

The Pleasures of Revolution: Sexuality, Power and Gender Roles in Julia Alvarez's *In The Time Of The Butterflies*

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Abstract

Although a historical fiction novel, Julia Alvarez's "In the Time of the Butterflies" (1994) takes a realistic, personal approach to the lives of the Mirabal sisters, whose role in the Dominican resistance against Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship rendered them mythological symbols replete with collective hope, relatively devoid of nuance. In this paper, I will first account for the intersection of gender, class, and religion and the meeting of various social constructs that informs the Mirabal sisters' views on gender roles and sexuality. Then, I will seek to reveal how their gradual involvement (or lack thereof) in the resistance movement leads the sisters to perform a form of critical thought on sexuality and gender roles. I will further apply the close reading method on several significant passages to shed light on the strategies employed by the Mirabal sisters to navigate public and private forms of patriarchy. Finally, I will try to demonstrate that they construct sexual agency and personal fulfilment on different terms and that the espousal of revolutionary ideals is not equally liberating to all of them, thus speaking to the multiplicity and diversity of feminisms and feminist approaches.

Keywords: sexuality; gender; historical fiction; feminism; intersectionality

Introduction

In her memoir *Something to Declare*, Dominican-American author Julia Alvarez details her personal journey in writing about the Mirabal sisters, Dominican freedom fighters who opposed Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship and whose heroism earned them the title of national heroes (Novas 226-227). In her essay "Chasing the Butterflies", Alvarez expands on her wish to depict the Mirabal sisters not as the mythological figures of popular media, but as "the living, breathing women who had faced all the difficult challenges and choices of those terrible years" (Alvarez SD 203). However, *In the Time of the Butterflies* has outgrown the confines of a historical fiction novel, as various critics have associated the sisters' individual narratives with testimonio, a Latina form of writing whereby Latina women can tackle historical and collective events in a personal manner ("Telling to Live" 3) (McCracken qtd. in Vázquez 307) (Karczewska 31). Reconstructing the sisters' daily lives through first-person narratives, such as diary entries and coming-of-age accounts, Alvarez aligns with the struggles of feminists of color to address multiple oppressions through the lens of "lived experience" (Moraga qtd. in Trujillo 59-60). In portraying women's daily activities, Alvarez reflects on how women's everyday choices can either undermine or further reinforce discriminatory systems based on gender, class, religion and social structures (Oliver n.p.).

As for historical context, Alvarez taps into Trujillo's dictatorial regime so as to exemplify a form of Latin American patriarchy still in place today, which assigns constrictive gender roles to women and unlimited

powers to paternal figures (Gallo n.p.). In choosing coming-of-age narratives, Alvarez reckons with the impact of patriarchal oppression on young women's constructions of sexuality, shedding light on the two-fold struggle of the Mirabal sisters: fighting for freedom against an abusive political regime while also fighting for agency on a personal level (Fregoso 10). In this paper, I will first look at how the interplay of gender, class, and religion informs the Mirabal sisters' views on gender roles and sexuality; then, I will try to argue that their gradual involvement (or lack thereof) in the resistance movement leads them to reassess their approach to gender roles and sexuality. I will perform close reading on a number of significant passages so as to illuminate the strategies employed by the Mirabal sisters to navigate public and private forms of patriarchy. I will seek to demonstrate that they construct sexual agency and personal fulfillment on different terms (as in gaining sexual control in a relationship, reclaiming their body and sexual urges, and expressing their sexual desires, be they assertive or submissive), and that joining the revolution is not equally liberating to all of them. So as not to derail from the purpose of this analysis, I will only perform close reading on the chapters prior to their imprisonment (as looking into the experience of incarceration would entail a different discussion and the assessment of new forms of physical and sexual oppression).

In the first section of my paper, I will focus on Patria and her efforts to mediate between faith, sexuality, and family. In my analysis, I will rely on Aída Hurtado's cultural criticism so as to account for how Marianismo (the cult for female chastity and submissiveness in Latin American Catholic cultures) is both a source of oppression and power for the oldest Mirabal sister (Hurtado 17). Additionally, I will draw on Gloria Anzaldúa's incorporation of Freud's concepts of Eros and Thanatos into her theory of spiritual/sexual wholeness for Latina women (Capetillo-Ponce 91). Further on, I will look at Minerva's negotiation of patriarchal authority by drawing on Foucauldian readings of power relations in Alvarez's novels (Oliver n.p.) (Rivera-van Schagen 151). Thus, I will engage with how Minerva strategically uses erotic power play and appropriates a masculine gender role so as to undermine patriarchal hierarchies. Lastly, I will consider the pervasive influence of Old World values on Dominican culture (Roorda et al. 1), and the subsequent impact of romanticized heterosexuality on Dominican young women's views of love and sexuality (Sandoval 34). I will argue that Alvarez's insertion of an overromanticizing character asks important questions about how young Latina women can reconcile domesticity and sexuality.

1. "The little ghost of a being folded in my womb": Eros and Thanatos in Patria's Reformed Motherhood

In the narrative choir of the Mirabal sisters, Patria is signified through a blend of Biblical and motherly discourses, and a constant reliance on the Catholic religion as a means of interpreting her experience. A religious fervent since her infancy, Patria often questions the strength of her faith to tackle what she considers to be a temptation. As she grows up into a woman, wife, mother, and revolutionary, her relationship with religion becomes strongly linked with her negotiation of sexuality. More often than not, she tries to invest her body with a religious role. Presenting her birth as a miraculous act, Patria employs comparisons with plants and birds so as to describe the body of a baby that is non-human and otherworldly. The first images of Patria's

corporeality envision a body that merely exists to articulate the desire for God: "So you could say I was born, but I wasn't really here. One of those spirit babies, *alélá*, as the country people say. My mind, my heart, my soul in the clouds" (Alvarez TB 44). The physicality that Patria sees fit for herself is the ethereal, sexless body of an eternal child, a spirit divested by sexuality and untarnished by biology, in direct connection with God. Moreover, Patria's desire to be one with God and God's creatures is manifested as a compulsion to give away everything. In an anticipatory gesture, Patria's mother singles out the girl's lack of an ownership or self-protection instinct: "You had no sense of holding on to things [...] I was afraid [...] that you wouldn't live long, that you were already the way we were here to become" (45). In view of Patria's reiteration of the self-sacrifice motif throughout the narrative, her excessive selflessness in childhood is the first, eerie manifestation of Patria's death drive, a sacrificial need that she will manage to fulfill only later on, by joining a higher cause.

As the very intense language of the narrative seems to indicate, Patria's overwhelming desire to share herself with the world is a form of erotic energy which, as a child, she innocently channels towards religious pursuits and motherly practices. Ten-year old Patria saw God as her future bridegroom, and adult Patria retrospectively compares her early commitment to God with her peers' dreams of marrying "cute boys" (Alvarez TB 45). Already, the desirable sexlessness of the "spirit child" is undermined by the unconscious performance of gender norms. Learning appropriate gender behavior parallels Patria's growing love for Catholicism, and the two merge to construct Patria's early identification with motherhood and self-sacrifice. Her performances of godly submission (comforting troubled young men, tending to her younger sisters) and her discourse of absolute selflessness (providing for the whole world) pertain to a daily reiteration of motherhood. In retrospect, however, Patria ironically compares the selflessness and submission required by God to the quiet passivity required by a political tyrant: "My immortal soul wants to take the whole blessed world in! But, of course, it was my body, hungering, biding its time against the tyranny of my spirit" (45).

While in convent school, Patria experiences her biological body for the first time, as part of the typical teenage sexual awakening. Gazing upon her breasts and dimples, Patria is first repulsed by her womanhood and perceives it as a form of distraction from religious duties. She sees her body in the third person, as separate from herself, and tries to symbolically purge it of its womanly attributes, in an attempt to align it with her earlier sexless commitment to God: "I put my hands up against the glass to remind her that she, too, must reach up for the things she didn't understand" (Alvarez TB 45). However, as she also starts experiencing her body through touch, Patria can tell that her sexual urges are as powerful as her religious fervor. This first encounter with her own sexuality challenges Patria to slowly acknowledge her strong erotic drive, which she has so far interpreted as a desire for God: "[My hands] rambled over my growing body [...] I tried reining them in, but they broke loose, night after night [...] [When] the hands slept again [...] other parts of my body began to wake" (47).

Between looking in the mirror and masturbating at night, Patria turns her faith to the repression of her body. Ironically, while she's in the Mother Superior's office in search for guidance, Patria seems to acquiesce that the instrument of her nightly sins – her palm – will be the strongest guide to her future: "Surely it would be pride to claim a calling at my young age! I shook

my head, blushing, and looked down at my palms, marked, the country people say, with a map of the future” (46). For Patria, this direct reckoning with “sin” is the first acknowledgment of sensuousness as part of her religious vision.

Having acknowledged her sensuous body and sexual desires, Patria reverts to her submissiveness as a mother figure in an attempt to regain her favor with God. While washing the parishioners’ feet on Holy Thursday, one body allows her to experience both physical and spiritual fulfillment, both pleasure and piety. Thus, upon sensuously experiencing a man for the first time, Patria commits herself to becoming the earthly bride of Christ (Alvarez TB 48). Her word choices in describing Pedrito articulate the ambivalence of the motherly gender role, as both a means of submission and power: „And why, you might ask, was the otherworldly, deeply religious Patria attracted to such a[n earthly] creature? I’ll tell you. I felt the same excitement as when I’d been able to coax a wild bird or stray cat to eat out of my hand” (50).

Patria’s marriage will reassert her godly selflessness both as a means of nurturing and comforting her husband and family, but also as a means of “taming” and controlling them. At this point, Patria has invested her motherly role with both productive and destructive qualities, which she will seek to exploit so as to navigate power relations in her marriage.

Throughout her marital life, Patria struggles to ensure the stability of her marriage, which she sees as a means of fulfilling her religious duty: “Build your house upon a rock, He said, do my will. And though the rain fall and the floods come and the winds blow, the good wife’s house will stand” (Alvarez TB 148). This house of God, Patria cannot fail to notice, is inhabited and protected by her spirit, which marks her, once again, as a chosen one. It is a reiteration of her hyperbolized motherly attributes, a form of religious matriarchal power through which she also maintains her social standing in spite of having married into a lower class: “Patria Mercedes was in those timbers [...] in those wide boards on the floor and in that creaky door opening on its old hinges” (Alvarez TB 148) (Vega 99-100). However, besides being a manifestation of her deep religiousness, Patria’s saintly domesticity is also a way for her to negotiate sexuality in her marriage. Her “consolations” to Pedrito’s grief come in the form of sexual submissiveness; however, her performance of selfless motherhood creates a mother/son dynamic and a bodily dependency that will enable her to convince Pedrito to give over both his lands and his son to the revolution: “I put aside my own grief to rescue [Pedrito] from his. Every night I gave him my milk as if he were my lost child, and afterwards I let him do things I never would have before” (Alvarez TB 53).

It takes a turning point in Patria’s rock-hard marriage for her to reassess her motherly role and probe to the heart of her unresolved sexual issues and religious concerns. This is one of the first moments when a sister’s revolutionary ideas are passed onto another and prompt change. Minerva voicing her rage with Trujillo’s regime echoes and reinforces Patria’s budding disenchantment with God. Minerva’s insistence on the priests’ hypocrisy, supposedly devoted to their congregation but actually selling their secrets to the SIM (Dominican Secret Services), drives home the analogy between God and Trujillo, as both have turned from professed benefactors into tormentors of their people (Alvarez TB 52). This realization impacts the spirit/body balance which Patria has been trying to achieve by dissolving her erotic desires into her commitment to marital and maternal roles. The fact that not even religious spaces are safe from human cruelty is an abrupt

desacralization of the world, which Patria processes as a miscarriage, a literal inner death. Patria's faith in God is shaken, and so is her grasp on her body; her miscarriage unveils the tension between her actual sexual desires and her carefully performed role as a model wife and mother. Rejecting the fetus equals rejecting a burdensome faith, which Patria mistook for spirit and which she blindly nourished for years. In a contrastive parallel to the fruitful spirit inhabiting Patria as a child, this scene depicts a Patria that has subdued her erotic energy into dry, numb motherhood:

For days, I'd been feeling a heaviness inside me. And I admit it, Minerva's talk had begun affecting me [...] My faith was shifting, and I was afraid [...] [S]uddenly [...] I could feel the waters breaking, the pearl of great price slipping out, and I realized I was giving birth to something dead I had been carrying inside me (Alvarez TB 52).

Patria's reawakening to her religious calling will come as a result of two pilgrimages, which form the background of two equally powerful epiphanies. While visiting the Virgencita of Higüey, Patria realizes that in worshipping figures of authority (be it God, Virgin Mary or Trujillo), she has lost sight of her professed selflessness to the world around her, a world she promised to serve when she was a child: "And I heard Virgencita answer me with the coughs and cries and whispers of the crowd: Here, Patria Mercedes, I'm here, all around you. I've already more than appeared" (Alvarez TB 59). On her pilgrimage to Constanza, upon witnessing the fatal shooting of a young revolutionary, she experiences the terror of the dictatorial regime firsthand, and her faith takes a new turn. Both pilgrimages are shifts from her self-perceived position as a privileged, godly individual (a chosen one both in terms of social class and religious calling), to her role as a people's messenger of godly purposes. She conflates her three sons – the stillborn baby; the eldest, Nelson, who is already part of the revolution, and the newly born Raúl Ernesto, named for Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara – into the sacrificial figure of Jesus Christ, thus also articulating the Virgin's motherly sacrifice for the common good: „Coming down that mountain, I was a changed woman. I may have worn the same sweet face, but now I was carrying not just my child but that dead boy as well. My stillborn of thirteen years ago. My murdered son of a few hours ago" (Alvarez TB 162).

By becoming a missionary for the revolutionary message to the campesinos and offering up her family home for the Butterflies' meetings, she renews her motherly gender role and infuses it with new meaning, as she becomes the symbolic mother and "avenging angel" of the movement (Alvarez TB 163) (Broome 5). Her selflessness and transcendental calling are finally channeled into the salvation of the many and the fulfillment of a collective purpose through personal sacrifice. As this new role satisfies both her erotic and death drives, Patria can finally see her sexuality in more than motherly terms: she fully renounces the sexlessness of marianistic embodiment and instead embraces the sensuous body of a guerilla angel, a body both productive and destructive through the sacrifice of its progeny. The insertion of earth imagery, suggestive of renewed fertility and the sensuousness of conception, reframes the upcoming revolution as a religious act, a (re)birth through destruction:

It was in those old and bountiful fields that Pedrito and his son and a few of the other men buried the boxes once we got them loaded and sealed [...] This was a kind of farming, too, he told me later, one that he could share with his son Nelson.

From those seeds of destruction, we would soon – very soon – harvest our freedom.
(Alvarez TB 168)

2. “Snapping her eyes on the Nipples bomb”: Mate’s Romantic Revolution

Alvarez’s use of diary entries for Mate’s voice works as a reflection upon Mate’s privilege within her family (as the youngest daughter) and the negotiation of this privilege in her adult life, as a woman in her early 20s. These diary entries retain the child-like quality expected of the youngest daughter in a family and create the impression of authenticity and unfiltered style. Tied to the sheltered existence of Mate, this unfiltered expression of a girl’s wishes and everyday experiences unveils a conception of pleasure predicated on domestic privilege. Growing up under the aegis of her parents’ protection, Mate uses her diary to register the behavior of her elders and vicariously live through them the excitedness of adult life. Ten-year Mate likes performing and being watched, as seen in the manner she stages her First Communion: “I love my new shoes for my First Communion. They’re white leather with just a little heel like a grownup young lady. I practiced a lot beforehand, and I must say, I didn’t wobble once on my way to the altar. I was so proud of myself” (Alvarez TB 30). As a privileged subject in the domestic sphere, she is encouraged to perform her femininity and thus develop a romanticized view of love and domesticity. Reveling in the sensuousness of everyday life, she desires domestic entertainments more than anything - a well-made chocolate is the highest form of pleasure, and family celebrations are her longed-for treats:

Tomorrow, Minerva and I take the train home for the holidays. I can’t wait! My soul is full of longing all right. I long to see Papa, whom I haven’t seen in three whole months! And my rabbits, Nieve and Coco [...] And the chocolate made with enough chocolate. (32)

This playful domesticity is in close connection with her special relationship with her father, a relationship which also fuels her romantic view of the world. Even though she is schooled by Minerva in the biological workings of sex, Mate is repulsed by the idea of physicality and further retreats into romanticism as a teenager.

Encouraged by Minerva to look for her soul through writing, Mate discovers a stringent need that she cannot fulfill with either Patria’s religious fervor or Minerva’s restless fight for justice: “I want to know things I don’t even know what they are. But I could be happy without answers if I had someone to love” (Alvarez TB 122). She tries filling the void by committing herself to love and relationships, but the erosion of paternal authority, following the death of her father and her disenchantment with Trujillo, another father figure, deprives her of her domestic privilege and undermines her romantic pursuits. She cannot form a functional relationship because she subconsciously feels that any involvement with a man would be a betrayal of her father. Haunted by a dream where her wedding dress covers her father’s face in a coffin, but still striving for the romantic ideal, she perceives her encounters with men as repetitive and meaningless (122). As a result, she starts following Minerva as an alternative authority figure. Unfazed by her university courses, she picks up the revolutionary bug while receiving an ammunition delivery from one of Minerva’s “comrades”. Thrilled at the prospect of bigger (and illegal) things, Mate becomes the second Butterfly

and becomes romantically involved with said comrade. She finally finds fulfillment upon receiving an active role in the plot against Trujillo: fabricating bombs with her roommate (144). Under the supervision of a new father figure (her revolutionary lover) and the watchful eyes of nosy neighbors, she relives the thrill of the domestic pleasures of her childhood home. At the heart of something both meaningful and entertaining, Mate recovers both her playful sense of pleasure and her romanticized version of love: on the one hand, she enjoys using her innocent femininity to cover up her illegal activities; on the other hand, she delights in the narrative of the damsel in distress that her lover weaves around her: „[My lover] was spending every moment too worried about me to pay careful attention to the revolution. My heart stirred to hear him say so. I admit that for me love goes deeper than the struggle, or maybe what I mean is, love is the deeper struggle (147)”.

3. Minerva and Dédé: Playing with Authority or Sitting Back

Recounting her teenage years in convent school and her adult life as a student, mother, and wife, Minerva highlights the main events that shape both her attitude towards sexuality and her role in the revolutionary struggle. She experiences her first menstruation on the same night she finds out through a roommate's tragic story that Trujillo is not a benefactor, but a dictator, and she will come to associate her terror at the blood with the discovery of Trujillo's atrocities (Alvarez TB 18). Watching one of her colleagues, Lina Lovatón, receive visits and gifts from Trujillo on campus, and then become Trujillo's underage mistress, leads Minerva to take a first stance against Trujillo's regime by refusing to showcase her femininity. Confronted with the immediacy of her colleague's tragedy, she resorts to small, daily gestures meant to dismantle the patriarchal system that lures teenage girls into becoming luxury prostitutes (Oliver n.p.). However, in doing so, Minerva also starts feeling repulsed by her body and repressing her sexuality. While dressing up as a boy to perform a school play in front of Trujillo is a subversive gesture, Minerva's breast-biding in an attempt to desexualize her body marks the internalization of the misogynist perception of womanhood as weakness or vulnerability (Alvarez TB 23).

However, witnessing Lina progress from a mere schoolgirl to a national symbol celebrated in school (the gymnasium is renamed for her) also informs Minerva about the impact that female sexuality can have upon male authority (Alvarez TB 24). She is close to reiterating Lina's relationship with Trujillo when she is invited by the dictator to attend the celebrations of Discovery Day as one of his special guests (93). Processing the minute organization of these select social events (from table arrangements to dance routines), Minerva realizes that these celebrations are erotic power plays meant to consensualize submission to the regime:

He rises from his chair, and I am so sure he is going to ask me that I feel a twinge of disappointment when he turns instead to the wife of the Spanish ambassador [...] This regime is seductive. How else would a whole nation fall prey to this little man? (96)

While dancing with Trujillo, Minerva plays along with Trujillo's sexual innuendos and capitalizes on his sexual desire so as to convince him to allow her to sign up for law school (98). Using her sexuality as a form of

negotiation with an abusive patriarchal system, Minerva will seek to derive power and control, rather than romance, from sexuality.

On the cusp of adulthood, Minerva declares herself clearly unimpressed by romance and uninterested in men. It is in the aftermath of another reckoning with male authority that she gains interest in male bodies. When told off by her father for her revolutionary sympathies, Minerva calls him out on his hypocrisy and asks to see his mistress and second family (Alvarez TB 89). On their way back home, she drinks in the bodies of men working in nature and claims having experienced romantic feelings for men for the first time:

And as I said those words my woman's eyes sprang open. All the way home I kept seeing them from the corners of my eyes, men bending in the fields, men riding horses, men [...] nibbling on a spear of grass, and I knew very well I was looking at what I wanted at last. (92-93)

However, seeing as she later becomes a provider for her father's second family after her father's death, her epiphany of restored faith in masculinity can also be interpreted as a newly found desire to unseat defective male authority (embodied by Trujillo and her father) and take on manly responsibilities herself. On this occasion, as on her second encounter with Trujillo, when she is asked to plead for her father's release from prison, she wants to be seen as an equal enemy to patriarchy rather than a woman, an individual of equal rights to man and who can have a similar impact in society: "I look down at the lopsided scales as he puts his dice back. For a moment, I imagine them evenly balanced, his will on one side, mine on the other" (115).

Dédé's coming-of-age narrative is different from her sisters' in that her teenage years are uneventful by comparison, especially when it comes to traumatic sexual discoveries. The most practical and conforming of all the sisters, she successfully manages her father's business and naturally accommodates everyone with her bright and mild nature (illustrated in her nickname, "Miss Sonrisa, cheerful, compliant") (Alvarez TB 177). Out of all the sisters, she retains a particularly strong connection with their family, by marrying one of her cousins and then moving in her parents' home after their father's death. Once the sisters become strongly involved in the revolution, Dédé's down-to-earth nature ensures the connection between her sisters' radical approach and their mother's skepticism. Significantly, Dédé's first heartfelt romance coincides with Minerva's first contact with a real-life revolutionary. However, while Minerva gets close to Lío because their relationship as revolutionary comrades allows her to receive equal treatment to men, Dédé feels romantically attracted to Lío but actively holds back her desires for fear of looking unfeminine. Symbolically, the "play" metaphor is reiterated in the girls' attitudes towards the volleyball matches with Lío: Minerva sees participating in a then-masculine activity as one more opportunity to play with and subvert male authority, while Dédé prefers only watching, for fear of antagonizing her father and losing her stable position in the family: "Of course, she never plays. Except for Minerva in her trousers and tennis shoes, the girls all sit in the galería cheering the boys on" (70). She vicariously experiences the thrill of revolution through her discussions with Lío and wishes to be with him so as to feel "grand and brave" herself (79).

It is out of practicality (and fear) that she marries one of her cousins, predictable and familiar Jaimito. Years later, when she is the only sister to not have joined the revolution, Dédé tries to blame her lack of action on her marital problems (Alvarez TB 179). Encouraged by her sisters to stand up to Jaimito, she plans on leaving him but backs down when he threatens to permanently take away their children. With her family and her uneventful life on the line, she indirectly admits that it has been comforting, rather than oppressive, to have her husband deter her from joining the revolution, and thus validate her own fears: “I just have to admit to myself. I’m not you – no really, I mean it. I could be brave if someone were by me every day of my life to remind me to be brave. I don’t come by it naturally” (186). Dédé is genuinely afraid for herself and does not feel comfortable dissolving her uncertainties into a higher cause. Unlike Patria, who joins the revolution so as to reconcile her sexuality and her religious calling, Minerva, who wishes to experience equality to men, and Mate, who needs to find a middle ground between romantic adventurousness and paternal authority, Dédé would hold on to her small, hard-earned achievements (her children and her parents’ home) rather than reconcile romantic and social fulfillment through a larger narrative.

Conclusions

All in all, *In the Time of the Butterflies* is one more example of Alvarez’s predilection to juxtapose the personal and the political. Minerva’s words, “None of us [come by courage naturally]”, seem to sum up the quintessence of Alvarez’s message (Alvarez TB 186). The trials and tribulations of the Mirabals’ daily lives show the revolution for what it is – a process involving both personal and collective change. Just like the Garcia Girls of Alvarez’s eponymous debut novel, where becoming American parallels becoming a woman, the Butterflies grow up into women as they accept or refuse to enter and process the revolution. Coming to terms with their sexuality and reforming their gender roles is integral to their struggle, as is the negotiation of family life and religion, central to Latina women and Latino communities. While not all four Mirabal sisters welcome the liberating potential of the revolution, engaging with the revolution is an eye-opening experience for all (the reader included) about the resonance of personal power and the significance of daily choices. Rewriting miscarriage as part of a religious mission so as to reclaim one’s body, fabricating bombs for your boyfriend so as to live your romantic fantasy, playing up the erotic factor so as to undermine dictators, or taking pleasure in safety and stability, are all personal choices which feed into and shape the making of history.

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