianism in the Latina/o Novel* (New York: Oxford UP, 2018), 260 pp.**

- **“Her research interest is directed toward the ways the dictatorship narrative migrated to the United States, hence developing “a new set of dictatorship novels” (4), in which Latina/o writers read dictatorial power “as a trope and an aesthetic problem that enables us to rethink the relationship between different forms of power and the power of form” (14-15). Harford Vargas investigates how this new subgenre of contemporary Latina/o dictatorship novels produces postmemory narratives (in the sense of Marianne Hirsch) which create a difference and distance to historical dictatorial power.” (1)**
- **“ Harford Vargas demonstrates how Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) uses character representation and the modes of narration for interrogating dictatorial power without reproducing it in his own text.” (2)**

- **“She summarizes that Latina/o dictatorship novels do not offer a permanent resolution to the problems of authoritarian power, but that the counter-dictatorial imaginary expresses at least anti-authoritarian longings and, thus, participates in the creation of a “decolonial imagination,” a “projective power of the imagination to envision a radically different world that is structured through solidarity rather than through dominance” (32).” (3)**

### **Representing Dictatorship in the Global South by Magalí Armillas-Tiseyra**

- **“Representations of dictatorship from the Global South denounce the dictator and dictatorship while also pointing to the larger, global forces that prompt, sustain, and benefit from dictatorial regimes in the Global South.”**
- **“Novels about dictators and dictatorship satirize or parody the authoritarian leader, condemn his collaborators, and register experiences elided in the official record.”**
- 

What is the thesis—or main argument—of the book? If the author wanted you to get one idea from the book, what would it be? How does it compare or contrast to the world you know? What has the book accomplished?

What exactly is the subject or topic of the book? Does the author cover the subject adequately? Does the author cover all aspects of the subject in a balanced fashion? What is the approach to the subject (topical, analytical, chronological, descriptive)?

How does the author support their argument? What evidence do they use to prove their point? Do you find that evidence convincing? Why or why not? Does any of the author’s information (or conclusions) conflict with other books you’ve read, courses you’ve taken or just previous assumptions you had of the subject?

How does the author structure their argument? What are the parts that make up the whole? Does the argument make sense? Does it persuade you? Why or why not?

How has this book helped you understand the subject? Would you recommend the book to your reader?

Who is the author? Nationality, political persuasion, training, intellectual interests, personal history, and historical context may provide crucial details about how a work takes shape. Does it matter, for example, that the biographer was the subject’s best friend? What difference would it make if the author participated in the events they write about?

What is the book’s genre? Out of what field does it emerge? Does it conform to or depart from the conventions of its genre? These questions can provide a historical or literary standard on which to base your evaluations. If you are reviewing the first book ever written on the subject, it will be important for your readers to know. Keep in mind, though, that naming “firsts”—alongside naming “bests” and “onlys”—can be a risky business unless you’re absolutely certain.