Paula Study Guide

Paula by Isabel Allende

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Paula published in Spanish in 1994 and English in 1995, is the first nonfiction book by Isabel Allende, one of today's most influential Latin-American authors. An autobiography framed by the author's experience of watching her only daughter's slow death, the book is "equal parts heartbreak, humor and wisdom," as described by Cynthia Dockrell in her review for the *Boston Globe*. Allende wrote the book while her daughter Paula was in a coma from 1991 to 1992 and uses her writing to preserve memories as she teaches herself to let her daughter go. Like with her first, landmark novel, *The House of the Spirits*, Allende followed a personal tradition of letter-writing to begin Paula and did not think of the audience: "It was meant to become a journal that I would give to my children and my grandchildren," she said to Dockrell. The book that was never meant to be published became an instant bestseller in several countries.

Many reviewers have pointed out that Allende's first work of nonfiction reads like a novel□in fact, German and Dutch translations of *Paula* were subtitled "A Novel"□but the author differentiates between genres even in the book itself. When describing the evening she met her second husband, on anight of the full moon with Sinatra singing from the restaurant's speakers, Allende adds: "This is the kind of detail that is forbidden in literature ... The problem with fiction is that it must seem credible, while reality seldom is." This time around, the reality behind the inspirations for many eccentric, mystical, larger-than-life characters and adventures in Allende's earlier works are revealed in her descriptions of actual people and events□proving that her fictional work often stems from the author's life itself.

Author Biography

Allende was born on August 2,1942, in Lima, Peru, the first child of affluent Chilean parents: her parents were Tomas, a diplomat and the nephew of future Chilean President Salvador Allende, and Francisca (Llona Barros) Allende. Following the couple's divorce three years later, the author's mother returned to her parents' home in Santiago where Allende grew up. In 1953, her mother married Ramon Huidobro, a Chilean diplomat who took his new family to his posts in Bolivia, Europe, and Lebanon over the next five years. Allende graduated from a private high school in Santiago, Chile, and shortly after married Miguel (Michael) Frias.

After working as a secretary for a couple of years, Allende began successful careers in the theatre and print and broadcast journalism. She also had two children. In 1970, Salvador Allende won the popular election and became president of Chile, only to die three years later in a right-wing military coup. Allende lost her job on political grounds and the family began receiving threats from supporters of the new regime; they fled Chile and sought asylum in Venezuela in 1975. During Allende's life in exile, her marriage fell apart; eventually, she remarried and now lives in California with her second husband.

While in exile, Allende began a letter to her grandfather that turned into her first novel, *The House of the Spirits*; published in 1982, it quickly became a bestseller in several countries. *Paula*, published in 1995, is Allende's autobiography, con-textualized by her daughter's death in 1992, a year after Paula fell into a coma due to a rare blood disease. As Allende states in an interview with Farhat Iftekharuddin for *Speaking of the Short Story: Interviews with Contemporary Writers*: "I think that I am still in [the] tunnel of pain, but the fact that I finished the book has been like a catharsis in many ways. So, when I started writing [*Paula*], my only goal was to survive."

Recent novels include *Aphrodite: A Memoir of the Senses* (1998) and *Daughter of Fortune* (1999).

Plot Summary

Part One: December 1991 to May 1992

Sitting by Paula's hospital bed in Madrid and waiting for any sign of improvement as her daughter lies in a coma caused by a rare blood disease, Allende begins to tell the story of her life with the purpose of offering her own past to her ill daughter. "Listen, Paula. I'm going to tell you a story, so that when you wake up you will not feel so lost."

Allende begins with her Chilean heritage and national history, her family tree, the controversial circumstances of her parents' marriage, and Allende's birth. Often switching between the vivid memories of the past and the silent waiting of the present by Paula's hospital bed, the narrator introduces a complex web of relatives that surrounded her during her childhood, after the scandalous divorce of her parents: her father abandoned the family after a political scandal at the Peruvian embassy, in which he might have been involved. Back in her maternal grandparents' home in Chile, little Allende forms strong and lasting bonds with family members and begins to develop a sense of liberal politics as she observes the lives of her family's servants. She also learns the art of storytelling from her spirit-summoning grandmother Meme and her grandfather Tata. After her mother's marriage to Chilean diplomat Tio Ramon, the family moves again, and Allende spends her teenage years in Lebanon. Because of the political unrest in the region during the 1950s, she is sent back to Santiago to finish school; there she meets her first husband Michael. They have two children, Paula and Nicolas.

Allende proceeds to write about her professional adventures, from her work for the United Nations to her work as a journalist. During the 1960s, Allende relates how she developed into a feminist liberal while traveling and greatly expanding her social life. When she attempts to interview poet Pablo Neruda, he advises her to use her creative talents to write fiction; advice she will eventually take. Further, the author recalls the victory of Salvador Allende in 1970, only to contrast it with the events three years later when the military coup under Augusto Pinochet fully disrupts the life she had in Chile. The first part of the book ends with the heavy atmosphere of a Chilean police state and terror that is yet to be fully comprehended.

Part Two: May to December 1992

In the second part of the book, as she learns of Paula's brain damage and the impossibility of her recovery, Allende abandons the letter format of her writing and proceeds to tell a story as an autobiography. While moving Paula to California, where she can take care of her in her home, the author begins to recall the years of her life after 1973, when her homeland changed forever.

Many people around Allende suffer under the Pinochet regime, and she and her family organize ways of helping those in need, always afraid of possible consequences. The author loses her job as a journalist for political reasons, and the family begins to feel the pressure of anonymous threats. In 1975, they flee Chile and seek asylum in Venezuela, where Allende experiences one of the worst periods of her life. With great difficulty, she finds a job as a school administrator, but the rest of her life seems to be falling apart. As her relationship with Michael begins to disintegrate, Allende looks for comfort in an affair that ultimately ends her marriage. Exasperated and depressed, the author begins to write to her dying grandfather (Tata) in Chile; the letter becomes a novel, *The House of the Spirits*. At this point, Allende explains the somewhat superstitious process she goes through in her work, the purpose of her writing, and the techniques she employs; she also recalls the connections between the real people and events in her life and the characters and adventures described in her fiction.

Allende's marriage seems beyond salvation, so she divorces her first husband in 1987; about a year later, she meets Willie and remarries, moving to California with him. Settling into her new life and new professional identity as a writer in America, Allende criticizes the role of the United States in Latin America. At the house she shares with Willie, she takes care of Paula and slowly accepts the inevitable. She lets her go with a final goodbye, and the book ends with Paula's departure into the world of spirits, exactly one year after she fell into a coma.

Part 1, Pages 3 -19

Part 1, Pages 3 -19 Summary

Isabel Allende is a native of Chile, her father a cousin of Salvador Allende. At the beginning of this non-fiction work, we are told by the author that her adult daughter Paula is critically ill in a hospital in Spain. The author has joined her side. Initially, her daughter slips in and out of consciousness from complications of porphyria.

In order to pass the time, the writer, who has written many successful novels, is encouraged to write a novel or some factual accounts of the family history while she is sitting by her daughter's side. She is writing this book as though it is a letter to her daughter, one she hopes Paula will read when she recovers from her illness. Rather than having chapters, the book simply continues on much like a diary. In the early entries, the author goes back and forth between her own family history and the day-to-day events that occur at the hospital.

Ms. Allende starts by making it clear that her mother's side of the family descended from men who migrated to Chile from the Basque area of Spain. Due to intelligence, a drive to succeed and some good choices in business investments, each generation improves the fortunes of the family. Isabel's grandfather had been very poor as a young man, as his father died while he was still a teenager. Isabel's grandparents on her mother's side of the family work hard to become rich and well placed in society. Ms. Allende focuses first on her grandparents who were always there for her. Her grandmother was a very spiritual person who saw visions of dead people and claimed to have some psychic abilities. Most people in the family believed the grandmother, nicknamed Memé, or simply tolerated her spirituality. Memé believed in a natural approach to life, including keeping chickens and goats about the courtyard, even though they lived in the city of Santiago. The household made foods such as plum jam from trees in the yard. Memé would wake and speak of her own dreams as prophecies.

The grandfather was called Tata. Ms. Allende writes that her grandparents had a whirlwind courtship as Tata fell in love with Memé at first sight. Memé was the youngest of twelve children and very young when they married. Tata owned land east of the Andes on which he raised sheep. The family also had a second home on the ocean in the far south of Chile where the family would vacation every summer. Isabel's mother was the only daughter with several brothers. The home in Santiago housed several generations of family members. The men would leave on business matters for long periods of time, leaving Memé in charge.

Isabel's mother was a beautiful young lady who was courted by many members of the elite society once she became a teenager. She had led a sheltered life. She was educated at a girls' Catholic school. Her first love was Tomás Allende, first cousin of Salvador Allende. There were

rumors that Tomás liked to party and gamble and there was even a whispered rumor of an illegitimate child. However, he swept Isabel's mother off of her feet. Grandfather Tata took the family to Spain to spend time in Europe, hoping Paula's mother would find a handsome new suitor and forget Allende. Unfortunately, just as the ship landed, World War II broke out in Europe. They were forced to scramble to return home on a tramp steamer in order to get away from war. Once they got home, Tomás Allende presented himself to Paula's mother and they were soon married.

Through family connections, Allende received the appointment of secretary to the Chilean embassy in Peru. Thus, the new bride began marriage in a new country without any family there to help. She became pregnant with Isabel on the honeymoon. As the wife of a government official, she was expected to entertain, in spite of her duties as a new mother. Her mother, Memé, sensed her daughter needed her and she arrived just in time for Isabel's delivery. At that time, Isabel's mother was kept apart from the baby in the hospital. She was so distressed at the separation and the unfamiliarity of the hospital, that Isabel's mother and Memé snuck into the nursery of the hospital, grabbed the baby, and left before they were absolutely sure they had the right baby. Thus began the family joke about whether Isabel was really a blood relative.

Over several years, Tomas Allende had managed to finagle and maintain a station above himself by providing wine, women and gambling to other men in society in Peru. He kept an apartment for assignations of others and even had a two-way mirror so that he could guarantee what he wanted by blackmail, if necessary. However, one of the assignations proved disastrous for those involved and caused such a scandal that Tomás was forced to go into hiding.

Isabel was three years old and her brother was barely a toddler when their mother gave birth at home, unable to afford the hospital.

The Chilean embassy sent over an official to discretely assist Mrs. Allende and her children pack for the return to Chile. The man was Ramón, later known by the children as Tío Ramón. With the exception of Salvador Allende, Isabel never saw her father or any of his side of the family again. Isabel and her mother and brothers returned to Santiago to move back in with Memé and Tata. Ramón had fallen in love with Isabel's mother. He began a long process of leaving his wife and eventually would come to be the father figure who raised Paula.

Part 1, Pages 3 -19 Analysis

Isabel Allende begins this non-fiction book by going into the historic details of her family. She is placing the time frame by giving approximate dates of events such as the birth of her mother and the life of her grandparents. The author sets the theme of the book as a diary with a stream of consciousness style in which she goes from then current events back to historical information. She explains what kind of man her father was and how he came to abandon his family.

Part 1, Pages 19 - 23

Part 1, Pages 19 - 23 Summary

The author begins this part of the book by discussing what she was doing when she received the phone call that her daughter was seriously ill in a hospital in Madrid. She had recently published a new novel, *The Infinite Plan,* and had been on a book tour in Spain when she was notified. Thus, she was able to join Paula in a matter of hours, as opposed to having to travel from San Francisco, California, her home. The initial report was that Paula had the flu, so no one was seriously concerned about her illness until she began vomiting blood. The author was glad to be close by, but disheartened that the porphyria apparently had been poisoning her body unnoticed for sometime. She felt guilty at not having noticed Paula's problem immediately. The writer related that Paula was happily married and devoting her life to volunteer work with underprivileged children at a Catholic school in Madrid. Paula's last words to the author were that she loved her, before she slipped into a comatose state.

Paula's husband Ernesto and the writer took turns sitting with Paula when they were allowed into the intensive care area. Ernesto was a Spaniard and was able to reach his nearby relatives who joined them. After tests, the doctor advised them that Paula was critically ill. Isabel and Ernesto began notifying relatives, many of whom were in the Western Hemisphere. As the days went by, the writer settled into a routine of waiting for hours in the hallway until she could see her daughter briefly twice a day. Isabel's mother arrived from South America and she began sharing a hotel room. They used a hot plate in the room to prepare simple meals and occasionally someone would arrive with food. In a matter of days, Paula's father and Ernesto's father, both of whom lived in South America, arrived. Occasionally, Isabel's husband Willie would fly in from California. Isabel related that she felt completely out of time and place, surrounded by others who were also there to see loved ones in intensive care.

The author acknowledges that she felt a weakness in her inability to put Paula in God's hands, while Ernesto seemed more fatalistic about the possible death of Paula. The author discussed the surrealistic feeling of having everything in her life out of control. She stated that the only certainty of her life was the hospital; everything else evaporated into a mist. She goes on at length of the nature of her life and Paula's life becoming intertwined and that she felt their souls were going together down rapids. The author relates that she began seeing images of various times in her life, including her own childhood and Paula's childhood, in rapid, disjointed fashion. She admits that she had always been secretive about many things from her childhood and never wanted to share those things as stories incorporated into any of her fictional novels. She says that she is so worried about Paula losing so much of her memory when she recovers, that for the first time ever, she puts these memories in writing to help Paula reorient herself when she recovers from her coma.

Part 1, Pages 19 - 23 Analysis

The writer explains that she is out of her normal routine and "lost" among the medical bureaucracy of the hospital in Madrid. Isabel is discussing her strengths and weaknesses in regard to her own religious beliefs. She believes in a bond between mother and daughter that surpasses all others. One can tell by the fact that Isabel Allende has relatives and friends coming from all over the world, and that she is a widely traveled person who has been exposed to many cultures.

Part 1, Pages 23 – 49

Part 1, Pages 23 – 49 Summary

The author returns to the time in her early life when her mother and brothers first return to Santiago, Chile. They moved into one large bedroom in Tata's house. Isabel was enrolled in various schools. She was expelled from some due to her strong will and rebelled against any conformity demanded by the nuns. She was so petite that she was sent to various places for exercises and told to suspend herself upside down in hopes it would help her grow. Eventually at puberty, she reached five feet. While she was very young, her grandmother died. Tata was so distressed that the caged songbirds were released and all music and liveliness seemed to evaporate from the house. Even the nanny goat slipped out of the gate and it was killed by a passing cart. Isabel had already been made aware of her grandmother's belief in spirits and life after death. Isabel attempted to stay in touch with her grandmother by pinning notes to the back of heavy drapes in the formal living room of the house. The domestic help insisted they could feel Memé's spirit moving about the house. Isabel admits that she loosely based the character of Clara in *The House of Spirits* on her grandmother.

Tata became very depressed over the loss of his wife. He painted all of the furniture black and forbade music in the house. He would spend long periods of time alone in his bedroom and withdrew from many social functions. In spite of this, Isabel knew he loved the family and would die protecting them if necessary. Isabel's mother obtained an annulment of her marriage to Tomás Allende and obtained a position in a bank to earn money. Two brothers of Isabel's mother also lived in the home and served as role models for Isabel and her brothers. Uncle Pablo would help financially and warded off any possible social scandal when Isabel's mother had her marriage annulled.

Uncle Pablo loved to read. He had a small cot in the middle of his bedroom so that he could fill up the walls with bookcases. He exposed Isabel to many great books and encouraged her curiosity by giving her a flashlight so that she could read late into the night. The uncles relished teasing the children of the house. Tata tolerated the teasing as he felt it strengthened character. Occasionally the family would go up into the nearby hills for a Sunday afternoon picnic to socialize and watch the city below. It was there that Isabel would socialize with Salvador Allende and his family. Tata and his sons were in the wool business and would travel east of the Andes from time to time. They would visit their ranches to see the sheep shearing and to prepare the wool for shipment to Scotland.

Isabel's mother made so little money at the bank that she made extra money by making fine hats to be shipped to Peru. Tata and Uncle Pablo also contributed financial support. Isabel needed partial scholarships to afford Catholic schools, so the family all pressed her to study hard. At night, her mother would tell the children fanciful stories to keep them entertained and Isabel ascribes her love of story telling to her mother. Isabel's brother Pancho ran away from home as a teenager to join a religious cult. He would

very infrequently cross paths with Isabel. She knew he had married and divorced twice and had several children. Like her father, Pancho simply walked out and never came back.

Isabel's brother Juan was the great mind of the family. He studied extensively and received two master's degrees as well as a doctorate. He married and began teaching theology at a university in the United States. As soon as he learned of Paula's illness, he joined Isabel in Madrid. He prayed at Paula's bedside for her recovery. Isabel admitted she was feeling a loss of time, almost as if Paula were returning to her womb. She thinks back to her childhood and how her mother suffered excruciating pain from migraine headaches. Isabel was always worried that if her mother died, she and her brothers would be forced to go live with their absentee father. Isabel would secretly pray that she would be strong and healthy like Tata, and not weak like her mother.

Isabel was sorry that she had not been born a boy. Tata would go with his brothers to the ranches for the sheep shearing. He would hunt and camp out under the stars. Isabel felt this was most exotic and was saddened that as a girl she was only invited along once. She loved the trees in the mountains. The author remarks that whenever she is trying to draw strength from the memories of childhood, the only ones she remembers that she adores are the beauty of the landscape in the Chilean mountains. When she thinks of Chile, this is the most beautiful part.

There were times when Tata would take her and her brothers to see wrestling matches, most of which sounds very similar to the WWF, with disguises and outrageous costumes. In the Southern Hemisphere, summer is from mid-November to mid-February, so most families would combine Christmas with a vacation. Tata owned a second home on the beach in South Chile that the family would go to every year. They would stop along the way and buy eggs and produce for meals upon arrival. Tata liked to buy live turkeys to eat after they arrived. The turkey would be tied up and placed among the baggage on top of the car. Tata would make necessary repairs to the ramshackle house to keep it going one more year.

There were many families who did the same thing yearly. The men would stay for a while but most would return to their jobs in the city. The women would form social groups to keep themselves entertained at the beach until the men returned to take them back to the city at the end of February. The town was rustic, mostly fishermen and tradespeople who lived simple lives in small houses. One year an artist who lived there year-round was found murdered. He had been inviting local men to pose for him and he would invite them to stay and drink with him for days at a time. The women got tired of their husbands hanging out with him and secretly murdered him. Even though everyone in town knew who was involved, the crime remained unsolved since no one would talk to the police.

Isabel then turns in the book to her mother's love affair and long-term romance with Ramón. Shortly after Isabel and her family left Peru to return to Chile, Ramón's wife and children returned to Santiago and Ramón transferred to the embassy in Bolivia. He began the drawn-out attempts to annul his marriage in order to be free to marry Isabel's

mother. Every time he believed there was another suitor who might win her over, he would return to Santiago long enough to convince Isabel's mother to wait for him. They even managed to have a quiet rendezvous in the north of Chile. With the scandal about to explode in polite society, Tío Ramón pledged his undying love for Isabel's mother and moved into Tata's house. Isabel admits she was jealous at first of this ugly man, but came to love him as the only father figure she had growing up.

Part 1, Pages 23 - 49 Analysis

The author begins explaining to the reader the social climate in which she was reared. She had two very dramatic grandparents. .She knew her mother was socially at risk due to the abandonment by her father. Likewise, she knew her future in Chilean society was limited in regard to education and career choices. With divorces virtually non-existent, a woman was vulnerable to economic pressures in exchange for annulments. We can tell that Isabel knew she would have had many more choices and could have been active in the family wool business had she been a male. We can tell, however, that Isabel was able to see a positive romantic relationship between her mother and Ramón.

Part 1, Pages 49 - 71

Part 1, Pages 49 - 71 Summary

The author turns to the times of her early childhood when she was introduced to books and the joy of storytelling. She admits that in spite of how close she is to her mother, she has pledged to never use her mother as a fictional character in anything she writes. In her memories of her childhood, the author believes that she was lonely, and out of this loneliness, she began hatching stories. Out of her loneliness, she began asking questions and she believes that in her case, her writing was her attempt to find answers.

Isabel next turns in her book to her relationship with Tío Ramón. He shared a vehicle with another man and they would take Isabel's brothers and mother out for rides. Sometimes they would go to the orchards at a mental institution to pick fresh fruit. Isabel would spend many days and nights down in the basement of the home. She would use candles or the flashlight to read many books, some written by American authors such as Twain. For her ninth birthday, Tío Ramón gave her the complete set of William Shakespeare, which she read many times. She grew to love the intrigue of the plots and was first given her inspiration for mysterious twists in the stories she would later write. One Christmas, Santa left her paints and brushes and a note that she could paint murals on her bedroom walls. A Chagall print was on the wall and she realized for the first time that art, and writing, did not have to follow formulas of gravity and space. She admitted that she painted for many years as a way of expressing herself. She would paint over the murals and change them from time to time. When the family was moving from the house, Isabel's mother gave her a diary and suggested that she use that form of expressing herself. Isabel admits she poured out her heart in that diary and she realizes that she is doing it again for Paula.

Isabel relates the story of how Paula met Ernesto. They were both students. After Paula completed her master's, they married and returned to Spain, where he worked as an engineer and Paula began volunteering as a school psychologist. On their first anniversary, Paula would already be in a coma. The author relates how devoted Ernesto is to Paula, coming daily, leaving items under her pillow for her to smell, making tape recorded messages for Isabel to hold up to her ears to play.

Isabel thinks back to her first childhood crush on a boy. When she was age eleven, Tío Ramón was assigned to the Chilean embassy in La Paz, Bolivia. In spite of not being married, Isabel's mother and her children accompanied him there. They set up a household as though married and society quietly looked the other way. Isabel recalls a visit from the ghost of Memé telling her she was tired of the house and ready to go with her. To Isabel, seeing her grandfather in the street from the rear window of the car meant the end of her childhood.

La Paz was beautiful and exotic to Isabel. New sites and sounds and smells in the rarefied atmosphere of a city seemed so close to Heaven. In school, Isabel became enamored of a young Bolivian boy. The schoolmates realized her ardor and were forever teasing her as the Chilean outsider with a crazy crush. The love was not reciprocated and ultimately she ended up in a wrestling match with him in the schoolyard, where only a nip on his ear was to be her passionate exposure to unrequited love.

About two years later, Tío Ramón was transferred to the embassy in Lebanon. While he flew on ahead to go to work, Isabel's mother packed up all of their belongings and began the long sea voyage, followed by train through Europe to Beirut. While in Beirut for three years, Isabel was able to travel to other parts of the mid-east with the family. This was in the 50's, when Israel was in near outright war with its Arab neighbors. Society constrained Isabel and her mother. They were on a tight budget and Tío Ramón made one room of the apartment the Chilean consulate, so that the family was forced to keep the place clean and to be on their best behavior.

Isabel admits she resented Tío Ramón for becoming the man of the family and for taking them away from Santiago. She admits she tried to sabotage the love between him and her mother. She learned to respect him as the years passed. Isabel was enrolled in a school for British girls. In this way, she learned some English and some religion. Tío Ramón would ask Isabel what she was learning in school. Frequently he would say he disagreed with what was being taught. He would debate with Isabel and began to force her to make her own judgments, which she admits has served her well over the years.

Isabel became mature enough to begin attending functions at various embassies in Beirut. Her stepfather taught her to dance and he bought her nicer dresses for the parties. On one occasion at the British embassy, she was too afraid to go and tried to beg off from going to the dance. Tío Ramón made her go and told her that everyone else was just as afraid as she was. This comment has stuck with Isabel and whenever she is in a new environment and frightened, she thinks back to his comment. Dance music was changing. Rock and roll and Elvis Presley had made it as far as Lebanon.

Tio Ramón had a large wardrobe and in part of it, he had hidden some racy magazines, cigarettes and chocolates. Isabel and her brothers became adept at breaking in, taking the chocolates but rewrapping the boxes so that it was not immediately apparent that the treats were gone. Once Ramon realized that this had happened, he called them in and had a "policeman" there, ready to arrest them. They were told they could avoid arrest if they confessed their sins immediately. Years later Isabel realized that the "policeman" looked suspiciously like a driver for the embassy. She knew Ramón was capable of such tricks. She again went into the wardrobe where she found *A Thousand and One Nights.* Whenever her parents were out of the house she would break in and read snatches of the book.

Part 1, Pages 49 - 71 Analysis

The author is introducing us to her travels and exposure to different cultures. She is also developing into an independent thinker. However, she still believes in spirits and matter-of-factly describes a visit from Memé. She does discuss her first exposure to the politically charged atmosphere of Beirut, Lebanon. She admits that Tío Ramón was a good teacher.

Part 1, Pages 71 - 109

Part 1, Pages 71 - 109 Summary

Isabel turns her diary to Spain, to her dreams of Paula. She awakens, crying, believing that a dream of Paula is about her death. Isabel's mother is there to comfort her and to analyze the dream in such a way as to take the premonition of death out of it. Isabel is not so sure. She feels that Paula's coma has lasted too long. She cannot enjoy Spain under the circumstances and just wants to get Paula better so she can return to San Francisco.

Various family members and friends come to visit. Isabel witnesses the heart wrenching visits Ernesto makes with his wife. Isabel has grown close to him. Isabel's husband Willie comes from America to visit for a few days every few weeks. A family friend who is a physician comes from Venezuela. He is given access to Paula's charts. He tells Isabel the prognosis is not good and that Paula may die. Isabel and her mother turn to the quiet of the chapel to be able to pray and gather their thoughts. Isabel wants more than anything for Paula to reawaken, even if she would be an invalid for the rest of her life. Isabel realizes that neither she nor Ernesto is ready to let Paula go. But she realizes that for every day that Paula remains in a coma, there is one day less of hope. Isabel believes her task is to distract death and not let it find Paula.

Isabel returns to her memories of Lebanon in the late 50's. She remembers the art of bargaining in the bazaars; she remembers how her mother acquired beautiful material to make Isabel's wedding dress some day. In 1958, the American Sixth Fleet landed and began staying in Beirut to stave off skirmishes between various political factions there. The apartment that Isabel's family was living in was at the edge of several neighborhoods where some violence had occurred. Tío Ramón had ordered them to place mattresses in front of the windows and to stay home, but they would watch for violence from the windows anyway. They went to the docks to meet the American sailors. On one excursion when Isabel had gone ice-skating, she was actually grabbed and kissed by an American sailor. The schools began closing. Tío Ramón insisted that Isabel stay home when not at school. She felt as if she were trapped in a harem. Eventually her school also closed and Isabel and her brothers were put on a commercial airplane. Isabel returned to Tata's home at age 15. Her mother and stepfather stayed behind to set up a Chilean embassy in Turkey. Isabel and her mother got into the habit of writing to each other every day when apart.

Isabel's grandfather realized that Isabel's education had been sporadic and incomplete. He had her study some materials from books at the house, but turned her over to an older woman for math tutoring. Isabel was free to travel by bus throughout Santiago and began meeting boys. She became entranced by one student who took her to see a movie after a math class, but he then disappeared. Years later when Isabel was called to the morgue to identify her father's body, she realized that the boy looked so much like him; he might have been Isabel's brother.

Soon, Isabel met another young man, Michael, her future husband and Paula's father. He and his parents were British. His father was an engineer overseeing production at a mine in Chile that was owned by a North American conglomerate. At age twenty, Michael was studying engineering and living in an apartment. He had a maid who cooked and cleaned for him. They began a very slow courtship. Michael and she both had many years of schooling ahead of them. It was almost a year before he kissed her.

Paula has a medical crisis and almost dies. Isabel's mother offers herself to God in place of Paula. However, Paula pulls through and Isabel returns to the discussion of being courted by Michael. Isabel was courted the old-fashioned way, with Michael coming to Tata's home for Sunday dinner and on Wednesdays being allowed to go see a movie. Isabel was impressed with the way Michael's parents accepted her. She knew they had hoped he would marry a woman of English descent. Michael's father was very politically conservative and was suspicious of Isabel due to her family connection to Salvador Allende. Isabel appreciated the way he managed to avoid voicing his political concerns when he first met her. Isabel admits that at this time in her life she was very politically naïve and wasn't interested in politics.

Isabel's first job after high school graduation was to present herself to a branch of the United Nations which had offices in Santiago. She claimed she could type. The man who was in charge of the office was gone for a month when she arrived. During his absence, she taught herself how to type and how to act like a secretary, so that when he returned, she was able to convince him to keep her. The office was the Food and Agriculture Organization. It turned out the boss knew her family and transferred her into the Office of Information. It was there that she began making television appearances to disseminate agricultural information. She also was exposed to the rudiments of journalism in preparing press releases.

Isabel then remembers an event that occurred at the beach house at Christmastime, 1950. She was lured into the woods by a local fisherman she had met at the beach. She did not know he wanted to make sexual advances for his own gratification. She was so young that she did not know what petting meant. He invited her again the next day, and told her to keep quiet about it, but he didn't show up. Since this event did not result in actual intercourse, she did not equate this with the growing sexual urges she was feeling for Michael.

Part 1, Pages 71 - 109 Analysis

The author is telling us of her adolescence. She is being exposed to more adult events and she realizes that she was very encumbered in Middle Eastern society, as opposed to being free to ride buses, unchaperoned, all over Santiago. She has her first kiss and she begins dating Michael, the man who would become her first husband. However, she admits that even though she grew up in the home of an ambassador, she was not encouraged to think about politics. Isabel admits she is relying on family and friends who come to visit to give her the emotional support she needs in this critical time during Paula's hospitalization.

Part 1, Pages 109 – 130

Part 1, Pages 109 – 130 Summary

Isabel pushes the doctors to try to wean Paula off of oxygen. She hopes this will either help her to wake up or to at least make it easier to transport her to another location such as home.

The doctors are leery, but agree to cut back on the oxygen a little more every day to see what Paula can tolerate. Isabel believes that if they don't, Paula will slip away from her earthly bounds.

Isabel goes on to talk about her relationship with Willie, her husband, a man she came to know when she was in her 40's. She then contrasts that mature love to the young, innocent and ultimately disastrous love she felt for Michael. When Isabel was only nineteen, Tío Ramón was sent to Switzerland to be Chile's representative there. Isabel and Michael were married and moved into the house that Isabel's mother and Tío Ramón owned. Michael continued in his education and Isabel continued to work. They led the life of young, financially strapped college students.

Tata became very seriously ill and Isabel spent as much time with him as possible. He made her promise to assist him in dying with dignity when the time came. He actually had pneumonia and a stroke when he was eighty, but recovered and lived almost twenty more years.

The author tells Paula that she was Tata's favorite great grandchild.

Isabel talks more of her daily routine with Paula. She describes how difficult it is to see the death of other patients in intensive care. Isabel admits she takes valerian to be able to sleep at night and that she has the same dream about Paula every night. Paula is moved from intensive care to a six-bed ward in the area of the hospital for neurology patients. Isabel gets to know the patients as well as the families who come to visit.

After Paula has been in the hospital for one hundred days, Isabel realizes her mother is exhausted and makes arrangements for her to return to Chile. Isabel thinks to this time as a blessing. Her mother was only twenty when Isabel was born and they have been constant companions in Madrid. Isabel describes the special intimacy only a mother and daughter can share.

Other family members are returning home to their own jobs. Ernesto's father goes back to the Amazon. Isabel tells us of what she has learned about Ernesto's father when they visited in the hospital. He was a young child when the Spanish Civil War erupted. Many people in his village, including his own father, were brutally murdered. His mother smuggled him and his two siblings out of the town. After the war, there was continued repression under Franco. Ernesto's father fled the country when one of his friends was taken in for questioning. He went from place to place, finally ending up in the Amazon

where he married and raised his family until the Franco regime fell. After returning to Spain, and meeting the woman who could have turned him in as a communist, he realized that the thirty years of exile had been pointless, as she had never confessed. Isabel wonders how his life would have differed had he not gone into exile. As it is, he is able to entertain Isabel with the tales of his adventures in the jungles of South America.

Part 1, Pages 109 - 130 Analysis

The writer begins focusing more on Paula and how other family members react to her medical crisis. The author learns more about the background of Ernesto's father and how he had come to flee Spain during Franco's regime. She admits to the need for medical help to be able to sleep. The reader can see Isabel's unwavering devotion to her daughter. The reader can visit the official website of Isabel Allende to see pictures of her various family members and to see the names of some members such as her mother and grandparents.

Part 1, Pages 130 to 162

Part 1, Pages 130 to 162 Summary

Isabel turns her chronicles to the early days of her marriage when she began broadcasting on Chilean television. At first, she was giving forestry reports, but since she was a pretty young woman, the television producers wanted her to begin a weekly program. This gave her some notoriety. When Paula was about two, Isabel and Michael received scholarships to study in Europe. Isabel took Paula to see her parents in Switzerland. Tío Ramón fell madly in love with Paula and began treating her like a princess. He set about making a world of magic and make-believe for Paula, to the point that Isabel worried about his sanity. He would wear all of his medals received from his service in the diplomatic corps and tell Paula they were medals for heroism in combat. Across from his office building was a lake with fountains timed to go off intermittently. He told Paula he owned the fountains and he would pretend to call to have them turned on when Paula came to visit. In reality, the "calls" were made shortly before he knew the fountains were timed to come on.

Isabel and Michael were living in Belgium at the time and both were students. Isabel was studying television. All of the other students were Black men from the Belgian Congo. It was a culture shock for Isabel as well as the Congolese, who were not used to seeing women being educated. In between semesters, Isabel, Michael and Paula would travel to various parts of Europe in a Volkswagen camper. They often slept in tents. Isabel's son Nicolás was conceived during a camping trip.

The return to Chile happened at a time when the political upheaval was really beginning. Salvador Allende was trying to win the election, promising more benefits and better minimum wages for the poorest workers. The Ultra Right wing factions of the military and the government did everything they could to scare the voters into rejecting the leftist politicians. Isabel, however, was preoccupied with her job and her two young children. Hippies were becoming the rage in Santiago, and Isabel admits she wore the clothes and painted flowers on her car, to the astonishment of her family.

In 1967, a new magazine was started for women. It contained some articles that addressed social issues, but mostly it was devoted to fashion and current events. Isabel was invited to write a humoristic, current events column. This gained Isabel even more notoriety. She did approach various people in an attempt to put together a more serious column, even approaching Salvador Allende, but she was always rebuffed. It was in her attempts to reach out to various public people for interviews that she realized how chauvinistic the men in Chile were at that time. Isabel went so far as to publish an interview with a woman who spoke on the condition of anonymity about how many wealthy women were having affairs because they were so underappreciated by their husbands. It caused an uproar in society in Chile. Isabel's husband and family were scandalized.

Isabel then writes about how she might have been liberated politically, but around the house, she was a wife, mother and housekeeper. She took her paycheck and used it for household expenses, never asking her husband about what he did with his income. Isabel returned to television, hosting a topical talk show. The public knew of her whereabouts and would often show up at the television station or at her home asking for personal help. Isabel came into her office one day to find a baby had been abandoned. Fortunately, the baby's grandparents arrived and took the baby. Michael's parents were so concerned about the safety of Paula and Nicolás that they began keeping the children at their home more and more to protect them. Isabel admits that it was at this time that she and Michael began drifting apart.

Isabel's mother and Tío Ramón returned from Switzerland so that he could fill a top spot in the diplomatic corps. Paula had gotten into trouble one day, writing an essay about her family lineage, including indicating that her grandfather was a prince. Shortly thereafter, Paula had to leave school early for a dental appointment. Tío Ramón arrived in a presidential limousine with two motorcycle escorts. He wore a lavish cape and had all of his medals on, so that the teacher was astonished when he arrived. Thereafter, the teacher believed anything Paula wrote.

Isabel writes that it was at this time that she was called to the morgue to identify a body. Her brother had joined a cult and disappeared, so she feared it was he. However, she didn't recognize the man. Tío Ramón arrived and told Isabel that this was her father, whom she had not seen since she was about two. It turned out that Isabel had an older half-brother and other siblings. She felt no connection to them and after her father's funeral, she never saw any of them again. However, at this time she thinks back to the fisherman who molested her and how she felt responsible for his death. The fisherman told her that if Tata ever found out that they had been together, Tata would kill him. When he turned up dead three days later, Isabel assumed that somehow Tata knew of the molestation and had made arrangements to have the fisherman killed.

Isabel writes that she has begun wearing white dresses and shoes to blend in with the hospital staff so that she can spend more time with Paula. Isabel has watched the therapists and nurses enough to know how to bend and turn her daughter, as well as change sheets and to bathe her. With six patients on the ward, Isabel knows that Paula will not get enough individual attention. On one occasion, Isabel tied Paula into a wheelchair and took her out onto a patio. Paula actually opened her eyes and looked at her surroundings, but because of her tracheotomy, she could not talk. Isabel felt that Paula was coming out of her coma and began explaining to her the circumstances. However, when she went back to the ward, her seeming consciousness disappeared. Willie has begun looking into the possibility of transporting Paula to the United States and to set up a room for her at home rather than continue to be without his wife. Various doctors and therapists believe that Paula needs to be in a long-term care facility, but no one believes Paula could withstand the rigors of flying from Madrid to San Francisco.

Part 1, Pages 130 - 162 Analysis

Isabel focuses more on her young married life. She was admittedly exposed to various cultures in the family's time abroad. She admits that she dressed like a hippie, in a watered-down fashion. Politics are heating up in Chile. Salvador Allende, a leftist politician, is gaining support for election by pledging improved working conditions and better wages for the lowest level of workers. Isabel tells the reader that she truly misses her home and her husband and she knows that Willie, her husband, has begun looking into rehabilitation centers near their home. She is torn in that like most mothers, she doesn't want to leave her critically ill daughter, but knows her marriage will fall apart if she doesn't return to California. Isabel has taken a more stealthy approach to being with Paula by dressing like a nurse.

Part 1, Pages 162 – 202

Part 1, Pages 162 – 202 Summary

Isabel is beginning to lose her strength. Part of her wants to let go, and she feels out of time and place in the cold of Spain. This is making her feel somber, and so her writing turns to a somber time, that of political upheaval in Chile in the 1970's. Salvador Allende was finally elected to the presidency of Chile. However, because his margin of victory was so slim, other parties and the military could covertly plot to sabotage any potential benefits he sought to bring into being.

Tío Ramón was appointed ambassador to Argentina, so Isabel was once again separated from her parents. Isabel turns to the reforms initiated by the Popular Unity Party. The government nationalized the mining of natural resources, which had previously been owned by foreign countries. True agrarian reform began and school programs to improve food for children and provide free milk were passed. However, the right wing was afraid of this and foreign investors were willing to assist in subtle sabotage. Foreign parts and tools didn't arrive, so when factories were stopped to make repairs, they couldn't start again. Tires didn't arrive so trucks broke down and couldn't move to make deliveries.

Salvador Allende dismissed his bodyguards and attempted to be the president of the people. Isabel remembers him as honest, brave and not one to back down from a fight. He had a quick wit and was determined to make his presence known. This angered the military and those who feared communism. Allende was an admitted Marxist. Isabel admits she was oblivious to the danger and didn't accept the portent of the food lines and rationing.

Food shortages resulted in staged strikes and public protests. Food was not really scarce, but due to lack of replacement tires, there were few trucks to deliver the food. Isabel would frequently send her children to Argentina, or wait to receive packages from her mother to replace what was becoming scarce in Santiago. Isabel turned her attentions to writing a play that was a satire about the life of an ambassador who can't do anything since he is completely surrounded by bodyguards. She also wrote several lighthearted musicals in which the unexpected happens.

These were performed in large cafes and drew a favorable response from the critics.

Isabel went undercover to write an expose on girlie shows. She was wearing a G-string and pasties, along with a tall, feathered headdress, when the national television station came in to film the revue as an exposé. Isabel appeared on national television dressed that way. She was scandalized and forced to resign from the children's television show where she had been employed. In spite of this, Michael said nothing and the children bragged about it to avoid being teased.

Isabel's mother retreated to a convent in Romania to rest. It was there that she met a Mr. Valentín Hernández, also there to rest and rejuvenate. They became fast friends and he returned to Venezuela when Isabel's mother returned to the embassy in Argentina. They would later need his assistance and he became a lifelong friend of the members of Isabel's family.

Isabel recalls the time that Pablo Neruda invited her to his home for a visit. He was the poet of Chile. After socializing for a while, he predicted great social upheaval in Chile and even believed that a military coup might occur. He thought either Salvador Allende would commit suicide or he would be forced into exile. Isabel scoffed at that possibility and she told Neruda that Chile was a great democracy and would never overturn democracy that way. Isabel tells Paula this to let her know how oblivious Isabel can be when things are happening all around her. One patient in the ward has been trying to tell Isabel that the doctors have seriously botched Paula's case and that she is only still alive because Isabel won't emotionally let go of her. Isabel begins to wonder if this is a truth she won't face.

Isabel then turns her diary back to early 1973 in Chile, where things are coming to a head politically and economically. For want of small parts, whole factories are closed. Whispers of money shortages cause widespread panic and runs on the banks. Because Allende had a coalition government, he was spending all of his time with various political factions trying to work out compromises. Whispers of a military coup grew. Isabel admits she had no idea what that meant. Many people thought that the military would step in, depose Allende, establish an interim government and call for elections in two or three months. They had no idea what the military and Augusto Pinochet had in mind. Allende called for a referendum vote to be held on September 11, 1973.

Isabel returns to the present. The neurologists determine that medical tests are necessary, especially to check for Paula's nervous system. Electrical probes are attached and used in the testing process. It reminds Isabel of the tortures the military in Chile inflicted on people there after the coup. Isabel's daughter-in-law in San Francisco is pregnant and Isabel is turning her attentions to getting arrangements made to transport Paula there. Isabel is furious that the doctors on their rounds discuss Paula as if she weren't there. The staff is beginning to press the family to move her to an institution or into hospice care.

Isabel returns to September 11, 1973, the day the coup began in Chile. It started with the revolt of the Navy, followed by the other branches of the military and the police. Salvador Allende left the official residence and headed to the official presidential offices. He discouraged his supporters from rioting in the streets out of fear of mass bloodshed. Isabel admits she was astonished by the abruptness of it and goes into detail of the lockdown of the city. Allende sent his family away and waited in the presidential palace, vowing not to be taken alive. The military offered him safe passage out of the country. There were reports that he committed suicide, but the writer believes that he was killed by the military when he refused to surrender. Isabel quotes part of his speech to the people that he made via the radio shortly before the military stormed the palace.

Isabel went to work as usual, only to see the business padlocked. She then saw helicopters and bombers flying overhead flying toward the palace. Isabel went to a friend's house and tried to listen for news on the radio. Everything seemed to her to be in a lockdown mode. Neighbors began returning, reporting massive arrests and men seized from their offices. The telephone lines were overwhelmed and international calls virtually impossible to place, so Isabel was unable to contact her mother. In Argentina, Tío Ramón handed in his resignation as ambassador to the military members present at the embassy. He and Isabel's mother took a final inventory of the property of the embassy before they left so that they could not be accused of theft. They left the embassy unsure of their future.

Top ranking members of the military appeared on television to announce the "Military Pronouncement." For the first time, Augusto Pinochet appeared with them. He was head of the Chilean police. Thousands of vocal supporters of Allende were taken into custody. Makeshift prisons were set up in various places, including soccer fields. They executed thousands of Allende supporters because the holding areas were too crowded. They reported on the news that Salvador Allende committed suicide in a drunken stupor. Curfews were imposed and the television station only broadcast cartoons and benign movies. No independent news reporting was allowed to occur. The military refused to announce any plans for an election.

Any travel by car resulted in frequent stops and searches. Cars were supposed to be for emergency use only. The magazine Isabel wrote for reopened but the best reporters had fled and others were busy seeking asylum for themselves or relatives. Isabel was fired from all of her jobs within a few days. Women in the streets had their trouser legs cut off and men had beards forcibly shaved for being "communistic." The military junta sold mines and factories to foreign investors and sold massive fishing rights and the right to log old growth forests to the Japanese. No talks about an election were forthcoming; instead, a totalitarian regime took over the country.

Part 1, Pages 162 - 202 Analysis

The author is getting into much more detail about the election of Salvador Allende and the coup that would wreak havoc in Chile. What everyone has assumed would be a bloodless coup with quickly called elections was not to be. The dark hours in Chile remind the author of the dark, depressing times she is going through with her daughter's medical crisis. The reader may find this pat of the book to be most enlightening if one is interested in the political history of Chile in the 1970's.

Part 2, Pages 205 - 238

Part 2, Pages 205 - 238 Summary

Isabel turns the story to the doctors in the hospital. The scans have shown that Paula has suffered serious, irreversible brain damage. If she were to in any way recover, she would never go beyond the developmental level of an infant. The neurologist could not say if the brain damage was a result of malpractice or the progression of the porphyria. Isabel is devastated. She now knows that Paula will never read this diary. Isabel flashes back to her memories of Paula at various times of her childhood. Isabel makes the decision to take Paula home with her to San Francisco. Isabel states that the first major tragedy that became a turning point for her had been the coup in Chile. She knows that Paula's fatal illness is the second.

Isabel makes arrangements to get Paula to San Francisco by buying several first class airline tickets so that she can be stretched out. Paula's husband Ernesto and a registered nurse accompany them on the flight. Upon arrival in San Francisco, Paula is taken straight to a clinic that Willie has found. Paula's blood pressure has dropped and her health is very precarious upon arrival. Isabel talks to Paula to remind her of her surroundings. She tells Paula that times had been dark when they fled Chile; they had managed to make it through. She tells Paula that she will make it through this dark time.

The author returns to the time when life was so difficult in Chile that the family decided they must flee. Pablo Neruda died a mere twelve days after the coup, in very poor health, but refusing to leave his people. Against the advice of her family, Isabel helped several people flee Chile shortly after the coup. She would hide people or sneak into areas of Santiago to take food to the poorest people. She found an underground network of nuns and priests and she would assist them in helping others flee. In the summer of 1974, Isabel realized the danger she had put herself and her family into by such actions.

Chile began working again, but the government had abolished minimum wage and erased most of the safety statutes and medical benefits to employees, thus making employees work for such a paltry sum that many were at risk of starving to death. Isabel's parents had been forced to flee Argentina when the death squads from Chile arrived and began assassinating well-known Chileans. Isabel had received death threats. Isabel's parents had stayed with many friends in different countries, but ultimately went to stay with Valentín Hernández. When Isabel's children were threatened, Isabel decided that it was time to flee the country as well. The family ended up joining her parents in Venezuela.

Isabel next turns to the then present time in San Francisco. Her son and his wife Celia come to their house to give birth to their second child, a daughter to be named Andrea. Isabel compares the beauty and joy of giving birth to writing a book. She remarks that

children, like books, take one on a voyage to one's inner self, during which time mind, body and soul shift course and turn to the very center of existence.

Isabel is amazed at the beauty of the experience of witnessing her granddaughter's birth. She speaks of it as a miraculous event. She speaks of the quiet in the room at the time of the delivery as opposed to how loud and bright it would have been at a hospital. Isabel believes that Andrea was an angel before birth. Isabel states that the times before birth and after death are quiet—it is everything in between that is noisy.

After a month of evaluation, the doctors tell the family that Paula is in a permanent vegetative state. They recommend that she be institutionalized for long-term care. She would not benefit from staying at a rehabilitation center. The doctor asks if they think Paula would want to be treated aggressively if she became ill. Isabel announces that there will be no extraordinary care given, that in fact Paula will be taken home to be cared for by friends and family. Paula's father Michael returned to Chile and Ernesto returned to the new job he had in New York.

Isabel realizes that, just as at birth, Paula has become completely dependent on Isabel. Their fates are inextricably intertwined. A hospital be is installed on the ground floor of the house. Four women are hired to assist Isabel and Paula is brought home. The room has windows overlooking the bay and there are many blooming plants on the patio to bring fragrances inside. A local cat shows up and begins sleeping at Paula's feet. Isabel hires an acupuncturist and other people to seek alternative medicines and treatments for Paula. Isabel becomes friendly with them, and in many instances, they do her more good. After three months, Isabel realizes that while some treatments may make Paula more comfortable, they are not improving her condition. Isabel knows that writing helps alleviate some of the pain she is feeling.

Part 2, Pages 205 - 238 Analysis

The author takes us back to current events. Paula's true condition is determined after extensive testing. It is then that the author begins focusing her efforts on getting Paula to the United States. She talks about the time that she helped the political underground in Chile and knew that to do so was dangerous, but she did not realize how dangerous. The modern reader might be astounded at some of the risks she took which could have resulted in the deaths of everyone in her family. Only after the children began receiving death threats did she see the necessity of fleeing her homeland.

Isabel also focuses on the joy of watching her granddaughter Andrea being born. She marvels at how mothers and children can be so intertwined. The author recognizes that Paula is like a newborn, completely dependent on her for everything.

Part 2, Pages 238 – 257

Part 2, Pages 238 – 257 Summary

Isabel turns the book to her time in Caracas. The warmth of the country and the nearness to the Caribbean brought a new life to Isabel and her family. The country was enjoying the boom of oil and gas development. Compared to the cold climate and austere political regime, Isabel went through a very serious culture shock. She saw much waste and hedonistic living. Isabel recounts some of the events that occurred in the thirteen years that she lived there. Her children grew up and married and Isabel saw her marriage slowly come undone.

Life was difficult because of the need for Michael to acquire a new license to be able to practice as an engineer in Venezuela. Isabel turned to writing plays and books because she could not find a job on a magazine or at a television station. They lived in the same apartment building as Isabel's parents. Michael ended up working on a project out in the jungle. He would come for weekend visits every fifth or sixth weekend. Isabel was always dreaming of a return to Chile, never dreaming how long the repressive Pinochet government would last.

Isabel would go out to cafes and meet friends to socialize. Eventually she met a musician who would become her lover. He was from Argentina and had a wife and children there. They began sneaking off together and openly worked together on a musical. He began talking about the two of them running away together to Spain. Isabel did not want to leave her children.

Michael needed to take a business trip to Europe. He had arranged for Isabel's mother to look after the children so they could go alone. Isabel felt guilty for going with him under false pretenses. While on the trip, she left Michael and went to join her lover in Spain. She was desperately lonely and missed the children. Michael came looking for her and convinced her to return to Caracas with him, that all was forgiven. However, Isabel realized that the love she had for Michael was gone and she was still unhappy. Michael's parents had gone to Uruguay to live with Michael's sister. Isabel was called to come as everyone realized that Granny was dying. Isabel and Michael were with her when she died. She was buried in an English style garden at the cemetery, near jasmine. Isabel told Michael that she was no longer in love with him and that she intended to rejoin her lover in Spain. He declared that she could go, but she couldn't take any money, and she could not take the children.

Isabel went to Spain, where she and her lover rented a cheap apartment. He worked intermittently in bars as a musician. Within three months, Isabel was desperately lonely. She broke it off with her lover and went back to Caracas. Michael asked her for another chance to make the marriage work.

Part 2, Pages 238 - 257 Analysis

Isabel is sharing with the reader some of the highlights of the family's time in Venezuela. There seemed to be more freedom than that of Chile, but life was financially hard as Isabel and Michael reestablished their careers. In hindsight, Isabel could tell that her children had a very difficult time with the move, even if they were living in the same apartment building as Isabel's parents. For the first time, Isabel has an affair outside of her marriage and seems destined to act out the frustration in her life by running away to Spain with a lover. It is not until she returns from Spain and goes back to Michael that she realizes how much she traumatized her children. The author does not hold back from the reader, being honest about her own shortcomings.

Part 2, Pages 257 - 289

Part 2, Pages 257 - 289 Summary

Isabel writes in her diary that it is her fiftieth birthday. She remarks upon the last few years, when she met and married Willie and when they bought the house in which they are residing. She can feel the ghost of the woman who died here and she feels Paula's spirit moving about the house at night. She wonders if she is getting old and whether she will live much longer. She was in such shock over Paula's illness that her hair began falling out and began going gray.

The house offers some comfort. They have painted it and added skylights to make it brighter. They have put in Saltillo tiles and added much Latin American art on the walls. There is always a bubbling spicy dish on the stove. They are ready for visitors to drop in at anytime, but Isabel feels out of touch with her corporeal being as Paula slowly slips away. Isabel wonders if she will live much longer and if she will ever have the ability to write again.

Isabel returns to events in Caracas. She decided upon her return to seek a job and begin to save money, so that if she ever wanted to leave again she could. She also did not want to be penniless and totally dependent upon Michael for financial support. Isabel found a job at a local private school that taught art and general education to special education students. Isabel realized that Paula had learned how to drive while she was in Spain. Paula and her brother became independent teenagers, freeing Isabel up for other things.

Paula had her first crush, a young man from Sicily whose father was in the construction

business. He was a playboy and Isabel realized she did not respect a man who did not have to work to earn a living. Paula studied psychology in college, which was focused on the topic of human sexuality. When she became too forthright in the general community about her studies, the young Sicilian broke off the affair.

Isabel's son Nicolás began traveling a lot to explore such diverse natural things in the world as the peaks of the Andes, diving with sharks and other highly dangerous activities. He broke bones on several occasions. When he was off on any adventure, Isabel would be afraid to answer the telephone, always afraid that it would be news of his tragic death. One time he even rigged up a harness in such a way that when Isabel entered his bathroom, she thought he had committed suicide. By the time he was seventeen, he put away all of his gear and began studying computers.

Michael left his job in the jungle and returned to Caracas to seek work there. Isabel continued working at the school and for a while, the couple seemed happy. In early January, 1981, someone called from Santiago to tell Isabel that Tata, now nearly one hundred years old, was very ill. Isabel sat down to write him a letter, but somehow it

became longer and longer, spoken through the voice of Rosa, Tata's first love and Memé's older sister, who died shortly before Tata was to marry Rosa. It turned into a novel. Since then, Isabel admits that she always begins writing a new book on January 8, for good luck. This book was shopped to various publishers and agents. Ultimately, *The House of Spirits* was published in Spain.

The literary agent who responded to Isabel's rough draft told her that anyone can write one book, but the writer is generally not recognized until a second novel is published. Isabel began her second novel almost immediately after she returned from touring Spain. Michael's business was failing and he became ill. Testing showed that he had porphyria. Further testing of the family showed that Paula and Nicolás had it as well. Isabel did not realize the potential seriousness of porphyria. On January 8, 1983, she began writing *Of Love and Shadows*.

Isabel explains that this novel is based on many events that occurred during the imposition of martial law in Chile. She had kept press clippings and quietly spoken with family members and friends of loved ones who disappeared and how torture was conducted on political prisoners. One soldier told her that when a person was ordered to be shot, the soldiers would shoot at the victim's legs so that the ranking officer would have to go close in to deal the deadly shot with a hand pistol. In this way, the officer could not pretend that he was just following orders and blood would be on his hands too.

Isabel's novels are starting to show up in bookstores in Caracas. One time a man approached her and told her about his imprisonment briefly in Chile. He had been there on business and because he spoke with a different accent, he was turned in as a possible Marxist in from Venezuela to foment a revolution. However, Ildemaro was a physician and his credentials checked out so he was released. He and his family became friends with Isabel's family and they often dined together and attended social events together. It was Ildemaro who came to Spain to review Paula's medical records and offer comfort.

While the economy was volatile in Venezuela and crime was increasing, the family moved into a home up in the hills outside of Caracas. Isabel says that Paula traveled innocently to and from the university, oblivious to the dangers of being raped, kidnapped, robbed or murdered. Isabel's parents insisted on returning to Chile and Isabel began her third novel, *Eva Luna.* Isabel discusses some of the members of the family whose personalities arose as characters in this novel.

Part 2, Pages 257 - 289 Analysis

Isabel is going into details of her life that she was able to use as inspiration for plotlines and characters in some of her other novels. If the reader is interested in reading some of her other novels, the reader can gain better insight into them by reading *Paula*.

Allende gets into more detail about the end of her marriage and her return to Chile. She also goes into her budding writing career. She says that she has interviewed many people and kept press clippings for inspiration. She admits that as she buried herself more into writing she withdrew more and more from her marriage to Michael, until she wanted a divorce.

Part 2, Pages 289 – 324

Part 2, Pages 289 – 324 Summary

Isabel discusses the fact that Paula is now in her home. A hospital bed and all of the necessary medical equipment has been installed in the room where recently a granddaughter, Andrea, was recently born. She is near enough to be where family members can see her and she can smell the aromas emanating from the kitchen. Isabel's mother comes from Chile. She is shocked to see how much further Paula has deteriorated. Paula's hair, which used to reach her waist, has been cut off. She is continuing to lose weight and curl up into a fetal position. Some of the Catholic caretakers refer to her as being stuck in limbo.

Ernesto comes for a visit and for the first time he did not rush to be by his wife's side. He finally seems resolved that Paula will not recover. He has a dream where Paula appears to him and asks him to let her go. He states that he will let go of Paula if Isabel will. The writer discusses how painful it is to watch a child die and to know that she may have been extending Paula's life. They go to her bedside and Ernesto tells her it is time to die. He promises to find her in the hereafter. Isabel is too upset to talk.

Willie thinks that Isabel is sleepwalking, but she tells us that she slips out of bed at night to be with Paula. In some way, Isabel feels that Paula is communicating with her. A Chinese herbalist prescribed medicines for Isabel to help her sleep and to calm her. A Western doctor gives her pills that will supposedly ease her depression and allow her to sleep. However, Isabel feels that she must go through this pain with Paula. She thinks of the pain that her daughter-in-law Celia went through in giving birth. Isabel feels she must now go through this pain at the end of Paula's life.

Isabel knows that her husband Willie is dealing with the crises of his own children. His daughter is a drug addict and his son commits many criminal acts to fund his drug habit. They both know that when the phone rings, it could be the police telling him his son is in jail again, or the medical examiner asking him to come identify a body. They both know how precious and precarious the lives of their children are.

Isabel relates to the reader how she met a northern European on a book tour who told her about one Nazi he actually knew. This inspired her to add some more characters to her book *Eva Luna*. She also relates how she and her husband decided to divorce and separate their assets. After the divorce, she believed she was destined to spend the rest of her life alone.

Isabel had agreed to go on a lecture tour of North America. Willie had remarked to someone that he had read *Of Love and Shadows* and felt really connected to the book. They were seated opposite each other at dinner in a group at an Italian restaurant. Isabel was attracted to him because he was a mix of refinement and roughness. He wore a silk shirt, but he had a tattoo on his hand. He told her about his life over dinner.

She was very attracted to him. He called her the next day, asked her out, and took her to his house to see the Bay from his window. He had several children and foster children, who were not his, living with him and one of his sons.

Isabel refused to be upset by so many strangers. They spent the night together, and in spite of subterfuge by the children, Isabel felt as if she and Willie were destined for each other. Isabel shared a night of true passion with Willie before she returned to Venezuela. She realized upon her return to Caracas that she missed him terribly and that she felt she loved him. She wrote a "contract" of the terms under which she would return to the United States to live with Willie. She express mailed it to him. He signed and returned it to her immediately. She knew there would be language problems and cultural gaps, not to mention the strangers in his home. Some left, some stayed.

Isabel settled into a domestic lifestyle and began teaching at Berkeley. She wrote a collection of short stories. Some of them were either experiences she had in Chile during the coup, or experiences of friends around her that became stories. Isabel admits that if she writes something she fears it will come true, and if she loves someone, she fears the love will end in disaster. However, as she puts it, she cannot stop writing and she cannot stop loving, When Isabel's mother came to the United States to visit, she was shocked that Isabel would live with Willie without being married to him. She reminded Isabel it would be easy to extend her visa to stay in the United States if she were to marry. She gave Willie an ultimatum and one day later, he agreed to marry her.

In 1988, Isabel decided that it was finally time to return to Chile. Elections had been called. There was hope that candidates would be elected who could neutralize Pinochet's regime.

Isabel was shocked at how much it impacted her to set foot on Chilean soil after so many years. On her first visit, she went out to the home of the late Pablo Neruda. She went to see Michael, her first husband. She and Michael walked around the neighborhood where they had lived as newlyweds and even went to see the home where they lived for a few years. Isabel states that she felt the pain and agony of the reality that youthful love cannot last forever and that we all get scars from love. She says that she wears her scars proudly.

On the second visit, she was actually allowed to vote. A new president was elected, but Pinochet stayed on as head of the military. He had appointed all of the men to the courts, and there was a blanket amnesty he had given to his compadres, so that any effort at reform would be slow and painful. Many people who sought governmental assistance for atrocities were not to see any quick and easy retribution.

Isabel is awakened one night by Paula's spirit. Paula begs her to release her. Nicolás has already told her to go. Isabel is the only one in the house who won't say goodbye. Paula assures her that she will still come to her in her dreams and that spiritually she will always be with her. She asks her to remember some of the good times they had together during the twenty-eight years that Paula has lived. Paula recounts some of their travels and good times. Isabel begins to cry in her sleep. Willie wakes her, telling

her she is having a nightmare. She tells Willie that Paula was there with her and when she looks down, she sees Paula's favorite slippers next to her side of the bed.

Isabel's brother Juan comes for a visit. He sees that Isabel is running out of strength in caring for Paula. He discusses with her the pain and guilt she would feel if she were to take nay measures to speed up Paula's dying process. Isabel admits that she would never stop feeding Paula and that she has been stockpiling sleeping pills to give Paula when she gathers the courage. She is afraid if she doesn't, Nicolás will and she doesn't want him to live with that guilt. Juan begs her to understand that Paula will die naturally in good time.

Isabel tries to bury herself in writing. The family can feel Paula becoming less responsive and more angelic every day. Isabel sees her grandchildren and wants to be a good grandmother to them, but doesn't have the energy. She is overwhelmingly depressed when she finally acknowledges that Paula is lost to her in this world. She still sees and hears Paula, but her voice is getting weaker.

Back in Spain, Ernesto had given Isabel a letter from Paula, which was to be opened if anything happened to her. Isabel had never been able to open it and read it. However, in her final acceptance of Paula's impending death she does. Paula asks to be cremated and her ashes scattered. She wants her money to go for scholarships for poor children. She promises to stay with them in spirit. Isabel lets herself mourn. She crawls into bed with Paula and cries. Deep, inconsolable moans come forth. She wants to die and let Paula inhabit her body so that Paula can have the years of life that otherwise would be denied to her. She goes out into the woods and rolls in the mud, commending Paula back to Mother Earth.

Part 2, Pages 289 - 304 Analysis

Isabel tells the reader how she came to be in North America and how she met Willie, the Californian who would become her husband. She talks about her walks into the woods and her feeling of being as one with the earth. She talks about her time with Paula's spirit and her realization that she must let go of her. Paula promises to always stay close in spirit. This may seem surprising to the reader, but spirits and the afterlife are the themes of many Latin American writers. This theme is used throughout Isabel's earlier novels, so it may seem somewhat ironic that the author has such a hard time letting go of the corporeal body of Paula.

Part 2, Pages 325 – 330

Part 2, Pages 325 – 330 Summary

This portion of the book is denoted as the epilogue. It is cold in Northern California. Winter has arrived and it is getting close to Christmas. Paula's breathing has become shallow and she is non-responsive to touch. Willie brings in a bottle of champagne and the family toasts her trip to the next world. Celia plays guitar and sang soft songs to her. The family brings out an album of photographs and speaks about various events that occurred in which Paula was involved. Isabel tells her she loved her and releases her. Paula is bathed and put in warm clothes. Her favorite slippers are put on her feet. Isabel crawls into bed and holds her as she dies. Paula stops breathing at about four in the morning on December 6, 1992.

Part 2, Pages 325 - 330 Analysis

The writer has finally released Paula and allowed her to die. She sees to it that she dies with dignity, surrounded by loved ones. She commends Paula's soul to the spirit world. The author has finally found peace with the inevitable, but we know she will always hold Paula close in her heart.

Characters

Isabel Allende

Isabel Allende, narrator and protagonist, emerges as strong, imaginative, passionate, and loving but also impulsive, prone to mistakes, and, at times, guilt ridden. In the year of silence and sadness at her daughter's bedside, she struggles against Paula's death the best way a storyteller can□by capturing memories. Allende survives exile in Venezuela for the sake of her children; she survives her marriage by finding a creative outlet in a letter to her grandfather□which turns into her first novel. She uses writing again to cope with her daughter's coma and death. Allende comes through as a survivor in spirit and finds love with her second husband. Throughout the book, she demonstrates an energetic spirit as the main caregiver for her daughter during her illness and finds strength in her love for her daughter in the moment of Paula's death.

Juan Allende

Plagued with illness from the moment of his birth, Juan is the narrator's weak, but likeable, youngest brother. As an adolescent, he joins the National Air Academy only to learn that he detests military life. Always considered the intellectual genius of the family, Juan becomes a professor of political science but turns to divinity studies when he experiences a spiritual crisis.

Pancho Allende

Pancho is the narrator's brother, their parents' second child, and a troublemaker from his teenage years on. Allende recalls his tendency to vanish for months and years at a time to go on daring spiritual quests. As an adult, he is estranged from his family.

Salvador Allende

Salvador Allende, the founder of Chile's Socialist Party and the world's first freely elected Marxist president, is the uncle of the narrator's father, Tomas. Although the narrator's familial relation to Salvador Allende ends with the divorce of her parents, the influential "uncle" continues a cordial relationship with the family. He is described as a loyal friend, sharp and energetic, arrogant and charming, and with a witty sense of humor. Allende writes that in her view, his main traits were "integrity, intuition, courage, and charisma." During the three years of his presidency (1970-1973), Chile is divided by fear and harsh, unchanging economic conditions. In 1973, the president's political enemies, headed by General Augusto Pinochet, take over the country in a violent military coup during which Salvador Allende allegedly commits suicide.

Tomas Allende

Tomas, the narrator's estranged father, disappears from her life too early for personal memories. Allende describes him as a "clever man with a quick mind and merciless tongue . . . [and] a murky past," whose lineage (he is the cousin of Salvador Allende) granted him certain political standing. After the wedding, Tomas takes his bride to Peru where he is appointed secretary of the Chilean embassy. Their three children, the narrator being the oldest, are born in Lima. Tomas' career and marriage come to an abrupt end with the scandalous news of sexual perversions involving an important politician. Allende never encounters him again until, ironically, she is called in to identify his body.

Ernesto

Ernesto, Paula's husband, is an electronics engineer in Madrid. Allende writes that, the day after Paula met him, she called to tell her mother she'd found the man she was going to marry. Allende describes her son-in-law as a sensitive, tender, emotional, yet strong and exuberant young man, very supportive of his wife. The couple lives in Madrid until Paula's illness; she falls into a coma before their first wedding anniversary. Allende describes the details of the young husband's suffering, noticing that even the nurses at the hospital feel envious□"[they] wish they could be loved like that."

Fisherman

The fisherman in Allende's story is a part of her memory of her first secret sexual experience at the age of eight and of the moral crisis that ensued.

Celia Frias

Celia is Allende's daughter-in-law, another example of the many radical conversions in the family: strictly religious and highly prejudiced at the time of her marriage to Allende's son Nicolas, Celia becomes a free spirit in time, eventually giving birth at the home of her mother-in-law.

Michael Frias

Michael is the narrator's first husband and the father of her three children; they meet in Santiago and marry young, after three years of chaste courtship. Michael is a member of an English family, which has lived in Chile for generations but maintains British mannerisms: he grows up treated like a "young lord," taught to control and conceal his emotions. Although a patient and supportive husband, he becomes distant and emotionally estranged from the narrator, especially during the second half of their marriage, which is spent in exile. During that time, he works on a dam deep in the

Venezuelan jungle and visits his family every six weeks. Allende has an affair with an Argentinian musician with whom she spends three months in Spain, but she cannot stay away from her children and comes back. Despite many attempts to remedy their marriage, the two eventually divorce.

Nicolas Frias

Allende's son Nicolas is described as an imaginative albeit morbid teenager who tortures his mother with pretend suicides; eventually, he becomes an explorer-turned-computer expert. Nicolas is also very close to his sister and a great pillar of support for the narrator during Paula's illness.

Paula Frias

The author's daughter gives her name to this autobiography, as her tragic illness inspires Allende to write the book while taking care of her. Paula is the narrator's first child and only daughter; born in 1963, she grows up during her mother's professional rise in Chilean television. While her parents are at work and engaged in a lively social scene of 1960s Chile, Paula becomes "a complete lady in miniature" by the age of two in the hands of her paternal grandparents. Paula is spoiled yet mature, stubborn yet a quiet accomplice in acts of kindness□ like hiding her grandmother's drinking habit by burying the empty bottles in the yard. Paula's idyllic childhood comes to an abrupt end when the family flees to Venezuela. There, Paula does volunteer work in the slums of Caracas, just as she helped classmates in post-coup Chile whose parents were persecuted by the new government.

After graduation, Paula marries Ernesto and moves to Spain with him; in a moment of clairvoyance, she writes a letter to be opened after her death, in which she bids everybody farewell. At the beginning of the book, she has just been confined to a hospital in Madrid, Spain, diagnosed with porphyria, a rare metabolic disease of the blood. Paula falls into a coma from which she never wakes up, and she dies exactly a year later.

Granny

Allende's first mother-in-law and Paula's paternal grandmother, Granny is a sensitive and loving English lady, who adores her grandchildren and spends the last years of her life taking care of them. With the social deterioration in Chile, she becomes depressed and turns to alcohol; after her grandchildren leave to seek exile in Venezuela, she loses touch with reality, repeatedly asks for them, and gradually dies□of alcoholism and loneliness.

Meme

The author has few memories of Meme, her maternal grandmother and Tata's wife who passes away early in the narrator's childhood, but her spirit seems to follow Allende throughout her life. Ethereal and mystical, the grandmother is a comforting presence and an essential part of the narrator's inspiration. Meme was training her granddaughter to become a seer but died before Allende developed her mystical gifts; with her death, the household became quiet and cheerless.

Mother

Brought up in a sheltering world of wealth and privilege, Allende's mother faces a life of disgrace after her divorce and suffers a long illness. Her health improves but her social status worsens when she falls in love with a married Chilean diplomat, Tio Ramon, whom she eventually marries. In the beginning of her second marriage, while the family lives in Lebanon, Allende's mother becomes an "expert in the supreme art of keeping up appearances" due to the family's modest income. Although often weakened by illness and stress, the narrator's mother remains a pillar of strength and encouragement in her life. When Allende returns to Chile, the two maintain a rich daily correspondence and visit each other at times of crisis.

Pablo Neruda

Probably Chile's most famous poet, the winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, Pablo Neruda is a great influence in the narrator's writing career. During her job as a reporter, Allende visits him for lunch, hoping to get an interview; however, the poet laughs at the idea, calling her the country's worst journalist□lacking in objectivity, placing herself in the middle of all her stories, inventing and falsifying news. He finally gives her advice that will ultimately change her life: "Why don't you write novels instead? In literature, those defects are virtues."

General Prats

One of Salvador Allende's most loyal supporters, Prats dies with the defeat of his government in the military coup; however, the narrator salutes his ghost, which allegedly haunts the presidential palace during Pinochet's reign to remind its occupants of the terror they have imposed on the country.

Tio Ramon

Tio Ramon is Allende's stepfather, who enters her life shortly after her parents' separation. Entirely smitten by the beauty and vulnerability of the narrator's mother, he divorces his wife (with whom he has four children) and begins a life filled with financial

struggles but entirely fulfilling. A diplomat assigned to various Chilean embassies, Tio Ramon takes his new family along and successfully weathers the many trials of raising another man's children. When Salvador Allende becomes president, Ramon gets a high and well-paid post in Argentina, only to leave after the coup; in his old age and in exile, he looks for work in Venezuela. Intelligent and charming, never uttering a word of complaint, he sets an example of courage and optimism that follows the narrator through her life's struggles.

Even though at their first meeting Allende declares she has "never seen such an ugly man" and becomes jealous of her mother's attention given to this stranger, she eventually develops a deep respect and love for her new father, whose vivacity and fairy-tale imagination make the years of modest living feel like they are filled with splendor. Although tough and persistent in making the narrator face her insecurities, Tio Ramon is also disarmingly supportive of her: when his fourteen-year-old stepdaughter doesn't want to go to a dance at her school in Lebanon out of fear of being the wallflower, he "closed the consulate and dedicated the afternoon to teach [her] to dance."

Tata

Tata is Allende's grandfather. As a young man, he is described as exhibiting "the concentration and integrity that were his characteristics; he was made of the same hard stone as his ancestors and, like many of them, had his feet firmly on the ground." Nevertheless, he marries his absolute opposite, a beautiful clairvoyant with telekinetic powers. In his old age, Tata remains a stubborn and proud man "who [believes] discomfort was healthful and that central heating sapped the strength." When he develops a heavy cough and high fever, he drives himself into a stroke with self-imposed remedies: "He buckled a saddle cinch around his waist and when he had a coughing fit gave himself a brutal tug to 'subdue his lungs'" and "tried to cure [the fever] with ice cold showers and large glasses of gin."

Allende acknowledges Tata's influence in her development as a writer as she recalls the long conversations she had with him, stating: "My daily visits with Tata provided me with enough material for all the books I have written, possibly for all I will ever write." She describes him as a "virtuoso storyteller, gifted with perfidious humor, able to recount the most hair-raising stories while bellowing with laughter." While in exile, Allende hears that Tata is dying and begins to write him a letter which becomes a best-selling novel.

Willie

Willie is the narrator's second husband, a California lawyer with an aristocratic appearance and a frustratingly messy household life. The two meet after both of their lives have suffered a shipwreck of sorts, and they marry shortly thereafter. Allende falls in love with his life story and uses it in one of her novels.

Themes

Humor

Although *Paula* arises from an emotionally difficult time in the author's life and is permeated with her pain at losing her child to a long and excruciating illness, the writing is more often than not colored with Allende's wry sense of humor. For example, in describing the painful separation and social disgrace of losing her father after Tomas abandons his family, Allende recalls that her mother gladly returned to him his coat of arms, which featured three starving dogs—an ironic reference to the blue blood that Tomas brought to the family, then took away. As she writes of the sad days of her exile, the narrator also infuses her recollections with humorous remarks: she points out the loudness and vivacity of the Venezuelans, stating that, compared to them, "discreet Chileans with their high-pitched voices and delicate Spanish seemed like dolls on the wedding cake."

A crucial element of much of Allende's fiction, humor serves a double role in *Paula*. It emphasizes the magnitude of the narrator's pain through contrast: after entertaining anecdotes, Allende switches back into the reality of waiting, silence, and suffering in her daughter's inanimate presence. It also testifies to Allende's ability to find beauty, life, and strength in the face of tragedy, thus becoming a document of survival. Even while she writes about Paula's days in the hospital, the narrator notices the humor in the patients around her—like in the woman awaiting brain surgery who blames her condition on her husband's impotence. Allende's use of humor speaks of her personal ways of coping with pain and serves to balance out the emotional impact of the book, offering hope amid times of sadness.

Memory

In works that fall within the genre of autobiography, such as *Paula*, the author's memories are the essential component of the text. However, Allende arranges hers within the framework of the present, always reverting to her time with her daughter—the intended audience and the reason for telling the story of her life. The narrator's memories involve the recollections of others, as when she writes about the events that took place before her birth or in her early childhood; also, Allende acknowledges the changing nature of memory with aging and time, saying that people often make up in imagination for what they lack in memory of important participants in their lives. In describing her grandmother Meme, Allende says: "I heard people talk about her, and I hoard her few remaining relics in a tin box. All the rest I have invented, because we all need a grand mother." However, because she is telling the story to her daughter, Allende writes that she is trying to be as faithful as possible to what really happened.

The author further explains the personal significance of memory in her life as she recalls that her family members who passed away were preserved as alive in survivors'

memories of them. Allende's grandfather, Tata, maintains his relationship with his wife through memories: "'She lives on,' he said, 'because I have never forgotten her, not for a single minute.'" Faced with Paula's slow death, the narrator examines the importance of memory for the connection with one's loved ones when they pass on to spiritual existence; she writes that, once gone from the material world, they remain present only as spirits and memories, living intangible lives within those left behind.

Family

Amidst the narrator's recollections of personal growth, historical events, and cultural changes witnessed in her past are the detailed descriptions of the members of her family tree, with special emphasis on those who shaped her life and personality. Allende emphasizes the importance of family in her life over and over again, examining her own genetic and social heritage through the portraits of those that preceded her. When she describes the way her mother and grandmother "kidnapped" her from the hospital after she was born, Allende writes: "It is possible that in their haste they traded me for another baby, and that somewhere there is a woman with spinach-colored eyes and a gift for clairvoyance who is taking my place." However, the family relations created after her birth prove to be more important to Allende; based on the relationships she forms with various family members, she develops not only a large part of her personality but also her identity as a storyteller. Family also forms a basis for her sense of cultural identity, as she recalls the views and actions of those who have influenced her in determining her world views.

The situation of Paula's illness is also crucial for the author's sense of family, as she loses a part of her own. Allende writes: "Since the day [my children] were born, I have never thought of myself as an individual but as part of an inseparable trio." Given the sad occasion of Paula's dying, the family becomes closer and more significant for everybody involved, as is illustrated in the book's final pages when the family members gather to bid Paula goodbye.

Style

Autobiography

The genre of *Paula* is apparent in several elements of the book's construction. First of all, it is written in first person narrative, which the author specifies is her own voice; she names herself clearly in the text as Isabel Allende, not a character with the same name. Then, the foreword situates the work in relation to actual events in the author's life: Allende opens the book by stating, "These pages were written during the interminable hours spent in the corridors of a Madrid hospital... as well as beside [Paula's] bed in our home in California." Throughout the rest of the book, specific references are made within this time frame: the first part is written during the stay in the Madrid hospital; the second part continues in the author's house and ends with Paula's death. Allende further specifies the nature of her writing in *Paula* when she states that she will try to tell the truth about her life without embellishing the facts.

Style

Many critics have noted that *Paula* resembles Allende's fictional works because the real characters, situations, and events from her life are described in the same style as her fictional ones. Style, defined as a specific way of using elements of writing composition to convey ideas and to give the text a stamp of the author's personality, is an indication of Allende's presence in all of her works. In *Paula*, when the narrator speaks of her identity as a writer, she admits to creating her novels and short stories on the basis of real-life encounters. For example, Allende focuses on family and culture as important topics covered in *Paula*, and there are detailed descriptions of individual characters as well as historical events. Also, the realistic presentation of facts is diluted by the author's references to ethereal, mystical visions and events; this is a technique that classifies Allende as a writer in the tradition of magic realism□a genre of modern Latin American novels that addresses social issues but keeps them veiled in "magical" symbolism.

Flashback

Allende creates a parallel plot in *Paula* by switching between two story lines: one in the present, in which she takes care of her daughter in her illness, and the other in the past, presented more or less in a linear fashion, in which the narrator tells the story of her life. The second story line is a flashback, a device used in literature to showcase events that took place before the story's beginning. Allende goes back and forth in her memory although she mostly maintains chronological order in the flashback, starting with a broad and unspecified description of her ancestry and going through the various stages of her life until the present time.

The benefit of using a flashback to tell a story is that the narrator knows what eventually happens; therefore, and especially since *Paula* is an autobiographical work, the author

often comments on the future events in her story line while contextualizing a character or discussing an event. This way, Allende reorganizes the book to accommodate the development of certain themes: she groups them together by shifting the chronological order of her memories somewhat. For example, when talking about her estranged father at the book's beginning, Allende points out the irony of being called in to identify his body years later because she never knew what he looked like; she tells Paula all of his photographs were burned decades ago. This reference makes a link between the narrator's present, in which she tells Paula about a family photo from her childhood, and her past, in which the flashback continues with a description of the problematic marriage of Allende' s parents.

Historical Context

NAFTA

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect on January 1, 1994. This trilateral agreement between Canada, the United States, and Mexico created an economic zone free from tariff barriers. During the period of negotiations, the countries of the American Hemisphere left out of the agreement began to create their own trading blocks or to improve existing ones. In December 1994, the Summit of the Americas was held in Miami, Florida. All the nations of the hemisphere were present, and trade was high on the agenda. The dream of a hemisphere trading block was resuscitated, but nothing was immediately agreed upon due to the myriad of existing blocks that would need to be aligned.

For example, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay had, in 1990, formed Mercosur (a Spanish acronym that, in English, translates as the Common Market but is sometimes referred to as the Andean Group). However, the economies involved in this trading block did not begin to boom until 1992 when nearly every regional tariff between the member nations was removed. The 1992 agreement was in response to the NAFTA negotiations as well as the desire by individual countries, especially Chile, to eventually win inclusion into NAFTA. By 1997, Chile was approaching fast-track inclusion in NAFTA.

Chile

Chile's return to democracy began in 1987 when Pope John Paul II visited Chile and accused General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte's regime of human rights violations. In the political fracas that ensued, Pinochet agreed to a confidence plebiscite, a vote in which the people would decide whether to allow Pinochet to reign as president for another eight years. Sixteen of the opposition parties banded together to form a "No" coalition, and in the fall of 1988 Pinochet lost the plebiscite. Consequently, new elections were held the following year. In 1990, the Christian Democrat Patricio Aylwin, who represented the seventeen-party coalition Concert of Parties for Democracy, became president. Pinochet became "Senator for Life."

Aylwin succeeded in maintaining civilian rule by continuing to decrease the power of the military. His ability to avoid an overthrow of the government was successful. During the Aylwin administration, the Rettig Commission began to collect information on the human rights violations committed by the Pinochet regime. In the 1993 elections, democracy was assured with the election of Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle.

America's Republican Revolution

Responding to a potential ideological vacuum, left by the Cold War's end, to President Clinton, and to the demographic shift in America, which had made the suburbs an

electoral power in their own right, the Republicans took a commanding control of Congress in 1994 under the leadership of Newt Gingrich. This takeover has been called the Suburban Congress, the Republican Revolution, or the Newtonian Revolution. The extreme rhetoric of the revolutionary Gingrich eventually led to his political demise but not before seriously heightening the drama of the culture wars by reducing the National Endowment for the Arts and changing the structure of the welfare system.

Assisted Suicide

The "right to die" became a serious debate in the United States in response to a Michigan pathologist who became known as Dr. Death. By 1996, Jack Kevorkian had enabled thirty people to use his "suicide machines" to end their lives. Several states pursued murder charges against Kevorkian but three such cases failed. Several states put the issue to referendum votes.

Critical Overview

The critical reception of *Paula* was divided: although most reviewers praise the book as a passionate and candid voyage through memory and grief, some find it disappointing after Allende's previous work. Negative reviews range from criticism of the author's use of her daughter's tragedy as a peg on which to hang the story of her own life to seeing the book as an overly romanticized autobiography relying on questionable facts, to pointing out that the author's kitschy rhetoric camouflages the book's introspective parts. However, the majority of critics applauded Allende's effort in her first nonfiction work and admitted to feeling drawn into the story's powerful emotional pull.

In a review for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Patricia Holt praises the book and writes: "In her feverish determination to bring it all to life, and Paula along with it, Allende produces some of her best writing." Her writing, Holt says, is "voluptuous" and universally moving, as she seeks "answers to life's largest questions" in wondering about loss, death, revival, and acceptance. Liz Warwick writes in a Montreal *Gazette* review that *Paula* is "a haunting memoir of [Allende's] life and a poignant meditation on her daughter's year-long descent into death." Warwick also recognizes the honesty with which Allende reveals the many layers of her personal and public personae, including the one of writer, while remaining humble throughout. As Allende states in the interview with Warwick:

Mothers across the world for millennia have experienced the loss of their children. Why should I, in my terrible arrogance, imagine that I don't deserve this or that my daughter didn't deserve to die young? This is what life is about□coming into the world to lose everything we have ... And from each loss, we learn and grow.

In the introduction to *Conversations with Isabel Allende*, John Rodden recognizes the stages in Allende's work as indivisible from her personal life and notes that *Paula* is a testimony to the author's individual development, saying: "Allende's courage and openness have also extended to a greater capacity for self-disclosure about her private demons." Rodden also points out the author's personal investment in the book, made remarkable by her willingness to share the experience with an audience of her readers. He further observes, in "After Paula," another chapter of the same book, that the magic in *Paula,* criticized for its presence in an autobiography, is in fact strangely existent in her life: a psychic once told Allende that her daughter would become known all over the world, which "was to come ironically true in another way: by the end of April 1995, *Paula* was number eight on the *New York Times* best-seller list, after having already become a best-seller throughout Europe."

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Hubbell is a Ph.D. candidate in history at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. In this essay, he examines the literary expression of traumatic symptoms and the author's coping strategies in Allende's Paula, *evident in the content as well as in the textual elements of the book.*

During the 1990s, the concept of trauma entered the American cultural spotlight and found its place in the spheres of "psychoanalysis, psychiatry, sociology, and even literature," as Cathy Caruth writes in the book *Trauma and Experience: Explorations in Memory*. The public interest in the literature of this issue became apparent when autobiographical works focusing on a traumatic experience, such as *Angela's Ashes, My Sergei: A Love Story*, and *Tuesdays with Morrie*, reached and stayed on national bestseller charts throughout the decade.

The symptoms of trauma, as outlined by Caruth, are the following: intense personal suffering, avoidance or delay in emotional response that is too overwhelming to be experienced all at once, repetition and reliving of the experience in an attempt to recapture it, and the sufferer's becoming possessed by the overwhelming event. Underlying these symptoms is the sufferer's sense of fragmentation, disorientation in space and time, an apparently irrational desire to hang onto the trauma as a definition of self, and, if it is a trauma of loss, to retain a kind of memorial to the deceased within oneself. In her autobiography dedicated to her daughter, Allende finds an outlet for at least some of her traumatic symptoms by recording them in her writing and in the process creates a document that testifies to her pain and survival.

Allende exhibits several traumatic symptoms as she writes *Paula*; the two story line threads (of the narrator's past and of her daughter's present) reflect the return of old traumas from her life. The most obvious traumatic event□the one that propels her into writing the book in the first place□is Paula's sudden tragic illness and the deterioration of her condition while she is in a coma. Allende's response of beginning a letter to her daughter can be seen as a form of avoidance of pain; in the beginning of the book, as she introduces the agonizing circumstances of her writing, she states: "I plunge into these pages in an irrational attempt to overcome my terror."

Allende's choice of the book's content also speaks of her need to escape the painful present as she reverts to memory and returns to the past□far from Paula's imminent tragedy. By writing of her own past, not exclusively Paula's, Allende signifies her desire to find self-affirmation outside her suffering as well as to remove herself from the source of unbearable pain. This attempt repeatedly fails because the author cannot help but return to the inanimate figure in the hospital bed. Allende speaks of her fear that Paula will not wake up intact from her coma, of guilt at placing her in a hospital where she was misdiagnosed and mistreated, of struggling not to lose hope in face of the doctors' grim predictions, of not being able to survive the loss; she speaks of these emotions in temporally distributed intervals, placing enough textual distance between them to make them manageable. Thus, the structure of the book demonstrates the author's way of

coping with the trauma of Paula's illness. Further, the author documents a typical defense mechanism of trauma victims who are too overwhelmed by the event to face its horror in reality: she describes several dreams in which her worst fears are expressed, thus finding an outlet for her feelings in nightmares. The most disturbing dream is one in which she sees her daughter's death and cannot prevent it:

I dreamed that you were twelve years old, Paula ... You were standing in the center of a hollow tower, something like a grain silo filled with hundreds of fluttering doves. Meme's voice was saying, 'Paula is dead.' You began to rise off the ground ... I tried to hold you back by your clothing; I called to you, but no sound came.

An important way in which the text reflects Allende's traumatization is the juxtaposition of past and present events: when she accepts the news of Paula's brain damage and loses hope for her full recovery, the author also reaches the peak of pain in the story of her life□her unwanted exile in Venezuela after the assassination of her uncle, Chilean president Salvador Allende. This mirroring of an old trauma with a new one shows a repeating pain in the author's life, in both cases caused by unwanted abandonment, first of her country (which at the time did not have a chance of "recovery"), then of her hope for Paula's physical and mental recovery from her illness. Other losses come into the story as well: that of Meme and Tata (grandparents who die years apart, leaving both emptiness and fulfillment in the author's heart), of her own father who deserts the family before she can ever remember him, of her favorite uncle, of her brothers who become estranged, of her first marriage, which disintegrates while in exile, and so forth. These painful experiences range from personal to national, showing that trauma as a phenomenon exists and shapes not only individual lives but the lives of cultures, histories, and societies as well. When the doctors test Paula's peripheral nerves by administering electric shocks to her arms and legs, Allende is "thinking of all the men and women and children in Chile who were tortured in a very similar way with electric prods."

Allende's recollections of these various traumatic events serve a twofold purpose in the text. First, they reveal what the author has already survived and how she and those around her dealt with these losses; and second, they document her attempt to survive the tragedy at hand, perhaps by remembering the coping strategies she used in the past. Admittedly, the most powerful strategy for Allende is writing; at the beginning of the book, she says to Paula that her first novel (*The House of the Spirits*) began as a letter to her dying grandfather in an effort to deal with the pain she felt about his death and her own life in exile. Writing can be an effective way to relive the traumatic experience without being overwhelmed by it. In fact, Allende relates the accumulation of her life's traumas to her need to organize her memories so that she can deal with Paula's situation. Trying to fight off the sufferer's disorientation in time, she writes: "I am trampled by memories, all happening in one instant, as if my entire life were a single, unfathomable image." The text further reveals the traumatic nature of Allende's memory in its uncontrollability: "My past has little meaning; I can see no order in it, no clarity, purpose, or path, only a blind journey guided by instincts and detours caused by events beyond my control." Yet, writing has the benefit of giving trauma shape and some unity and of taking it from the abstract realm of one's mind into the concrete realm of text:

Looking back, I view the totality of my fate and, with a little luck, I shall find meaning for the person I am ... My grandmother wrote in her notebooks to safeguard the fleeting fragments of the days and outwit loss of memory. I am trying to distract death."

Another symptom of trauma apparent in Allende's writing of *Paula* is a sense of fragmentation she repeatedly describes. For example, when her husband Willie visits her in Madrid, the author experiences her physical existence once again and reaffirms herself: she touches parts of her body and rediscovers life in it. Putting these parts together is a process that Allende employs in writing the book itself□taking pieces of her past, segments of memory, and putting them together into an autobiography. That way, she can once again find stability in a life ruptured by sadness. After months of feeling overwhelmed by Paula's tragedy, the author attempts to reestablish a sense of self outside the trauma that has come to define her everyday existence: "This is me, I'm a woman, I'm Isabel, I'm not turning into smoke, I have not disappeared."

The fact that Allende wrote an autobiography at this point in her life can be seen as an effort to negotiate the importance of the traumatic event as well as to let go of it. In preserving her feelings of loss and desperation in text, Allende manages to retain the event□in a way, "saving" the trauma on paper□and thus acknowledges the significance of losing Paula from her life. However, because the author writes about her life's experiences in the book, she also recognizes and reestablishes herself through the cycle of life that keeps her going. The fact that the book about the mother's life is dedicated to her dying daughter is a recovery that works in two ways: although she has created a tangible memorial to Paula, Allende has also contextualized the event as a part of her existence instead of the other way around. By the book's end, it becomes obvious that the author has learned to negotiate with her feelings and that she is ready to let Paula go into the spiritual realm that encompasses all existence: "I am the void, I am everything that exists, I am in every leaf of the forest, in every drop of the dew, in every particle of ash carried by the stream, I am Paula and I am also Isabel, I am nothing and all other things in this life and other lives, immortal. Godspeed, Paula, woman. Welcome, Paula, spirit."

Overall, Allende's autobiography is an ultimate testimony to survival after a tragic loss. The style and structure of *Paula* ultimately reveal the writer's state of mind although many other textual elements counter her record of her suffering. The book's humorous and buoyant tone, picturesque descriptions, magical depictions of everyday reality, and a cast of life-affirming personae are nevertheless delicately balanced against the author's painful attempts to deal with trauma in her life as well as in her literary work. An exemplary document of private as well as public trauma, *Paula* is a case study of the presence of an author's emotion in literature.

Source: Jeremy W. Hubbell, Critical Essay on *Paula*, in *Nonfiction Classics for Students*, The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following interview-essay, Allende discusses with Mujica her writing technique, criticism of her works, and the uniqueness of Paula.

The night before this interview I attended a talk by Isabel Allende at Georgetown University□a stop on a long publicity tour for her memoir, *Paula* (HarperCollins). Allende spoke about her book, which she began in 1991 in a hospital in Madrid, where her daughter was being treated for porphyria. A beautiful, intelligent, active young woman in her late twenties, Paula had just married a young Spaniard. She was working as a volunteer with poor children at a Catholic school in Madrid when she became ill. Although porphyria is rarely fatal, due to an error in procedure, an accident, or some other unknown circumstance, Paula never came out of her coma and died on December 6,1992. In spite of the fact that *Paula* was engendered by a tragedy, this is not a sad book, for Allende emphasizes the beautiful moments she spent with her daughter as much as the physical destruction caused by the disease.

In her presentation, Allende spoke of the most difficult moments of her long, hard ordeal, but she also read humorous passages about her own life, including one in which she recounts her experiences as a chorus girl at the follies, when she was researching an article for a feminist magazine. I was impressed with the ease with which she passed from terribly painful to amusing segments of the book, laughing and provoking laughter, telling embarrassing anecdotes, answering difficult questions. Small, pretty, and very sharp, in front of an audience Allende is a professional in complete control of her medium□perhaps due to the long years she worked on Chilean television. It was obvious that this presentation had been carefully orchestrated and rehearsed, one of many that she was giving to promote her new book in countless cities. And yet, one sensed terrible sadness behind the protective shield. After the talk, several listeners remained in their seats sobbing disconsolately.

I asked Allende where she found the strength and vitality to do these presentations night after night, week after week□how she could go on talking about Paula and laughing, how she managed to get on with her life□because her energy was indeed amazing. "When the idea to do this book tour came up, I was terrified," she admits. "I thought I wouldn't be able to do it. Obviously because the topic is very hard for me to deal with, and also because it's all still very fresh in my mind. Two things have helped me a lot. One is people's reaction. There's a marvelous energy that the public transmits. You can feel people's affection, their openness, their tolerance, their understanding. So many people come up to me with a letter they've written on the back of a ticket, a little note, or a gift to tell me that they've lost someone close ... Or often very young girls who identify with Paula . . . The second thing is that I read these texts in English, and the language constitutes a filter. These aren't the words that I wrote; they're the words of my translator, and that creates a little space between the text and me, which helps. But those few times I'll have to do it in Spanish I think will be very hard."

In her talk at Georgetown Allende spoke of the mask of language she hides behind. Nevertheless, people penetrate that mask and feel her pain. "It's that the pain is always there," she explains. "It's part of my nature. It's like wrinkles and grey hair. Those things are part of me now. I welcome a feeling that I know will be with me the rest of my life. Each time I see a long-haired girl in blue jeans walking down the street, I think it's Paula. And often I find myself with my hand on the phone ready to call her□because I called her all the time, almost every day□and then I realize that there's no place to call her. What I'm saying is, that's going to be with me always ... and I have to live with it."

Four years ago Allende was at a party celebrating the publication of *The Infinite Plan* (HarperCollins), feeling elated, triumphant, thinking that she had reached the high point of her career, when she received the call that Paula was in the hospital. When she arrived at the intensive care unit and was informed of her daughter's state, she was convinced that Paula would get better. She began to write during the long hours of waiting at the hospital; it was a way of killing time. Besides, she thought that Paula might not remember certain things when she awakened, and the book□a long memoir of the author's life with family anecdotes and descriptions of the political situation□would serve to orient her.

"My mother told me: 'Write or you'll die,'" says Allende, "and I started to think that as long as I wrote, Paula would stay alive. It was a way of defying death. My mother saw the end way before I did. Life is full of signs and premonitions, if only we knew how to read them. I had a lot of trouble coming to terms with the truth."

Allende began jotting down her thoughts and recollections on a yellow pad. She didn't intend to write a book, so the procedure never became a literary project. "At least not while I was writing," she says. "Now it is, because it's out of my hands. But writing was so tied to everything that happened ... From the moment when Paula got sick I began to write, and I wrote during the entire year she was ill and during the fist year of mourning. It was like part of the process, I never separated it completely. There are no variations in an illness like this one, nothing ever happens. There are no reactions. I wrote a lot of letters to my mother . . . when I went back over them I saw that none of them revealed any kind of change . . . Everything is the same from the first day to the last. Writing was a means of separating the days, of allowing time to pass and fixing it in my memory. It was like, by writing the day, the day happened. Without that, everything was the same. Writing was so tied to the process of grieving and also trying to help Paula that the book never developed an independent life. It's just that it wasn't a book. It started to be a book a lot later. So it never had its own life. When I wrote the last draft of the book, we still hadn't decided whether or not to publish it because I wasn't really writing it for anyone but myself, first of all, and then for my son, Nicolás, and my grandchildren. Porphyria is a genetic problem. Nicolás may have it. It might possibly show up in the children. It's a dominant gene, so it's very possible that the children have it. I thought it was important to leave them a testimony of what happened. Who knows when it might happen again?"

Nevertheless, today book publishing has become a commercial enterprise. Under the circumstances, marketing *Paula* must have been tremendously difficult for Allende. "I

never had to do this before *The Infinite Plan*," she explains. "When I changed publishers, HarperCollins stipulated in the contract that I had to do book tours. And I did the one for *The Infinite Plan* under terrible conditions because my daughter had died some six months before. I had to go all over the country, to eighteen cities, talking about *The Infinite Plan*, which didn't have anything to do with Paula's story, with a truly broken heart. So that was a really traumatic experience. This time, as well, I approached it with certain terror, but it hasn't been so bad. Of course, I don't think of it as selling the book. Instead, I think of it as talking about Paula. And somehow a sort of spiritual clearing forms in which I can take refuge, even on this trip, because the topic is a spiritual one."

There has been a lot of talk about the influence of other writers, especially Gabriel García Márquez, on Allende's work. However, in *Paula* there can be no question of imitation. The tone is intimate and the voice, absolutely authentic. The author insists that the question was raised years ago with respect to *The House of Spirits* (Knopf, 1985) but hasn't come up since. "I believe that every story has its own way of being told, every story has its own tone," she says. "I had never written nonfiction before ... well, of course, when I was a journalist, but I'd never written a whole book that wasn't fiction. But the tone of this book is very different from that of the others. This one is written the way I speak."

Allende believes that *Paula* is different from everything else she has written. "I can't judge it from a literary perspective," she says, "and I can't compare it with other books because it would be unfair both to this book and the others; they're two different genres ... I don't know what I'm going to write in the future. I don't even know if I' m going to write. I feel that during my whole life I was preparing to write this book. And what comes after, I don't know. I have the impression that nothing. All I feel is a great emptiness."

As for her evolution as a writer, she says: "I've learned very little. I've learned to cut a lot, to be more and more critical of my own work. But I have the impression that for each book you have to start from scratch. I know certain things that I'll never do again. For example, I can't try to force the story or the characters in a particular direction because I have a preconceived notion of how things should be, because that doesn't work for me. When I try to do that, everything falls apart. I have to follow the natural course the story takes all by itself. As if I could just interpret something that's in the air, but not create something new. That's something I've learned. And I've learned to be disciplined. I don't believe in inspiration. I believe in work. In my case, inspiration doesn't cut it; what cuts it is sitting all day, six or eight hours, and working. And that's something I know now, so I don't even wait for the story to fall out of the blue because I know that won't happen. And to edit, to do a lot of editing. But I always have the impression when I start on a new project that I don't know anything. Nothing.

"It seems to me that all my books are written differently. *The House of the Spirits* has an oneiric, magical tone. *Of Love and Shadows* (Knopf, 1987) is a police story that could have been written by a journalist. *Eva Luna* (Knopf, 1988) has a very different tone because there's a strong element of irony; it's a book that can be read on a lot of different levels. On the first, it could just be the story of *Eva Luna*; on another, the story

that she invents about herself; on another, the soap opera that she's writing about the story that she's inventing about herself. There are a lot of steps to reading it. And that sensation of peeling an onion, I had it while I was writing. It's very different from my other books. *The Infinite Plan* is a story that was already there. My job was to re-create it, but all the characters already existed, and the entire story existed. Even the title existed because my husband's father was the one who invented the religion called the Infinite Plan, and that's where the story came from. So I even stole the title from him. Everything!"

Allende also has a popular collection of short fiction, *The Stories of Eva Luna* (MacMillan, 1991). "People are always asking me for stories, but they're difficult to write," she says. "Stories are like apples. They come to you whole, round. Any little thing that's off, the story is ruined. There's one advantage, though: it's that you can work in segments, in segments of time. In two or three weeks, you can write a story. On the other hand, a novel is a commitment that can last two, three years. It's like falling in love. On the other hand, a short story is like a one-night stand!"

When she's working on a book, Allende follows a rigid schedule. She has one day□January 8□when she begins all her projects, "because it's too easy to put off writing," she says. "There's always something better to do, like play with the grandchildren, for example, so I need the discipline of always beginning on the same day. And once I begin, I don't start any other project until I finish the first one. I write just one book at a time, I never have several projects going at the same time. I write in the morning rather than in the afternoon because I'm more creative and energetic in the morning than in the afternoon. I get up very early, at six, and I go to another town, where I have a study, a garage that my husband fixed up like a study, and that's where I work. In the afternoon, at about two more or less, I have to take care of my correspondence. There's always more and more mail; we're forever waiting for it to crest and die down, but it doesn't, it just... it's like bureaucracy, it can only grow. Unless it's contracts, invitations . . . my assistant□who fortunately is also my daughter-in-law, Celia in the book□she takes care of all that. She deals with it ... she's really my boss. The letters, the fan letters, I answer them all personally. Because, if a person is kind enough to write me a letter, to look up my address and send it to me, at least I can answer it. That takes quite a bit of time.

"Generally, I type right into the computer a draft into which I pour everything. That's the part I like best, telling the story, without worrying about how it will come out. And after I've written the whole story, which takes about three or four months, I print it and read it for the first time. Then I know what it's all about. After that, I begin to clean it up, to leave the main story and get rid of all the extraneous material. That's for a novel, not for a memoir or stories, which are different. And then, there's a second draft in which the story is there, defined, and another in which I only worry about tension, language... I polish it, I polish it carefully ... I don't know how long that takes because with the computer you correct and overcorrect and correct again right on the screen... I don't print it each time. And when I have the feeling that it's pretty much ready, I print it out and send it to my mother in Chile.

"My mom reads it with a red pencil. Then she gets on the first plane she can find and comes to California. We lock ourselves up in the dining room to fight, and we fight for about a month. There's no better editor than my mother. She's heartless, absolutely cruel. She says things that would destroy any writer ... If she weren't my mother, I'd have killed her already! But I know she does it because she loves me. She demands a lot from me because she loves me so much. She's not jealous of me, and she doesn't have a preconceived notion of what will sell, the way an editor from a publishing house might. A professional editor might be thinking . . . well, if we put a sex scene on page 40, we'll sell more copies. Such an idea would never occur to my mother. She just goes by the quality. She insists and insists. We polish it between the two of us, and then she leaves and I continue polishing the draft by myself, incorporating a large number of my mother's suggestions, but not all of them, because my mom, for example, is shocked by the fact that I include sex scenes in my books. Sometimes I don't even show them to her. Now, with the computer, I censor them before she sees them." Allende bursts out laughing, proof that she hasn't lost her sense of humor. "If there's some reference to the pope, I censor that too," she says, still laughing.

Although Allende's books have been translated into many languages and are praised all over the Western world, she has not been immune to negative criticism. I asked her how adverse commentaries affect her, whether they hurt her or simply roll off her back. "It depends," she answers. "There are criticisms that are just negative and others that are malicious. And there's quite a difference. I can accept that someone doesn't like what I write for some reason. But at times I perceive meanness in the criticism. Meanness that comes from the fact that I wrote something that someone doesn't understand for any particular reason. Or because there was antagonism there to start with. Sometimes it's happened to me that another writer, often a man, criticizes my work, and you can tell from his comments that he is envious. His tone is nasty. That bothers me. But it doesn't bother me that much, because in reality, public response is what really matters in the long run. There are criticisms that are very destructive. The worst review in the history of literature appeared in the *New York Review of Books* on *Eva Luna*. This is an important piece because it goes to all the bookstores, all the libraries, so any students or other people who are studying my work or want to know anything about me, the first thing they'll do is go to the library and look for criticism, and the first thing they'll find is that one, which is horrible. A man who is an expert on baseball and took a trip to Latin America wrote it. Someone thought that because he had traveled in Latin America, he was the person to write about *Eva Luna*. He didn't understand the book at all, and he tore it apart in the most vicious way possible. And that bothered me because, who is this guy? What moral or literary authority does he have to take a book he didn't even understand and tear it apart?"

In spite of being the subject of many studies and theses, Allende admits that she doesn't keep up with the latest literary criticism. "I never studied literature," sheexplains. "And I haven't taught it, either. I've taught creative writing, which isn't the same thing. So fortunately, I'm not up on all the theories, which terrify me! But I get a lot of studies done by students, books written by professors on my work ... Generally, I don't understand them. I think it's the same with most writers. One writes as one can, the best one can, and it's the job of other people to vivisect what one produces, to explain it, but it's

difficult for a writer to explain her own work. I have maybe four papers on Barrabás, the dog in *The House of the Spirits*... what the dog symbolizes... It was just a dog who lived in my house and his name was Barrabás, that's all! But how can I explain to a student who has been working on a thesis on Barrabás for a year that he's just a dog? I'd feel awful!" The author laughs as she remembers the strange explanations that some critics have given to different characters or episodes in her books. "I think it can also be very paralyzing if you have that kind of explanation in your head ... if you're always thinking about those theories, about what the critics are going to say," she says. "You wind up writing for professors and critics, which is very dangerous."

Some feminist critics have insisted that there is such a thing as "women's writing," which, according to the French theorist Hélène Cixous, is more spontaneous, natural, and fluid than men's writing. Allende approaches these theories rather cautiously because, in her opinion, "women have been segregated from everything in life, including writing. So, when we talk about literature, we just suppose it's masculine and it's not qualified by an adjective. When women write, they call it 'women's literature' as if it were a minor genre. I think we women have to be careful not to fall into that trap ourselves. Nevertheless, on the one hand, literature is always the same and language, the instrument that we use, is always the same. But, of course, it's also true that there's such a thing as point of view, perspective, which is determined by one's sex, one's age, one's place of birth, the social class one is born into, the race one is born into. All these things determine a biography, a world view and, therefore, a form of writing. Why do women chose subjects different from the ones men choose? Why do women read certain books that just don't interest men, and vice versa? Because certain things are common to our sex."

The House of the Spirits, the book that launched Allende's career, continues to be her most highly praised work. In spite of this, however, it seems that certain aspects of the novel have been understood only superficially by readers outside of Chile. For example, *The House of the Spirits* is one of the few books that really show the diversity of opinion among conservatives during the socialist regime in Chile. Many of the conservatives of the generation of Esteban Trueba, the protagonist's grandfather, were afraid of change and unable to support socialism on ideological grounds, but felt that when Salvador Allende fell, Chile would return to its democratic roots. When they saw what Pinochet's dictatorship brought, they were horrified. Outside Chile, there is a tendency to classify the opponents of socialism automatically as supporters of the dictatorship. Nevertheless, Allende shows that this was not the case.

I asked her if she feels that readers grasp this aspect of the novel. "Some, yes," she says. "But others get angry. For example, when *The House of the Spirits* was published, it was during the worst part of the repression in Chile. And the message at the end is reconciliation. Not forgetting, but yes, reconciliation, with the idea that a new country could be built□or the country could be restored□ only on a foundation of national reconciliation. It just wasn't possible to go on proliferating hatred systematically forever and ever, on and on, because that way we would never end the violence. That set very badly among the people who had suffered repression firsthand in Chile, because it was practically asking them to forgive in a period when no one was entertaining that idea

yet. So I had a very negative reaction from the people on the left, and of course, a horrible one from the people on the right, because I tried to explain the circumstances under which the coup occurred; I spoke clearly of torture and the horror that took place under the military regime, which, back then, it was still possible to deny because we were living with censorship and self-censorship, so nothing was being published about it and people could say no, those are just Communist rumors and not accept what was really happening in Chile. Nowadays it's almost impossible for people to keep on denying it. It's very difficult. There are still people who do, but those are just dinosaurs who really don't matter. So I had bad reactions from both sides. But there was a huge number of people in the middle who did understand the subtleties of how things were, because in every family there were people on both sides. The country was divided, families were divided, couples were divided. So a lot of people did understand, and the book was very well received by those people in the middle. Now, how the public understands it in the United States or in, say, Denmark, I don't know. I just don't know."

In 1994 a film based on *The House of the Spirits* was released, with Jeremy Irons, Meryl Streep, Glenn Close, Winona Ryder, and Antonio Banderas. It received mixed reviews, but the author liked it a lot. However, she says, "I felt a few things were missing. The lack of humor, that's what bothered me the most. I don't know if you know Jeremy Irons ... he's the funniest person imaginable. I think that in the book, in *The House of the Spirits*, except in the very most tragic moments, there's a current of irony and humor that just isn't in the movie. I found that lacking, and also a more Latin touch ... I would have liked more ... more of that Latin tone. But I did like the film very much."

It is hard to believe, in spite of what she says, that Allende has no plans for the future. She is too dynamic to remain inactive, and she loves writing too much to give it up. She admits that she has already begun another project: "Well, January 8 always prompts me to begin another book," she says. "And I did begin something. Let's see when I finish with all this, if I can spend time on it and create another book. But I don't feel the passion to write it that I've felt before, with other books. I think it's because *Paula* is still too fresh. I just finished the memoir last October. It was published immediately in Spain in December. Everything has gone so fast that I haven't had time to breathe. It's been too fast."

In spite of how hard it has been, at least she is fortunate enough to be able to count on the support of her family: "I have a husband, a son, and a daughter-in-law, who want only for me to write, because that way I don't bother them. They want me to be locked up writing all the time. My husband met me because he fell in love with one of my books ... *Of Love and Shadows*... He read it in English, he fell in love with it, and so he went to San José [California] when I was on a book tour, and that's where he met me. So, he came to me because he admired my work. And his admiration for my work hasn't diminished at all. It's a nice feeling because, as a Latin woman, I' ve had to struggle my whole life against the lack of respect of the male establishment ... in every aspect of my life. For example, it took many years before my stepfather, whom I adore, was able to respect me professionally, in my career. He automatically respected the male children. Women, we have to earn respect from one day to the next. It's hard. To have to fight like that during your whole life leaves you scarred."

But Allende hasn' t lost faith in people. She sees her book *Paula* as a celebration of existence, of all the things in the world that are beautiful and worthwhile. She concludes a conversation with these words: "The only thing I want to say is that this book, in spite of the tragic subject matter and the tragic circumstances under which I wrote it, is not a book about death. It's not a sad book. I think it's a book about life ... about family ... about relationships ... about love ... about all the things that are important and should be celebrated in my life and in Paula's."

Source: Isabel Allende and Barbara Mujica, "The Life Force of Language," in *Americas*, Vol. 47, No. 6, November/ December 1995, pp. 36-43.

Critical Essay #3

In the following review, Behar calls Paula *a "memoir of devastating passion," citing its "charged poetry."*

"Listen, Paula, I am going to tell you a story, so that when you wake up you will not feel so lost." With those simple, enchanted words, the Chilean novelist Isabel Allende begins *Paula,* a memoir of devastating passion dedicated to her daughter. Sadly, unlike Sleeping Beauty, Paula Frias Allende will never awaken to hear her mother's tale. She has fallen, at the age of 28, into a sudden coma caused by the rare illness of porphyria, which has left her speechless, motionless, lost in an angelic stupor that is broken only rarely by tears and trembling. As her mother unfolds her tale, patiently seeking to awaken Paula and bring her back to the world of the living, Paula edges closer to death. By the end, she becomes a gentle spirit who appears to her mother in the night, asking to be released from the suffering and weight of her body. Allende must finally confront a harsh truth: not only that her tale won't save her daughter, but that she must cease her storytelling altogether, that it is keeping Paula strapped to a reality she no longer inhabits.

Paula, despite the title, is not a biography or even an account of the life of Isabel Allende's daughter. It is Allende's own autobiography, told to a daughter who has entered a limbo between life and death. Paula's entrance into that border zone becomes the occasion for Isabel Allende to tell her own life story. The dying daughter becomes a mirror in which the mother reaffirms her reality and comes to terms with the decisions she has made as a woman and a writer. In the cruelest possible twisting of the order of things, Paula must die before her mother, must become a daughter who gives birth to her mother. This unflinchingly honest self-portrait becomes Allende's parting gift to her daughter.

How inspiring it is for any woman who feels she has yet to do the work that really matters to read Isabel Allende's story of how she found her calling as a novelist. Allende recalls, "New Year's, 1981. That day brought home the fact that soon I would be forty and had not until then done anything truly significant. Forty! that was the beginning of the end, and I did not have to stretch too much to imagine myself sitting in a rocking chair knitting socks." Unable to imagine what she might do that would seem significant in her own eyes, she makes a number of sensible New Year's resolutions. She resolves to stay indefinitely in Venezuela, where she'd gone into exile with her husband, her two children, her mother and her stepfather in 1975 after General Pinochet toppled the democratic government of her uncle, Salvador Allende, and instituted a regime of repression, torture and terror. She resolves to continue working steadily at a school in Caracas for children with emotional problems, which will provide security and stability. And she resolves to "sacrifice love" for the "noble companionship" of a good husband, for whom she no longer feels any passion.

"The plan was entirely rational□and it lasted not quite a week," Allende tells us. On January 8, in a phone call from Santiago de Chile, she learns that Tata, her beloved

grandfather, soon to turn one hundred years old, is dying. She begins to write a letter "to tell him he could go in peace because I would never forget him and planned to bequeath his memory to my children and my children's children." That letter, like a wild weed, quickly and unexpectedly grows into the five hundred pages of her novel, *The House of the Spirits*, and it is Paula who, in another strange gesture of premonition, tosses the coin that helps Allende choose the title of the book that will completely change her life.

Not long after, Allende writes a second novel, *Of Love and Shadows*, to prove to her literary agent in Spain that she is a serious writer and not just the accidental lucky author of a bestseller. All her sensible plans for a quiet and predictable life joyfully unravel. She quits her job at the school, gracefully undoes her marriage in a single afternoon and lets passion sweep over her in California, where she meets Willie, a cowboy-booted lawyer who'd given up on women, and overnight convinces herself and him that they have found in each other the passion of a lifetime. Sound romantic? Well, it is, and Allende, a magical writer, makes you believe that "happily ever after" is still possible, and in the very prime of a woman's life.

Now, Allende desperately wishes she could trade her life for her daughter's life. She is a privileged woman, in that she can afford to be present constantly at Paula's bedside and can hire others to help with all the complicated details of her daughter's daily care. But like Job she struggles with God, asking why her daughter had to be anointed early, so early, as a spirit? For a writer whose first best-selling novel was entitled *The House of the Spirits*, it is ironic to see that fictional house of spirits transformed into her real-life daughter' s home.

Indeed, the Premonitions of her fiction haunt Allende throughout the writing of *Paula*. Especially eerie to her is the foresight embedded in her short story, "And Of Clay Are We Created," which was inspired by the 1985 avalanche in Colombia that buried a village in mud. Among those trapped was Omaira Sánchez, a thirteen-year-old girl who became the focus of attention of news-hungry photographers, journalists and television cameras that fixed their curious and helpless eyes on the girl who kept her faith in life as she bravely met her death. In that horrid audience of onlookers, there was one man, a reporter, who made the decision to stop observing Omaira from the lens of his camera and lay down in the mud to offer her what comfort he could as her heart and lungs collapsed. Allende, who was obsessed by "the torment of that poor child buried alive," wrote her story from the perspective of a woman□and she was that woman□"who watches the televised struggle of the man holding the girl."

Allende assumed that once the story was published (in *The Stories of Eva Luna*), Omaira would disappear from her life. But Omaira, she discovers, is

a dogged angel who will not let me forget her. When Paula fell into a coma and became a prisoner in her bed, inert, dying slowly before the helpless gaze of all around her, I remembered the face of Omaira Sánchez. My daughter was trapped in her body, as the girl had been trapped in mud. Only then did I understand why I had thought about her all

those years, and finally could decipher the message in those intense black eyes: patience, courage, resignation, dignity in the face of death.

She reaches a paradoxical conclusion: "If I write something, I fear it will happen, and if I love too much, I fear I will lose that person; nevertheless, I cannot stop writing or loving ..."

Like the reporter who joins the girl in the mud, Allende, too, relinquishes the detached observer position. For her, this means exiling herself from the territory of fiction, which in the past has allowed her to invent the destinies of her characters and so removed reality to a safe and controllable distance. Until her daughter fell ill, she remarks, she much preferred to write fiction. But with Paula's descent into death, Allende comes to feel she can only write about the world that lies insistently before her as if

a dark curtain has separated me from the fantasy world in which I used to moves so freely, reality has become intractable ... Everything is suspended, I have nothing to tell, the present has the brutal certainty of tragedy. I close my eyes and before me rises the painful image of my daughter in her wheelchair, her eyes staring toward the sea, her gaze focused beyond the horizon where death begins.

The pages of the memoir that Allende writes at her daughter's bedside in a Madrid hospital and later in her home in California are

an irreversible voyage through a long tunnel; I can't see an exit but I know there must be one. I can't go back, only continue to go forward, step by step, to the end. As I write, I look for a sign, hoping that Paula will break her implacable silence and answer somehow in these yellow pages ...

Paula is a heartbreaking lament, written with the charged poetry that emerges at those times when there is an urgent need to speak, though one knows that words, no matter how ravishingly spoken, will change nothing. Isabel Allende couldn't save her daughter by writing *Paula*, nor even by enlisting every kind of therapy and remedy, from the most advanced biomedical techniques to acupuncture and astrology. And yet it is a tribute to Allende's skill as a writer and the depth of her soul-searching that *Paula*, written on the eve of death, is immensely life-affirming. This is one of those unusual books about suffering that has no use for pity, that manages, somehow, in a situation of utter depletion, to give much more to the reader than would have seemed possible. One reads *Paula* with gratitude for the way it poignantly marks the loss of a daughter while restoring faith in the power of language to free those of us women who are still in this world and still caught in the labyrinths of our own lives. And Margaret Sayers Peden's translation into English is so exquisite that the unpretentious lyricism of Allende's Spanish seems to glow on the page.

In the face of her daughter's dying, Allende may have felt unable to write fiction, but like Eva Luna, the protagonist of her third book, she has clearly set out to live her life "like a novel." Or at least, to her daughter, Paula, to try to awaken her, she *tells* her life as if it were a novel. In that novel of her life, Isabel Allende emerges as a woman who isn't

afraid of her own desire, or her own happiness. She is able to admit, at one of the worst moments of her grief, "I have lived nearly half a century, my daughter is dying, and still I want to make love. I think of Willie's reassuring presence and feel goosebumps rise on my skin, and can only smile at the amazing power of desire that makes me shiver despite my sorrow, even push death from my mind." Embracing life and love with all her might, Allende honors the memory of Paula and lets her go, gently, back out into the universe.

Source: Ruth Behar, "In the House of Spirits," in *Women's Review of Books*, Vol. XIII, No. 2, November 1995, p. 8.

Adaptations

Channel BBC1 in the United Kingdom did a production of *Listen Paula* in September of 1995. The special, focusing on Allende, Paula, and the family's history, received much public attention.

Topics for Further Study

The hereditary blood disease, porphyria, has its own rich mythological background. Investigate both the fiction and the facts about this rare illness. Discuss the reality and mythology of the disease in terms of the depiction of Paula as a character in the book.

Select a few culturally specific narratives that negotiate a period of historical trauma. Such narratives might arise out of wars, like the Vietnam War or the Korean Conflict, or genocide, such as the Holocaust or the Indian Wars in the American West. How do narratives reveal variations in the representation of trauma based on their purpose (e.g. historical works, sociological studies, and fictional accounts)?

The interest amongst Americans in their genealogy exploded during the 1990s. Investigate this recent interest in terms of best-selling works, like Allende's, that emphasize family trees.

Although *Paula* reflects the author's Chilean heritage, in what ways does her work also take part in the creation of an international literature? How does Allende continue the spirit of "El Boom"?

What is Marxism and why has it receded as a viable alternative to capitalism? What was so unique about the experience of Marxism in Chile compared to other attempts to create a socialist state?

What Do I Read Next?

Allende's *Daughter of Fortune*, published in 1999, is the author's sixth novel. Set in the 1800s, it tells the story of a young woman who takes the road less traveled in pursuit of her own identity and happiness. Like Allende's former fictional works, this one also presents characters that span many generations, plots that converge, and questions issues of class and ethnicity.

Angela's Ashes: A Memoir is Frank McCourt's 1996 book, which quickly became a bestseller; it was eventually followed by 'Tis, a sequel to his autobiography. McCourt recalls his childhood and life in Ireland and New York City, painting a poignant yet often humorous picture of a life of poverty, spent among many siblings and with an alcoholic father.

Richard Wright's semi-fictional autobiography *Black Boy*, originally published in 1945, came out in a new edition in the 1990s. A moving story of a young boy's coming of age, this book is a seminal text in American history about the experience of black men in the American South during the Jim Crow years.

Tuesdays with Morrie: An Old Man, a Young Man and Life's Greatest Lesson, published in 1997, is journalist Mitch Albom' s recollection of the relationship he had with his mentor, Morrie Schwartz, before his mentor's death from a terminal illness.

Ekaterina Gordeeva's 1996 book *My Sergei: A Love Story* is an autobiographical account by the young widow after her husband's untimely death. The book details the professional and intimate relationship between the author and her husband/ skating partner Sergei Grinkov, the famous Russian two-time Olympic gold medalists in pairs skating.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Nonfiction Classics for Students (NCfS) 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, NCfS 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 NCfS 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 NCfS 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 NCfS 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 NCfS 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

NCfS 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 Nonfiction Classics 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 NCfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS 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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When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Nonfiction Classics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NCfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

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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 Nonfiction Classics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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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 Nonfiction Classics 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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