

Use of weather in in the time of the butterflies novel

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The setting of a story plays a vital role in developing and advancing the story, its theme and its characters. Weather and geography, for example, are two vital aspects of the setting of *In The Time of the Butterflies*, a historical novel by Julia Alvarez. The use of weather, whether rainy or sunny, has been used throughout the novel in order to establish an atmosphere for the story's tone, as had the geography in developing the characters, their conflicts and the advancement of the plot.

One instance of the use of weather to create an atmosphere to suit the story's tone occurred on October 12th, the day of the Discovery Day Dance in El Jefe's mansion (Alvarez 93), in which a rainy storm notably arrives, disrupting El Jefe's party and his dance with Minerva. After an uneasy night dancing with El Jefe, Minerva retains yet hides his hatred of him from her time spent with Sinita as she nostalgically recalls the same "feeling [of] stagefright of five years back" (98). Trying to take advantage of the night, Minerva pleads for his permission to attend law school in order to become a lawyer, but after one sexual advance too many on El Jefe's part, she slaps her hand "down on the astonished, made-up face" (100). The uncertainty of the night, as well as her sudden criminal offense, is reflected by the sudden rain that "comes down hard," causing "squeals of surprise" (100). The rain helps add to the "mysterious" and "miserable" tones of the scene (Foster 71), as Minerva fears that she may be arrested for her sudden actions, but to her surprise, El Jefe opted to not arrest her, bringing about a glance of the "rainbow" that accompanies the rain (74). However, after leaving the party, Minerva realizes she left behind her purse and the traitor Lio's letters inside at the party, thereby evoking feelings of fear, stress and uncertainty, as if El

Jefe found these letters, she and her family may be accused of being traitors. These emotions are accompanied by the “rainy spell,” in which “the rain comes down all morning” on this “dreary day” (Alvarez 102).

Another instance of rain establishing a feeling of suspense and fear occurs when Patria, Maria Teresa and Minerva travel to Monte Cristi in order to meet with their husbands, accompanied by Rufino and a soldier they met on the road. When approaching Monte Cristi, a storm overcomes the mountainside road. An ominous tone is established as Minerva notes the “steep drop just inches from the slippery road, [...] the dangerous possibilities, the fumes from the bad muffler [and] the bumpiness of the road” (284), all of which only gets worse when the storm approaches, making “the inside of the Jeep [grow] dark and stuffy” (285). The rain is “isolating” as a weather condition (Foster 71), as Minerva notes that, because of the downpour of the heavy rain, she “could barely hear Patria or Mate talking, much less Rufino and the young soldier up front” (Alvarez 286). The uncertainty and suspense of the dark and stormy night further develops when Manolo warns Minerva to avoid returning home during the storm and to instead wait overnight (294), but despite his warning and feeling “a little uneasy” (296), Minerva and the rest of the group opts to travel that night, only to be confronted by their own murderers.

The geography of the Dominican Republic is necessary for the events of this novel to occur as well as to establish the circumstances for the characters to become the Butterflies. The government of this country is run by General Trujillo, the self-appointed president who runs the country like a dictator,

having everybody who opposes him or dissents him killed or jailed (Alvarez 19), with even an accidental typo in a newspaper leading to months imprisoned. His likeness becomes an omnipresent presence in the culture, as each household has a “ required portrait of El Jefe” (202). People are pressured into fear either directly by the SIM or through spies who take away people’s privacy, even from the comfort of one’s home. A growing resentment from the people of this culture leads to the development of the rebellion group, with each of the Mirabel sister having their own impetus, whether denial to practice law or a devastating explosion during a church retreat, thereby igniting a revolution to overthrow Trujillo’s regime. The people of this culture and geography can no longer tolerate Trujillo and the SIM, allowing for the revolution and the political involved to ignite and soon lead into the end of Trujillo’s dictatorship and for true democracy to take over in this country.

Rain means more than just rain, and geography defines more than just where a story takes place, as demonstrated by Julia Alvarez’s historical novel, *In The Time of the Butterflies*. Without applying these techniques to her story, the Mirabal sisters would not have been able to tell their emotional anecdotes with as much meaning and power as they did. By creating an emotional atmosphere and suspense through the weather and delivering the feelings and grievances of the people through the geography, Alvarez has successfully allowed for the reader to live through the story of the Mirabal sisters as they challenged Trujillo’s regime.