

= Julia Alvarez =

Julia Alvarez (born March 27 , 1950) is a Dominican @-@ American poet , novelist , and essayist .

Alvarez rose to prominence with the novels *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) , *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) , and *Yo !* (1997) . Her publications as a poet include *Homecoming* (1984) and *The Woman I Kept to Myself* (2004) , and as an essayist the autobiographical compilation *Something to Declare* (1998) . Many literary critics regard her to be one of the most significant Latina writers and she has achieved critical and commercial success on an international scale .

Born in New York , she spent the first ten years of her childhood in the Dominican Republic , until her father ' s involvement in a political rebellion forced her family to flee the country . Many of Alvarez ' s works are influenced by her experiences as a Dominican in the United States , and focus heavily on issues of assimilation and identity . Her cultural upbringing as both a Dominican and an American is evident in the combination of personal and political tone in her writing . She is known for works that examine cultural expectations of women both in the Dominican Republic and the United States , and for rigorous investigations of cultural stereotypes . In recent years , Alvarez has expanded her subject matter with works such as *In the Name of Salomé* (2000) , a novel with Cuban rather than solely Dominican characters and fictionalized versions of historical figures .

In addition to her successful writing career , Alvarez is the current writer @-@ in @-@ residence at Middlebury College .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life and education = = =

Julia Alvarez was born in 1950 in New York City . When she was three @-@ months @-@ old , her family moved back to the Dominican Republic , where they lived for the next ten years . She grew up with her extended family in sufficient comfort to enjoy the services of maids . Critic Silvio Sirias believes that Dominicans value a talent for story @-@ telling ; Alvarez developed this talent early and was " often called upon to entertain guests " . In 1960 , the family was forced to flee to the United States after her father participated in a failed plot to overthrow the island ' s military dictator , Rafael Trujillo , circumstances which would later be revisited in her writing : her novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* , for example , portrays a family that is forced to leave the Dominican Republic in similar circumstances , and in her poem , " *Exile* " , she describes " the night we fled the country " and calls the experience a " loss much larger than I understood " .

Alvarez ' s transition from the Dominican Republic to the United States was difficult ; Sirias comments that she " lost almost everything : a homeland , a language , family connections , a way of understanding , and a warmth " . She experienced alienation , homesickness , and prejudice in her new surroundings . In *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* , a character asserts that trying to raise " consciousness [in the Dominican Republic] ... would be like trying for cathedral ceilings in a tunnel " .

As one of the few Latin American students in her Catholic school , Alvarez faced discrimination because of her heritage and was often called a " Spic ! " by her classmates . This caused her to turn inward and led to her fascination with literature , which she called " a portable homeland " . She was encouraged by many of her teachers to pursue writing , and from a young age , was certain that this was what she wanted to do with her life . At the age of 13 , her parents sent her to Abbot Academy , a boarding school , because the local schools were not considered sufficient . As a result , her relationship with her parents suffered , and was further strained when every summer she returned to the Dominican Republic to " reinforce their identities not only as Dominicans but also as proper young ladies " . These intermittent exchanges between countries informed her cultural understanding , the basis of many of her works .

After graduating from Abbot Academy in 1967 , she attended Connecticut College from 1967 to 1969 (where she won the Benjamin T. Marshall Poetry Prize) and then transferred to Middlebury College , where she obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree , summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa (1971) . She then received a master 's degree from Syracuse University (1975) .

= = = Career = = =

After acquiring a master 's degree in 1975 , Alvarez took a position as a writer @-@ in @-@ residence for the Kentucky Arts Commission . She traveled throughout the state visiting elementary schools , high schools , colleges and communities , conducting writing workshops and giving readings . She attributes these years with providing her a deeper understanding of America and helping her realize her passion for teaching . After her work in Kentucky , she extended her educational endeavors to California , Delaware , North Carolina , Massachusetts , Washington , D.C. , and Illinois .

In addition to writing , Alvarez holds the position of writer @-@ in @-@ residence at Middlebury College , where she teaches creative writing on a part @-@ time basis . Alvarez currently resides in the Champlain Valley in Vermont . She has served as a panelist , consultant , and editor , as a judge for literary awards such as the PEN / Newman 's Own First Amendment Award and the Casa de las Américas Prize , and also gives readings and lectures across the country . She and her partner , Bill Eichner , an ophthalmologist , created Alta Gracia , a farm @-@ literacy center dedicated to the promotion of environmental sustainability and literacy and education worldwide . Alvarez and her husband purchased the farm in 1996 with the intent to promote cooperative and independent coffee @-@ farming in the Dominican Republic .

= = Literary work = =

Alvarez is regarded as one of the most critically and commercially successful Latina writers of her time . Her published works include five novels , a book of essays , four collections of poetry , four children ? s books , and two works of adolescent fiction .

Among her first published works were collections of poetry ; The Homecoming , published in 1984 , was expanded and republished in 1996 . Poetry was Alvarez ? s first form of creative writing and she explains that her love for poetry has to do with the fact that " a poem is very intimate , heart @-@ to @-@ heart " . Her poetry celebrates nature and the detailed rituals of daily life , including domestic chores . Her poems portray stories of family life and are often told from the perspective of women . She questions patriarchal privilege and examines issues of exile , assimilation , identity , and the struggle of the lower class in an introspective manner . She found inspiration for her work from a small painting from 1894 by Pierre Bonnard called The Circus Rider . Her poems , critic Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez suggests , give voice to the immigrant struggle .

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents , Alvarez ? s first novel , was published in 1991 , and was soon widely acclaimed . It is the first major novel written in English by a Dominican author . A largely personal novel , the book details themes of cultural hybridization and the struggles of a post @-@ colonial Dominican Republic . Alvarez illuminates the integration of the Latina immigrant into the U.S. mainstream and shows that identity can be deeply affected by gender , ethnic , and class differences . She uses her own experiences to illustrate deep cultural contrasts between the Caribbean and the United States . So personal was the material in the novel , that for months after it was published , her mother refused to speak with her ; her sisters were also not pleased with the book . The book has sold over 250 @, @ 000 copies , and was cited as an American Library Association Notable Book .

Released in 1994 , her second novel , In the Time of the Butterflies , has a historical premise and elaborates on the death of the Mirabal sisters during the time of the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic . In 1960 their bodies were found at the bottom of a cliff on the north coast of the island , and it is said they were a part of a revolutionary movement to overthrow the oppressive regime of the country at the time . These legendary figures are referred to as Las Mariposas , or The

Butterflies . This story portrays women as strong characters who have the power to alter the course of history , demonstrating Alvarez ? s affinity for strong female protagonists and anti @-@ colonial movements . As Alvarez explains , " I hope that through this fictionalized story I will bring acquaintance of these famous sisters to English speaking readers . November 25 , the day of their murders is observed in many Latin American countries as the International Day Against Violence Toward Women . Obviously , these sisters , who fought one tyrant , have served as models for women fighting against injustices of all kinds . "

In 1997 , Alvarez published *Yo !* , a sequel to *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* , which focuses solely on the character of Yolanda . Drawing from her own experiences , Alvarez portrays the success of a writer who uses her family as the inspiration for her work . *Yo !* could be considered Alvarez ? s musings on and criticism of her own literary success . Alvarez ? s opinions on the hybridization of culture are often conveyed through the use of Spanish @-@ English malapropisms , or Spanglish ; such expressions are especially prominent in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* . Alvarez describes the language of the character of Laura as " a mishmash of mixed @-@ up idioms and sayings " .

In the Name of Salomé (2000) is a novel that weaves together the lives of two distinct women , illustrating how they devoted their lives to political causes . It takes place in several locations , including the Dominican Republic before a backdrop of political turbulence , Communist Cuba in the 1960s , and several university campuses across the United States , containing themes of empowerment and activism . As the protagonists of this novel are both women , Alvarez illustrates how these women , " came together in their mutual love of [their homeland] and in their faith in the ability of women to forge a conscience for Out Americas . " This book has been widely acclaimed for its careful historical research and captivating story , and was described by *Publishers Weekly* as " one of the most politically moving novels of the past half century . "

= = Influence on Latin American literature = =

Alvarez is regarded as one of the most critically and commercially successful Latina writers of her time . As Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez observes , Alvarez is part of a movement of Latina writers that also includes Sandra Cisneros and Cristina García , all of whom weave together themes of the experience of straddling the borders and cultures of Latin America and the United States . Coonrod Martínez suggests that a subsequent generation of Dominican @-@ American writers , such as Angie Cruz , Loida Maritza Pérez , Nelly Rosario , and Junot Díaz , have been inspired by Alvarez ? s success .

Alvarez admits " the bad part of being a ' Latina Writer ' is that people want to make me into a spokesperson . There is no spokesperson ! There are many realities , different shades and classes " .

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents is the first novel by a Dominican @-@ American woman to receive widespread acclaim and attention in the United States . The book portrays ethnic identity as problematic on several levels . Alvarez challenges commonly held assumptions of multiculturalism as strictly positive . She views much of immigrant identity as greatly affected by ethnic , gendered , and class conflict . According to critic Ellen McCracken , " Transgression and incestuous overtones may not be the usual fare of the mainstream ? s desirable multicultural commodity , but Alvarez ? s deployment of such narrative tactics foregrounds the centrality of the struggle against abuse of patriarchal power in this Dominican American ? s early contribution to the new Latina narrative of the 1990s . "

Regarding the women ? s movement in writing , Alvarez explains , " definitely , still , there is a glass ceiling in terms of female novelists . If we have a female character , she might be engaging in something monumental but she ? s also changing the diapers and doing the cooking , still doing things which get it called a woman ? s novel . You know , a man ? s novel is universal ; a woman ? s novel is for women . "

Alvarez claims that her aim is not simply to write for women , but to also deal with universal themes that illustrate a more general interconnectedness . She explains , " What I try to do with my writing is

to move out into those other selves , other worlds . To become more and more of us . " As an illustration of this point , Alvarez writes in English about issues in the Dominican Republic , using a combination of both English and Spanish . Alvarez feels empowered by the notion of populations and cultures around the world mixing , and because of this identifies as a " Citizen of the World " .

= = Grants and honors = =

Alvarez has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ingram Merrill Foundation . Some of her poetry manuscripts now have a permanent home in the New York Public Library , where her work was featured in an exhibit , " The Hand of the Poet : Original Manuscripts by 100 Masters , From John Donne to Julia Alvarez . " She received the Lamont Prize from the Academy of American Poets in 1974 , first prize in narrative from the Third Woman Press Award in 1986 , and an award from the General Electric Foundation in 1986 .

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents was the winner of the 1991 PEN Oakland / Josephine Miles Literary Award for works that present a multicultural viewpoint . Yo ! was selected as a notable book by the American Library Association in 1998 . Before We Were Free won the Belpre Medal in 2004 , and Return to Sender won the Belpre Medal in 2010 . She also received the 2002 Hispanic Heritage Award in Literature .

= = = Fiction = = =

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Homecoming : New and Selected Poems , Plume , 1996 , ISBN 978 @-@ 0 @-@ 452 @-@ 27567
@-@ 6 - reissue of 1984 volume , with new poems
The Woman I Kept to Myself , Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill , 2004 ; 2011 , ISBN 978 @-@ 1
@-@ 61620 @-@ 072 @-@ 5

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@-@ 193 @-@ 5 (collected essays)
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670 @-@ 03873 @-@ 2 .
A Wedding in Haiti : The Story of a Friendship 2012 .