The House of the Spirits Study Guide

The House of the Spirits by Isabel Allende

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Introduction

Isabelle Allende's *The House of the Spirits* is often compared to Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* The obvious similarities are that both novels relate the saga of a family, both make liberal use of magic and fantasy, and both established their authors' literary reputations. But where García Márquez's words create a poetic picture of Latin-American life, Allende's words offers an explicit commentary on the political situation in Chile. On the surface, Allende's novel is the story of Esteban Trueba, his wife, his children, and his granddaughter. But *The House of the Spirits* is also the story of political corruption, patriarchal authority, feminine oppression, and the movement from the old world into the new. The action in the novel spans four generations and covers more than fifty years of history. During those fifty years, the country changes, first through technology and modern communications, and later through the desire to find a better life. Nivea and Clara become suffragettes, and Jaime works to improve people's lives, while Alba becomes involved in a protest movement that will ultimately ask great sacrifices of her. Throughout all these events, Esteban will be little more than an angry observer. But by the end of the novel, he will have undergone a significant change, having grown from a selfish, self-centered man into a fair, loving grandfather. *The House of the Spirits* is filled with violence and corruption, but it is also filled with love and magic.

Author Biography

Isabel Allende was born in Lima, Peru in 1942. Her father, Tomas Allende, was a diplomatic representative from Chile; when her parents divorced, Allende moved to Chile, where she lived with her maternal grandparents. Although Allende had little contact with her father, she remained close to his family, including her uncle and godfather, Salvador Allende, president of Chile from 1970 to 1973. Allende spent much of her adolescence in Bolivia, Europe, and the Middle East with her mother and stepfather. As an adult Allende returned to Chile and became a journalist, where she worked in television and wrote for a radical feminist magazine. When her uncle, Salvador Allende, was assassinated during the overthrow of the Chilean government, Allende was shaken, and after realizing that she, too, was in danger, she left the country, moving to Venezuela in 1974.

Allende's literary career began with a letter to her grandfather, who was dying. She began the letter as a response to his idea that people only died when they were forgotten. The letter, which was never mailed, became Allende's first novel, *La casa de los espiritus* (1982; *The House of the Spirits*). The matriarch and patriarch in this first novel were based on Allende's grandparents. Her second novel, *De amor y de sombra* (1984; *Of Love and Shadows*) also takes place in a country recognizable as Chile, where a military regime oppresses the people. A third novel followed in 1987, *Eva Luna*, and was followed in 1989 with *Cuentos de Eva Luna* (*The Stories of Eva Luna*), a collection of short stories based on the biographical sketches of the character Eva Luna for the previous book. A fourth novel, *El plan infinito* (1991; *An Infinite Plan*), followed. Allende's 1995 memoir, *Paula* , evolved out of an effort to understand her daughter Paula's death at age 26. Allende is also the author of *Afrodita: Recetas, cuentos y otros afrodisiacos* (1998; *Aphrodite: A Memoir of the Senses*). Allende has won several awards for her work, including the Feminist of the Year Award from the Feminist Majority Foundation. Allende also received honorary doctorate of letters degrees from Bates College and Dominican College in 1994. Allende was divorced from her first husband in 1987, after 25 years of marriage and the birth of two children. She has remarried and currently lives in California.

Plot Summary

Esteban Trueba, born circa 1897, is his father's only son and the inheritor of an established family name but without any family wealth. In his early years, he struggles as a miner, establishing a productive gold mine, and gaining his initial worldly possessions. While he works in the distant mines, his fiancé dies in the capital city of the unnamed South American country. Trueba returns to the city, leaving the mine in the hands of the foreman. He then travels to the family country estate at Tres Marias and begins an expansive program of revitalization. As the arch-conservative patrón, he views the land and the peasants as his possessions and works them unceasingly while still providing material improvements to their lives. He also fathers dozens of unacknowledged bastard children on the local peasant girls. Over several years Tres Marias becomes immensely productive and Trueba grows quite rich. He returns to the capital city and marries Clara, the younger sister of his deceased fiancé. Trueba and Clara establish a mansion in the city and fill it with finery and wealth. They have three children though Trueba's conservatism and temper leaves them all estranged as adults. Eventually even Clara refuses to speak to him and he lives many years as a virtual recluse in his own home. He enters politics and does well, becoming a national senator of some repute. Meanwhile his relatives and children pursue their own lives and interests. Trueba's granddaughter, Alba, eventually becomes his only close friend though their hugely disparate ages yields some awkwardness in their relationship. As Trueba slips into the decline of old age, the country enters a period of national upheaval. Trueba promotes a military coup to prevent an apparent Marxist takeover of the country. But once the coup seizes power they refuse to give it up and a prolonged period of institutionalized terror begins. During this period, Trueba loses his family and his own personal worth.

Chapter 1 Rosa the Beautiful

Chapter 1 Rosa the Beautiful Summary

Clara, the youngest daughter of Severo del Valle and his wife Nívea, is born circa 1914 in a South American country that is not named in the novel but generally is understood to be a lightly fictionalized version of Chile. Clara is quite precocious and exhibits numerous signs of clairvoyance, precognition, and frequently demonstrates the ability to move objects—even large objects—with her mind. Clara receives a puppy, covered in its own filth, with a shipment of books and objects to her parents' house from her Uncle Marcos. She names the puppy Barrabás. Clara's Uncle Marcos was a sort of magician-charlatan-snake-oil-salesman rolled into one and his strange and magical tales fascinated the del Valle children. During his last visit he ordered and assembled a primitive aircraft and then flew away in it, never to be heard from again. Eventually the family learned he died of a plague in Africa. His body is among the luggage returned with the puppy Barrabás.

Clara routinely writes various events in small notebooks, a habit she continues her entire life, and the notebooks eventually become the basis of the novel. She arranged the notebooks by topic, not chronologically. Clara's family lives in the Parish of San Sebastián and their priest is Father Restrepo. Restrepo delivers monolithic sermons full of the horrors of hell; he routinely accuses specific parishioners of horrible sins, such as provocatively claiming that Doña Ester Trueba, the pious mother of Esteban Trueba, is a dock-working prostitute—she does not know what a prostitute is and so is only partially offended. On several occasions Clara, as a child, participates in the services by interrupting Restrepo from the audience with insightful observations that are very much not appreciated.

Clara's oldest sister, Rosa, is known as Rosa the Beautiful because of her other-worldly beauty. She has green hair, white skin, and yellow eyes. Rosa is engaged to Esteban Trueba and is about eight years older than Clara. Esteban Trueba is away at the mines, working his gold mine claims, so that he can amass enough money to pay Rosa's considerable dowry. The del Valles are established and wealthy, while the Truebas are the crumbling remains of a once-grand family dynasty. Clara's father, Severo del Valle, is a lawyer who becomes involved in politics. His liberal outlook brings him into conflict with the existing conservative power structure. One day some food and poisoned wine is delivered to the del Valle household. Rosa drinks the wine, intended for Severo, and dies. She is autopsied in a peculiarly sexualized episode. Clara watches while hiding as the doctors strip, admire, fondle, and dissect the corpse. Later in life, Trueba rages at the twists of fate that have shaped his destiny.

Chapter 1 Rosa the Beautiful Analysis

The novel is related from the third-person, omniscient point of view with intervening sections of autobiographical material related by Esteban Trueba in the first-person point of view. Chapter One includes two such interjections which cause the reader to mistakenly assume Trueba is the primary narrator. Instead, the final portions of the novel make it clear that Alba de Satigny is the narrator while Trueba writes only those portions presented in the first-person. The novel's opening is set in the year circa 1922; although the novel references numerous historical events none of them are presented as historically accurate—instead, the entire novel presents itself as fiction. Likewise, the novel is set in an unnamed and rather generic South American country though all of the external events noted correspond closely to the geography, climate, and political history of Chile. Many of the characters, too, can be closely aligned with historic figures. For example, the narrator Alba is clearly a fictionalized representation of the author Isabel Allende, while the figure of Esteban Trueba is clearly a fictionalized representation of the author's grandfather Agustin Llona. The novel's dedication strongly infers this autobiographical link.

Chapter One introduces many of the principle characters and sets the tone of the novel. Within the novel, impossible events occur—such as Clara actually being clairvoyant and actually moving things with her mind. This diagnostic feature of magical realism is limited but prevalent in the novel but in general does not really impact the course of developments in the narrative. Another diagnostic feature of magical realism is found in Uncle Marcos' detailed adventures that encapsulate, and in most ways prefigure, the development of the entire Trueba family. He becomes a symbol of the family's passage through the years, just as the family becomes a symbol of the nation's passage through the years. Uncle Marcos leaves as a pilot and returns symbolically, at least, as a feces-encrusted dog with an insatiable and murderous sexual drive. The dog lives from Clara's childhood until her marriage to Trueba when it apparently is murdered.

The novel appears to present a fairly straightforward narrative timeline but this is very deceptive. The events are described by a narrator born after many of the event have transpired. Finally, the narrator claims to write the novel from source materials often cited in the novel, and from a distance of some sixty years from the novel's opening. The narrator admits to a complex authorship, too, where the source material is written by one person, arranged by another person, and then extrapolated into the narrative by two more people—all of whom are actors in the narrative. Of course this is meta-fictional invention but it does add an unmistakable distance to the narrative and calls into question the validity of nearly all events. In fact, the two 'authors', Alba and Trueba, often disagree in details and interpretations of events. Finally, the narrative structure frequently refers to events happening before or after the dominant timeline.

Note the novel establishes a fairly languid pace—Severo del Valle and Nívea remain essentially minor characters; Uncle Marcos, Father Restrepo, Rosa the Beautiful, and others do not recur. Trueba and Clara are not overly-emphasized in the chapter but they become the dominant characters of the novel. Severo's liberal leaning and Nívea's

suffragette actions influence Clara, which in the future puts her into a constant tension with the arch-conservative Trueba.

Chapter 2 - The Three Mariás

Chapter 2 - The Three Mariás Summary

Esteban Trueba's father has died, leaving him with a solid name in society but devoid of monetary means. Esteban's sister, Férula, is a spinster who is unable to find happiness outside of misery and servitude. She has spent her life taking care of Doña Ester Trueba who is an invalid. Ester appears to suffer from a wasting disease and toward the end of her life is described, more or less, as festering away within her own skin. After the death of Rosa the Beautiful, Trueba determines that he will no longer work the gold mines. It is too difficult, too dangerous. And freed of the immediate need of a gigantic dowry, he finds no need to take the risks associated with mining. He returns home to the city for a brief interlude but finds the home environment stifling. Férula is bitter at her role and argues that Trueba must intervene or, at least, provide a higher standard of living. Trueba is troubled by the crumbling estate and his apparently meaningless blue-bloodedness, but he refuses to become trapped in Férula's situation. Instead, he leaves the city and travels to the country where he takes up residence on the family estate. In the country the peasants work the land but do not own in—essentially a form of serfdom bordering on slavery. In fact, Trueba owns the land and in some sense he believes he owns the peasants. On the family estate Trueba finds the peasants to be lazy and insolent, the fields to be untended, and the buildings to be tumbling down. He takes the estate in hand, working ceaselessly and demanding the peasants do the same. The fields are returned to farming, new buildings are constructed, and eventually the estate —called Tres Mariás—becomes not only profitable but a model plantation. Trueba considers himself a superb patrón. However, he also considers himself to be above morality and whenever occasion presents he rapes the peasant girls, taking his favorites as domestic servants so they can live in the big house. When they become pregnant he sends them away and replaces them with another, younger girl. He refuses to acknowledge his illegitimate children which are many. The first girl he impregnates is Pancha, the daughter of Pedro Garcia, a senior and highly respected peasant in the community. Pancha later delivers a son who is named Esteban Garcia, but thereafter none of Esteban's children bear even his given name. Trueba picks Pancha's brother, Pedro Segundo, as his foreman for the plantation. Pedro Segundo is competent and intelligent but hates being deferential to Trueba's enforced social stratification. Over the next ten year, until circa 1933, Trueba performs had work, demands the peasant perform hard work, and exhibits many cruel tendencies. He rapes numerous peasant girls and demonstrates an insatiable appetite for sex and power. He invents and practices many schemes to dominate his land—for example, paying the peasants in script instead of money. Over the decade, Truebe becomes increasingly wealthy. He routinely sends money and food to the capital city for his sister and mother. During this period the novel mentions that automobiles, cocaine, and champagne become favorite objects among society. Also during this time Trueba visits whorehouses and in one he meets Tránsito Soto, a particularly intelligent prostitute born circa 1917. Tránsito states she desires to relocate to the big city. Trueba loans her fifty pesos but notes that he

expects it to be returned. Shortly thereafter she disappears. Chapter two ends when Trueba receives a letter from Férula telling him that his mother, Ester, is near to death.

Chapter 2 - The Three Mariás Analysis

This chapter covers Trueba's productive years from circa 1922 to circa 1933. This period is marked by his ascendency as patrón on the family estate. He fathers numerous unrecognized illegitimate children, including Esteban Garcia who will father a child with great influence on Trueba's later life. He also grows quite wealthy, taking his gold mine earnings and turning them into an established agricultural revenue stream. Viewing himself as the caretaker and master of the peasants, he drives them to unrelenting work but also, in his own way, provides for some of their needs. Yet his social program is predicated upon the exercise of control, force, and fear. In brief, Trueba establishes a microcosm of fascist rule on his family estate: his exploitation of the peasants makes him wealthy at the same time that it ties them to his patronage. The chapter presents the essential character of Trueba and this will not meaningfully change throughout the novel. Even as Trueba becomes a father he treats his children more or less like he treats his peasants.

Although appearing only in a minor segment of the chapter, the character Tránsito Soto plays a fairly significant role in the novel, reappearing from time to time at critical moments in Trueba's life. Tránsito can be viewed as a sort of power center outside the sphere of influence of Trueba. He cannot access her strength nor can he control her; in fact, their sexual exchanges are described in a way that rather puts Tránsito in control which is perhaps after all why Trueba finds her so attractive. She also enjoys a sort of parallel career with Trueba as she grows in the spheres of wealth and power. Once again in the chapter, Trueba interjects a first-person autobiographical comment on the events described. He sees himself in a vastly more sympathetic light than does the reader, commenting on his unceasing hard work, his dedication to bettering the peasants' lives, and downplays the significance of his widespread and recurring rapes of peasant girls.

Chapter 3 Clara the Clairvoyant

Chapter 3 Clara the Clairvoyant Summary

When Clara is ten years old Trueba is twenty-six years old. At ten, Clara suffers a sort of awakening which results in her becoming mute. She remains mute from circa 1924 through 1933, roughly the period of time when Trueba is away at Tres Mariás. This is the first of two prolonged periods in her life when she will become voluntarily mute. Also during this time Clara exhibits clear extrasensory abilities: moving large objects around the room with her mind; clairvoyance and precognition; and the ability to clearly communicate with the spirits of the dead and other types of spirits. Clara ends her muteness by announcing that she will be married in one year.

Clara's parents have a total of fifteen children, not all of whom live to adulthood. Most of the children are not named and beside Clara and Rosa none are significant in the novel. The oldest son is named Luis, one daughter, Ana, is a nun, and one daughter, Teresa, is chronically ill. One of Clara's favorite stories is told often by her mother Nívea, about a relative named Juan who performed athletic demonstrations until one day passing gas during an exhibit whereupon he became locally known as Juan of the Fart. Thus shamed he eventually was driven away. During the year circa 1933, Trueba calls upon the del Valle family and inquires that, since Rosa has died, if the del Valle family might have another daughter suitable for marriage. After consideration, Ester proposes that Clara alone remains an eligible girl for marriage. At the time Clara is about nineteen and Trueba is about thirty-five. They conclude an agreement and Trueba and Clara become engaged—at that exact moment Ester dies. At their formal engagement ceremony Barrabás is stabbed in the back and dies—the murderer is never disclosed. Trueba waits for one year in mourning for his mother and in circa 1934 Trueba and Clara are married. Trueba expends a veritable fortune and builds a massive mansion in the capital city to receive his bride - it becomes informally known as the house of the spirits because of Clara's clairvoyant ways. The happy couple takes a three-month honeymoon in Italy. Férula, freed of caring for Ester, moves in with Trueba and Clara as a sort of housekeeper. She immediately falls in love with Clara and begins a sort of minor homosexual relationship with her, which infuriates Trueba. Clara delivers her first child, Blanca, in circa 1935, by Caesarean. Blanca is said to be an ugly baby and exceptionally hairy. Over these few years Trueba splits his time between the country estate and the city house.

Chapter 3 Clara the Clairvoyant Analysis

The chapter offers many profound symbols. First, Clara's muteness develops roughly when Trueba moves away and ends when he comes back to marry her. Symbolically, Clara's 'voice' depends upon her relationship to Trueba. Second, Barrabás, carrying the magical torch of Uncle Marcos' exotic adventures, is murdered at the engagement party —effectively breaching Clara's attachment to childhood fantasy. The break is violent and

traumatic. Third, Ester dies at the moment Clara is selected to be her son's bride. Trueba only has the capacity to be close to one woman. Finally, Férula transfers her doting fixation onto Clara and engages in numerous unmistakably sexual interactions with her sister-in-law. The chapter ends as Trueba becomes a father—his relationship with his daughter will remain distant and strained throughout the novel. The little family anecdote of Juan of the Fart demonstrates that in some cases style dominates substance completely—once lost, public image cannot be regained. The house, the house of the spirits, informs the title of the novel. The bulk of the remaining action in the novel transpires within the byzantine house built by Trueba.

Chapter 4 The Time of the Spirits

Chapter 4 The Time of the Spirits Summary

Blanca is a precocious and intelligent child. For the first years of her life the family remains in the city while Trueba travels to the country estate. However, in circa 1941, the entire family summers at Tres Mariás. While there, Clara follows in her mother's footsteps by espousing a very liberal ideology and propagandizing the peasants. Trueba is outraged and furiously demands she stop. Blanca meanwhile strikes up a very close friendship with a young boy named Pedro Tercero García, the son of Pedro Segundo García and the grandson of Pedro García. Clara and Blanca love the countryside but Férula detests the peasants and the local culture.

That summer a plague of fire ants scourges the plantation. A firm believer in science, Trueba hires scientists and entomologists to get rid of the ants but they all fail. Finally the old man Pedro Garcia, nearly blinds, explains that the ants don't want to be on the plantation but don't know how to get away. Taking his time he leads a few of the ants away to the highway and beyond. The scientists and entomologists scoff at peasant stupidity but within a few hours all the ants have left. After a long stay the family returns to the city circa 1942 at which time Clara is pregnant again. Back in the city, Trueba visits a whorehouse and finds Transito Soto, about twenty-seven, again. They have sex and catch up on old times; she tries to repay his fifty peso loan but he demurs, saying he will collect the debt at some future time. A few days later Severo and Nívea del Valle are killed in an automobile accident in their car, named Covadonga, one of the first automobiles ever to come into the countr - Nívea is decapitated and her head cannot be found. Days later, however, Clara has a vision, drives to the accident site, and then walks right to the head and recovers it. She takes the head home and places it on a bureau in her bedroom and then delivers her twins, Jaime and Nicolás, under the dead gaze of her mother's head. Nívea is buried without her head. The head is stored in the basement from that time forward. With Nívea dead, Clara hires her housekeeper Nana who moves into the Trueba household. Férula instantly hates Nana and the two develop a troublesome relationship based on jealousy. At the same time Trueba and Férula's relationship descends into one of jealous hatred over Férula's constant sexually charged intimacy with Clara while Clara remains oblivious. During this same period Clara befriends three sisters of the Mora family who are very interested in spiritualism. Clara and the Mora sisters use devices such as a three-legged table and a pendulum to contact spirits of the dead.

When Jaime is about twelve he begins a devoted reading of Marxist theory. Eventually Trueba has had enough of Férula's homosexual intimacies with Clara and drives Férula out of the home. As she departs she curses her brother; he remembers her curse the rest of his life and it proves remarkably correct. Also during this time a severe plague of exanthemic typhus ravages the country. In the country, the young Pedro Tercero begins to study Communism—his age is uncertain but he is probably born circa 1934. Pancha García dies circa 1944 at the age of about thirty-eight; Trueba is ignorant of her—he

does not even remember that he raped her or that she was the mother of his first-born child and later he will wonder why Pancha's child was named Esteban.

Chapter 4 The Time of the Spirits Analysis

The exact dating in Chapter 4 is problematic—in general it follows the basic outline of being tied to Chilean history, but there are several inconsistencies. For example, the twins Jaime and Nicolas are said to have been born circa 1942 but elsewhere dating can place their birth at circa 1938 (Jaime is said to be twelve years old and studying Marxism in circa 1950 inferring a birth in circa 1938). The novel also implies that Marx is contemporaneous with Jaime's studies (refer to p. 158) but Marx died in 1883 and the popular international wave of Marxism occurred initially circa 1917 with the Russian Revolution. Marxism's penetration to South America occurred much later, of course, in the 1930s and 1940s. The exanthemic typhus plague noted at the end of the chapter is again problematic because that disease was largely controlled in Chile before 1941. In any case, the most likely dating places the events of Chapter 4 from circa 1941 to 1943. Of course, the fictional timeline must not align perfectly with the historical timeline though usually it does.

The Chapter introduces a few more minor characters, notably the Mora Sisters. They recur throughout the novel as a sort of equivalent to the Greek chorus. Other notable events in the Chapter include the fire ants, a demonstration that common sense sometimes trumps science, much to Trueba's surprise; and Férula's curse upon her brother for driving her out of the house—specifically for denying access to Clara. Jaime's fascination with Marx mirrors Pedro Tercero's fascination with Communist Jaime demonstrates a cerebral attraction to Marx's pure theory while Pedro Tercero demonstrates a visceral attraction to socialism in action, enforced from above through revolution as in Communist Russia history. Throughout the period Blanca and Pedro Tercero remain close friends although by the end of Chapter 4, their age at about eleven or twelve, begins to make their intimate relationship somewhat suspect.

Pancha's death at thirty-eight illustrates how invalid Trueba's statements about his care of the peasants are. He claims they are thriving under his care but Pancha dies a young woman because she does not have access to any medical care. Clearly, the peasants at Tres Mariás do not enjoy the high standard of living that Trueba claims. Again, these claims are made by jarring interjections in the first-person, autobiographical tenor of Trueba. Other indications that Trueba inflates his influence for good are found in the initial description of Pedro Tercero as an infant with his belly distended by parasites, the abject poverty of Pedro Segundo and Pedro García, and the inability of the local peasant women even to understand what Clara is espousing with her liberal viewpoint.

The rare narrative first-person intrusion in Chapter 4 (see p. 128) should not be confused with the first-person autobiographical passages of Trueba. Here this arguably is Alba speaking in the first-person.

Chapter 5 - The Lovers

Chapter 5 - The Lovers Summary

Trueba sends his twin sons to English boarding school where they are raised in a strictly English environment. He sends Blanca to a Spanish Catholic school. Blanca intensely dislikes the school and chafes under its various rules. Throughout her adolescence, Blanca pursues her close friendship with Pedro Tercero. In circa 1947, Férula dies. Her ghost appears at the Trueba house to announce her passing. Trueba spends a few days tracking down his sister's whereabouts and finds her deceased. He also finds that she has been living in abject poverty for many years, storing all of the considerable money he has sent to her in a box in the closet.

Throughout the 1950s, Pedro Tercero becomes locally well-known for being a musician; he sings folksy songs about socialism and issues of class struggle. On one occasion Trueba overhers Pedro Tercero singing at Tres Marías and whips him brutally. When Blanca is fifteen years old, she finally succumbs to adolescence and she and Pedro Tercero begin having sex. As the years go by Pedro Tercero becomes a widely known socialist singer and labor agitator; he closely aligns himself with the church. Because he is not allowed on Trueba's property, he meets Blanca when time and occasion permits. Meanwhile, Blanca begins to make pottery crèches of monsters and strange figures. They seem to sell well and become popular in the local market.

Sometime circa 1953 by the novel's timeline a series of massive earthquakes shakes the area, causing massive destruction, tidal waves, landslides, and subsequent epidemics. Also during this time war ravages the globe. Trueba is grievously injured when his house at Tres Marías collapses on top of him. With multiple fractures he nearly dies. Old Pedro Garcia, entirely blind, sets the various fractures by touch. Over the next few years Trueba recovers but suffers from pain the rest of his life. He rebuilds Tres Marías. Nana dies.

Chapter 5 - The Lovers Analysis

Trueba's essential sexist outlook is emphasized by his choice in school for his children. The boys go to a top-notch British boarding school where they receive a world-class education; Blanca is sent to a local Catholic school where she primarily suffers discipline. As the relationship between Blanca and Pedro Tercero blossoms into sexual love, Férula and Nana both die, completing in a metaphorical sense the generational transition from Trueba's generation to Blanca's generation. This further is symbolized by the destruction and rebuilding of Tres Marías. Blanca's inability to assimilate in Trueba's conservative Catholic society finds metaphorical outlet in her crèches of monsters; that she is not alone in her outlooks is buttressed by the crèche sales. As Blanca lives stifled under Trueba's rules and rule, Pedro Tercero burgeons into a popular folk hero. Note that Pedro Tercero is a nameless individual in a long line of Pedro Garcias - the third.

These Pedros are compared to the 'proper' Trueba family who selects new names for each generation, allowing a personal and unique identity.

The timeline of Chapter 5 remains somewhat obscure. By the novel's internal dating the massive earthquake occurs circa 1953. Historically, it occurred in 1960 and was one of the largest and most destructive earthquakes recorded in modern history. Likewise, the novel places the earthquake as occurring before World War II which would push that event into the mid-1950s, nearly a decade after is actually happened. Regardless of external chronology, the impact of the earthquake in the novel is similar to the historical impact - massive destruction, loss of life, and social upheaval. Against this backdrop of natural change, Pedro Tercero ascends into the informal role of agitator for change. Trueba stands in stark contrast as a conservator of the established order, virtually fascist in outlook.

Chapter 6 - Revenge

Chapter 6 - Revenge Summary

As Trueba heals he lives in constant pain and begins to allow his fury free reign in his life. He has constant outbursts and violent tantrums and everyone begins to fear him. Even Clara draws away from him, going so far as to put a lock on her bedroom door so that he is excluded from her. All three of Trueba's children view their father as a relic of crumbling society; he believes that all three of them are strange and mentally deranged. As World War II passes, Trueba demonstrates a very pro-Nazi stance (refer to p. 206). About this time a French Count, Jean de Satigny, appears in the social scene. He has fled from the Spanish Civil War and is about thirty-five, indicating a birth circa 1904. Blanca is twenty-four years old and the Trueba twins are twenty-one years old. De Satigny cuts a large social figure because of his noble title and French fashion. Trueba becomes enamored by him and engages in an expensive business venture of breeding fur-bearing animals; the business is a disaster and Trueba loses considerable funds, but still he dotes on de Satigny. Pedro Garcia dies, and Blanca is grief-stricken at the loss of her lover's family patriarch. Pedro Garcia's grandson through Pancha, Esteban Garcia, is ten years old at this time. The novel mentions the Poet (refer to p. 224) at this time.

During this period, Blanca and Pedro Tercero meet for sex nearly every night. Jean de Satigny, interested in Blanca's inheritance, follows her and discovers her secret. Immediately he informs Trueba. Flying into an uncontrollable rage, Trueba responds by physically beating Blanca quite severely. When Clara moves to intervene, Trueba beats her so severely that he knocks out teeth. Both women withdraw entirely from Trueba with Clara refusing to speak to him for the remainder of her life. Trueba announces he will murder Pedro Tercero at the first opportunity. Pedro Segundo, long the overseer of Tres Marías, announces that he will depart and does so. Sometime later, the young Esteban Garcia leads Trueba to Pedro Tercero's hideout on the promise of monetary award. Esteban Garcia tells Trueba that everybody knows where Pedro Tercero is hiding. Trueba ambushes Pedro Tercero, taking him by surprise, and shooting at him, but he misses. As Pedro Tercero seeks to escape Trueba attacks him with a machete, chopping off three fingers on his right hand. Pedro Tercero escapes and Trueba returns to his home where he spurns Esteban Garcia, refusing to honor their agreement. Esteban Garcia fully is aware that Trueba is his great-grandfather; Trueba is ignorant and wonders why the boy would have his name and decides it must be as a form of honorific to the patrón.

Chapter 6 - Revenge Analysis

Much of Chapter 6 is presented in first-person and autobiographical style written by Trueba. In much of this material, he seeks to exonerate himself from various reprehensible actions, framing them as unavoidable consequences of others' actions. The writing is a curious mix of angry justification and guilty confession. The central

event of the chapter, a major turning point in the novel, is Trueba's violent attack on Blanca and Clara. This outburst violates the family and permanently destroys the family nucleus. From this point forward, Trueba entirely is isolated from the family. The remainder of the family also is fractured; the two boys never engage with the family again and Blanca pursues her own course of action from this point forward. Clara withdraws entirely and spends the rest of her life with friends. This family breakdown mirrors and foreshadows the societal breakdown that looms in the novel's final third. Trueba then attacks Pedro Tercero and maims him but does not kill him. This also metaphorically foreshadows the national crisis that will maim, but not destroy, the people. Pedro Tercero, as a guitarist, acutely feels the loss of his fingers but he overcomes this and changes his style of play to adapt. In the greater narrative, his wound hardly matters. Also, to this point in the novel—for a period of decades. Trueba has relied upon Pedro Segundo to be the overseer and daily manager of his country estate. After Trueba's outburst, Pedro Segundo departs. This leaves Trueba without effective management on his estate and this loss is keenly felt throughout the remainder of the novel, even though Trueba's interests move away from the rural areas and into urban politics. Thus, the impact of Trueba's attack spreads very far from the center of action, impacting the lives of hundreds of peasants in a negative way. Jean de Satigny turns out to be the only beneficiary of these events.

Again, the chronology of the novel is inconsistent with world events by a few years this way or that way. World War II is a definite anchor circa 1944, but is said to occur after the destructive earthquake of 1960; by the novel's internal timeline World War II would transpire somewhere between 1955 and 1962. This is not significant to the narrative but does complicate an alignment between the novel's references to historic events and history itself.

Chapter 7 - The Brothers

Chapter 7 - The Brothers Summary

Clara and Blanca retire to their home in the city, the year being circa 1959. After a multi-year absence it needs cleaning and restoration and they perform these tasks. Jaime and Nicolás return home from school as graduates. Trueba remains in the country until he learns, second-hand, that Blanca is pregnant by Pedro Garcia. Trueba responds by arranging a marriage between Blanca and Jean de Satigny. Blanca is not consulted; de Satigny agrees because Blanca is to come with a notable monthly stipend. Trueba believes the contrivance will protect the family name and prevent Blanca's child from being born a bastard. In order to secure Blanca's agreement, Trueba tells her that Pedro Tercero is dead—that he himself has murdered her lover. Later, Clara tells Blanca that she has learned from the spirits that in fact Pedro Tercero is still alive. In any event, Blanca and Jean de Satigny are married in a very sad but very huge and festive and political event. As the months pass by Clara engages more and more in social and charity work. Trueba involves himself in politics and is elected as a national senator. Meanwhile Nicolas engages in several bizarre and ridiculous business ventures that all fail. He meets and fall in love with Amanda, a local student a few years older than he. Amanda takes care of her younger brother Miguel; they are orphans. Jaime falls in love with Amanda but keeps his distance. Jaime spends his time receiving medical training at a local medical clinic for the poor. When Amanda, twenty-five years old, becomes pregnant Nicolas, twenty-one years old, approaches Jaime for help with an abortion. The three sneak into the clinic after-hours and Jaime performs the abortion himself in a very awkward and charged process. Afterward, Amanda dislikes being with either Jaime or Nicolas though they take her to their own home for recovery.

Trueba meanwhile is racked with pain and discomfort. He becomes something of a hypochondriac and consults with numerous physicians, all of whom fail to diagnose anything. But Trueba is convinced he has a secret illness that remains undiagnosed. Suffering from bone pain he travels to the United States for comprehensive medical examinations which also discover nothing. Trueba, however, realizes that he slowly is shrinking in physical stature.

Chapter 7 - The Brothers Analysis

Chapter 7 focuses on Jaime and Nicolas, heretofore fairly absent from the novel. Returning from English boarding school they begin to pursue their distinct lives. Nicolas, brilliant and athletic, is directionless and wastes his time and energy. Jaime becomes a noted provider to the poor and gives away everything he comes by. He lives in a warren of books and seems to have no personal life. While the narrative does include the twins they never achieve the prominence within the novel of the other family members. Both of the men are eccentric and withdrawn and in the end both become non-persons in the story. Likewise, Amanda is notably primarily for her introduction of Miguel who will come

to prominence in later life. The abortion scene is very well written and fuses a jarring element of suppressed sexuality with the horrible medical process of destroying the life of a fetus—here, Jaime aborting his brother's child. Clearly, the sneaking around at night and secretive process demonstrates the shame and guilt of all those involved. Amanda does not recover mentally from the abortion; it ruins her life.

The novel marks a turning point as nearly the entire Trueba family becomes devoted to charity work and service to the poor while Trueba continues to turn to conservative values; his political career is based around the rights of the wealthy landowners and the continued exploitation of the poor. He mistakes his guilty conscience and age for an invisible, secret illness that no doctor is able to find. Trueba does not realize he has poisoned his own soul through his failure to control his passions.

Chapters 8 - The Count and 9 - Little Alba

Chapters 8 - The Count and 9 - Little Alba Summary

After their marriage, Blanca and de Satigny move away to the northern portion of the country, far, far away from Clara's house. De Satigny never engages Blanca in sex. Instead, he focuses himself on disposing of the considerable monthly stipend he receives from Trueba. He focuses on cocaine, opium, and photography. His photography is very secretive and transpires in a locked basement room where Blanca is forbidden. De Satigny also sets up a large business network that illegally plunders local artifacts and sells them to international buyers. He sells many relics including entire mummies that fetch particularly high prices from foreign museums.

Over the months, Blanca notes the house staff treats her with a particularly obnoxious disdain—de Satigny has hired a caste of misfits from the local Indian tribes and they are complicit with him in isolating Blanca. Isolated by the insolent staff, Blanca begins to believe she hears spirits moving about the large house at night and on one occasion believes she sees a dwarf mummy walking the halls. On one evening de Satigny is out and Blanca believes she follows strange sounds up to the locked door of the photography studio. Blanca breaks the lock and forces her way inside where she discovers an extensive collection of pornographic photographs featuring de Satigny and his Indian retinue in various despicable sexual practices; the pornographic images are mingled with mummies and other stolen artifacts.

In Chapter 9, pregnant Blanca flees de Satigny's home and travels home alone making her way as best she can. On the final train segment of her voyage she goes into labor but does not deliver her child through sheer force of will, until she reaches Clara's home in the city. There, she gives birth to a daughter named Alba de Satigny. Alba is raised believing that her father was a French nobleman named Jean de Satigny who died of disease. As an adult she will be called into a morgue to identify his body, which perplexes her because she had believed him to be long dead.

Meanwhile, Amanda has recovered enough to care for Michael and they leave the house and simply vanish into the slums of the big city. Elements of the Trueba home are said to be influenced by [Marc] Chagall. Alba grows up a solitary child without any friends of her own age. Her primary companions are her two uncles who infuse her with their own bizarre and eccentric believe systems. Nicolas travels to the Himalayas for one year and returns full of Eastern philosophy; he teaches Alba to ignore physical pain as an illusion. Alba loves to paint. Meanwhile Trueba remains entirely isolated from the family except that he develops a sort of doting grandfatherly relationship with Alba. Throughout these years, Blanca continues her secret relationship with Pedro Tercero. Alba meets her biological father but is told simply he is a family friend. Pedro Tercero often requests that Blanca marry him and live with him but Blanca, afraid of leaving

behind her upper class upbringing, declines. In circa 1966, Esteban Garcia, twenty-two years old, calls upon Trueba in the city to deliver a minor report about the country estate. While waiting for Trueba to appear Esteban Garcia meets Alba, then six years old, and engages her in brief conversation before becoming sexually aroused. Jealous of her position and wealth, he realizes he hates her and begins to molest her which ends prematurely when Trueba arrives. Esteban Garcia then asks for a letter of recommendation to the police forces which Trueba, ignorant as ever that he is talking to his great grandson, writes for him. In circa 1967, Clara dies, apparently simply worn out of living. Upon her death, of course, her notebooks about life stop abruptly.

Chapters 8 - The Count and 9 - Little Alba Analysis

Chapter 8, very brief, discusses the strained marriage of Blanca and Jean de Satigny. Clearly, de Satigny has sold his name to Trueba for money, thus socially and legally legitimizing Alba. This is important to Trueba but not important to anyone else. The brief chapter is constructed much like a traditional short story being an atomically contained narrative event introducing new characters and following a traditional Freytag's pyramid in exposition, rising action, climax (turning point), falling action, and dénouement. In fact, it reads in many ways better as short fiction than as a segment of the novel. The tension is built with the insolent behavior of the servants, their strange costumes and habits, and de Satigny's distance and secretive habits. In this sort of gothic fiction Blanca grows ever more suspicious and, like Catherine Morland in Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey, begins to explore the unknown reaches of the castle—unfortunately for Blanca there is much fantastic grotesquery and many wicked secrets to be discovered. Shocked, Blanca flees the horrible estate concluding the episode.

In Chapter 9 Blanca it at a major turning point; she flees her putatively legitimate husband and returns home to deliver Alba. This point is significant because it realizes that Alba is not contaminated with de Satigny's perversions—only his name, which she will soon abandon in favor of Trueba. Her interaction as an adult with the corpse of de Satigny passes almost as a footnote in the narrative. The remainder of Chapter 9 deals with Alba's early youth as a precocious, intelligent, and eccentric youngster. Perhaps the most difficult passage of the novel occurs when Esteban Garcia becomes sexually aroused by his feelings of hatred for little Alba and begins a process of sexual molestation, which is cut short by happenstance only. This episode, circa 1966, is concluded at the novel's end.

The novel's major theme of class also becomes prominent with Blanca's relationship to Pedro Tercero. Blanca receives no support from her father and lives in the Trueba house as a pauper, doing odd jobs to secure minor sums to feed and clothe herself. She is living in lower class poverty but has the illusion of being in the upper crust of society because of her family and where she lives. Pedro Tercero moves from his working class neighborhood into a middle-class neighborhood to woo Blanca but she declines even this. Blanca is so rooted in her upper-class awareness that she essentially sacrifices her adult life to social appearance—even though nobody is looking at her. The death of Clara marks a major turning point in the narrative construction. Chapter 1 through 9

meta-fictionally claim to have been authored by Alba based upon her reconstruction of events derived from Clara's meticulous but disorganized notebooks (with interspersed autobiographical commentary from Trueba). The remainder of the novel obviously cannot derive from Clara's notebooks and instead is said to be derived from letters, various family artifacts, and memory. This fulcrum of the narrative causes the first portion of the novel to focus essentially on the trivia of the Trueba family whereas the remainder of the novel focuses essentially on the broad social developments of the nation within which the Trueba family acts limited roles. The novel from Chapter 10 onwards is a palimpsest of historic events shaped to the family's interpretation. Trueba's voice becomes much clearer at this point and Alba focuses on larger movements and public issues. This change in tone is remarkable and quite evident, even in the various chapter titles which henceforth deal with epochal periods rather than characters or events.

If the novel is accepted essentially as a historically-based novel, the character of Alba can be most-closely associated with the author Isabel Allende (1942-). Other characters that can be so associated include Esteban Trueba, Alba's maternal grandfather, as the historic Agustín Llona (1882-1981), Allende's maternal grandfather. Blanca equates to Francisca Llona Barros (1920-), Allende's mother. In this metaphor, Pedro Tercero equates to the historic Victor Jara (1932-1972) and the Poet, referenced several times, clearly would be Pablo Neruda (1904-1973). Note the novel's dedication strongly implies some autobiographical links as well as the narrative following the broad outlines of family and national history.

Chapters 10 - The Epoch of Decline and 11 - The Awakening

Chapters 10 - The Epoch of Decline and 11 - The Awakening Summary

Trueba, about seventy years old, returns to Clara's bed on the first night after she dies, stripping her corpse and examining it in great detail. He sleeps alongside her in profound sadness. He notes that he has lost, by actual measurement, four inches in height. He wonders if it is an invisible disease or, perhaps, simply the fulfillment of Férula's curse. While Clara is being buried the head of Nivea is rediscovered, now desiccated and ancient. Rather than cause a fuss, the head secretly is placed into Clara's coffin and buried with her. After Clara dies, the entire house falls into abject ruin. Trueba maintains his personal room and office but nobody else cares for the remainder of the sprawling campus. Trueba does, however, lock off Clara's old bedroom and he preserves it exactly as she did in life. Over the next months he builds a vast family mausoleum where Clara is reinterred. Trueba also approaches the del Valle family about reinterring Rosa the Beautiful in the mausoleum but they decline—so Trueba steals the corpse and reinters it anyway. Meanwhile the entire country is beginning to shift toward Marxism. Nicolas in particular becomes well-known as a labor agitator. Infuriated and humiliated, Trueba forces him to leave the country. Nicolas travels to North America where regular payments keep him diverted. He never returns and vanishes from the narrative. After Clara dies Trueba decides Alba must have a civilizing influence and shifts her education from the Catholic school to a British school. Alba endures ten years of agony in school before graduating.

Nationally, Marxism becomes popular and socialist and Communist groups form among the working classes and student groups. Trueba, the senator, opposes them, openly espousing military violence against anyone who threatens to overturn his own vision of how society should be organized. Pedro Tercero grows nationally famous as a musician who espouses the cause of socialism. One day of loneliness, Trueba visits a whorehouse and finds Tránsito Soto who manages to arouse his long-dormant sexuality. She notes that even the whorehouse has been voluntarily collectivized by the prostitutes.

In Chapter 11, circa 1974, Alba is fourteen and Esteban Garcia, her half-first-cousin through Esteban Trueba and her 2nd cousin through Pedro Garcia, is twenty-five. They meet at a political event and during a moment of semi-privacy Esteban Garcia once again becomes aroused with hatred and forces an unwanted kiss and grope upon her. In circa 1978 Alba, eighteen, meets a young man at college and falls in love with him. He is Miguel, the younger brother of Nicolas' lost love Amanda, though at first they do not recognize the family connection. Miguel vocally advocates armed resistance against the government which he views as a fascist dictatorship. During this period a man

known only as the Candidate (first appearing on p. 377) is introduced. He is openly Marxist and is publicly lauded as the next President. Jaime is the Candidate's personal physician; Alba views the Candidate quite favorable; Miguel views him as too conventional. Needless to say Trueba views the Candidate as a dangerous radical that should be shot. Eventually, Jaime realizes that Alba's Miguel is also Amanda's Miguel and discreet inquiry makes this odd fact known to the happy couple. Miguel leads Jaime to Amanda but their reunion is not joyful. Amanda now is a heroin junky who lives in abject squalor on the verge of death and starvation. Yet, Jaime loves her still.

Chapters 10 - The Epoch of Decline and 11 - The Awakening Analysis

These chapters mark the transition of the novel's focus from essentially family-centric to a larger thematic representation of the national society as a whole. The Epoch of Decline refers obviously to the Trueba family as it splinters after Clara's death. It also refers to the national as a whole—especially as viewed by Trueba. As Trueba shrinks in stature, Blanca shirks away from Pedro Tercero, Amanda uses heroin, Nicolas undergoes forced emigration, and Jaime withdraws into his books and studies. The only touchstone of normalcy for Trueba is Alba but she begins a secret romantic relationship with a revolutionary as her mother did before her. Symbolic of the family, the Trueba house falls apart. Pedro Tercero, the Candidate, and the Marxists all gain the ascendency throughout this period. The novel closely mirrors the process of Marxist ascendency in Chile during roughly the time period of the novel; historically, Marxism in Chile was the dominant political ideology in the early 1970s, ending with the military coup of 1973 (e.g., Pinochet). In the novel, this process takes place roughly a decade later circa 1979-82. Again, there is no necessity for the novel to exactly mirror the history from which it draws; for example, the country in the novel is never named and therefore could be interpreted as Chile, based on Chile, or completely divorced from Chilean history. Similarly, major figures in the novel that clearly are derived from Chilean history such as the Candidate, the Poet, the President, and the General are not given names and are referred to only by abstract title. Thus the novel echoes Chilean events but does not rely upon them for understanding.

Chapter 11 again contains a difficult scene where Esteban Garcia casually assaults Alba; he views her as something of an interloper. She is the granddaughter of a senator who is wealthy, elite, and possibly noble. He is a peasant, a police officer, a nobody—but they are related and but by a change of marriage he would have what she does have. This infuriates him but it also arouses him. He finds Alba sexually appealing in a strange, evil way, and is not at all adverse to molesting the much younger girl. Note again that Esteban Garcia is, in American jargon, Esteban Garcia Jr.. His father, Esteban Garcia (Sr.) is the son of Pancha Garcia, the one-time lover of Esteban Trueba. Because Trueba has forgotten his rakish past as a rapist of peasant women he has no idea that Esteban Garcia is his descendent. However, Esteban Garcia keenly is aware of the relationship. This horrible conflict has unspeakable consequences in Chapter 14.

Chapters 12 - The Conspiracy and 13 - The Terror

Chapters 12 - The Conspiracy and 13 - The Terror Summary

The Candidate is elected in a Marxist landslide and becomes the President. Trueba and many other conservatives in the government secretly conspire to control the economy in a process they refer to as "economic destabilization" (p. 387). They intend to make the President's policies appear to fail entirely by artificially manipulating available goods and so forth. Trueba also begins to buy massive quantities of food, ammunition, and firearms, which he has secretly stored in his basement. Unknown to Trueba, the inquisitive Alba bores a hole through the wall of the storage cellar and finds the cache and investigates. As the weeks go by, she steals large amounts of food and distributes it to the poor, making sure to close up the numerous crates she opens so they do not appear disturbed. Much of the stolen food ends up going with Alba's love Miguel, directly to the leftist guerilla groups with whom he associates. Meanwhile, Jaime and Miguel enter into lengthy ideological conversations—Miguel espouses violence against the system as a legitimate political tool; Jaime rejects violence out of hand and insists that only democratic processes, however flawed, are legitimate. Alba remains aloof.

As the months go on, Pedro Tercero becomes fully frustrated with Blanca's refusal to legitimize, or at least normalize, their relationship and for several months he refuses to see her at all—he still loves her, but can't stand the on-again, off-again secret relationship. Meanwhile, the poor grow ever poorer and the economy starts to collapse. At Tres Marías, the peasants openly revolt, refusing to work and killing all the breeding livestock and racing horses for food. They raid the patrón's wine cellars and stockpiles. Trueba, incensed, leaves the city and travels to his country estate where he finds the entire locale in ruin. He is then seized by some peasants and held captive in his own country home. Needless to say, Trueba is furious, but also helpless. As the news spreads Blanca begs Pedro Tercero to intervene and he does. He travels to the estate, greets the peasants (most of them are related) and secures Trueba's release. Trueba is placed in an awkward position of being rescued by the man he once tried to murder. Trueba returns to the city. After this event, Trueba more than ever turns to fascist conservative values and begins openly to advocate a military coup to remove the Marxist President and his associates from government.

In Chapter 13 the military coup that Trueba has espoused comes to pass. The President summons Jaime to the presidential offices to provide medical care. Trueba is distressed to discover that he has not been consulted by the military. The coup mounts in intensity until the presidential officers are bombed from the air, killing many. The President refuses to flee, instead remaining in his office until the military arrests him and shoots him on the spot—later claiming he committed suicide. Jaime is arrested, beaten, and

then shuttled from holding cell to holding cell over the next several days. He is tortured and then finally shot, his corpse discarded into a pile of corpses. As the weeks pass, Trueba eventually learns of Jaime's death but does not accept it as factual until months later. Trueba also realizes that he has not been consulted by the military authorities because he has been excluded from the coup. He now is simply an anachronistic holdover of a failed government and has no power. The Poet, mentioned elsewhere in the novel, also dies. Thousands of opponents or resistors to the military coup are rounded up, tortured, and executed. Pedro Tercero is wanted by the new government—Blanca hides him in the basement of Trueba's house because she reasons no one would look for him there. Trueba gives in to the request as he realizes it makes as much sense as anything else. Later, with help, Blanca smuggles herself and Pedro Tercero into the Vatican Embassy where they are safe (but virtual prisoners). Miguel surreptitiously visits Alba a few times and tells her his group is involved in violent resistance. Then, police forces appear at Trueba's home, search the premises, and arrest Alba for consorting with Miguel, a known terrorist. After being held for a day or two Alba is transferred to a prison under the command of Colonel Esteban Garcia.

Chapters 12 - The Conspiracy and 13 - The Terror Analysis

As with the few previous chapters, these chapters follow the destiny of the nation more than the destiny of the Trueba family, though of course the two are tightly intertwined. The Conspiracy that informs the title of Chapter 12 can refer either to the conspiracy of "economic destabilization" (p. 387) of Trueba and his cronies, or the conspiracy that leads to the military coup—perhaps both. As the national economy falters and social unrest increases Trueba's personal country estate falls into complete disorder. Here, the novelization suggests that the peasants have long been restrained from stupid and self-destructive actions only by Trueba's firm hand of governance, rather supporting Trueba's worldview. This clearly is at great variance with a Marxist view of things. When Trueba arrives, the estate is destroyed and the peasants are without any means of livelihood. The pathos of Trueba's arrest and detention is palpable; his rescue by Pedro Tercero involves a certain amount of ironic comedy. Alba's activities of meeting with Miguel and providing food, ammunition, and weapons to the resistance has been observed by agents of the newly-established police state; this leads to her arrest in Chapter 13. The graffiti slogan "Djakarta" (p. 410) appears to refer to the establishment of the "New Order" of Indonesian President Suharto.

The Candidate who becomes the President is undoubtedly a fictionalized representation of Salvador Allende (1908-1973) of Chile, the first democratically elected Marxist president in Latin America—and also the author Isabel Allende's first cousin once removed. The concise speech broadcast by the President (p. 395) are the actual words uttered by the historical person on the historical event depicted in the novel. The General referenced in the reminder of the novel is undoubtedly a fictionalized representation of Augusto Pinochet (1915-2006) of Chile, the dictator who assumed power through a coup d'etat on September 11, 1973. The broad outline of the fictional

coup follows in lockstep with the broad outline of the historic coup; this would place the novel's events of Chapter 13 as transpiring circa September 1973. However, the novel's internal timeline suggests a date of something more like circa 1978. As stated in the novel, the historic coup was heavily supported by the United States of America, especially by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The remainder of the novel focuses almost exclusively on Alba and Trueba. Note that Alba is the narrator of the segments of the end of Chapter 13 where she discusses herself in the third-person.

Chapter 14 - The Hour of Truth and Epilogue

Chapter 14 - The Hour of Truth and Epilogue Summary

Alba is held for several months. During this time she is interrogated and tortured on a routine basis, usually by Esteban Garcia, her half-first-cousin through Esteban Trueba and her 2nd cousin through Pedro Garcia. Under Esteban Garcia's explicit instructions, Alba is stripped and held naked throughout her ordeal. She meets other women being held, learns tidbits of news—including the fact that Miguel has not been captured. Trueba is wild with grief and humiliated by his total inability to make any meaningful inquiries through legitimate government channels. He therefore contacts Tránsito Soto who now owns her own whorehouse. She recalls the favor that she owes him from long ago; within a few days she has located Alba. All she can tell Trueba is that his granddaughter is alive but imprisoned.

In the Epilogue, Trueba dies in Alba's arms when he is about 90 years old (circa 1987). Alba then reminisces about Trueba's alliance with Miguel to try and rescue her. However, their efforts were unsuccessful. Eventually Alba's injuries became infected and she fell ill. She was then sent to a prison hospital to recuperate. While at the hospital she learned that Amanda died in prison. After Alba somewhat recovered her health she was transferred to another prison that functioned essentially as a workhouse. Several days later she was loaded into a van, driven into the city, and dumped onto the street. She then walked home.

Alba theorizes about the nature of revenge and wonders about the future. The novel ends as Alba turns to her mother's notebooks, reading aloud the self-same sentence that opened the novel.

Chapter 14 - The Hour of Truth and Epilogue Analysis

Alba's age at arrest is presumably eighteen and Pedro Garcia is about thirty. Although the novel does not explicitly state it, the assumption is that Alba repeatedly is raped by Esteban Garcia and others. Her torture appears to be mainly physical abuse without the refinement of interrogation torture. She is held naked for a prolonged period of time and it is long enough that eventually she becomes accustomed to it. Her route out of prison sees her in a prison medical facility where she recuperates because of the kind attention of a physician. She then moves to a kind of concentration camp, or workhouse, for several days and is then released from prison. Her entire ordeal, of course, was without the benefit of law or even any process. Her extra-legal experience was shared by others in the novel and historically, by many hundreds of thousands.

The Epilogue marks a distinct break in narrative style, moving into a past-tense retrospective with much internal thought exposed through narration. It is only at this point of the novel that the actual narrator, Alba, is established, and the priority of Clara's notebooks as the dominant narrative source is clarified. In this respect, the character Alba is closely identified with the author Isabel Allende.

Characters

Alba

Alba is Blanca's daughter, the result of a love affair with Pedro Tercero Garcia, the son of Esteban's foreman, Pedro Segundo Garcia. Alba is the story's narrator in the last half of the book. Her grandfather, Esteban, is so angry at the circumstances of her parentage that he will not acknowledge Alba's real father as her parent. Alba reminds everyone of Rosa, and her birth brings much happiness to Esteban. Like Rosa, Alba is blessed with the family's unusual green hair. When Pedro Tercero rescues Esteban from the peasants, Alba learns that he is her father. As a young adult, Alba becomes involved with student protests, and she is soon arrested and tortured by her grandfather's illegitimate son, Esteban Garcia. Clara tells Alba to use her imagination to create stories that would allow her to escape Garcia's torture. She is eventually freed from jail after her grandfather asks his friend Transito Soto to help. Alba, who is now pregnant, decides to write her family's story, with the help of her grandfather, Esteban. Alba represents the future of Latin-American women. She is strong, a survivor, whose desire to preserve her family's story leads to the creation of the book.

Amanda

Amanda is Nicolas's girlfriend. She becomes pregnant and goes to Jaime for an abortion. She is also the older sister of Miguel. When Amanda nearly dies of drug addiction, it is Jaime who saves her life. She later dies after being arrested and tortured.

Esteban Garcia

This Esteban is the grandson of the illegitimate son of Esteban Trueba and his servant, Pancha Garcia, also named Esteban Garcia. He will become a sadistic policeman and colonel. When he arrests Alba, he also tortures her and rapes her. He may be the father of her unborn child. Esteban Garcia is filled with hate for the Trueba family and thinks that they have stolen all that he should have possessed, had he been born to the legitimate son of Esteban Trueba.

Pedro Segundo Garcia

This Pedro is the father of Blanca's lover. He is Esteban's foreman and helps Esteban rebuild the estate after Rosa dies. He is devoted to Clara, and there is an implication in the novel that they are in love in a pure, nonsexual way. Pedro helps Clara rebuild the estate after an earthquake destroys it and injures Esteban.

Pedro Tercero Garcia

Pedro is the son of Trueba's foreman and the father of Alba. Pedro and Blanca fall in love as children and continue to love one another throughout their lives. After he and Blanca are caught, he loses three fingers when he is attacked by Esteban. Pedro goes into hiding for a short time, and Blanca is forced to marry someone else. Pedro becomes a popular Latin singer and supports the socialist government. Eventually, he is reunited with Blanca and with his daughter, Alba. Pedro finally receives Esteban's respect after Esteban is captured by peasants and freed by Pedro, who has become a Socialist revolutionary. With the help of Esteban, Pedro and Blanca are able to flee the country and live together in Canada.

Marcos

Marcos is Clara's uncle, a carefree but mad inventor, who leaves Clara a set of books that will help her develop her magical powers. He also leaves her a wonderful dog, whom she loves.

Miguel

Miguel is Amanda's brother and a member of the lower social class. He gets Alba involved in student protests and becomes her lover. He is finally forced to flee and hide to save his life. He may be the father of Alba's unborn child.

Nana

Nana is the family nanny. She has spoiled Clara throughout her childhood and later spoils Blanca. Nana is a possessive and jealous woman who does not want to share Clara and who is happy to see Ferula sent away.

Transito Soto

Transito is a long-time friend of Esteban. Esteban meets Transito at a brothel called the Red Lantern and gives her money to set up her own business. Over the years, Esteban visits Transito several times, often just for comfort and advice. Later, she will help free Alba from jail at Esteban's request.

Blanca Trueba

Blanca is the daughter of Esteban and Clara. She is also the mother of Alba. Blanca is rebellious, and resembles neither her mother nor her father in personality. Blanca is forced to attend a convent school, while her brothers are sent to a British school. When Blanca falls in love with Pedro Tercero, her father reacts with anger and attacks Pedro.

Esteban tells Blanca that Pedro is dead and forces the pregnant Blanca to marry de Satigny. Eventually, Clara tells Blanca that Pedro is still alive, and after leaving her philandering husband, Blanca is reunited with Pedro. After Clara's death, Blanca assumes control of her family's estate. Eventually, a contrite Esteban helps Blanca and Pedro escape to a life of freedom in Canada. Blanca's letters form an important element of the narrative that Alba puts together after she is released from jail.

Clara Trueba

Clara is Esteban's wife, and the mother of Blanca, Jaime, and Nicolas. Her diary tells the story that is recounted in the first half of the book. Clara is clairvoyant, and as a child she was able to predict the future, read fortunes, and make objects move. After the death of her sister, Rosa, Clara is mute for nine years, and when she does finally speak, it is to announce that she will marry Esteban Trueba when she is nineteen. Clara has foreseen that Esteban, who was once engaged to her sister, Rosa, will become her husband. She does not love him and refuses to allow him to control her. She is compassionate and concerned about the poor and is very much the opposite of her new husband. After Clara and Esteban marry, they move to his country estate. When her parents die in an accident, Clara saves her mother's decapitated head in a hatbox. Over the years, Clara comes to resent the controlling anger that Esteban uses to manipulate everyone. Clara never again speaks to Esteban after he hits her and beats Blanca, at the discovery of Blanca's affair. Clara dies when Alba is seven years old, leaving Esteban devastated. When Alba is in danger, Clara's spirit returns to protect her granddaughter. Clara represents strength, morality, and a willingness to fight oppression.

Esteban Trueba

Esteban is married to Clara, and is the father of Blanca, Jaime, and Nicolas. When he is thirty-five, Esteban returns to the city from his country estate to visit his dying mother and to find a wife. Esteban was Rosa's fiancé, and he spent several years grieving for Rosa after her death. Esteban is a stern man, often given to rage, but he is also very lonely. Somehow, Clara has telepathically summoned Esteban, and he will fall passionately in love with her and remain so for the rest of his life. Esteban is a self-made man. After Rosa's death, he took the money he had been saving for the wedding and used it to rebuild his family's ruined country estate. During this period, he raped many of the young women who lived on his estate or in the nearby town, and fathered many illegitimate children, including Esteban Garcia, the son who resulted from Esteban's rape of Pancha. Esteban is moody and often violent. He demands his own way and is used to getting it. Esteban cares little for the servants on his own estate, even raping them when it pleases him. One of the children born of these rapes will, in turn, rape Esteban's own granddaughter. Eventually, Esteban enters politics, becoming a senator. Esteban, who is opposed to communism, foolishly helps to arrange a military coup, which leads to the overthrow of the socialist government and the murder of the president. Later, when Esteban is captured by the peasants, he is rescued by Pedro

Tercero. The changing political climate causes Esteban to question his previous actions, and he decides to help Blanca and Pedro Tercero flee the country. By the end of the novel, Esteban has emerged as a sympathetic character because of his willingness to accept responsibility for his own mistakes. His deep love for Clara, who never loves him, adds to the picture of sadness. Esteban represents the tragedy of the *machismo* Latin male.

Ester Trueba

Ester is Esteban's mother; he returns to her bedside when she is close to death. Ester's inheritance was squandered by her husband, and she now lives in poverty.

Ferula Trueba

Ferula is Esteban's unmarried sister. She moved in with Clara and Esteban at Clara's request, and in return she pampers Clara and angers a jealous Esteban. Ferula loves Clara more than anyone else ever has, and Nana is jealous of this love. Ferula leaves when Esteban orders her from the house. After she dies, her ghost appears to the family.

Jaime Trueba

Jaime is Nicolas's twin brother and is one of Clara and Esteban's sons. Jaime is a quiet boy who grows into a reflective adult and becomes a doctor to the poor. In personality, he is very different from his twin brother. Jaime loves his brother's girlfriend, Amanda, and when she turns to Jaime for an abortion, he unhappily agrees. Jaime's socialist views lead him to support the new government, but when he refuses to accept the demands of the revolutionary military leaders, he is tortured and murdered.

Nicolas Trueba

Nicolas is Jaime's twin brother and is one of Clara and Esteban's sons. Nicolas toys with mysticism, magic, and Eastern religions, but focuses mostly on being a playboy. He carelessly gets his girlfriend, Amanda, pregnant, and then moves on to other interests. He is very intelligent, but lacks any direction and wastes the potential that he has been given.

Jean de Satigny

De Satigny is a French count who tells Esteban about Blanca's affair with Pedro Tercero. Esteban forces Blanca to marry de Satigny, but she eventually leaves him when she learns that he is devoted to pornography and to an underground lifestyle of sex and torture.

Clara del Valle

See Clara Trueba

Nivea del Valle

Nivea is Clara's mother. She has borne fifteen children, of whom Clara is her youngest. After Nivea's death in an automobile accident, Clara saves her mother's decapitated head in a hatbox.

Rosa del Valle

Rosa is often referred to as Rosa the Beautiful. Her green hair is a distinguishing element of her beauty. She was engaged to Esteban but died after accidentally sipping poisoned brandy. Rosa represents the blending of magic and reality, which results in a sort of ethereal beauty that enchanted Esteban.

Severo del Valle

Severo is Clara's father. He dies in an automobile accident while Clara is pregnant with her sons.

Esteban Trueba

Esteban Trueba is the principle character of the novel and generally functions as the protagonist. He is related to most of the other principle characters of the novel through marriage or paternity. The novel begins with an early focus on Trueba and extends only briefly beyond his death. Trueba is born c. 1897 in an unidentified South American country—probably Chile—to a family of good name but steeply declining finances. His father is not named but his mother is Doña Ester Trueba. Trueba has one sister, Férula, born about one year before him.

As a young man without means, Trueba falls in love with Rosa del Valle. In order to secure an adequate dowry and establish support for his love, Trueba travels to the distant mining region and spends several years in dangerous and difficult work establishing several producing gold claims. Returning to the big city to claim Rosa, he is devastated to learn that she has died of an accidental poisoning. Declining to take physical custody of his ill mother, Trueba leaves Ester under the continuing care of Férula and travels again to the country, this time to the crumbling family estates of Tres Marías. There, Trueba establishes himself as the patrón and begins a daily routine of hard work. He drives himself hard and expects the same of the peasants—little more than serfs. He also routinely rapes the young peasant women he comes across, fathering a large offspring of unacknowledged bastard children. Several years later the

family estate has been turned around and is producing a super-abundance of crops and wealth. Trueba returns to the city and marries Rosa's little sister Clara del Valle, seventeen years his junior.

Trueba fathers three children, Blanca and the twins Jaime and Nicolás. He enters various businesses and always makes money. The family becomes quite wealthy but throughout the years Trueba fails to connect with his children. He remains aloof and viciously conservative in outlook, identifying with the Nazis during World War II and espousing armed violence against Marxism and other left-wing political groups. During his middle age he enters politics and becomes a national senator. During one severe earthquake Trueba is severely injured and takes years to recover, never fully regaining his health and vigor. Living in constant pain, he becomes angry and personally violent. He often lashes out at his children and Clara, finally driving an unbridgeable gulf between them. Totally isolated even in his own house, Trueba retreats inward and becomes a bitter old man. The only person he ever manages to forge a durable relationship with is his granddaughter Alba. As the country is wracked by a military coup and subsequent reign of terror, Trueba laments his own personal losses and sees his fortune and family disintegrate around him. He dies a lonely, wealthy, and sad old man.

Clara del Valle

Clara del Valle is a principle character of the novel and functions throughout as a sympathetic protagonist. She is related to many of the other principle characters of the novel through marriage or paternity. Clara is born c. 1914 in an unidentified South American country—probably Chile—to a family of good name and reasonable financial means. Her father is Severo del Valle, a politician of some repute and her mother is Nívea. Clara has fourteen brothers and sisters, many suffering early death in childhood—and none playing a significant role in the novel. As a young woman of eighteen, Clara is married to the much-older Esteban Trueba. She bears him three children, Blanca and twins Jaime and Nocolás.

Clara is essentially positive in outlook and enjoys a wide circle of close friends and associates. She is intimately involved with her children and they all regard her warmly throughout their lives. Clara is said to be psychic and frequently reads the future. She also moves things around with the power of her mind, often unconsciously levitating herself while concentrating on something else. These peculiar facets of Clara's character do not much influence the novel's development. Clara otherwise is a vocal advocate of women's rights and universal suffrage for women. She spends much of her time performing charity work for the poor and gives away much of her wealth. These aspects of her personality enrage Trueba.

Clara is devoted and faithful to Trueba but after he severely beats her in about the eighteenth year of their marriage she secludes herself from him and refuses to speak to him for the remainder of her life. After a decade her attitude softens somewhat and she communicates with him, infrequently, through third party means. From the time she was a young child to nearly the time of her death, Clara kept a series of small notebooks in

which she noted down feelings and events. These are never referred to as diaries or journals, however, and they apparently are not organized in any chronological methodology. However, they are all retained beyond her death and in c. 1980 they form the meta-fictional basis of the novel itself.

Blanca Trueba

Blanca is the oldest child, and only daughter, of Esteban and Clara Trueba. She is born c. 1935 in an unidentified South American country—probably Chile. Blanca is a precocious and intelligent child and is much adored by her mother though her father, quite conservative and definitively sexist, largely ignores her. Blanca grows up in a privileged household without ever fully grasping the societal implications of her station. As a young child she spends much time in the country at her father's estates where she plays with parasite-ridden peasant children. As night she goes home to a nanny, opulent served meals, and clean sheets while they go home to a dirt floor and penury. One of her closest friends is Pedro Tercero Garcia, the peasant son of the estate manager. Their early childhood friendship develops into an adolescent crush and, later, love and sexual intimacy. When Blanca becomes pregnant her father flies into an uncontrollable rage and beats Blanca and her mother, then attempts to murder Pedro Tercero, striking off several of Pedro Tercero's fingers in the process. Trueba then arranges a forced marriage for Blanca with a perverse Frenchman named Jean de Satigny so that the child will not be born a bastard (ironically, Treuba has fathered an unacknowledged bastard on Pedro Tercero's aunt Pancha—something Trueba never thinks about).

Blanca's new husband is a drug-addicted criminal who smuggles antiquities and mummies out of the country to European collectors. He also is a pornographer and assembles a strange circus of prostitutes to act as house servants. Blanca flees the debacle after a few months, returning home in labor to deliver his child, Alba, at home. Blanca does not again leave the family home but continues to meet Pedro Tercero over the years. On many occasions he asks her to marry but she always declines because she is unwilling to give up her upper class roots. Even so, she lives in poverty because her father more or less pretends she does not exist and will not support her in any way.

Because of her indecision, Blanca ends up spending most of her life in a sort of negative space, defined more by what she does not do or will not do than by what she becomes. Her sole larger endeavor is as an artist—she makes crèches of fantastic figures and monsters and they sell fairly well. Even as a mother her parental role largely is replaced by Clara and her two brothers. At the end of the novel as the terrorist purges begin, Blanca escapes with Pedro Tercero into the safety—and isolation—of the Vatican embassy.

Jaime Trueba

Jaime Trueba is the son of Esteban and Clara Trueba. He is born as a twin with Nicolás c. 1942 and is the younger brother of Blanca. At a fairly early age Jaime is sent away to

a British boarding school throughout his entire formative period; thus, he is fairly estranged from his father and sister though he retains a fairly close bond with is mother. Jaime is intelligent but not particularly athletic. He has an amazing constitution and requires little sleep and little food. He is quite introverted and spends nearly all of his free time reading books and studying medicine. Indeed, his bedroom often is described as a towering stack of books through which a narrow tunnel, or trail, leads to the bed. Jaime works ceaselessly as a medical provider, working at a local clinic for the poor. It is unclear whether he actually is paid for his services or works as a volunteer. In any event, his tendency to give everything away to the poor—including on one occasion his pants—leaves him penniless. Yet he cares nothing for wealth. Jaime spends long hours at the clinic, returning home only to eat and sleep. He develops a fairly broad political opinion based on Marxist theory but is deeply opposed to violence in all forms. His father's constant pervasive conservative doctrine is a public embarrassment to him and as an adult he adopts his mother's surname, being widely known as Jaime del Valle. Jaime is a primary formative influence on Blanca de Satigny, his niece, and is also a close associate of the Marxist national President elected toward the end of the novel. Jaime is with the president during the military coup and though he survives the bombing of the presidential offices he is taken prisoner. He is held and tortured for several days and then, with dozens of others, he is taken to the airport where he is executed. His body is heaped in a pile of corpses and dynamited.

Nicolás Trueba

Nicolás Trueba is the son of Esteban and Clara Trueba. He is born as a twin with Jaime c. 1942 and is the younger brother of Blanca. At a fairly early age Nicolás is sent away to a British boarding school throughout his entire formative period; thus, he is fairly estranged from his father and sister though he retains a fairly close bond with is mother. Nicolás is very intelligent, athletic, and handsome but he is not particularly motivated. Many girls follow him around but he is not interested in durable relationships. He often engages Jaime in debate and, after winning one side of the argument switches positions and then wins the other side of the argument. Unlike the passionate Jaime, nothing in particular seems to interest Nicolás and his young adult life is marked by a series of business misadventures. At one point he spends a year in the Himalayas studying meditation and philosophy. Nicolás is a primary formative influence on Blanca de Satigny, his niece, and teaches her a form of meditation that attempts to transcend physical pain. He does not develop any political theory of his own but at one point becomes embroiled in a Marxist popular movement which discredits Trueba. At this point Trueba packs Nicolás off to North America where he receives a monthly stipend—and vanishes from the narrative.

Alba de Satigny

Alba de Satigny, born c. 1953, is the biological daughter of Blanca Trueba and Pedro Tercero Garcia; she is legitimized by the marriage of her mother to Jean de Satigny prior to her birth. Throughout her early life—even into young adulthood—Alba is

unaware that Pedro Tercero is her biological father. Apparently she learns this fact only after she reads about it in her grandmother's notebooks c. 1978. She never knows her legal father and only sees his corpse once he is dead, as a formality in the morgue. Alba is said to have had a lot of unfortunate hair as a baby and Trueba, her grandfather, considers her not very good looking. For this reason he desires that she obtain a first-rate education because he believes she will not secure a good marriage and thus likely will have to provide for herself. She is thus sent to an English boarding school for several years; she detests the rigid formality of the school and does not appear to internalize much of her education. Alba's childhood is spent with adults and she never experiences a typical childhood experience or view of the world. As a teenager at college she meets and falls in love with Miguel, a revolutionary Marxist who espouses violence against the state. Alba, not particularly political on her own, joins Miguel in his various political demonstrations. When the military coup occurs in the country, Alba remains with her grandfather as Miguel takes off into the country and joins guerilla fighting. Over the years, Alba loses her grandmother to death, her mother escapes into political asylum, her uncle Nicolás moves abroad, and her uncle Jaime is executed. Alba remains alone with her grandfather Trueba. She accepts his violent temper and eccentricities and he never directs his anger toward her. The two form an unlikely relationship based on love and mutual admiration. Because Alba accepts occasional secretive visits from Miguel she falls under suspicion of the Fascist military regime that has gained power through a coup. She is arrested and spends several months in prison. There, she is tortured and probably raped. In any event, she is incarcerated without clothing for lengthy periods and is subjected to definite sexual abuse. She survives only because she develops a severe infection and is sent to a prison hospital for treatment. There she recovers her strength and then is sent to a work prison from which she is released a few days later.

A few years before Trueba's death, Alba and Trueba make a joint effort to organize and codify the many notebooks, letters, and memorabilia left by the extended family. Chief among these artifacts are the notebooks of Alba's grandmother Clara. The partnership then produces a volume of family history. Trueba's primary contribution is written in the first-person perspective and focuses on specific events. Alba's contribution is written in the third-person perspective and forms the basic fabric of the narrative. It therefore is proper to refer to Alba as the meta-fictional narrator of the novel.

Pedro Tercero García

Pedro Tercero García, born c. 1935, is the son of Pedro Segundo García and the grandson of Pedro García. His mother and grandmother are not named and do not appear in the novel. His father is the foreman of the peasants at Tres Marías, the family estate of Esteban Trueba. Pedro Tercero is thus born a peasant—in effect, a serf—without land of his own, with no prospect of obtaining land of his own, and entirely dependent upon the whimsical goodwill of Trueba, his patrón. As a young boy Pedro Tercero meets and befriends Blanca Trueba, the daughter of the patrón. She is dressed in fine clothes but his belly is distended by parasites and malnutrition. Nevertheless they become close friends and as adolescents they fall in love and become secret sexual

partners at about sixteen. This continues for a few years until they are discovered. When Trueba learns of their sexual activities he predictably flies into a massive rage and takes his anger out on Blanca and his wife, Clara, beating them severely. Later, Trueba tracks down Pedro Tercero and attempts to murder him first with a firearm and then with an axe. Instead of killing him, Trueba maims him, hacking off most of the fingers on one hand before Pedro Tercero escapes.

Throughout his young adult life Pedro Tercero teaches himself to play guitar and becomes a singer of local repute. He favors simple folk songs with subtle messages of social inequality and injustice. This also angers Trueba who considers him a rabble rouser. The loss of his fingers is thus particularly devastating to Pedro Tercero but, under the physical and spiritual care of a local Socialist Catholic priest, Pedro Tercero heals and re-teaches himself how to play. He emerges from this crisis as a devoted Socialist and spends the next several years as a sort of troubadour, traveling the countryside and singing agitation propaganda songs. He becomes quite popular but never wealthy. As an adult he often asks Blanca to marry him but she declines, unwilling to join his lower- to middle-class lifestyle. When the military coup wracks the country Pedro Tercero is listed as an enemy of the state. Blanca hides him in the basement of her father's house and then escapes with him into an uncertain political asylum by sneaking into the Vatican embassy.

Esteban García

Esteban García, born c. 1949, is the son of Esteban García and the grandson of Esteban Trueba and Pancha García. His father is an unacknowledged bastard of Trueba and bears his name as a form of dubious honorific. Although not discussed in the novel, Esteban García is the nephew of Pedro Tercero Garcia and is twice related to Alba del Satigny, through Esteban Trueba as half first cousins and through Pedro García as second cousins. His grandmother, Pancha, has taught him that he is the unacknowledged grandson of the patrón though functionally this means nothing. The Trueba family—including Esteban Trueba—is unaware of the relationship. Esteban García thus grows up viewing the younger Alba as something of a cross between a competitor and a usurper of what he considers his rightful position in the world, unfairly denied to him. As a young child he is described as "strange" (p. 163) and exhibits a cruelty to animals and people. As a young man he decides to become a policeman and is described as looking like a rodent in uniform. He secures his appointment to the police academy by obtaining a letter of recommendation from Trueba. On several occasions in the novel Esteban García and Alba are brought together in a semi-private setting. Fourteen years older than Alba, Esteban García manipulates these situations in such a way that he can sexually molest his younger cousin—the events are very brief though they are described in the novel. His Fasicst leanings ensure he will be quite successful after the military coup and he appears late in the novel as a Colonel of police. He is in charge of a large prison complex where political prisoners are tortured and executed. He arranges to have Alba transferred to his prison after her arrest (the implication being that he also arranged the arrest). There, he tortures her, sexually abuses her, and probably rapes her. At some point he apparently is transferred to

another posting. After Alba's unlikely release from prison Esteban García vanishes from the narrative.

Férula Trueba

Férula Trueba is born c. 1896 in an unidentified South American country—probably Chile—to a family of good name but steeply declining finances. His father is not named but his mother is Doña Ester Trueba. Férula has one brother, Esteban Trueba, born about one year after her. Férula's early life is devoted to religion and caring for her ailing mother. Férula carries her service to her mother like a cross, never abandoning the duty but constantly lamenting her fate and noting her sacrifices for others. She frequently dresses in black and is devoted to donating money and service to the church in a public, formulaic method. After Ester Trueba dies, Férula is fairly unmoored in life and solves her crisis by moving in with her brother and focusing her attentive care on Clara, his new wife. Férula develops a very intimate—fairly sexual—relationship with Clara and in several humorous passages in the novel she and Trueba struggle for Clara's affections. Clara remains oblivious. Finally disgusted with his sister's obviously lesbian yearnings and designs for his wife, Trueba drives her out of the home and she retreats into an effaced existence. She maintains contact with the family only through her priest. Trueba sends generous monthly stipends to support her—also handled through the priest. Férula apparently spends the remainder of her life living in abject poverty and providing ostensible service to the poor and the church. She dies of neglect and malnourishment in her pathetic hovel with a box in the closet full of her brother's money. Férula is a pathetic character, so extreme in her views as to be almost comedic relief.

Pedro Segundo García

Pedro Segundo García is born c. 1897 to Pedro García and an unnamed mother who does not appear in the novel. He has at least one sibling, Pancha. At some point he marries an unnamed woman and has at least one child, Pedro Tercero García. Pedro Segundo's early life is marked by a certain success as he becomes the de facto community leader of the Trueba family estates at Tres Marías. Uneducated but intelligent, he holds the respect of the peasant community. He is thus very conflicted when Esteban Trueba appears and takes control of the community. Pedro Segundo regards Trueba as the rightful owner but also resents his condescending attitude. Over the years the two men of equal age work together and build the estate into a highly profitable business. Eventually, Trueba entrusts the day-to-day operations to Pedro Segundo. However, all of the profits go to Trueba and Pedro Segundo remains a landless peasant living in poverty. Unlike his son, however, Pedro Segundo views the situation as inexorable and unchangeable and therefore is resigned to a passive but bitter hatred. When Trueba announces his intention to murder Pedro Tercero, Pedro Segundo resigns his position and leaves the estate rather than watch the conflict between his son and his patrón develop. Both men—Trueba and Pedro Segundo—are grandfathers of Alba del Satigny.

Objects/Places

The House of the Spirits

Esteban Trueba builds a large mansion for his wife Clara. It is centrally located in the capital city and features a complex architecture. The complicated interior in many ways is like a maze. The house is one of the principle settings of the novel. Clara's circle of friends includes many who share her interests in spiritualism and their frequent séances and conjurations give the house the unofficial name of the house of the spirits, which informs the title of the novel.

Barrabás

Barrabás is a huge black dog of uncertain provenance. He arrives as a feces-encrusted puppy in a cage with the many other belongings of Marcos del Valle. Nearly dead, he is nursed back to health by Clara del Valle and becomes her devoted pet. He is known locally for his voracious sexual appetite which leads to the gruesome demise of most of his sexual partners. Barrabás dies on the day Clara is betrothed to Esteban Trueba, assassinated by being stabbed in the back by an unknown assailant. Barrabás can easily be viewed as a symbol of Clara's youth.

Tres Marías

Tres Marías is the country estate of the Trueba family. The method of acquisition is not considered in the novel, but Esteban Trueba inherits the estate from his deceased father. His absolute ownership is never questioned throughout the novel. Presumably, Nicolás Trueba inherits the estate after Trueba's death though this is not discussed in the novel. The estate is worked by a group of local peasants that appear somewhat like serfs.

Clairvoyant Visions

Throughout the novel Clara experiences numerous visions that foretell the future. They are uncannily accurate. Clara also demonstrates other remarkable psychic powers such as levitation. Her visions usually focus around a pendulum and a three-legged table that is said to shake; the exact mechanisms are not described in the novel.

Marxism

Marxism is a political theory that many characters in the novel espouse. The exact philosophy is not described in the novel but it may be supposed that a typical reader is associated with the basic concepts. The political struggle in the country that consumes

the last part of the novel is a struggle between Marxism and Fascism; in the novel, the Fascists win. Some aspects of the novel can only be understood if the reader is familiar with the fine differences between Socialism, Marxism, and Communism—but these are not discussed in the text.

Covadonga

Covadonga is the family name of a British-made car that is purchased by Severo del Valle. It is one of the first automobiles in the country that is the setting of the novel. The automobile appears to be able of accomplishing only moderate speed and usually is described as a claptrap contraption of many odd noises and shaking movements. The automobile is used for many years until it is wrecked in an accident causing the death of Severo and Nívea del Valle.

Nívea's Head

Nívea's del Valle is the mother of Clara Trueba. She is killed in an automobile accident by decapitation. Her head cannot be located after the accident and remains for several days in the bushes; her headless corpse meanwhile is buried. Clara finds the head after a vision. Upon retrieving the head, Clara goes into labor. The head is thus taken home and sits on the bedroom bureau, overlooking the birth of Blanca Trueba. The head then is put into the basement and remains for decades until the death of Clara whereupon the family secrets the head in Clara's coffin. The family symbol of the head is obvious and risible.

English Boarding School

Esteban Trueba desires to secure the best education possible for his sons so he sends them to English Boarding School. The school is not described but does feature a rigorous curriculum. Trueba judges the school meaningfully superior to any other available school in the region. Later, Alba attends an English boarding school but it is unclear whether these are the same schools.

The Coup

The final portion of the novel is dominated by political events subsequent to a military coup d'etat. In the novel, the coup apparently is led by General Hurtado who imposes a police state with many characteristics of fascism. The coup results in a reign of terror where people are kidnapped from the streets, tortured, and murdered. The coup forms a major turning point in the novel.

Clara's Notebooks

Clara Trueba, even as a young girl, kept a series of personal notations in a series of notebooks. The first one was only a few pages; later ones by inference were lengthier. The notebooks were arranged topically, not chronologically, though they appear to have been fairly comprehensive as to events. The notebooks serve as the meta-fictional source for the narrative.

Themes

Family

The dominant theme of the novel is family. The majority of the the novel focuses on the family experience of the Trueba family, beginning with the early adulthood of Esteban and Férula Trueba and the marriage of Trueba to Clara del Valle, and extending through the death of that generation to the coming of Alba's generation. Indeed, the novel's timeline spans approximately nine decades of time, all of it devoted to one generation or the other. The theme of family is evident not only in the marriage of Trueba and Clara and their children, but also in the marriage of Blanca Trueba to Jean de Satigny, Severo del Valle to Nívea, Ester Trueba to her husband, and so forth. The traditional families are contrasted to the illegitimate pairings of Trueba with Pancha, et. al., the inference of various peasant liaisons, and the unconventional but durable relationship between Blanca and Pedro Tercero. Other forms of family are represented by Nicolás and Amanda playing at being the parents of Miguel. Negative representations of families include the abortion of Nicolás and Amanda's unborn child by Jaime, the abandonment and rejection of Esteban García by Esteban Trueba, the beatings of Blanca and Clara by Trueba, and the molestation of Alba by Esteban García. Finally, the family's destiny is intricately intertwined with the national destiny. The major theme of family and family relationships runs throughout the novel and forms nearly the entire narrative structure.

Haves vs. Have-Nots

Esteban Trueba is born into a family with a good name but crumbling finances. As a young man he takes initiative and works hard to secure his future. He believes that he has overcome insurmountable adversity by gaining money and wealth. However, he also inherits a vast country estate—Tres Marías—from his father, along with his good family name. This contrasts markedly with e.g. Pedro Segundo Garcia, a man of Trueba's age who is born as a peasant into a life of hard work. Born on Tres Marías, Pedro Segundo does not inherit the land and has no title to it. Thus, as both men work to improve the estates into a highly profitable venture only Trueba actually profits from it. Pedro Segundo is aware of this gulf of difference but is powerless to affect it; he is a have-not. When severe difficulties separate the two men Pedro Segundo must leave the land upon which he was born because Trueba owns it. The novel features many other examples of this paradigm - Blanca and Pedro Tercero are notable for their differing perspectives on what it means to have wealth. Perhaps the most striking example in the novel is the contrast between Alba de Satigny, inheritor of a certain nobility as well as wealth and power, and her cousin Esteban García, inheritor of nothing. The novel nearly always characterizes the 'haves' as ignorant of the plight of the 'have-nots,' even when they are aware of it their reaction is to provide acts of charity rather than meaningful reform. The Marxist election and subsequent military coup can be seen as the result of this fundamental gulf between the rich and the poor. This theme runs throughout the novel, impacting the family as well as the nation.

Memory

The novel takes great care to document itself, to establish its own credibility and history, and to refute the concept of fiction. From the beginning, Clara del Valle is said to keep daily notebooks full of events, observations, thoughts, and feelings. Clara, as a clairvoyant, is certainly implied to have better-than-typical insight into the facts; because she writes things down her memory is not crucial. Coupled with a few family artifacts and numerous letters written between Blanca and Clara, the family history is documented as it occurs and in the voice of principle participants. Alba, the narrator, frequently points out that these unimpeachable resources form the basis of the narrative—of course it is all meta-fiction. Alba writes in the third-person voice and claims for herself narrative infallibility. This is sharply contrasted with the writings of Esteban Trueba which are constructed entirely from memory and related in the first-person voice. Trueba is vitriolic, old, and introspective in his contributions. He mostly dwells upon those episodes that involve him in a highly negative light and seeks to exculpate himself by explanation and apology. Generally, the same events are thus related twice, often from markedly different viewpoints. Alba is female, young, educated, and seeking to recreate a family biography. Trueba is male, old, entrenched in ideology, and seeking to apologize through an autobiography. The contrast is remarkable.

Style

Point of View

The novel features two points of view with each adapted to a distinctive voice and narrator. The most common point of view featured is that of third-person, limited, and is used by Alba de Satigny, the principle narrator. Alba uses as her source materials written notes and letters of her mother and grandmother and a few other undocumented family heirlooms (presumably certificates, diplomas, and so forth). She claims for herself narrative infallibility and often discloses interior thoughts of other characters because such thoughts are recorded in her source materials. However, many aspects of her narrative are unlikely to have been recorded in such depth and complexity in any contemporaneous account and one imagines therefore that Alba is crafting a fiction around the history of her family. Of course this is all meta-fictional, and represented within the novel itself.

The second point of view featured is that of first-person, limited, and is used by Esteban Trueba, the secondary narrator. Trueba recreates his autobiographical accounts from memory as an octogenarian reviewing a lifetime of struggles and bitter disappointments. He occasionally refers to written materials but usually not as source materials but as things he remembers having been created. Many aspects of Trueba's autobiographical accounts are recalled in striking detail; others are glossed over. This is consistent with memory, particularly with personal memories about events. Much of Trueba's narrative focuses on particularly unpleasant or painful episodes in his life. While he is open and fairly honest about his participation in these events, he also seeks to clarify his motivation and usually attempts to somewhat exculpate what often is abhorrent behavior.

Setting

The novel is set in a South American country that is not named. Much of the events transpire in the capital city, which also is not named. Some minor locales are named but not in such a way as to tie in literally with any particular South American country. However, the national history of the fictional country neatly mimics the actual history of Chile, as does the fictional country's geography, climate, and natural resources. In this respect, the capital city can be viewed as Santiago. However, a complete understanding of the novel hardly is dependent upon a literal interpretation of events and perhaps one of the strengths of the novel is derived from its being unmoored in geography. In this sense the novel stands more for family and universal experience than any localized experience. Within this large geographical setting most of the action takes place at two sites—a large mansion of complex architecture in the city (e.g., the so-called house of the spirits) where the Trueba family lives and a sprawling country estate called Tres Marías (the name is not explained in the novel). In many respects these two sites are quite distinct—urban vs. rural; wealthy vs. poor; commercial vs. agricultural. In other

respects they are very consistent - political beliefs, religious beliefs, and the people's cultural package all vary little between the two. The settings are particularly well developed and form one of the strongest aspects of the narrative.

Language and Meaning

The novel was written and originally published in Spanish (1982) with the first English translation appearing in 1985. Since then numerous Spanish and English editions have been printed. The English language translation retains several Spanish words that are used throughout. For example, patron; the more the reader is familiar with the nuanced meaning of this word, particularly in the context of South American history, the more it becomes apparent why it was not casually translated. The English language version exclusively is reviewed here. Within the novel, language and meaning are fairly traditionally approached. The narrative is rich in metaphor, however, and the more the reader understands Chilean history and South American literary history the more the reader will derive from the narrative.

Construction is fairly straightforward with routine dialogue and narrative exposition forming the bulk of the materials. The meaning is somewhat complicated by the presence of two narrators but the change in point of view makes the change in narrator immediately apparent and should pose no special barrier to interpretation.

Structure

The 488-page novel is divided into fourteen named and enumerated chapters and an epilogue. The chapters are of notably unequal length. Chapters are topical, for the most part focusing on a character or notable event. However, chapters contain much additional material and do not stand alone particularly well without the remaining novel. The structure for the most part is very traditional with the possible exception that 'magical events transpire with some regularity. For example, Clara moves things with her mind and has precognitive visions. This 'magical realism' is a hallmark of South American writing and the structure of the novel is not harmed by the adoption of the style.

The novel also features a remarkably complex and well developed meta-fictional structure that seeks to explain and justify itself. The novel claims to be based upon several written artifacts used by two characters as narrators to build the novel itself. A few years before Esteban Trueba's death, Alba del Satigny and her grandfather Trueba make a joint effort to organize and codify the many notebooks, letters, and memorabilia left by their extended family. Chief among these artifacts are the notebooks of Alba's grandmother Clara. The partnership then produces a volume of family history which is purported to be the novel itself. Trueba's primary contribution is written in the first-person perspective and focuses on specific events. Alba's contribution is written in the third-person perspective and forms the basic fabric of the narrative. It therefore is proper to refer to Alba as the meta-fictional narrator of the novel. Obviously, the relationship

between the actual novel's structure and the novel's meta-fictional structure is quite different, complex, and enjoyable.

Historical Context

The events in *The House of the Spirits* take place during a period of more than fifty years, from about 1920 to 1975. Allende sets her family saga against a backdrop of political change, in an occasionally violent era, but her novel also functions as an examination of women's lives during this period in Chile. In the early sections of the novel, both Nivea and Clara are involved in the suffragette movement. During this period, women were confined by traditional gender roles, with most women performing the work traditionally designated for women: marriage and family, or, if employed outside the home, teaching. The right for women to vote in all elections, an interest of both Nivea and Clara, was not granted to women until 1949, much later than in other Latin American countries. With regard to education, Chilean women have moved slowly toward greater access. Women have been admitted to universities since the middle of the nineteenth century, and Chile was one of the first countries to graduate a woman physician. But the number of women attending universities and working in traditionally male careers, such as law and medicine, has been, and remains, significantly lower than in most western countries. One reason that women have been so slow to gain equal rights in Chile is the tradition of *machismo,* which posits male superiority and control over women. This is evident in *The House of the Spirits* when Esteban, with impunity and without fear of reprisal, seizes and rapes any woman he wishes. He is also able to demand that his daughter Blanca marry a man she hates, so that her father need not be embarrassed by an unwed and pregnant daughter□a shame he has inflicted on countless other fathers. Esteban also has the right to control who his wife spends time with, even throwing his own sister out of the house when he chooses. And yet, *machismo* is not the only ideology that oppresses women. Women also have a cultural designation that leads to their repression, *marianismo,* which is a belief in the spiritual superiority of women, based on women's sisterhood with the Virgin Mary. This affiliation means that women are expected to emulate the Virgin Mary, both in piety and in purity. All of the women in Allende's novel display this piety, and some, such as Ferula, embrace purity as well. When Ferula observes Clara as an eager sexual partner to her husband, she is shocked and immediately devotes herself to praying for Clara. The idealism of *marianismo* is difficult for any woman to meet, as the novel makes very clear. But in spite of the difficulty, men expected women to maintain this ideal.

Religion, and its influence in Chilean society, also had an important impact on women's lives. In *The House of the Spirits*, the story begins with the family in church. Their priest is an important part of the family's lives, and the influence of the church is an important factor in the family's social and cultural existence. Chile is one of the last countries in the world where divorce is still not legal; thus, Clara leaves Esteban and spiritually divorces him, changing her name and removing her wedding ring, but legally she remains his wife. If it appears in Allende's novel that there is little that women can do to prevent pregnancy, that is because birth control information, which has been readily available elsewhere in the world since the 1960s, in Chile is only available to married women who have had a child. Such information is disseminated only during prenatal and postpartum checkups. Both Nivea, whose pregnancy predates the availability of

birth control, and Alba, whose pregnancy coincides with the 1973 revolution, were single and had no access to birth control information. Abortion, which was available as a therapeutic procedure during the period 1931- 1989, is now absolutely against the law under any circumstances.

Ironically, women began to gain more control under the repressive dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet, who controlled the country from 1973 to 1989. The coup which set Pinochet in control is the political event that controls the action at the end of the novel. This is because with so many men dead or in prisons, women began to protest on behalf of their families and their missing men. As a result, women today have more freedom in Chile than ever before. But during the period outlined in *The House of the Spirits* women were little more than chattel, owned and controlled by the men of Chile.

Literary Heritage

Much literature of Latin America is characterized by magical realism, sometimes referred to as symbolic mysticism. Much of the time, this means that the writer blends together naturalism and supernaturalism seamlessly. Often the literature of this area incorporates folktales and legends into the text, making the legends appear a natural part of the author's work. Magical realism erases the borders between the character's reality, the explicable and the inexplicable, and the natural world and the magical world.

Traditional Western literature has relied upon literary realism for more than one hundred years. This "realism" attempts to create a story and characters that are plausible, a representation of our everyday lives. The literature of magical realism attempts to portray the unusual, the spiritual, and the mystical, as ordinary facets of the character's lives. For the reader, magical realism requires an acceptance of the coexistence of the real and the imaginary. The author posits these magical events as authentic, with the supernatural events being interwoven seamlessly into the narration. For Allende, this means that Clara's ability to move objects or predict the future are interwoven into the story as essentially ordinary parts of her life. There is nothing exceptional about the ghosts who appear, and the reader accepts this, because Allende writes with authority. She claims this novel is based on her family's story, and so the magic and the ghosts must also be a part of that history. Because the author is so accepting of these details, the reader must also accept them.

Critical Overview

Reviews of *The House of the Spirits* have often focused on comparisons between Allende's first novel and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* Despite the similarities, Allende's novel offers some important distinctions and contains strengths that set the work apart from novels written by other Latin-American writers. In a review of *The House of the Spirits* for *The Christian Science Monitor,* Marjorie Agosin declares that Allende's novel "captivates and holds the reader throughout its 400 pages." Agosin agrees that the critical acclaim of readers and critics that greeted the publication of Allende's novel is richly deserved. Calling *The House of the Spirits* "a moving and powerful book," Agosin argues that the book is far more than a novel. Instead, according to Agosin, it is "a double text." This is because Allende's novel incorporates two different goals: "On one level it is the story of the Trueba family and its progeny, both legitimate and bastard. On the other level, it is the political and social history of Chile." Agosin notes that real events form the background of the novel, and also refers to the elements of magic and spirituality which contribute to the story's strengths, asserting that "the unbridled fantasy of the protagonists and their enchanted spirits is played out against the story of the demented and tragic country once free, now possessed by the evil spirits of a military dictatorship." According to Agosin, all of these elements□the family saga, the historical background, the spirituality of the women, and an excellent translation□make this novel "an unforgettable experience."

Jonathan Yardley, a reviewer for *The Washington Post,* is equally enthusiastic about *The House of the Spirits*. Although Yardley observes that this novel contains a "certain amount of rather predictable politics," he suggests that the humanity of the book transcends this predictability. Finding that "the only cause it wholly embraces is that of humanity," Yardley is fervent about the way the book embodies "passion, humanity and wisdom that in the end. . .transcends politics." One element of the book that appeals to Yardley is the depiction of Esteban Trueba, who is not allowed an easy "political conversion." Even when Esteban understands and accepts responsibility for his actions, he does not simply admit defeat; instead, he realizes, as Yardley notes, that "nothing is immutable." It is a simple distinction that reveals Allende's strength as a writer: "Allende has both the tolerance and the wisdom to understand that there is lamentable human loss when any world crumbles, even if it was not a good one, and thus the cantankerous Esteban emerges at last as a deeply sympathetic figure." That the reader is able to sympathize with Esteban, after all the destruction he has caused, is one the strengths of *The House of the Spirits*. The novel's success, suggests Yardley, is due to its status as "a novel not about ideas or causes but about people."

Not every reviewer offers an unqualified endorsement of Allende's novel. The *Los Angeles Times*'s Richard Eder finds *The House of the Spirits* to have strengths but also weaknesses. Among the book's strengths, says Eder, is its ability to make the victims of these events, as depicted in the book, "humanly, if not altogether ideologically, quite a bit like a Californian's son at Berkeley, a Bostonian's lawyer cousin, a New York professional serving on her school community board, or anyone's occasionally imprudent younger brother or sister. We meet the atrocity statistics and, in Pogo's

words, they are us." The people in Allende's novel are real, and the reader is able to recognize them as such. Eder also acknowledges that Allende has created a novel that is "a mix of romantic nationalism and revolutionary zeal." But, Eder also points to some weaknesses in the novel. Among these is the author's use of magical realism, which Eder says Gabriel García Márquez does "better than anyone else" and in her attempt to appropriate this device, Allende "rarely manages to integrate her magic and her message." This difficulty of cohesion is actually due to Allende's characterization, Eder states, with the result being that some characters lack enough depth to make effective use of the magic. Instead of the cohesion that García Márquez's novels contain, Eder asserts, Allende's novel is "populated too tidily with representative figures, possessing a richness of incident and detail, if not of character, and decorated rather than transformed by the magic." The result is that "there are times when the women's [Clara and Alba's] small miracles resemble the stories of saints recounted with pedagogical intent and unalloyed ravishment in the children's devotional literature used in Latin America a generation or two ago."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Metzger is a Ph.D. specializing in literature and drama at The University of New Mexico, where she is a lecturer in the English department and an adjunct professor in the university honors program. In this essay, she discusses how the women in Isabel Allende's The House of the Spirits *use the supernatural as a mechanism for escape from the patriarchy of Latin-American family structure.*

During the more than seventy years that *The House of the Spirits* spans, each of the women in Esteban Trueba's life finds a way to escape his obsessive control. Although externally, Clara, Blanca, and Alba continue to exist within Esteban's world and in his house, each one is able to escape, to create an internal place where she can go. With the use of the supernatural, the Trueba women can escape to a spiritual world, a magical world from which Esteban is excluded. This is one place where Esteban cannot follow, since it is a world without defining structure, without rules. In the spiritual world, there is no patriarchy, and there are no social constructs that define women as subordinate to men. The supernatural is an ethereal world of shifting boundaries; and as such, it is a world that offers Clara, Blanca, and Alba an identity separate from that of wife, daughter, granddaughter.

In the patriarchal world of Chile, women are little more than chattel, property which men possess, exploit, and even reject, as a facet of male privilege. Women have few rights, and so they must find their own means to control their lives. Isabel Allende provides the Trueba women with a tool magic that will simplify their escape from a patriarchal world. In a way the women's ability to escape into magic is a defeat for Esteban. In a critical study of Allende's work, Ronie-Richelle Garcia-Johnson suggests that Esteban exists within traditional codes of honor, which direct him to "possess and confine these women." But rather than succumb to Esteban's control of the home, his women move onto a spiritual plane within the same home. Esteban's home space, which he possesses and controls, becomes a woman's space, which she can then possess and control. As Garcia-Johnson notes, "The Trueba women confronted Esteban in his own space, usurped his control of that area, expanded their lives into alternative spaces, or left Trueba's property altogether." Instead of the male-dominated hierarchy that Esteban craved, the women dominated the familial spaces, and Esteban was defeated. His defeat lies within Clara's magic. Magic is the only mechanism that Clara has to escape Esteban's unrelenting desire to possess her. Clara's husband is not content to love his wife and share his life with her. His love is an obsessive need to own Clara, to own not only her body but her mind and soul. His unwillingness to share any element of Clara's life leads to his rejection of his own sister, whom he banishes from their home. To own herself, Clara can only escape into the supernatural world. In the real world, Esteban can break down locked doors to possess his wife, but in the spiritual world, her mind is free of him. Esteban's obsessive need to possess his wife does not end when her life ends. Clara cannot even escape into death, since even there Esteban can find her. Garcia-Johnson suggests that Esteban's decision to build an elaborate tomb, one that will house Rosa, Clara, and himself, is a way to make sure that he will have in death what he could not own in life Clara's entire being. Esteban's idea that he can confine

Clara is forced to wait until their deaths, because, during her life, she finds freedom by claiming something that Esteban cannot control. The spiritual world offers Clara her own place, a woman's place, something she can claim, while defeating her husband's idea that she must be confined in his place.

In a patriarchal society, such as exists in Chile, one element of male control is silence. Traditionally men have used silence as a mechanism of control. Patriarchy is founded upon the biblical injunction that women must obey their husbands, and they must obey without complaint. In defending their domination of women, men cite Paul's instructions in the New Testament. In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul tells wives that they must "submit yourselves unto your own husbands" and that "the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church" (Eph. 5.22-23). This hierarchy is again reinforced in verse 24: "Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing." Paul also notes that women were subordinate to men in matters of religion. Specifically women were not permitted to instruct or preach the word of God. To do so is "to usurp authority over the man" (1 Tim. 2.12). Consequently, women must be silent in church where the word of God is spoken. In the years since Paul wrote these words, patriarchal societies have used these biblical verses as a means to silence and control women. As is the case with much of the Bible, Paul's words are taken out of context to support an agenda. In this case, the agenda is patriarchy. Whereas in a patriarchal society, a woman is expected to be silent, in the Trueba household, Clara uses silence to her own best advantage. Instead of being silent as a signal of female oppression, Clara evokes silence as a way to control her own place within her husband's house. Clara cannot escape Esteban through divorce, but she can escape him through silence, and it is silence that permits her escape into the spiritual world. Clara defeats male domination by creating a separate interior life, while using silence in the exterior world, the world of men. In a discussion of the spirituality of *The House of the Spirits*, Ruth Y. Jenkins points out that Allende's novel "explore[s] the double bind of articulating female voice in cultures that ordain silence as the appropriate expression of female experience." Clara is silent because she chooses to be, not because Esteban orders her to be silent. Silence is her way of discovering her voice in a society that says she should not have a voice. She is not subordinate to Esteban; he cannot control her because her magic gives her a voice, and he cannot control her magic. Jenkins suggests that supernatural fiction, when used within a culture that "embraces the other-worldly," can be used to "explore the authority provided by ghosts and spirits to articulate an alternative story from those endorsed by patriarchal cultures." The Trueba women use the supernatural to tell their own story in a culture that would not otherwise be willing to hear their story. The spiritual world disguises Clara's strength and makes her struggle visible, by subtly and indirectly rejecting the patriarchal world. Clara can replace patriarchal silence with spiritual silence, and she can use her own silence as a way to voice her story. Through their connection to the spirit world, the Trueba women share an authentic feminine experience, to the detriment of the male-structured world. Jenkins proposes that these women are empowered by the spirit world and that they pose a threat to Chilean society, which, "while in transi tion, remains nonetheless patriarchal." If, in a patriarchally organized society, women can create an identity separate from that extended by the men in their household, then such women will pose a threat to the culture's social construct.

Clara's ability to find a voice, to create an interior life that offers escape from a patriarchal husband, provides her with something that she can leave to her daughter, and by extension, her granddaughter. In a patrilineal world, Clara has little that she owns and which is hers to bequeath to her daughter, but she does have her magic, which she can offer to Blanca and Alba. This inheritance, which Clara offers, results in Alba writing down the family story. When Alba has been captured, tortured, and raped, she wishes for her grandmother to bring her death. But instead, Clara tells her granddaughter that she must survive. To do so, Alba must escape into her mind, where she begins to write her grandmother's story. The resulting book is Alba's inheritance from her grandmother. Jenkins suggests that when Alba reconstructs her family's story, she is "assert[ing] the value of individual female experience while weaving it into generations of female history." Thus in writing down and preserving Clara's story, the female experience acquires a value it would not otherwise have in this patriarchal society. Ambrose Gordon maintains that when Clara leaves her parents' home and enters Esteban's home, she brings her spirit world "as a kind of dowry," and that these "spirits are an extension of her own clear spirit. . .her rich and loving femininity." But the spirit world is more than a dowry for Clara. In Esteban's house, she needs much more, and the spirit world offers Clara her own personal existence. Instead of a dowry, the spirit world provides Clara with an escape from patriarchy and an inheritance to leave her daughter and granddaughter. In a way, Clara leaves Blanca and Alba with their own escape from an oppressive world, which confines and restricts a woman's means of expression.

Source: Sheri E. Metzger, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Kelly Winters is a freelance writer and has written for a wide variety of academic and educational publishers. In the following essay, she discusses feminist themes in The House of the Spirits *.*

"Critics are terrible people," Allende told Farhat Iftekharuddin in *Conversations with Isabel Allende.* "They will label you no matter what, and you have to be classified. I don't want to be called a feminist writer, a political writer, a social writer, a magic realism writer, or a Latin-American writer. I am just a writer; I am a storyteller."

Despite her objections to being categorized, Allende is a feminist, as she made clear in the same interview. She told Iftekharuddin, "Because I am a woman and because I am an intelligent women, excuse my arrogance, I have to be a feminist. I am aware of my gender; I am aware of the fact that being a woman is a handicap in most parts of the world. . .in any circumstance, a woman has to exert double the effort of any man to get half the recognition."

And, she told Marjorie Agosin in *Conversations with Isabel Allende,* "All the women in my book [*The House of the Spirits*] are feminists in their fashion; that is, they ask to be free and complete human beings, to be able to fulfill themselves, not to be dependent on men. Each one battles according to her own character and within the possibilities of the epoch in which she happens to be living."

In *The House of the Spirits* although Esteban Trueba is a central figure, women are the true main characters, and the main focus of the book is the bonds and interrelationships among the generations of mothers and daughters. Trueba is a traditional Latin-American man, with traditional ideas about honor, *machismo,* sexuality, and the roles of women who should be quiet and under a man's control. The women in the book all defy these notions in very distinct ways. As characters, they are richly portrayed; all are uniquely talented, and all are influenced by the lives of their mothers and grandmothers.

As Allende notes, each woman in *The House of the Spirits* asserts herself against patriarch Esteban Trueba in her own way. Nivea is an enthusiastic early feminist; Clara lives in a time when divorce is impossible and is married to a controlling man, so she frees herself by maintaining her own mental and spiritual dominion, which Trueba cannot enter or control. Blanca defies him to be with the man she loves, and Alba is a member of a more modern generation: she is interested in work and politics, and allies herself with radical leftists, using Trueba's home and wealth to help them.

In addition, all the women in the book are creative in some way: they are all artists who create their own worlds. Clara is a spiritualist who keeps notebooks that "bear witness to life"; Rosa embroiders a huge tablecloth with phantasmagorical birds and beasts; Blanca works with clay to create creches of similar mythological and imaginary animals; and Alba retrieves Clara's notebooks and continues the tradition of keeping them. Allende told Agosin, "I chose extraordinary women who could symbolize my vision of

what is meant by *feminine,* characters who could illustrate the destinies of women in Latin America." It is not surprising, since all of these women are intelligent and creative, that they are all feminist in their own way.

All of the women manage to escape Trueba's dominion by ignoring him, evading him, using his house for their own purposes, and changing the house that he built to suit their own needs. As Ronie-Richelle Garcia-Johnson noted in *Revista Hispanica Moderna,* "With spatial symbols, Allende communicates the message that, although the patriarchy may seem to be in control, women and traditionally feminine spirits prevail behind the facade."

Allende has been angered by some feminist interpretations of the book as not being feminist enough. She told Inez Dolz-Blackburn in *Conversations with Isabel Allende* that some feminists object to the fact that at the end of the book, Alba goes back to her grandfather's house and calmly waits optimistically for the birth of her baby, disregarding the fact that the child is the result of rape. Also, she notes, some critics feel that even her politically active characters, such as Alba, become that way only because they fall in love with a man who is active. "And that's not a feminist attitude," Allende said. "[They think] she should go out on the streets and fight."

However, Allende says, the women in her book do defy the rules of patriarchal society, mainly the rule that women should not voice their opinions. Collectively, all the women in the book defy this rule by keeping a journal of their experiences. And, according to Allende, the baby Alba is expecting at the end of the book is a symbol of the new society she hopes for□one in which men and women are equal and free.

The women in *The House of the Spirits* draw their strength from their common bond of blood, which, Allende told Agosin, "goes beyond mere biology; it's a chain of love that goes from mother to daughter and which conveys some special qualities that are not transmitted to men. . .It links all women who've had similar experiences and makes them capable of understanding, of making sacrifices."

Allende's emphasis on the spiritual and emotional bonds between women is drawn from her own family, in which the women were, and are, very close. She has always been close to her mother, and told Magdalena Garcia Pinto in *Conversations with Isabel Allende,* "My mother was the most important person in my childhood, and she has been the most important person in my life. She's my friend, my sister, my companion. . .Her love has always nourished me." In addition, many of the characters in the novel are drawn from Allende's own life. The character of Clara, for example, is Allende's own grandmother, only slightly exaggerated; like Clara, her grandmother had psychic gifts.

Allende told Marie-Lise Gazarian Gautier in *Conversations with Isabel Allende,* "My greatgrandmother, my grandmother, my mother, my daughter, and I all communicate with each other telepathically, even after death. My grandmother died thirty-seven years ago but she still speaks to me. My mother who lives in Chile also speaks to me telepathically because calling by phone is very expensive. So there is very much of a female focus in my work because of my understanding of women."

Despite this emphasis on feminism and on women's lives, Allende is not interested in writing what others call "women's fiction." "I don't think literature has any gender," she told Garcia-Pinto, "and I don't think it's necessary to come up with a plan to write like a woman, because that seems like a kind of awkward self-segregation to me. . .You have to write like an authentic person as much as possible. . .and those qualities are independent of gender."

Allende is aware that not many women writers from Latin America are known outside Latin America, and that in the literature written by men, there are seldom well-developed women characters; the women in most Latin American fiction are stereotypes, "the mythical woman." She believes this is a result of traditional Latin culture, in which men and women had very different roles and lived largely separate lives. "That generation was brought up in a segregated world where men and women went to different schools, we only danced together, we didn't even sleep together very often," she told Dolz-Blackburn and colleagues. "And so, we knew about each other very little." As a result, she added, except for works by Jorge Amado, who "had great female characters. . .I think that literature written by women in Latin America has better knowledge of our feminine reality."

In response to a critic who remarked that Allende would never be "a writer of worth" until she created a male character who was as strong as her female characters, Allende told Garcia Pinto, "I wonder how many male writers have good female characters. Very few. And that doesn't mean that they write badly or that they aren't recognized as writers. . .I'm not asking for any concessions because I'm a woman, nor do I permit superfluous demands to be made of me because I'm a woman."

She told Linda Levine and Jo Anne Engelbert in *Conversations with Isabel Allende,* "I think that men and women are really not so different. If we were left alone, if we were not mutilated, so to speak, by an education that alters our course of development, we would all be persons who did not have such rigid roles and would lead happier, fuller, more integrated lives." And, she told Iftekharuddin, "I think that is what being a feminist means, the awareness and the strength to fight for what you believe."

Although her books often deal with political events and political realities that affect people's lives, Allende does not intend them to have a particular political message or easily stated moral. She told Michael Toms in *Common Boundary,* "I don't intend to deliver any sort of message, because I don't have any answers. I just have the questions, and these are the same questions that everyone asks. Maybe what a writer has to do is just tune into the question and repeat it in such a way that it will have a ripple effect and touch more people."

Source: Kelly Winters, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #3

In the following interview with Allende, interviewer Katy Butler discusses Allende's novels, including her work The Infinite Plan *and the history of both Allende's life and of California as backdrops for her writing.*

Isabel Allende, the daughter and stepdaughter of Chilean diplomats, is one of California's most famous literary immigrants. The author of *The House of the Spirits* and other books, she is probably best known for her memoir, *Paula*, chronicling the year she spent at the bedside of her comatose daughter, watching her die after being stricken with porphyria and a series of ultimately fatal medical misadventures. We met with Allende recently to talk about her new novel, as well as about the true history of the American Gold Rush, the creative process and her experience of making a new family in a foreign land.

KATY BUTLER: A historical novel like this is a departure for you. How did you come to write it?

ISABEL ALLENDE: In 1991, after I finished *The Infinite Plan*, I had fallen in love with California, and I realized that San Francisco was only 150 years old. Before that, there was a little town called Yerba Buena with 300 people, and nothing was happening there. The pioneers coming West were stopping in Oregon and other places that they felt were better for agriculture, less wild than California. So California was inhabited by nomadic Indian tribes, Mexican haciendas, farmers who had lived there in large communities forever□this belonged to Mexico. And Mexico lost California in a war with the United States nine days after the gold was found.

The Gold Rush, in a year's time, brought a large number of people here motivated by greed. And they formed this place very fast. It would have taken probably 50 more years to bring all those people here without the gold. I was fascinated by the Gold Rush because it is like war. It is a time when all human faults and human virtues become enlarged, highlighted. You see people with very strong characters; there's adventure, with bandits and prostitutes; and there's courage, idealism, irrational hope, all the things that in a novel are great ingredients.

I planned to start writing on Jan. 8, 1992. I knew only that it would be about a Chilean woman, not a prostitute, who comes north to the Gold Rush. Then my daughter fell sick and, during 1992, I was at her bedside. [She would die in 1993, after spending a year in a coma.] In 1993, I was very depressed and I wrote *Paula*. In 1994 and 1995, I was totally blocked and depressed and taking Prozac. I couldn't write anything.

BUTLER: What would happen?

ALLENDE: Nothing. When I write, there are voices that I listen to. There was no voice. It was just emptiness and void and silence and a sense of terrible frustration. I would have ideas. And I would sit down and I could never get the tone right. It never sounded

natural and never seemed to flow. It was just stuck there, like playing with Legos, where you put one piece on the other piece but it never looks real. I thought I would never write fiction again.

So I gave myself a subject as far removed from death as possible, and I ended up writing *Aphrodite* [a collection of erotic stories and recipes] about lust and gluttony. It unblocked me, I think, because it brought me back to my body, to the sensuous, to the joy of life.

Finally, I began to write. It just happened. The characters just walked into my house! In seven months the book was written. What I have learned in all these years is that you have to let go of things in life and in the writing. And if you just follow your characters around, you will get the story in a more natural way. They are not flat comic book characters that you can order around. You just let them live.

BUTLER: How did you research the book?

ALLENDE: First at Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley. I bought books. I watched documentaries. I went to exhibits at the Oakland Museum. I found that almost everything written in the history books and this is what they teach in school had been written by the victors. The white males. That was how the story was told: the epic thing of white males coming to the Gold Rush. But the truth is, they were a minority. The majority of the people here were not white until October of 1849, when 40,000 people, most of them white men, crossed the continent.

In 1848, when the panning began, the majority were people of color: Mexicans, who were miners by trade, who taught the whites what to eat, how to find food, how to get the gold; Chinese people; people from South America; people from all over. Then the white men [the Forty-Niners] came overland, and they took over. They took the mines away and made laws against people of color and took away everything from them until many of them became bandits.

There was the story that we have seen so often, the story of greed and violence and abuse and racism. However, the people of color stayed. They helped form this society, but in the history books they are invisible, so my interest was to tell the story from the perspective of a woman and an immigrant of color.

BUTLER: You say that people of color were actually the majority. How did you find that out?

ALLENDE: I read a lot of letters written by wives of miners or pioneers who came, and by miners themselves. And those letters tell about life in the Gold Rush better than any history book. And then there is a fantastic collection of photographs.

BUTLER: And they show that people are not all white?

ALLENDE: Of course. You see the Chinese settlements; you see the Mexican settlements, the Indians panning for gold. You discover, for example, that the Indians did not scalp the whites; the whites scalped the Indians and collected the scalps.

BUTLER: Do you see parallels between the time of the Gold Rush and today?

ALLENDE: The racism. There is always racism. In that era, there were signs all over saying no dogs or Mexicans or Chinese allowed. Now, it is more hidden. I live in San Rafael, where there is a large Hispanic community. One day, United Markets published the life story of a little immigrant boy who came from El Salvador on one of the paper bags they give you for groceries. There was picketing in front of United Markets by white women who said they were going to boycott the market because they were promoting immigration.

People want immigrants of color to do the work, to take care of their children, walk their dogs, wash their cars, do their gardens□but then they want them to disappear at 6 o'clock. They don't want to know that they live crowded four or five families in a small apartment.

People who come here have never heard of welfare. You come because you are desperate□so desperate that you are willing to leave behind your extended family, your village, your community. You decide to come to a country like the United States, come north, to a place where you don't know the rules, the clues, the codes of the society. You have never driven a car. You have never lived away from your village. You don't speak the language. And then you come here, and you are usually very exploited for a long time.

There is overt fear of the immigrant. We always fear everything that is different. So when the women who go to United Markets see men who look dark waiting at the corner for the truck, any truck, to pick them up and give them a menial job for the day, they are scared. Because they see them as different. They don't see the misery.

The first generation comes here out of hardship only. But they have the hope that their children will be Americans. And their children will do well. My housekeeper, to give you an example, is from Nicaragua. She will probably die exhausted. But her kids will be professionals. One is studying to be a chef, another is a public accountant and another is studying administration. In Nicaragua, they wouldn't have a chance. Her grandchildren will be totally American; they will look American and they will not speak Spanish, just like my grandchildren. And they will probably look for their roots. They will say, "Oh, let me talk to my grandmother. I will go back to Nicaragua and find out about her!" While her children don't want to know anything about it. They want to be Americans.

BUTLER: Are there any parallels between your experience and that of your heroine in "Daughter of Fortune," or the experience of other immigrants?

ALLENDE: I am very privileged. I speak English. I am married to an American and therefore I am legal. I do not need a job. I have paid my way. Very few come like this.

My photograph is in the newspapers so people know who I am. They know I am Latin but they bear with me! But I see how my [former] daughter-in-law, who looks very Latin and speaks with a strong accent, can be discriminated against, and how angry that makes her. My grandkids are probably the only brown kids in their school. But if they do [face some discrimination], it's OK. I think it's good for them. It makes them aware of their race and makes them strong, and maybe they will have more dignity and more courage.

BUTLER: Will you ever feel like an American yourself? Do you define yourself as an exile or as an immigrant?

ALLENDE: I define myself as an immigrant. A first-generation immigrant. I think in Spanish, dream in Spanish, write in Spanish, cook and make love in Spanish. So there is always this thing that you have to express yourself in another language. But I feel very comfortable here and very happy in the United States. When I fell in love with my husband, Willie, I decided that I would adapt myself. I never had when I lived in Venezuela; I was always looking south, always wanting to go back to Chile, always nostalgic for my extended family. When I came here, I said, "No, I will cut off all this. I will be Willie's wife, and I will form another extended family here."

BUTLER: How is this extended family different from what you had in Chile?

ALLENDE: In Chile it was larger, it was natural. This is artificial. I have to make a tremendous effort to put it together and keep it together. Because everything here tends to separate people, not bring them together.

BUTLER: Was it hard for you to adapt to American ways? Or was it like learning a different dance step?

ALLENDE: I think of myself as a person who is always moving. That was my fate, my karma. And I accept. I would love to have had roots and have my grandchildren around me with a sense of belonging and all that. That's not going to happen. My grandchildren spend a week in their father's house and a week in their mother's house. And that's OK. You can't have everything. I have a lot.

BUTLER: And how about your own background? Is it American Indian as well as European?

ALLENDE: My family would say that we are fully European. But I do not believe that. I don't believe that anybody in Chile is fully anything; that we are the result of mixture. And even if we do not have it in the blood, we have it in the culture. And I think we should be very proud of that and rescue that from our background.

BUTLER: My favorite line in your new book is this: When Eliza is leaving for the north, you write that she "had the clear sensation of beginning a new story in which she was both protagonist and narrator." Did this ever happen to you?

ALLENDE: Yes. When I started writing *The House of the Spirits*, I was writing about myself and my family, but I realized I was the narrator. I had the incredible possibility of turning things around, for better or worse, to highlight some things and keep other things hidden, to create the legend of my own life.

BUTLER: Did that affect your sense of control of the narrative of your real life?

ALLENDE: No.

BUTLER: You already had a sense that you controlled your life?

ALLENDE: No. I had the idea that I was in control for a while. But when Paula fell sick I realized I didn't control anything. I looked back at my life and I realized that most of the things that had happened to me had happened by chance. I had not chosen. My karma seems to be to get what I never aimed for and to lose what I most love. So that is what my fate has been about. I don't have any feeling of control.

BUTLER: What did you get that you never aimed for?

ALLENDE: Success, celebrity. Never aimed for. I never expected that I would make enough money to support an extended family all by myself. Never hoped to do that.

BUTLER: What did you lose?

ALLENDE: I lost Paula. I lost my extended family. I lost my country. I lost a sense of belonging. I lost control over the things I would have wanted to control. But it's OK. I never expected I would find a man like Willie and fall in love late in my life and 12 years later still be madly in love. So that is unexpected. It is a gift that I never aimed for.

I learned the hard way losing Paula□her year of agony, in which I witnessed her slow death, unable to help her in any way. I learned that if I could not keep her alive, I could not make the lives of the people I love easier. I can't.

BUTLER: How did you let go?

ALLENDE: When she died. It took her a day and a night to die. This thing inside me broke. I let go of the anger against the things that had gone wrong in my destiny. About Paula's death. I had been very angry at the hospital. But the sadness took over, and I realized that it was nobody's bad intention. It had been a misfortune. And somehow I accepted that. It was like unfolding, unfolding of things. During the whole year that I wrote "Paula," this unfolding continued. Every single day.

I am a happier person now because I don't cling. I know that I can't have most of the things I wish I could have. To give you an example: We were going to buy a house up in the hills. And then it all turned out wrong and it's not going to happen. I promise that it didn't take me 30 seconds to let go. Willie's still angry, and he's hitting his head against the wall, and I say, "Willie, just let go." We have a nice house. We are going to be dead, naked, underground, some day very soon. So what is the problem?

BUTLER: Has anything changed for you recently?

ALLENDE: Paula's agony was too long, and too painful. I could not remember her dancing and laughing. I could only remember her in the wheelchair or hooked to all those machines with a respirator. Slowly, I think that has started to change. I went to Alaska on a cruise with my mother last spring, and one day we were in the front part of the ship, slowly going into a bay, where all the glaciers were. There was absolute silence and whiteness. Everything was white but the sky and the water. There was a sense of solitude and beauty. And I thought that Paula was OK. I started seeing her happy again. I started having a few dreams in which I didn't see her sick. The other day I dreamed that I saw her with lipstick. She never in her life wore any lipstick. But I saw her with lipstick, and she was talking to me. I woke up and told Willie. It was such a wonderful thing to meet her in a dream and she was OK.

Source: Katy Butler, "Isabel Allende on California's Mythic Past," (interview) in *Los Angeles Times,* October 10, 1999.

Quotes

"Barrabás came to us by sea, the child Clara wrote in her delicate calligraphy. She was already in the habit of writing down important matters, and afterward, when she was mute, she also recorded trivialities, never suspecting that fifty years later I would use her notebooks to reclaim the past and overcome terrors of my own" (p. 7).

"I didn't tell her that I hadn't seen any other women all that time except for a handful of shriveled old prostitutes, who serviced the whole camp with more good will than ability. But I did tell her that I had lived among rough, lawless men" (p. 46).

"She had been born to cradle other people's children, wear their hand-me-down clothing, eat their leftovers, live on borrowed happiness and grief, grow old beneath other people's roofs, die one day in her miserable little room in the far courtyard in a bed that did not belong to her, and be buried in a common grave in the public cemetery" (p. 144-145).

"He knew that her body was his to engage in all the acrobatics he had learned in the books he kept hidden in a corner of his library, but with Clara even the most abominable contortions were like the thrashings of a newborn; it was impossible to spice them up with the salt of evil or the pepper of submission" (p. 150).

"'That's the way it's always been, son. You can't change the law of God,' his father would reply.
'Yes, you can, Papa. There are people doing it right now, but we don't even get the news here. Important things are happening in the world,' Pedro Tercero countered, following up with the speech of the Communist teacher or Father José Dulce María" (p. 189).

"The Mother Superior received her in her Spartan office, where there was an immense, bloody Christ on the wall and an incongruous spray of red roses on the table" (p. 193).

"'I'm not getting married, Papa,' she said.
'Be quiet!' he roared. 'You're getting married. I don't want any bastards in the family, do you hear?'
'I thought we already had several,' Blanca replied" (p. 245).

"We carried our tools down the cypress-lined path, found the del Valle family tomb, and embarked on the lugubrious task of opening it. We cautiously removed the heavy stone that safeguarded Rosa's eternal rest and slid the white coffin from its niche" (p. 345).

"'Marxism doesn't stand a change in Latin America. Don't you know that it doesn't allow for the magical side of things? It's an atheistic, practical, functional doctrine. There's no way it can succeed here!'" (p. 347).

"'Stop acting like a bunch of faggots and take out your guns!' he shouted when there was talk of sabotage" (p. 395).

"'I speak to all those who will be persecuted to tell you that I am not going to resign: I will repay the people's loyalty with my life. I will always be with you. I have faith in our nation and its destiny. Other men will prevail, and soon the great avenues will be open again, where free men will walk, to build a better society. Long live the people! Long live the workers! These are my last words. I know my sacrifice will not have been in vain'" (p. 416).

"The first is an ordinary school copybook with twenty pages, written in a child's delicate calligraphy. It begins like this: Barrabás came to us by sea" (p. 488).

Adaptations

The House of the Spirits was released as a film in 1994 starring Meryl Streep, Jeremy Irons, Winona Ryder, Antonio Banderas, Vanessa Redgrave, Glenn Close, Armin Mueller-Stahl, and Maria Conchita Alonso.

Topics for Further Study

Research the political events of 1970-1975, and determine how closely Allende's novel depicts historical reality.

What role does magic play in this novel? Decide what the use of mysticism contributes to the story and how it is used to foreshadow events. Do the many ghosts function as an omen or just as a device to foreshadow events?

Examine the role of patriarchy in this novel and discuss how the Latin *machismo* of the men oppresses the women characters in Allende's novel.

Note the references to nature and animals and discuss how nature functions in this novel. Is there is a connection between nature and the supernatural?

Throughout the novel, there are many events in each woman's life that are repeated. At the conclusion, Alba remarks that the cycle of rape will probably continue. Discuss the cyclic nature of these women's lives, paying close attention to their relationships with men.

Discuss the undercurrent of political corruption, intrigue, graft, and influence peddling in Allende's novel.

Examine closely the character of Esteban Trueba. What qualities does he represent? Many critics feel that he deserves the reader's sympathy. Put together a well-constructed argument supporting this point.

What Do I Read Next?

Daughter of Fortune (1999), also by Isabel Allende, is the story of a young woman's journey to California during the gold rush of the ninetheenth century.

Paula (1995), by Isabel Allende, is a memoir that was begun when Allende's daughter became ill.

A Cultural History of Latin America: Literature, Music and the Visual Arts in the 19th and 20th Centuries (1998), edited by Leslie Bethell, provides a cultural history of Latin America. This book contains essays that place the artistic expressions of Latin America into a historical context.

Based on a True Story: Latin American History at the Movies (1999), edited by Donald Stevens, presents an overview of how movies have depicted the history of Latin America. This book covers history from the 1500s to the present as depicted in film.

Speaking of the Short Story: Interviews with Contemporary Writers (1997), edited by Farhat Iftekharuddin, includes interviews with many Latin-American writers, including Isabel Allende, Rudolfo Anaya, and Arturo Arias.

Children of Cain: Violence and the Violent in Latin America (1992), by Tina Rosenberg, is a journalistic account of the effect of the violence in Latin America. The book includes individual stories that help capture the reality of this world.

Topics for Discussion

Much of the novel is devoted to the meta-fictional history of the narrative from Clara's notebooks to Blanca's letters to Trueba's recollections to Alba's compilation. Why do you think the narrative is so self-involved with this aspect of the multi-generational family history?

Alba narrates in third-person while Trueba narrates in first person. While this is perhaps correct for biography and autobiography it also has a remarkable influence on the narrative development. Discuss how the novel's construction largely relies upon periodic shifts in narrator and narrative point of view.

Severo del Valle, father of fourteen children, buys and imports a British-made automobile that the family names and then uses for decades. Eventually, Severo and his wife are killed inside the car in a bad automobile accident. The narrative notes that the automobile is one of the first cars in the entire country. How does the fact of owning the first automobile characterize the del Valle family?

After reading the novel, do you conclude that Esteban Trueba really is a self-made man, pulling himself up from penury into upper class society? Or does his success owe more to inheriting land and position than to hard work? If Pedro Segundo García had really wanted to be a wealthy senator, do you think it could have been available to him?

The novel usually is categorized as a narrative of 'magical realism' where realistic events are intertwined with magical events such as Rosa's green hair and Clara's precognition. How do you think the 'magical' aspects of the novel influence the narrative development? Would the novel be essentially the 'same' novel if it were presented as a more-traditional narrative?

The most-prevalent character in the novel is Esteban Trueba. He is exceptionally sexist, nearly fascist in politics, and deems himself entitled to deference, money, and power because of his birth. Do you find Trueba a likable character? Why or why not? What aspects of his character are admirable? What aspects are not admirable?

Numerous characters in the novel can be equated to historic ("real") people, including the President, the General, the Poet, and so forth. In particular, Alba can be seen as a fictional representative of the author Isabel Allende. Do you think that making these sorts of comparisons aids in an interpretation of the narrative? Or are they meaningless comparisons that obscure clean textual reading? Discuss.

Further Study

Agosin, Marjorie, *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love: The Arpillera Movement in Chile, 1974-1994*, University of New Mexico Press, 1996.

This book examines the lives of ordinary women as they tried to survive general Pinochet's oppressive military rule. The Arpilleras are tapestries made with scenes of everyday life which served as memorials to lost loved ones. The book contains a forward by Isabel Allende.

Bethell, Leslie, *Chile Since Independence*, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

This book focuses on the economic, social, and political history of Chile since it achieved independence from Spain in 1818. It contains much of the detail that establishes the background for Allende's novel.

Galeano, Eduardo, *Open Veins of Latin America; Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, Monthly Review Press, 1997.

This book provides a history of Latin America from a Marxist perspective. Since many of the characters in Allende's novel espouse socialist ideology, this book contributes some helpful background in understanding the political framework of the novel.

Kovach, Claudia Marie, "Mask and Mirror: Isabel Allende's Mechanism for Justice in *The House of the Spirits*," in *Postcolonial Literature and the Biblical Call for Justice*, University Press of Mississippi, 1994, pp. 74-90.

Kovach discusses symbols of the mask and the mirror in *The House of the Spirits.*

Rodden, John, ed., *Conversations With Isabel Allende*, University of Texas Press, 1999.

This book is a collection of 24 interviews with Allende from the 1980s and 1990s. In these interviews, Allende discusses her work and her life, offering readers insight into her perspective and motivations.

Tayko, Gail, "Teaching Isabel Allende's *La casa de los espiritus*," in *College Literature*, Vols. 19-20, Nos. 3-1, October 1992-February 1993, pp. 228-32.

This essay discusses how *The House of the Spirits* could be used in the classroom. This author argues

that Allende's novel works well to raise important issues about sexual, political, and economic oppression.

Toms, Michael, interview in *Common Boundary*, May/June, 1994, pp. 16-23.

Interview in which Allende discusses her writing methods and how her personal experience influences her work.

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Gordon, Ambrose, "Isabel Allende on Love and Shadow," in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 28, No. 4, Winter, 1987, pp. 530-42.

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Yardley, Jonathan, "Desire and Destiny in Latin America," in *Washington Post*, May 12, 1985, p. 3.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literature of Developing Nations for Students (LDNfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, LDNfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and

undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LDNfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LDNfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LDNfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LDNfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LDNfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literature of Developing Nations for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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□Night.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Literature of Developing Nations for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of LDNfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Literature of Developing Nations for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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