

**Recovering Loss: The Other Side of History as  
Depicted in Isabel Allende's The House of the  
Spirits**

استعادة الفقد: الوجه الآخر للتاريخ كما يظهر في رواية ايزابيل ايندي  
"بيت الأرواح"

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**Recovering Loss: The Other Side of History as Depicted in Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits***

This paper looks at the period of history from 1973 to 1990 in Chile as reflected in *The House of the Spirits* (1982) by Isabel Allende (1942- ). Throughout the novel, the reader follows the lives, loves and treacheries as well as the social and political changes that occur in and around the Trueba family. The novel clarifies the forces which have charted much of the region's history.

The paper tries to answer an important question; which is more truthful in recording the past, history or literature? It cannot be determined whether fiction is more honest than historical fact or history is more honest in recounting peoples' and countries' past. It might be reasonable to assume that literature is more appealing, especially to those who find exploring history a dreary task. However, both history and literature are essential, and both are crucial in understanding the world as it was at some point. The main link between literature and history is that literature is usually used to validate and retell history. The two are, therefore, complementary to each another. The biggest difference between the two is that the former postulates itself as fact, while the latter is taken to be an artistic form.

**Key words:** *Novel – Loss – truthful – History – Literature*

## استعادة الفقد: الوجه الآخر للتاريخ كما يظهر في رواية إيزابيل ايندي بيت الأرواح

يقوم هذه البحث بدراسة الفترة التاريخية في شيلي من ١٩٧٣ إلى ١٩٩٠ كما يظهر في رواية بيت الأرواح (١٩٨٢) للكاتبة إيزابيل ايندي (١٩٤٢-). فمن خلال قراءة الرواية، يستطيع القارئ تتبع جميع نواحي الحياة الخاصة بعائلة تروبا بما في ذلك الحب والغدر والتغيرات الاجتماعية والسياسية التي حدثت في محيط هذه العائلة. إذ يتضح من الرواية من هي القوى التي خطت الكثير من تاريخ هذه المنطقة.

ويحاول البحث الإجابة على سؤال هام وهو: ما أكثر صدقا في تسجيل أحداث الماضي التاريخ أم الأدب؟ والحقيقة أنه لا يمكن تحديد ما إذا كان الأدب أكثر صدقا من الحقيقة التاريخية أو أن التاريخ أكثر صراحة في سرد ماضي الشعوب والبلدان. ولكن قد يكون من المعقول افتراض أن الأدب هو الأكثر جذبا للقراء، وبخاصة لأولئك الذين يجدون أن استكشاف التاريخ مهمة رتيبة. ومع ذلك، فإن كلا من التاريخ والأدب ضرورة، وكلاهما أساسيان في فهم العالم كما كان في مرحلة ما. والصلة الرئيسية بين الأدب والتاريخ هي أن الأدب يستخدم عادة للتحقق من صحة التاريخ وإعادة كتابته. وبالتالي، فإن الاثنين يكمل كل منهما الآخر، وأكبر فرق بينهما هو أن التاريخ يفرض نفسه بوصفه حقيقة، في حين ينظر للأدب على أنه شكل فني.

## **Recovering Loss: The Other Side of History as Depicted in Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits***

The current paper looks at the period of history from 1973 to 1990 in Chile as reflected in *The House of the Spirits* (1982) by Isabel Allende (1942- ). The novel tells the story of four generations of the Trueba family. Throughout the novel, the reader follows the lives, loves and treacheries as well as the social and political changes that occur in and around the Trueba family. Although the author has never mentioned that the events are located in Chile, it is clear by the rich details in the novel - from the description of the geography to certain historical and political references - that the story takes place in Chile. The novel clarifies the forces which have charted much of the region's history. A locale that looks like Chile but is not explicitly stated which allows for a universal interpretation.

### **Which is more truthful in recording the past, history or literature?**

The paper tries to answer an important question; which is more truthful in recording the past, history or literature? It cannot be determined whether fiction is more honest than historical fact or history is more honest in recounting peoples' and countries' past. It might be reasonable to assume that literature is more appealing, especially to those who find exploring history a dreary task.

Webster (1981) defines history as "the bridge between the past and the present" (pp.14). It is an analytic record of events in a certain epoch. Therefore, history is the past experience of mankind preserved largely in written records. B. Sheik Ali (1970) stated that "history indicates the growth of human mind in which the unique facts of life are collected, classified and interpreted in a scientific way" (pp.3).

Literature is a form of human expression. It becomes a form of universal truth articulated through powerful personal expression. Literature includes creative writings (poetry, novel, drama, and essays), popular narratives and works produced by philosophers, historians, religious, social thinkers and writers.

A problem associated with history is that it is written with the lens of the historian, tainted with their biases and prejudices. As Kazin (1979)

puts it, "for non-fiction, personal history is a direct effort to find salvation and to make one's own experience come out right." (pp. 29-50). Literature, on the other hand, deals with the same events from a much more intimate viewpoint. For example, from history we know about the Chilean military coup and how it affected Chile and the government. However from literature, we know how it affected the people. History at its most basic is the story of humanity, but literature gives voice to voiceless people.

The main link between literature and history is that literature is usually used to validate and retell history. The two are, therefore, complementary to each another. The biggest difference between history and literature is that the former postulates itself as fact, while the latter is taken to be an artistic form. The twin ideas of fact and entertainment intertwine often within history and literature to produce historical fiction and narrative non-fiction. History and literature differ in how truth manifests itself in both of them assuming the assumption that each of the two exemplifies a specific form of truth. Truth can exist in literature, and that the novel is capable of expressing such a truth is undeniable. Hume's (1982) categorical statement that all novelists are "liars by profession" (pp. 169) is no longer very popular today.

Literature often responds to historical events, but not always in an overt way. Moreover, it sets an ideology which is both literary and political. Allende (1999) depicts the "political literature that some women have begun to create" as "so revolutionary [it's] no wonder many critics are scared" (p. 51). She adds that women authors "are questioning that set of values that have sustained human society since the first apes stood on their feet and raised their eyes to the sky. After centuries of silence, women are taking by assault the exclusive male club of literature" (Allende, 1999, p. 51).

Literature often mirrors events that happen in real life. Major key actions in history, such as the overthrow of a country's government, can serve as a dominant theme in literary works of the time period. This is especially true of *The House of the Spirits* by Isabel Allende, in which the real occasion of the overthrow of the Chilean government by the military is an important facet of the plot in an otherwise fictional novel. Peter

Earle (1987) comments on the phenomenon of finding more accurate information concerning historical or social events within a piece of fiction than in other media, "books have undeniably been a steadier and more reliable source of disclosure in Latin America than radio, television, or the press" (p. 545). The novel can be analyzed based on the historical background of when it was written, and the impacts it had on Allende's life.

Throughout history people have suffered under brutal and oppressive regimes. These regimes usually wish to control the flow of all information - especially transparent information - in an effort to hide and protect their illegal gains. At such times, literature has often been the only way to record the truth.

### **Historical Background:**

The period from 1910 until 1973 in the Chilean history provides the novel's framework with its combination of personal, political, private and public spaces. The change in power stability occurs through Allende's preference of female voices. It seems to accurately mirror Chilean society and the repression under which the country lived during the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990). In the novel, we get a deep sense of the actual anxieties of the people: families that lived through the oppression and how it affected their daily lives and their plans for the future. The novel also details the mistreatment of women and suppression by the military after the coup of 1973, culminating in the emergence of an opposition to the ruling class and the inevitable clash between the two.

In 1970, the Chilean political system gave birth, without the predicted violence, to a democratically elected Marxist government, led by Salvador Allende, head of the Popular Unity Party in full agreement with the Chilean constitution. Allende organized the process of converting Chile into the first Marxist country in the world to implement the changes inherent in such a system through democratic means. The social, political and economic adjustments were made supposedly to render the system more just and equitable for the less fortunate. Salvador Allende began his Presidency hemmed in by (1) an opposition-controlled Congress, (2) an autonomous Army [but at the beginning it simply wanted to avoid political controversy], and (3) an independent judiciary.

Allende had substantial executive and economic powers (de Vylder, pp. 44-46), for example, setting wages and prices (de Vylder, p. 44), expropriating businesses (but only with full compensation), and temporarily seizing businesses (de Vylder, pp. 138-39). Only Congress, however, could vote taxes or ratify new laws (de Vylder, p. 45).

Unfortunately, many changes were made without consulting the congress. Instead, the administration used ancient articles in long-forgotten laws that Allende's people were successful in locating in order to begin the massive societal reorganization. Until 1973, Chile's armed forces respected the democratic process, and for the most part, civilian authority. Argentine author Jacobo Timerman (1987) writes that:

The Chileans regarded their cultured and well-ordered country, once the most stable democracy in Latin America, as a European nation. To them, Chile was "the England of the South." In 1973 they discovered, and have continued discovering every day since, that they cannot escape their savage Latin American destiny. (p. 8)

In 1973, respect for civilian rule was ended. With the support of the Chilean middle class and with obvious help from the United States Government, the armed forces interrupted the democratic process. The coup d'etat resulted in the death of Salvador Allende and his Marxist experiment in Chile. In its place rose a brutal and repressive dictatorship. General Augusto Pinochet took control of the country, suspended the constitution and the civil liberties he claimed to be defending and began a reign of terror against any individual or group perceived as a threat. He employed brutal tactics (described in the novel) incomparable in Chile and perhaps in all of Latin America.

In Pinochet's Chile (1973-1990), the dictatorship severely limited information which opposed the official version of the truth. Books were censored or blacklisted. Newspapers and magazines were shut down or intimidated and put out of business. Television was either run directly by the government or by persons loyal to the dictatorship. These drastic changes affected Chilean life profoundly. The force and bloodiness with which Pinochet and his followers pursued their ideological enemies profoundly shocked the Chilean people if not the whole world. Thousands were detained. Many were tortured. Many more simply disappeared. In

the aftermath of the bloody coup d'etat of September, 1973, rape of detained women by their military jailors was common. Cigarette-butt and cattle-prod treatment to "jar the memories" of detainees of both sexes occurred over and over again. They were then set free (but blacklisted) or instead just shot and squirreled away somewhere, far from public view (Spooner, 1994).

Isabel Allende is the niece of the late President Salvador Allende. In 1975, Allende and her family fled to Venezuela (Pinto, 1988, p. 27). She carried with her letters from her mother, her grandmother's journals, as well as articles on imprisoned persons and various other records that exposed Pinochet. Prior to leaving Chile, she had also secretly conducted interviews and tape-recorded information concerning the torture of many people by Pinochet and the military. Allende states in an interview:

I was not able to publish in my country a major part of the material I had gathered and I brought it to Venezuela, thinking of how it would serve as a testimony in the future. At this time the idea to write a novel had not crossed my mind. I assumed that these documents would be put to use some day, when it was possible to accuse those guilty.... At any moment these horrendous events could leave the light and when this happens, the histories that I compiled would not be lost, they will serve as a historical testimony. (Allende, 1987, pp. 42-43)

As she fled just two years after the coup, she probably heard about the hard conditions from family members and friends who were still in Chile, however, she herself noted the starvation and the terrible conditions after the coup, and therefore, this picture of Chile may have been an inspirational factor to include the real events in the novel. Allende shows what it was like in Chile just before the coup, as well as under the military dictatorship. She noted the shortage of food and goods prevalent during the socialist rule - under the previous government - and the following growth of a black-market system which highlighted the dominant horrible living conditions in the country.

**Research problem and significance:**

The importance of this novel is in bearing witness to actual events using the only means of expression at their disposal. It is a historiographic

metafiction, not merely a record of historical facts and events. Most probably Allende wrote about the pre-coup period for two reasons: firstly, to display the traditional patriarchal structure of society in Chile, and secondly - including the overthrow of the government - to raise awareness of that experience which might happen in other countries. Chile is not one of the leading countries of the world, and therefore Allende felt that the world was inattentive to the actions taking place in her country. The overthrow of the government, which was followed by the tough conditions of the military regime, may not have been broadly broadcast in other countries; thus detailing them in the novel might help to increase awareness of these events.

Throughout the novel we realize that these events had a major impact upon Allende's life which made her the product of her time and place, and she wrote about it as a way of healing from the sorrow and the agony of her loss. Simply, Allende wanted to recover all that she had lost: her land, her family, and her memories. Allende wrote the novel to keep her memories of her family and country from disappearing altogether. As Sheffield (2002) puts it, "through rewriting, such as is evident in *The House of the Spirits*, memories that history ignores are preserved and given voice" (p. 34). Allende faced her fear by describing and documenting the awful events themselves. Writing the novel was the only way to recall her past, the bridge that led her to her earlier life. Exiled in a foreign country, *The House of the Spirits* was written as a way of recovering that past. The depiction of Alba - granddaughter of politician Esteban Trueba - who was imprisoned, tortured and raped for remaining loyal to socialist rebels after the coup, was intended to draw attention to the maltreatment of the people of Chile. Alba comes out of jail, stable and active as she used to be, and starts to narrate the history of her family and her country based on her grandmother's diaries. Thus, Alba - like Allende - overcomes her trauma by detailing it from the very beginning.

### **Symbolic aspects of family in the novel:**

*The House of the Spirits* is about Clara's family: Esteban Trueba, her husband, a traditionalist senator, dictatorial, and male-chauvinist head of family; Bianca, their daughter; and Alba, their granddaughter. The historical references in Allende's novel are particularly strong; some of

her characters describe real Chilean figures. The Candidate/President is, of course, Allende's uncle, Salvador Allende.

The family itself is symbolic of the nation, as Earle (1987) shows that the del Valle-Trueba family finds an analogy in Chilean politics, "The political dispersion of the family she [Allende] tells about is microcosmic, for contemporary Chilean history is also one of dispersion, beginning the day after Salvador Allende's election in 1970" (pp. 545-46). Thus, while Allende politicizes "the family" as standing for the nation, the novel's autobiographical elements tie the political to the personal: although the dictator in the novel goes unnamed, it is clear Allende refers to Pinochet. The "dispersion of the family" implies Allende's exile, those others who fled Chile, as well as family members who lost their spouses, children, or relatives in the wake of the 1973 coup.

#### **Retrieving "lost" memory and identity in the novel:**

*The House of the Spirits*, says Allende, "is based on the experiences of my past, my family, my country" (as cited in Allende, 1987, p. 51). The composition of her first novel suggests how important memory is to Allende, especially in exile. In Venezuela, Allende received a call from Chile in 1981 that her 100-year-old grandfather was dying (Coleman, 1986, p. 27; Ross, 1989, p. 4). She subsequently started composing a letter to him, stating that he would never die as long as she kept alive her memories of him. This sentiment corresponds to her grandfather's own belief that "death did not exist, only forgetfulness did" (as cited in Pinto, 1988, pp. 25-26).

Allende's anxiety over her grandfather's impending death was coupled with the effects of exile. She felt a "tremendous paralysis" for many years: "I felt I'd lost roots, that I'd lost my native land, that I'd lost my whole world" (as cited in Pinto, 1988, p. 24). She also lamented having lost her friends, who were scattered or dead, or who had disappeared (as cited in Pinto, 1988, p. 24). Reflecting on the experience, Allende states: "You never think about the past in normal times," but when you have to leave everything behind, the past becomes central because you have to put your roots in the past and not in the landscape or on a place. That's what I achieved with *The House of the Spirits*. (as cited in Foster, 1988, p. 44)

While writing to her grandfather, Allende eventually forgot that she was composing a letter, and it evolved into *The House of the Spirits*. This was the start of her literary career. The novel consists of the documents and other materials she had brought with her from Chile, memories of her family and the *coup d'etat*, as well as characters she took from other families (Pinto, 1988, pp. 24-29). *The House of the Spirits* attests to the redemptive function of memory, its ability to keep alive the spirits of the past.

The military coup, says Allende, "split my life in half with the blow of a hatchet" (as cited in Pinto, 1988, p. 26). But exile for her has been paradoxically both tragic and beneficial, beneficial because in writing she has been able to recover her past and to know it in a way that she might not have, had she remained in Chile. Exile has also made Allende a stronger, more mature person who sees the world from a wider perspective (Foster, 1988, p. 44). A contributing factor to her strength is her political formation, which is constituted by her feminism (that privileges justice and compassion) and a recognition of the social injustices and political oppression in Latin American history. As one reviewer of *The House of the Spirits* notes, the author's surname "carries tremendous emotional weight as a symbol not only for the Chilean cataclysm, but also for the struggle over the definition of social justice in Latin America" (as cited in Hall, 1986, p. 31).

In exile, Allende believes that memory redeems the personal past of the individual and the collective past of Latin America. In other words, personal memory signifies collective memory, suggesting the shared history of the nation as family. Memory is "grounded in a recuperated relation to the historical," and like her own female protagonist-writers, Allende "is animated by the desire to preserve pasts too often trivialized, built over, or erased, and to pass them on" in writing (Foreman, 1995, p. 285). But writing is also important to the exile because it has allowed her to unleash the repressed sadness and sympathy for those who suffered under Pinochet's military regime (Pinto, 1988, p. 29). Alba Trueba echoes this sentiment when given her grandmother's notebooks: "I would use her notebooks to reclaim the past and overcome terrors of my own" (Allende, 1988, p. 1).

### **Reconstruction of Allende's "lost world":**

For Allende, writing is power. This idea corresponds to Clara del Valle's ability to alter the future. Allende came to her identity from the marginal position of the exile; as weapons of liberation against the imposed silence of exile, remembering and writing for the author are not simply privileged topics in her fiction. They are necessary activities that suggest the intensified subjectivity generated by her displacement. Allende exposes in her fiction the process of recovering her past and identity through her characters' narratives. In a gesture toward nation-building, she writes in order to name the home of her past. Ernest Renan's definition of "nation" is reflected in *The House of the Spirits*. The "nation," he says, is a spiritual principle, the outcome of the profound complications of history; it is a spiritual family not a group determined by the shape of the earth:

. . . Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form . . . (Renan, 1999, pp. 18-19)

The ideas of memory, solidarity, and survival are rooted in Allende's experience of exile, where the loss of context signifies a loss of meaning that must be recovered. Allende does this through writing.

### **Allende's approach to feminism and magical realism:**

From the first lines of *The House of the Spirits*, Allende uses the technique of a feminized magical realism to draw the reader to a political-historical novel. Magical realism encompasses myth, magic and other extraordinary phenomena in nature or experience which European realism excluded. Allende uses the technique of magical realism in her novel to blend reality and fantasy so that the distinction between the two erases. She uses it for more than a reason: the first is to avoid censorship and prevention, the second reason is to produce a general novel credible to all human beings and its implications are not limited to a limited context, and the third reason is presenting her the novel not as a reflection of reality but as a monitoring of history.

The novel specifically refers to the spiritual powers that the women possess as allowing them to construct a new unity between women so as to have a tactic of survival in a man's world. Allende presents a world characterized by two conflicting perspectives: the rational view of reality and the acceptance of the supernatural as a simple reality. As a child Clara was known to have spirits soaring around her, to be telepathic (as when she knows the identity of the murderer of the schoolchildren before the police do [Allende, 1988, p.77]), and able to interpret dreams (Allende, 1988, pp. 74-5). Clara is also skilled at forewarning. She predicted the death of her godfather (Allende, 1988, p. 75) and her own marriage (Allende, 1988, pp. 82-3). Perhaps most remarkable, she is able to move objects without touching them (Allende, 1988, p.77). And as the novel shows, this talent is passed onto female children and grandchildren. Clara's world, as her grandchild, Alba, notes when reading the former's notebooks, is one "where the prosaic truth of material objects mingled with the tumultuous reality of dreams and the laws of physics and logic did not always apply" (Allende, 1988, p. 82). The three Mora sisters, Clara's friends, for example, "discovered a way to transmit mental energy [...] which enabled them to give each moral support in difficult moments of their daily lives" (Allende, 1988, p. 125). This knowledge becomes essential later on for Alba when she is imprisoned in a camp and suffering daily torture. She is relieved by the apparition of her grandmother, Clara, from beyond the grave (Allende, 1988, p. 414).

Alba Trueba from Allende's *The House of the Spirits* is a viable example of this revolutionary female narration. Her story, which incorporates her female relatives' viewpoints and excludes Trueba's version, is a direct block to Trueba's egotistic, stiff, and somewhat fabricated version of events. Her woman-centered narration is, furthermore, an image of the triumph of women's expression and their revision of patriarchal and authoritarian history. Alba watches the military eradicate history and shatter the country, but she in turn employs her power of writing to resist. Alba and her gender, therefore, become existing symbols of a more compassionate way of viewing history.

In her essay, "Writing as an Act of Hope", Allende declares, "[n]ow, finally, women are breaking the rule of silence and raising a strong voice to question the world . . . [with] a literature that doesn't invent history or try to explain the world solely through reason, but also seeks knowledge through feelings and imagination." (Allende, 1999, p. 45). In opposition to her domineering husband Esteban Trueba, Clara invites into her home the hungry and the poor whose poverty is maintained by the country's Conservative Party and dictator. As matriarch, Clara offers these silenced groups of people food, shelter, and companionship, nourishing the human spirit of the poor and the eccentrics.

Allende's novel is a hybrid mix of the magical and everyday life. Her technique of magical realism employs hybrid multiple planes of reality that take place within opposites to accommodate hybridity and foreignness to construct one national space. Allende's protagonists are living symbols of a more encompassing way to view history. When asked about her first novel, *The House of the Spirits*, Allende describes it as a compilation of many literary techniques; she claims, "[i]n a novel we can use everything: testimony, chronicle, essay, fantasy, legend, poetry and other devices that might help us to decode the mysteries of our world and discover our true identity" (Allende, 1999, p. 45).

Alba is a key to rewriting history to include women's knowledge and experience. Susan Frick clarifies Alba's unique narrative style. She asserts that in Alba's woman-centered form of narration, she is "tapping into collective memory to evoke and interpret the stories and voices of the past and to learn how best to proceed with her own individual life experience" (Frick, 2001, p. 29). Clara, Alba's grandmother, had the routine of recording noteworthy events. Afterward, when she was deliberately voiceless, she also detailed insignificances, never doubting that fifty years later, Alba, her granddaughter, would use her notebooks to recover the past and conquer fears. She struggles, with her grandmother's diaries, her mother's letters, and many other family documents, to collect the family story in a way that joins events rather than simply recording them. According to Alba and her female relatives, direct history is not the

only way to record events, and Alba's conscious narration of the Trueba family is a more consolidating way to life and history.

Alba's purpose, then, is twofold: to recuperate her female predecessors' stories and to sustain herself through their empowerment. Therefore, Alba's version is an attempt to re-tell her family history, with the help of all her female relatives. Frick (2001) states that, "[h]aving brought together her female ancestors' experiences and her grandfather's male perspective, Alba is finally ready to admit to being the first-person narrator of *La casa de los Espíritus*" (p. 37). Alba's account overcomes Esteban's effect and recovers the stories of her female ancestors, giving them, as well as herself, a legacy.

Esteban Trueba is portrayed as the stereotypical, emotionally suppressed control freak, whose ideas concerning women and the social/political system are fanatical. Trueba is a symbol of the "viejo orden" or the old guards in Chile. Earle (1987) describes Trueba as the symbolic representative of Chile's "viejo orden" when he says:

He is the blind force of history, its collective unconscious, its somatonic (i.e., aggressive, vigorous, physical) manifestation. Trueba is a semi comic version of the "world historical personalities" conceived by Hegel; never happy, "they attained no calm enjoyment; their whole life was labor and trouble; their whole nature was nothing but their master passion." (p. 550)

Trueba and his family contribute to certain historical events which reach their climax in the novel with the coup of September, 1973 which ended the constitutionally elected socialist government of Salvador Allende. A close study of Trueba's narrative style reveals the gaps in his account, due to his old age but more significantly due to his selective recall and restating. He repeatedly admits that "[m]ore than a half of a century has passed" and he confesses that his memory is, therefore, hazy. Significantly, Esteban tries to conceal many of his mistakes, and it is only Alba, using Clara's journals and her mother's testimony, who reveals these errors. Sheffield (2002) argues this point stating:

In narrating Trueba's story, Alba shares and contextualizes more than Trueba is willing. For example, in the 'Tres Marias'

chapter, Trueba does not share the stories of his rapes of peasant women. [...] Without Alba's explication, Trueba would eliminate memories of such things as his rapes of peasant girls [...] because to him, and the dominant political machine, those things are insignificant. (p. 35)

**Social-Darwinism in the novel:**

As indicated by their critics, social Darwinists contend that the strong tend to see their riches and influence increase while the feeble tend to see their riches and influence diminish. Diverse social-Darwinist groups have contrasting perspectives about which gatherings of individuals are thought to be the strong and which gatherings of individuals are thought to be the weak, and the exact mechanisms that ought to be used to reward the strong and punish the weak. Such perspectives are claimed to have spurred thoughts of tyranny, genetic counseling, prejudice, imperialism, autocracy, Nazism, and battle between national or racial gatherings. In a socially-Darwinian world, such as the one envisioned by Esteban Trueba, justice varies according to one's wealth and social status. His attitude is, "I got mine, now go get yours." Trueba is the symbol of the authoritarian tradition, of the patriarchal elements in his country, not only in terms of his arrogant, superior attitude, but also with respect to his perception of a woman's place in society:

By that point I was used to having dead-end relationships with easy women, since there was no possibility of any other kind. In my generation we used to distinguish between decent women and all the rest, and we also divided up the decent into our own and others'. (Allende, 1988, p. 22)

The objectification of women, which reduces them to an almost sub-human level, is more than just a philosophy for Trueba. His actions are quite in line with his words. On his very first foray into Las Tres Marias, Trueba commits a savage rape, "Esteban did not remove his clothes. He attacked her savagely, thrusting himself into her without preamble, with unnecessary brutality." (Allende, 1988, p. 57) The women whom Esteban rapes are not remarkable to him, because he views them as his belongings and feels eligible to use them as sexual objects. He thinks that he owns

the land and the people. The peasants are helpless to stand up against him as he is both a patriarch and a tyrant. As a well-known political figure, Esteban certainly would not have written in his memoir about the prostitute he had an affair with throughout the novel, nor the poor children whom he fathered at Tres Marías, except for Tránsito whom Esteban is forced to include in his story because she releases Alba from detention and torture. Otherwise, we might rightly assume that responsibility for truthfulness and faithful recording in the case of Esteban's rapes would have been left to the novel's more trustworthy and reliable narrator, Alba.

Rape is an act that will be repeated by his illegitimate grandson many years later against his granddaughter, Alba. The theory of a cycle, a repetition of abuses and violence in which the oppressed, once they gain power, become even worse oppressors is a fact of which the history of human civilization has provided significant proof. Earle (1987) refers to this cycle of revenge and continued abuses which begins with the rape of Pancha Garcia and ends with the rape of Alba (Trueba's granddaughter) by Esteban Garcia (Trueba's illegitimate grandson):

The most troublesome outcome of his sexual escapades in the environs of Tres Marias was Esteban Garcia, his natural grandson born of an off spring of Pancha Garcia, his first wheat field victim. After a childhood of deprivation and growing resentment, the grandson has nothing but the grandfather's first name for an inheritance. Since childhood he had wanted to become a policeman. And he became one. (p. 547)

The rape of Alba by her own cousin completes the cycle which began with Trueba's adventures in the countryside so long ago. Allende herself comments on the repetition of violence and abuse which continues, not just in her novel, but in everyday life as well, "I wanted to show that life goes in a circle, events are intertwined, and that history repeats itself, there is no beginning and no end" (as cited in Coleman, 1997, p.1).

There is a parallel between Trueba's innate racist tendencies and his ideas concerning the role of women. Both are traditional and contrast greatly with the social changes portrayed in the novel as well as those

which actually existed in Chile during that era. Coleman (1997), writing about Isabel Allende's success and about a literary community which suffers the same problems of rampant "machismo" as do the characters in her novel, says in his introduction to *Contemporary Literary Criticism*:

[It] is a world ruled by men. It is haunted by the figure of the hyperbolic macho, an authoritarian force in the family and in the national political structure. Such a man glories in his ability to command submission, to flaunt his gigantic ambition, usually at the immediate expense of the women who surround him. (p. 1)

Within Trueba's family history, Clara is the character who provides the balance to her husband's volatile, abusive manner. She challenges his macho attitude and actions in a spiritual and confrontational manner. Contrasting between Esteban and Clara, Earle (1987) describes each one in the following manner:

The family was to grow in its strange diversity through three generations, but Clara and Esteban would always constitute its vital, antithetical nucleus. The latter embodies privileged power; the former, humanitarian resistance. (p. 546)

It is Clara, to a great degree that defines her husband, in the same way that privileged power can only be seen as such by juxtaposing to object poverty. It is no accident that Clara symbolizes humanitarian ideals. From her encounters with the spirits to the charity work she does, Clara proves that her concerns are with people (both alive and dead) and not with acquiring and maintaining social, political or economic superiority.

One's social circumstances are as insignificant to Trueba as is the inherent unfairness of the economic system he and his allies both control and to which they severely limit access. While energetically opposed to the rise of the left in his country, his condemnation, similar to that of the Chilean conservatives of 1970, had little impact as in 1970 Salvador Allende won the presidency of Chile. His was the first democratically elected socialist government in the world. In *The House of the Spirits*, the references to "the Candidate" are references to Salvador Allende, who had run several times before he was elected president. The annoyance which Trueba feels when he realized the possibility that the "Candidate" might

win the election represents the attitude of the Conservative class in Chile as a whole:

We're not letting anyone in here to start preaching against honest work, the reward for work well done, the reward for those who meet life head-on, you can't expect the weak to have the same as those of

us who've worked from sunup to sundown and know how to invest our money, run risks, and take on responsibilities ... not even Jesus Christ said we have to share the fruits of our labor with the lazy. (Allende, 1988, p. 170)

Trueba decides to get involved in the political debate, motivated by the increasing popularity of those who, according to him, are "preaching against honest work." His election as senator is a step toward maintaining control which makes him fit for survival, in light of the growing unrest on the part of the "marginados"— those who live life in the margins of society and whose needs were ignored in the past. Trueba and those of his sort desire absolute control over all social change and over the political process so as not to lose the way of life they have achieved by exploiting the less fortunate.

#### **Politics and history in the novel:**

The political action in this novel parallels actual historical events in Chile before the election of Salvador Allende and his party, La Unidad Popular (The Popular Unity). Trueba, just as the part of Chilean society he represents, shows his fears and worries in the face of the advances the socialists make. When they finally win the election, he expresses a point of view very common in the social class he symbolizes, "It's one thing to win an election and quite another to be President" (Allende, 1988, p. 342)

A little later, there is a reference to external influences in Chile's national political scene when Trueba:

Left his refuge and headed to a country house on the outskirts of the city, where a secret lunch was held. There he met with other politicians, a group of military men, and gringos sent by their intelligence service to map a strategy for bringing down the new

government: economic destabilization, as they called their sabotage. (Allende, 1988, p. 342)

Isabel Allende comments on the structure of the social classes in her country and the influence of the armed forces when she says:

We have our own privileged groups who are exploiters. They have the complicity of the armed forces, which act as mercenaries for the social class that holds power. Our countries have history of terrible contrasts and inequality. (as cited in Coleman, 1986, p. 27)

Esteban Trueba is the literal embodiment of these attitudes which go hand in hand with the arrogance of power and a desire to control everything and everyone who threaten the *status quo* with ideas of liberation. It matters little whether it comes from the women in his own family or the peasants who, working for him in Las Tres Marias, survive but do not prosper. A precursor of future events in the book takes the form of a story that one of his workers, Pedro Garcia, tells to his grandson and his little friend, Blanca Trueba. This story is filled with political symbolism which points toward profound changes in ideas, personal relations and in the society as a whole:

One day the old man Pedro Garcia told Blanca and Pedro Tercero the story of the hens who joined forces to confront a fox who came into the chicken coop every night to steal eggs and eat the baby chicks. The hens decided they had had enough of the fox's abuse. They waited for him in a group, and when he entered the chicken coop they blocked his path, surrounded him, and pecked him half to death before he knew what had happened. "And that fox escaped with his tail between his legs, with all the hens chasing after him," the old man finished.

Blanca laughed at the story and said it was impossible, because hens are born stupid and weak and foxes are born astute and strong, but Pedro Tercero did not laugh. He spent the whole evening absorbed in thought, ruminating on the story of the fox and the hens, and perhaps that was the night the boy began to become a man. (Allende, 1988, pp. 140-1)

It came to pass that the "marginados," the hens, as it were, had their day and "The Candidate" (Allende) was elected. At this point in the novel, Esteban Trueba finds himself isolated from his family due to his own rigid way of thinking. His dogmatism has left no room for change or compromise. He only has contact with his granddaughter Alba, a young girl who loves her grandpa without understanding his violent temperament. But when the coup d'etat takes place, even this relationship is put to the test when Alba and her grandfather find themselves on opposite sides of the conflict.

Whether it is the bombing of the presidential palace, or the curfew instituted by the dictatorship, Trueba praises and supports each action. In Chile, during these brutal first days, the upper-middle classes and the rich also supported the actions taken by the military, believing that they were restoring "democracy" to their country. But we read of the surprise in Senator Trueba's reaction, when he speaks to a soldier and tries to understand the attitude of those "saviors of democracy":

"Is it true the President committed suicide?"

I asked.—

"He's gone," he answered me.

"Gone? Where to?"

"He's gone to Hell!" he said, laughing.

I walked out onto the street feeling extremely disconcerted, leaning on my chauffeur's arm. (Allende, 1988, p. 375)

Trueba tries to convince himself that this military intervention is going to help the country, but he cannot quite do it. While expressing these doubts, he asks a rhetorical question about a future which, for Chile, has been denied by the military with the support of many Chileans:

"I'm also sorry about what's going on, Lieutenant.

But there was no other way. The regime was rotten.

What would have happened to this country if you people hadn't taken up your arms?" (Allende, 1988, p. 375)

But right afterward, Trueba expresses his own doubts when he thinks that:

deep down I wasn't so sure. I had a feeling things weren't turning out the way we had planned and that the situation was slipping

away from me, but at the time I kept my doubts to myself.  
(Allende, 1988, p. 375)

Coleman (1997) comments that within the old guard that Esteban Trueba represents, the problem of violence is a "debate among men who are not only deaf but who have fixed and unalterable ideas on all subjects." (p. 1). This immovable stance, which helped bring about the coup, begins to weaken when Esteban Trueba witnesses the repressive measures firsthand. Upon hearing of the death of his son, Jaime, at the hands of the military, Trueba's faith in that which he helped to achieve—the destruction of the legitimately elected government—begins to fade precipitously. His daughter Blanca escapes into exile while his granddaughter Alba, the only person he really loves, is abducted from his own house by soldiers. Trueba is forced to speak with one Transito Soto—a prostitute-turned-madame who owes him a favor. In asking for Soto's help in freeing Alba, his plea almost becomes a confession:

I was the first to throw corn at the military cadets and to suggest the coup, before the others took it into their heads, and I was the first to applaud them, I was present for the Te Deum in the cathedral, and precisely because I was I can't accept that this sort of thing should happen in my country, that people disappear, that my granddaughter is dragged from my house by force and I'm powerless to stop them. (Allende, 1988, p. 420)

In this passage, Trueba experiences the powerlessness he previously had imposed on others. He has committed the same abuses as the military regime—violent attacks (against Blanca and Clara), rapes (Pancha Garcia, among others) and torture (Pedro Tercero Garcia and his chopped-off fingers) - but he was always able to rationalize his actions, saying he needed to protect the well-being of his family. However, when he is subjected to similar injustice by a power he has no hope of controlling, he is able to see what he himself has done wrong in the abuses being committed by the dictatorship.

Esteban Trueba, and the sector of Chilean society he typifies, believed in established stereotypes. They supported the economic and institutional barriers instituted by those who gained power by force. They

impeded any type of changes in favor of equality, not just between men and women, but also between those who did not believe in the inherent superiority of a particular sex, family name, race or religion. Unfortunately, those people, like Esteban Trueba, waited until the coup d'etat to have their eyes opened to the injustices which existed all along.

This realization echoes back to the reason why, when Clara dies, Trueba cannot easily talk about her. Besides his grief, she represents a part of him he has refused to acknowledge. Esteban Trueba is the pragmatist, the determined force with reason on his side. On the other hand:

Clara, Blanca and Alba ... embody historical awareness and intuitive understanding. Their role throughout the novel is the preservation of moral and social conscience and civil responsibility. (Earle, 1987, p. 551)

Civil responsibility, for Trueba, consisted of maintaining the status quo. For that reason he saw fit to become active in politics. As a senator, he offered no hope to those living on the margins of society while his wife, as well as his daughter and granddaughter, were there, like guiding lights he never chose to follow:

In *The House of the Spirits*, Clara, Blanca and Alba are its persistent mainstays over three generations. Light is freedom and hope, and the luminous names of the three women are clearly symbolic. The dramatic force of the book is the struggle between Trueba and the forces he generates, on the one hand, and the female members of his family, on the other. (Earle, 1987, p. 550)

Although the consequences of this struggle result in hundreds of deaths and an authoritarian military regime, Allende leaves the reader with a note of hope. At the end of the novel, Esteban Trueba comes to the realization that he does not have the answer, that he was wrong and that his point of view and his values are not the only ones with any merit; and that Alba, his own granddaughter, after having been tortured and raped, wants the cycle of violence to finally end:

It would be very difficult for me to avenge all those who should be avenged, because my revenge would be just another part of

the same inexorable rite. I have to break that terrible chain. I want to think that my task is life and that my mission is not to prolong hatred but simply to fill these pages while I wait for Miguel, while I bury my grandfather, whose body lies beside me in this room, while I wait for better times to come, while I carry this child in my womb, the daughter of so many rapes or perhaps of Miguel, but above all, my own daughter. (Allende, 1988, p. 432)

It is on this hopeful note at the end of the novel that Alba carries on in her grandmother's footsteps. Her resistance to continuing the cycle is, in every sense, humanitarian.

**Subjectivity, objectivity and appropriation:**

Sheffield (2002) suggests that Alba's mixing of first and third person is actually a technique called "the objective/subjective position" (p. 34). Whereas Esteban's approach is what Sheffield terms "capitalistic appropriation/ownership of the story" (consistently subjective and biased), Alba avoids this appropriation of the family's history by admitting that her information comes from other sources, such as Clara's notebooks. Her record is more similar to a helpful narrative than a first-person narration, and this "subjective/objective position" not only gives her credibility but, even more importantly, "allows for the deeply personal accounts of individual people, memories, and stories in the novel while preventing the appearance of personal bias" (Sheffield, 2002, p. 34). Flora Schiminovich (1991) recognizes Esteban's patriarchal narration and character, arguing that "Trueba's 'truth' is the ideology of patriarchy, capitalism, dominance, and politically dictated history and memory; he only begins to realize it is a falsehood after his granddaughter, Alba, returns from the government torture camp and tells her story" (p. 35). Schiminovich's including of the torture camp in Esteban's transformation leads to another reason for dual narrators: Esteban is, simply, the one who urges Alba to write her family's history. Clara's spirit appears to Alba when she is imprisoned, but Esteban insists that Alba must record the family legacy. As Alba notes, "It was my grandfather who had the idea that we should write this story".

Earle (1987) examines such conflicting histories: capitalistic versus collective, male versus female, patriarchal versus egalitarian. Earle (1987) claims that "[t]he dramatic nucleus of the book is the struggle between Trueba and the forces he generates, on the one hand, and the female members of his family, on the other" (p. 550). For Earle (1987), Esteban Trueba "is the blind force of history" along with all of "its aggressive, vigorous, physical manifestations" (p. 550). In other words, Esteban and his dominant political party make one history, while Alba and her female characters fight against this forceful gathering with their own substitute history.

Sheffield (2002) adds to Earle's treatment of double narration/histories by suggesting that Esteban's portrayal serves as a foil to Alba's. As Sheffield (2002) claims:

The two narrators, Alba and Trueba, provide the reader with a view of both the dominant history taught in schools and the subversive women's memories in the novel. The differences in their narrative voices serve to highlight the single-minded linear view held by Trueba, and others within the dominant group, as the negative and repressive one. Through Alba's abundant vision and memory, and Trueba's tendency toward narrow-mindedness, we catch a glimpse of two distinct worlds, and through those worlds, we are offered a re-vision of history. (p. 34)

Both Sheffield and Earle associate Esteban to the oppressive governmental rule which jails Alba. Esteban, like the government, tries to hinder all the women in his life, physically and spiritually, until the disappearance of his granddaughter makes him recognize that he should detach his actual self from the tyrannical military in control. Only at that time, Esteban encourages and helps Alba to write the Trueba's history. As Earle (1987) maintains, Alba employs a "more imaginative, more perceptive resistance" to Esteban's and the government's patriarchal domination (p. 551). Earle (1987) also states that "Clara, Blanca, and Alba [...] embody historical awareness and intuitive understanding. Their role throughout the novel is the preservation of moral and social conscience and civic responsibility" (p. 551).

Esteban believes that men like him should control both politics and people, and that history (including his own) should be told from the perspective of the prominent class. When Esteban talks about his part as patrón to the peasants of Tres Marías, he says, "What you need here is a strong government, with a strong man. It would be lovely if we were all created equal, but the fact is we're not. It couldn't be more obvious" (Allende, 1988, p. 64). This is almost what Esteban means when, earlier in the novel, he states that he "can't go along with [his] granddaughter's story about class struggle" (Allende, 1988, p. 51). Another example of Esteban's version of history is revealed when the military coup occurs. Alba notices the way in which the new government edits and rewrites history; she writes, "[w]ith the stroke of the pen, the military changed world history, erasing every incident, ideology, and historical figure of which the regime disapproved" (Allende, 1988, p. 383). Esteban supported the military coup and its leaders, therefore his views are reflected in the ways that the military dictatorship writes history.

Esteban's memories help Alba to write the other side of the story. She tells us, "I began to write with the help of my grandfather, whose memory remained intact down to the last second of his ninety years" (Allende, 1988, p. 431). It seems that she appreciates his memory for the vision he gives; it is the other side of the coin. The fact that Esteban completes his family's story and then rests on Clara's bed to die in peace is similar to what Martínez (1991) states: "[t]o symbolize his [Esteban's] redemptive awareness, Allende makes him assist in the telling of the story, done by the main narrator, Alba" (p. 290). In this way, Esteban adds more value to the women's story and, therefore, is partially forgiven for his sins.

### **Women's role against the Patriarch:**

Esteban and Clara are not the only ones who contribute to Alba's record of events, the women in the detention camp play a vital role in supporting Alba and representing part of the female's history. At the climax of the novel, with the extreme terror of the military coup's reign, Alba is kidnaped from her home and thrown into a political prison where she is beaten, raped, and tortured. After Colonel García and the other men finished with her, they leave her in a detention camp with other women

who have gone through similar conditions, unaware of the power those women represent. She is pleased by the ghost of her grandmother, Clara, from beyond the grave (Allende, 1988, p.414), and by her prison companion, Ana DÍaz (Allende, 1988, pp.425-7). That Ana DÍaz's support is the mirror image of Clara's tends to make Clara's magical apparition more believable, confirming once more one of the central techniques of magic realism. Clara's ghost is an example of the politicized ghost, which inhabits magic realism's pantheon. The ghost returns to Alba and encourages her to create a monument to those who lost their lives in Pinochet's brutal dictatorship, which turns into *The House of the Spirits*. In this way the novel reasserts the importance of the feminine and shows how female instinct is supported not only by a sixth sense like forewarning or telepathy, but also by a sense of political justice.

Clara's ghost convinces her that "the point was not to die... but to survive, which would be a miracle" (Allende, 1988, p. 414). And it is Clara's spirit which encourages her to write in order to survive:

She [Clara] suggested that she write a testimony that might one day call attention to the terrible secret she was living through, so that the world would know about this horror that was taking place parallel to the peaceful existence of those who did not want to know, who could afford the illusion of a normal life, and of those who could deny that they were on a raft adrift in a sea of sorrow, ignoring, despite all evidence, that only blocks away from their happy world there were others, these others who live or die on the dark side. (Allende, 1988, p. 414)

Alba's voice will survive in the written testimony of her detention. With this spirit of survival, Alba is changed into a new person who is "beyond his [Esteban Garcia's] power" (Allende, 1988, pp. 414-15). In the novel, the group of the imprisoned women, who challenge their oppressors' endeavors to break their spirit, give Alba the moral energy to survive the trauma of torment and rape. As Sheffield (2002) argues, the "feminine collective" of the detention camp "provides the support Alba needs to present the revision of history present in the novel; it is the chorus of

women's voices following behind her that gives Alba the ability to write and preserve their (and her) testimonies" (p. 37).

*The House of the Spirits* is an example of women's history surpassing the classical version of men's history. Though Alba longs for the relief of death, the women around her renew her power, and motivate her to tell her/their story. They give her notebooks and support her as she begins the hard voyage of recording as a kind of resistance. Alba states:

I had managed to resist the inferno with certain integrity, but when I felt so much support, I broke down. The smallest expression of tenderness sent me into a crying fit. I spent the night with my eyes wide open, wrapped in the closeness of so many women, who took turns watching over me and never left me alone. They helped me whenever I began to suffer from bad memories or when I saw Colonel García coming to plunge me back into his world of terror. (Allende, 1988, p. 426)

Without those women, Alba's side of history might never have been told.

Ruth Jenkins (1994) clarifies Allende's particularly woman-centered modes of writing, she states, "[m]ore than defying poor memory, these narratives record stories of female experience neither sufficiently nor authentically articulated by histories constructed from patriarchal perspectives" (pp. 66-7). Jenkins (1994) further contends that *The House of the Spirits* is mainly a strong example of "the power to script history" because "Allende asserts the value of individual female experience while weaving it into generations of female history" (p. 66). Once more, Alba's history with its individual and collective nature sets it above Esteban's single-minded memoirs. The novel with its female characters is considered a real challenge facing masculine writing and political oppression.

Alba's knowledge that the baby she carries is a girl, as well as her claiming of her, confirms the strength of the matriarchy. We are left with the feeling that Alba's knowing the father's identity, so vital in Latin society, is less important than what she alone can offer her daughter. Allende presents in each character, both traditional and nontraditional images of mothers and female ideals. These qualities of sustaining, fighting and solidarity are found in Clara, her daughter Blanca, and her

daughter Alba. In turn, Alba will pass these qualities on to her unborn daughter, the "daughter of so many rapes," she tells us, "or perhaps of Miguel, but above all my own daughter".

While writing *The House of the Spirits*, Alba states, "I have to break that terrible chain. I want to think that my task is life and that my mission is not to prolong hatred but simply to fill these pages while I wait for Miguel, while I bury my grandfather, [...] while I wait for better times to come, while I carry this child in my womb, the daughter of so many rapes or perhaps of Miguel, but above all, my own daughter" (Allende, 1988, p. 432). It is notable that Alba will always remember the miseries she and her family have faced. However, she will never surrender any expectation of surviving and having a superior future. Alba's own struggle rises to the struggles of a great number of Latin American women, who are rewriting their own histories, including their unique perception and their strong sense of hope also.

The collaboration between Alba and Trueba in archiving history, implies the opening of dialogue between them, the mutual acceptance of difference, and compromise. Reading Clara del Valle's diaries drives each of them to audit their past actions and to comprehend their lives within the context of Clara's own history, as well as within each other's lives. Writing together to make the family history, Alba and Trueba rediscover themselves and each other in light of the fact that they start to see their lives plainly, which is Clara's particular unique quality. The mixture of these characters' specific personal histories constitutes the novel itself. Integration, thus, offers a method of recuperating individual histories and announcing a national identity along with Latin America's colonial history. The ideologies of writing in *The House of the Spirits* show Allende's struggle to recover her past. Alba chooses to write rather than contempt. In this regard, writing for the exiled author is an announcement of life.

### **Writing as a form of resistance:**

Allende uses magical realism to framework the influential story of a troubled political period. Allende, similar to her characters Clara and Alba, are recording history. Allende's objective in *The House of the Spirits* is to display the loss of her world, family and identity. She tries to

keep memories alive so that readers can learn from past faults. As Frick (2001) maintains, "remembering evolves as an empowering cultural response to trauma, through which the stories of the past are retold in an effort to shape the present and the future" (p. 28). Therefore, Alba recalls and records her own particular recollections, as well as those of her female predecessors. Clara perceives the significance of writing, for her spirit appears to her granddaughter:

At the crucial moment when Alba, having undergone the worst of the tortures directed by Esteban García, has decided to stop eating, drinking, and even breathing, in hopes of a quicker death. Clara succeeds in convincing her granddaughter that 'the point was not to die, [...] but to survive' (351). Further, she strengthens Alba's will to live by urging her to write—'in her mind, without paper or pencil' (351)—not only to forestall madness by keeping her mind occupied, but to preserve a testimony that sooner or later and one way or another must be revealed to the outside world. (Earle, 1987, p. 551)

Alba begins to write in order to survive, but once she is released from political jail, she continues composing, empowered by her purpose to keep living with reason. Her own and family motives are related in the way that she breaks the bloody history of patriarchy and the government by recording a new version of events.

Alba plays the role of the human linking between history and fiction and between reality and imagination, crossing over any barrier between the past and present with the political and individual stories of the spirits living at her house and her familial history. As she recalls her foremothers, Alba creates a repeating excess of the human experience, one which ensures a connection between herself and her ancestors across all the historical boundaries.

### **Conclusion:**

Both history and literature are essential, and both are crucial in understanding the world as it was at some point. While this novel is a work of fiction, there is a purposeful drawing of a parallel between fictitious representations and hard fact. The novel captures an important, social and historical aspect of twentieth century Chile. *The House of the Spirits* sets the stage and identifies the players who will move the country to the brink of self-destruction. As we have seen through the novel, many people had to leave Chile due to the vast repression of major civil rights. Artistic expression became one of the most sustainable means of recording their opposition to the Pinochet dictatorship. The unallowed "truth," whether it is manifested through symbolism or actual representative characterizations, finds one of its few viable means of expression through the arts— painting, music and, of course, literature. Censorship was strictly applied to more modern media as radio, television, and newspapers, but not so much to novels.

In the absence of a mass media capable of broadcasting accurate information, numerous authors write poetry, plays, short stories and novels to tell the untold stories and bear witness to the tragic realities of their homelands. The reader, however, usually falls into two categories: either he/she denies such things can and are occurring or he/she is just plain ignorant as to the realities of life under a dictator.

Among all forms of literature, why do novels have the ability to present real parts of history? A novel is not an account of reality. It starts from reality, but creates its own alternative world which is not a carbon copy of reality. *The House of the Spirits*, as it belongs to the historiographic metafiction, refers both to the world of history and that of fiction. It is the meeting point of history and fiction, allowing readers to approach the subject of history and real life from the related area of literature. In the novel, the tragic events which lead up to the coup, along with the repression that follows, are portrayed in a realistic manner. The characters are developed with the necessary details to make them sympathetic and believable since, by the author's own admission, all of her characters are based on real people. Specifically, Allende has drawn parallels between herself and Alba. Esteban Trueba was inspired by

Allende's grandfather. And while Allende suffered no torture under the Pinochet dictatorship, the innocence and hope embodied in Alba parallel the spirit of hope, renewal and catharsis she instills in her novels.

From Esteban Trueba's political views, his treatment of women and his overall conservative bent to those characters who would challenge Trueba and his allies and pay the price in the end, *The House of the Spirits* poses important questions about the consequences of one's political beliefs. Isabel Allende provides ample material to meditate on in the character of Esteban Trueba and those of his type since, throughout the text, the opposing discourses of justice and injustice, of rich and poor, of the empowered and the marginalized are constantly coming in conflict.

Social movements and the desire for equality and freedom (and elements opposed to upsetting the status quo) are not unique to any one country, culture or society. Because of its scope, both in terms of time covered (three quarters of that century) and the variety of characters and their interactions, *The House of the Spirits* provides the background for understanding, on a more human, personal level, how and why the events evolved as they did.

This point, the fact that all events, characters, and actions portrayed in the novel were inspired by real people involved in real events is significant. The knowledge and insight into the history of the opposing forces and the conflicts which have affected the lives of millions of Chileans, in particular (and of most of Latin America, in general), is more emotional, moving and lasting than other means of information. The themes covered, of injustices, social and economic inequality, of repression, tyranny and resistance are made more human, more real.

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