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Tragic realism : the socio-historical elements in Isabel Allende's The house of the spirits and Of love and shadows

James Reese Weckler
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"The House of the Spirits" and "Of Love and Shadows"**

Weckler, James Reese, M.A.

San Jose State University, 1993

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TRAGIC REALISM: THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL ELEMENTS
IN ISABEL ALLENDE'S THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS
AND OF LOVE AND SHADOWS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the
Department of Foreign Languages

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By

James Reese Weckler

November, 1993

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ABSTRACT

TRAGIC REALISM: THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL ELEMENTS IN ISABEL ALLENDE'S THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS AND OF LOVE AND SHADOWS

by James Reese Weckler

In this thesis, the socio-historical elements found in Isabel Allende's novels, The House of the Spirits (*La casa de los espíritus*) and Of Love and Shadows (*De amor y de sombra*) will be analyzed. It will be shown that these two novels accurately mirror Chilean society and the repression under which the country lived during the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990). Topics analyzed in The House of the Spirits include the nature of the traditional, patriarchal society in Chile, the emergence of an ideologically driven opposition to those ruling classes and the inevitable clash between the two. In addition, the (mis)treatment of women by the members of the "viejo orden" (old guard, traditionalists) and the repression wrought by the military after a coup d'etat are also studied. The analysis of Of Love and Shadows draws the parallel between the repressive actions portrayed in the book and the actual events which took place in Chile under the Pinochet dictatorship. Both works offer a unique insight into the forces which threaten many Latin American societies.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout time people have suffered under brutal and repressive regimes. These regimes, as a matter of course, wish to control the flow of all information--especially contrary information--in an effort to consolidate and protect their ill-gotten gains. In times such as these, literature has often been the only way the truth about these events has been recorded. During colonial times, the Spanish government outlawed the publishing of novels in the new world.

The inquisitors considered this literary genre--the novel--to be as dangerous for the spiritual fate of the Indians as for the moral and political behaviour of society, in which, of course, they were absolutely right. We novelists must be grateful to the Spanish Inquisition for having discovered, before any critic did, the inevitable subversive nature of fiction. (Vargas Llosa 4)

It was not until 1816, in México, that the first novel was published in Latin America--José Fernández de Lizardi's El Periquillo sarniento. Fernández de Lizardi

usó el género novelesco como vehículo para expresar sus ideas políticas, filosóficas y religiosas cuando le fue imposible hacerlo en panfletos o en artículos periodísticos a causa de la persecución a que le sometieron las autoridades coloniales. (Alegría 14)

The colonial authorities are gone, but the desire to control the flow of information remains a concern.

During this century there has been an information explosion. Satellites, televisions radios, teletypes, and computers place vast amounts of information virtually at the fingertips of the average person. These modes of communication, just like the novel in the time of the inquisition, are the first targets of a repressive, authoritarian government. Edward Luttwak in his book, Coup d'Etat: A Practical Handbook, says, speaking in the first person plural:

Our second and far more flexible instrument will be our control over the means of communications; their importance will be particularly great because the flow of all other information will be affected by our physical controls. Moreover, the confused and dramatic events of the coup will mean that the radio and television services will have a particularly attentive and receptive audience. In broadcasting over the radio and television services our purpose is not to provide information about the situation but rather to affect its development by exploiting our monopoly of these media. (168)

It is no secret that General Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile used these tactics and more radical ones after the 1973 coup d'etat. As a reaction to Pinochet's repression, literature became the repository of information about the society under siege. Hence, most works of fiction about Chile have been the principal outlets for free expression. Because of the restrictions instituted by Pinochet, people had few ways of expressing their hopes let alone their criticism of their country or the regime. This period in

Chilean history went virtually unreported in the country's own press. What news did leak-out was isolated and fragmented at best. Although the international press, along with numerous human rights groups, kept a steady stream of accurate information flowing throughout the world, one of the ways those inside were able to grasp the enormity of the abuses wrought by the Pinochet dictatorship was through reading certain literary works smuggled into Chile. They sometimes arrived piecemeal, without a title page, and were identifiable only by those who knew what to look for. In Doris Meyer's Lives On The Line: The Testimony of Contemporary Latin American Authors, Allende comments on how her first novel, The House of the Spirits, made it into Chile:

The book entered Chile like a pirate, hidden in the suitcases of brave travelers or sent by mail without covers and cut into two or three pieces so that it could not be identified. The few copies that entered the country this way multiplied by magic art. People who had a copy made photocopies that passed from hand to hand. There were lists of people who wanted to read it, and I am told that there were even a few people who rented out copies of it. (Allende 242)

Why did so many Chileans go to such lengths to read this book? Because it told a story about them, about their country. They knew all was not well--the book confirmed this.

In the face of massive repression of fundamental civil rights, many people had to leave Chile. Artistic expression became one of the most viable means of registering their opposition to the Pinochet dictatorship. Allende's novels, The House of the Spirits and Of Love and Shadows are just two of many such works. It was possible to write about repression during the 1980's because the military leaders paid only sporadic attention to works of fiction, underestimating the power of literature to spread a message of liberty. For the most part, the methods learned from the inquisitors were strictly applied to more modern media--radio, television, newspapers--and not so much to novels. In an interview with Peter Earle, Isabel Allende commented about this phenomenon:

"A poet friend of mine says that since the military doesn't read, it hasn't realized that books can be dangerous. So, in Chile, while they censor press notices of the fall of Marcos and Baby Doc, they still sell in bookstores works like Missing or Labyrinth, or the books of Antonio Skármeta, Ariel Dorfman, and many others who have written on the tragedy of Chile in recent years." (qtd. in Earle 545)

So, while some books were not allowed into Chile, other books addressing repression under the dictatorship were available.

In the analysis that follows, the socio-historical and literary antecedents of this genre will be summarized. In The House of the Spirits, the primary focus will be on the

main character, Esteban Trueba, and how he represents the "viejo orden" ("old guard" or "traditionalists") in pre-coup Chile. The emphasis will be on Trueba as the stereotypical, emotionally repressed, macho male; a control freak, given to violent reaction to any challenge to that control; his ideas concerning women; and his obsessive social/political views. The analysis of Of Love and Shadows will concentrate on the denial of the atrocities committed by the military regime; the loss of innocence of the main character, Irene Beltrán; the role of the Catholic Church; and censorship.

I. HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS: SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The social and political changes reflected in these novels deserve serious examination. The extreme actions taken by the military government headed by General Augusto Pinochet were a dramatic departure from the normal political process for Chile during the better part of this century, and these novels expose its nefarious consequences. Even more important is the fact that these two novels (along with many others) have been translated into English and other languages thereby reaching an international audience. Given the worldwide movement towards democratically elected, representative government, dissemination of the truth of the Pinochet years is essential to the novelists of the period. They know that few people spend as much time seeking-out political or historical studies about Latin America as they do browsing the "fiction" and "literature" sections of their local bookstore. By reading these works, the English-speaking world is experiencing, if only vicariously, the human suffering wrought by an illegitimate government which it often supported. The reader also has the opportunity to examine the results of allowing the "killer instinct," we all possess (but usually keep repressed) to run free.

During this century, repression under totalitarian regimes has been an undeniable fact of life in Latin America.

The propensity of the armed forces to intervene in the political/democratic process is a vestige of colonial Spanish-America. When Spain was experimenting with limited civilian rule in her colonies and a situation arose that appeared to be heading out of control (as control was defined by the military minds), the military sent the "general on a white horse" to save the day, restore order and defend everyone's "rights." This is consistent with the manner in which the Americas were colonized--primarily by soldiers.¹ Mao said that power comes out of the barrel of a gun (paraphrased). The age-old truthfulness of such an observation was well understood by the Spanish generals of colonial times. It has not been ignored by today's Latin American military officers either.

Eric A. Nordlinder, in his book, Soldiers in Politics, assesses the role of the military in the modern nation state:

The armed forces of all countries exert considerable political influence. They are symbols of state sovereignty and the primary defenders against possible external or internal attack against the government. (3)

Generals and the soldiers who serve under them are experts in defending the state from threats from within and without. Many times an internal threat is viewed in political or ideological terms instead of as an actual military threat. When a soldier's weapons are turned on his own population,

the brutality visited upon members of opposing ideologies is often extreme. Torture, murders and disappearances may not appear in the domestic press, but the actions of those "military men in politician's clothing" appear in the international press and, of course, in literary works.

Nordlinger writes:

There is a popular saying in Latin America that the highest military rank is the presidency--a comment that is borne out by the fact that more than half of the 121 men who served as presidents of their countries between 1940-1955 were military officers. (Nordlinger 6)

Dr. Nordlinger's statistic about the number of presidents who attained that office through military intervention is disconcerting, even if it pertains less to Chile than to the other Latin American nations.

In 1970, the Chilean political system gave birth, without the prophesied violence, to a democratically elected Marxist government. Salvador Allende headed a coalition party which took office after having been elected in full compliance with the Chilean constitution. In September of 1973, General Augusto Pinochet and troops loyal to *him*--not the constitutionally elected president--put an end to Chile's legacy of democratically elected governments.

Until 1973, with the exception of those years between 1924 and 1932--a tumultuous time for all nations due to the stock market crash and ensuing depression--Chile's armed

forces respected the democratic process. Generals followed the orders given by the elected leaders, but took every opportunity to influence their civilian commanders-in-chief. In Chile, the military, for the most part, respected civilian authority. Argentine author Jacobo Timerman, in his book Chile: A Death in the South, 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. (8)

Mr. Timerman is not alone in his analysis of how the events of September 1973 were a radical departure from the previous pattern of historical development for Chile. Genaro Arriagada writes of this democratic tradition:

The coup d'etat dramatically interrupted institutional life in one of the world's oldest and most stable democracies. Chilean democracy had been a noted exception to the repeated pattern of dictatorships in the developing world. For almost 150 years, the decency and civility of Chilean politics had earned the country international respect that belied its small size (a population of 10 million inhabitants) and a relatively weak economy. (3)

The Chilean people, for their part, exuded an attitude of superiority towards their neighbors in the southern cone of South America. There was intense pride in the political

stability those neighbors sorely lacked. In The House of the Spirits, Esteban Trueba--patriarch of the family and representative of the "old guard" of Chile--makes reference to this uniquely Chilean sense of superiority over other Latin American countries in a comment concerning the elections that had just taken place in the story:

"An example for this continent of Indians and Negroes who spend their time making revolutions to overthrow one dictator and install another. This is a different country. This country's a genuine republic. We have civic pride. Here the Conservative Party wins cleanly and openly, and we don't need a general to keep things orderly and calm, not like the neighboring dictatorships where they kill each other off while the gringos walk away with all their raw materials," Trueba declared in the club dining room, raising his wine-glass to offer a toast when the results of the elections were announced. (70)

This passage illustrates the uniqueness of Chile's political past. As well, it sets the tone for the analysis of Esteban Trueba--a character who embodies those characteristics which define the "old guard" or the more conservative elements in Chile.

The government of Salvador Allende, head of the Popular Unity party--"la Unidad Popular" or "la U.P."--was voted into office in 1970 with only 36.3% of the vote.² From there, Allende spearheaded 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 effected by Allende and the U.P. were done supposedly to make the system more just and equal for the less fortunate. Their other goal, the one not spoken but understood, was to make a shambles of the old capitalistic system and from its ruins to build a new, centralized, Soviet-style economy.

Unfortunately, President Allende initiated these changes--nationalization of the banks and of private concerns along with a Robin Hood-esque agrarian reform program--after having been elected by less than one-half of the Chilean voters. The Popular Unity government was also without the political or economic support of the other democratic nations of the world. Many changes were effected without consulting the congress. Instead, the administration used archaic clauses and loopholes in long-forgotten laws that Allende's people were successful in locating in order to begin the massive societal reorganization.³

In 1973, respect for civilian rule came to a halt. With the support of the Chilean middle class and with overt/covert 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 novels) unequaled in Chile and maybe in all of Latin America, save Argentina.

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 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 as well as the rest of the world. Thousands were detained. Many were tortured. Many more simply "disappeared." In the aftermath of the bloody coup d'etat of September, 1973, the rape of detained women by their military captors 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. The more visible water cannon were poised at strategic locations in the cities to quell the regular protestations against the "militares." As recent as 1989, there was still an impressive number--some say more than one million--of Chileans living in forced and voluntary exile in other countries.

LITERARY PRECURSORS

Ever since man began to write ("man" is a generic term used throughout this thesis) topics of rebellion or liberation have appeared in what can broadly be defined as "literature." In the Bible, for example, one reads in Exodus of the repression and slavery of the Jews, suffering under the tyranny and brutality of their Egyptian masters. Therein can be found a message of liberation and justice for those who followed Moses and believed in God. The book of Exodus from the Old Testament has served as an inspiration to many groups of oppressed people--from the Negro slaves in the early history of the United States who found a message of hope and deliverance, to the Jewish and other victims of Adolph Hitler's effort to purify the German "race." Epic poetry, aside from the aesthetic value it might have had, served a didactic function as well. It disseminated pertinent information throughout a kingdom in an effort to tie the peoples of vast and far-reaching territories together in the absence of mass communication technologies.

Latin American novels which address the causes and consequences of repression and then their effect on perpetrators and victims are not a recent phenomenon. Because of the military legacy inherited from their colonial forefathers, Latin Americans have experienced many coups

d'etat, and the region's authors have incorporated this aspect of their reality into their literary works.

The short story, "El matadero" (1871) by Esteban Echeverría, shows the single-minded brutality of Juan Manuel de Rosas (the dictator of Argentina during the 1830's) and his followers. Latin American Romanticism was initiated with the publication of Echeverría's short story about a slaughterhouse which symbolizes the carnage prevalent under the Rosas dictatorship: the butchers are the soldiers and the cattle they slaughter are anyone not "in step" with the regime.

In this century, there are many worthy examples of the literary representation of social injustices in Latin America. According to Celia Correias de Zapata, the region has a unique history with novels that:

apuntan a un fenómeno exclusivamente latino-americano: la continuidad y la frecuencia de las dictaduras como un modo de vida en Iberoamérica.
(Zapata 8)

This way of life is portrayed in El Señor Presidente, by the Nobel-prize winning Guatemalan author Miguel Ángel Asturias. The novel describes in detail the social situation in Guatemala under the despotic rule of General Jorge Ubico's (1878-1946) dictatorship. Literary critic Fernando Alegria has written that:

Nace la novela en el ambiente característico de la tiranía hispanoamericana, se nutre de aisladas anécdotas, de rebeldías, de exilio, de amargas y brutales injusticias, pero, por encima de todo, de una emoción que, convertida en motivo literario, es nueva en la novela hispanoamericana: el miedo.... Asturias creó en *El señor Presidente* la epopeya del miedo y de la impotencia. (210)

Fear and impotence have indeed motivated other Latin American writers to deal with the theme of repression. In The Kingdom of This World, Alejo Carpentier describes a world of violence and bloody tyranny, of rapes and assassinations in Haiti.

(Alegría 244) Augusto Roa Bastos' Son of Man and I the Supreme, portray a corrupt and unjust society and reinterpret Paraguayan history from a non-military point of view.

Zapata, referring to the despotic dictator, Dr. Francia, in I the Supreme, says that he:

aparece como el predecesor de una larga dinastía de hombres mesiánicos cuya estirpe prospera en suelo latinoamericano dada las condiciones fértiles de un continente que predica la democracia y la desconoce en la práctica de sus tradiciones. (Zapata 7-8)

In association with this infamous dynasty is Gabriel García Márquez' The Autumn of the Patriarch which, despite its recurring theme of intimidation and fear, is ultimately a testament to the perseverance of man; to the hope that good will eventually triumph over evil. Alegría sees the connection between the despotic patriarch and his symbolic doubles throughout Latin America:

El lector presiente que se trata de la historia de los muchos déspotas que hemos sufrido en nuestra parte del mundo. Entre líneas y detalles se puede identificar a los Ubicos, Gómez, Estradas, Somozas, Stroessners, Pinochets y secuaces. (Alegría 319)

Along these same lines, Huasipungo (The Villagers), by Jorge Icaza, is a description of the wretched existence of the oppressed Ecuadorian Indian. Likewise, The Bronze Race, by Alcides Arguedas, constitutes a strong denunciation against the oppression of the native population of Bolivia.

A loss of individual rights and liberties under repressive military regimes usually is accompanied by an extremely controlled information network. Censorship or outright shutting-down of newspapers, magazines, television and radio facilities is the order of the day. 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. In the absence of a mass media capable of disseminating 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.

II. ANALYSIS

THE AUTHOR

Chile has long been recognized for its excellence in the literary arena. Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda both received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1945 and 1971, respectively. This literary tradition has continued with writers for whom the events of 1973 and after became a focal point in their works. The coup d'etat was a ferocious blow to the Chilean psyche. One can see its literary manifestation in the works of Isabel Allende as well as other authors like Antonio Skármeta, Diamela Eltit, José Donoso, and Fernando Alegría.

Isabel Allende⁴ (1942-) is the niece of the late President Salvador Allende. Prior to the 1973 coup, Ms. Allende was a journalist in Santiago. In 1975 she fled Chile and went into voluntary exile in Caracas, Venezuela. Allende did not begin her formal literary career until 1981 when she began a letter to her grandfather which evolved, quite unexpectedly, into her first novel, The House of the Spirits (La casa de los espíritus). In numerous interviews, Allende has described this book as an "exorcism," a way of removing the "ghosts" she was carrying inside.

As with most Chilean authors, the events of September 11, 1973 found their way into her works--in Allende's case, the trauma she experienced in Santiago, seeing the dramatic

changes going on in her country, was relived in her writings.

Critic Peter G. Earle has said:

Allende was a journalist in search of a complimentary medium. Aesthetically, she would now participate in the basic ritual of Latin American Literature: a celebration of reality. Ethically, she wanted to bear witness to social injustice, political violence, and repression--having been motivated by the betrayal and murder by right-wing conspirators of an uncle on her father's side, President Salvador Allende. (541)

It is that reality and how it is represented in her first two novels that will concern us in this study.

* * *

THE NOVELS

As stated earlier, because Chile's political experience has been uniquely devoid of the tumult so common in Latin America, Chilean fiction reflects even more sharply than others the repression the country has suffered. The tone is often indignant, that of people unaccustomed to such doings. It is sometimes prominent and obvious and other times clandestine and less obtrusive, but in all instances, the characters in each novel experience, in a real human way, the repression that Chilean citizens have experienced. The images created by Isabel Allende, when envisioned by the reader, have a functional value in that the message screams

to the reader, "This is what is happening," or "No, you are not the only one it has happened to." Their aesthetic value lies in the eloquence with which the characters can ascribe some meaning to their/our existence, in a way that touches the soul of a reader who, when he/she reads, creates anew those characters and those images.

In the analyses that follow, events referred to in the plot of the novels will be compared to actual events in Chile as reported in various publications. While these novels are works of fiction, there is a purposeful drawing of a parallel between fictitious representations and real facts. This serves to confirm the importance of these novels, and others of their genre, in bearing witness to actual events using the only means of expression at their disposal.

An American author, Edward Abbey (1927-1989), whose works contain political and social themes, put quite succinctly the essence of the role of the novelist in society--it is an idea which is all the more appropriate in reference to Chile:

Why do I write? I write to entertain my friends and to exasperate our enemies. To unfold the folded lie, to record the truth of our time. (65)

This citation is especially applicable to the two novels to be analyzed. Whereas Of Love and Shadows "unfold[s] the folded lie," The House of the Spirits is a book which does

"record the truth of our time" in Chile.

THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS

The House of the Spirits (1982), by Isabel Allende, tells the story of four generations of the Trueba family. Within this multi-generational saga, 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 never mentions Chile specifically, it is clear by the abundant details in the novel--from descriptions of the geography to certain historical and political references--that the story takes place in that country.

Because The House of the Spirits deals, in large part, with subjects common to nearly all Latin American countries--the disparity between rich and poor, military intervention in the political process, "machismo," racism, etc.--it is important from a socio-historical standpoint. In a broad sense, this book is a study of the forces which have charted much of the region's history. That a work of fiction should so accurately represent this history is neither uncommon nor unique. Peter G. Earle has commented 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. (545)

Censorship loses its effectiveness when confronted with the freedom required for artistic expression, whether the views expressed therein are in accordance with the agent of that censorship or not. The internal conflicts inherent in Chilean society are portrayed in Allende's works both symbolically and directly.

The main character in The House of the Spirits, Esteban Trueba, is a symbol of the "viejo orden" or "old guard" in Chile. He and his family participate to one degree or another in certain historical events which reach their climax in the novel with the coup d'etat of September, 1973--the very coup which ended the constitutionally elected socialist government of Salvador Allende.

It is necessary to analyze the personal and historical factors which contribute to the formation of Trueba's personality to better understand, not merely *what* he, as representative of Chile's "old guard" does, but *why*. In the first two chapters, the reader follows that formation through certain remembered experiences and opinions about various aspects of his life. In chapter one Trueba describes himself:

I've never been particularly sociable; I have few friends and I don't enjoy parties or festivities.

I'm much happier when I'm alone ... I had never taken a hot bath, and my childhood memories were of cold, of loneliness, and of a perpetually empty stomach. (21)

The difficult times Trueba experiences leave him with an inner strength which helps him overcome many of the obstacles that life puts in his path. The image is a heroic one, of a man overcoming the odds through his own means. When he falls in love with Rosa the beautiful, he then feels himself able to do just about anything, inspired by his love for her:

My problem was that I didn't have a cent, although I felt capable, through my love, of becoming a rich man. (24)

This testimony is one of the few glimpses into the nature of Trueba's emotional state. The expression of emotions is a vulnerability, a weakness that Trueba cannot afford. In the cut-throat world in which he barely survives as a youth, the primary concern is to better one's self. Driven by an all-consuming passion for the mysterious Rosa and following his *traditional* values, Esteban Trueba looks for a way to acquire his fortune:

I looked around to find the quickest route within the limits of the honesty in which I had been raised. (24)

With references to the self-made man, working to attain his love by the sweat of his brow, it is evident that Trueba is an incarnation of traditional Chilean values. Peter G. Earle 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 somatogenic (i.e., aggressive, vigorous, physical) manifestation. Trueba is a semicomical 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." (550)

There is a description of the desolation that Esteban Trueba feels after returning from the mines to find that his reason for working so hard, Rosa the beautiful, has died. It contrasts markedly with the rest of the first-person narration of Esteban Trueba where there is a notable lack of emotion, passing on dry, antiseptic information. In the cemetery, Trueba says everything that decorum and his machismo kept him from saying before. He expresses the frustration of finding himself with the fortune he had sacrificed so long for, but without his inspiration for that fortune: Rosa. Alone after so many years of working in the mines, Trueba needs not to only say a final good-bye, but to finally express to her the feelings he never could, and in that way perhaps help her with her voyage to Heaven:

It was a long night, perhaps the longest in my life. I spent it sitting next to Rosa's tomb, speaking with her, accompanying her on the first part of her journey to the Hereafter, which is when it's hardest to detach yourself from earth and you need the love of those who have remained behind, so you can leave with at least the consolation having planted something in someone else's heart. (35)

The narrator does not tell us that Trueba sits down to talk to Rosa about his feelings. Instead, Allende changes narrators so that Trueba is speaking in the first person, adding a more personal impact to the narration, giving the perspective of a personal history. Frustration, pain, sacrifice, illusions, desires and all of his efforts to have a future with Rosa are expressed with a clarity uncharacteristic of the stereotyped image of Trueba. The images evoked are so strong as to give the reader the feeling that, without Rosa in the story, we too have lost something.

I told her that those years in the mine were an irremediable loss, and that if I had known she wasn't long for this world I would have stolen the money that I needed to marry her and built her a palace studded with treasures from the ocean floor--with pearls and coral and walls of nacre. I would have kidnapped her and locked her up, and only I would have had the key. I would have loved her without interruption almost till infinity, for I was convinced that if she had been with me she would never have drunk the poison that was meant for her father and she would have lived a thousand years. (36)

Trueba's thoughts are believable because, to a certain degree, at this moment, he is freely expressing his feelings,

devoid of the repressed, machista attitude he normally exhibits. It is this crack in his tyrannical armor that gives a human reality to Trueba. Allende captures the essence of love lost and the deep feelings of abandonment, frustration and pain that surface in Trueba, giving more depth and credibility to what might have been a purely one-dimensional character. Young Esteban risks expressing his most profound feelings only when he is alone and Rosa is already dead. Repressed, intimate emotions, contained within himself (in a very traditional, machista way of thinking) only come out when no one can hear them, save the dead.

This lapse of emotional control, though, further hardens the crusty patriarch. As a type of psychological "reaction-formation," Trueba inwardly vows to be in control of all things concerning him. His quest for maintaining absolute control over all people and things around him leads to temper tantrums when things do not go his way. Ambrose Gordon describes Esteban Trueba as:

the most powerful character present, he is also the most intelligible. He is destined for defeat by his willfulness and bad disposition. The constants in his life are love and rage. He wields with great effectiveness a silver cane (against china and glasses and bric-a-brac), a whip (against his daughter, when he discovers that she is pregnant by one of the peasants on his estate), a fist against Clara, when she speaks up in defense of the daughter--knocking out all her front teeth--and, with somewhat less effectiveness, an axe against the daughter's lover, missing the head but severing three of his fingers. If Esteban represents pure

will, Clara, his wife, appears to be all sensibility. (532-3)

Trueba's tantrums as a response to something he doesn't like show an infantile attitude towards frustrations and a lack of emotional maturity. One sees the same type of behavior in spoiled children when a parent says "no." The wealthy classes have much in common with that spoiled little kid, and Trueba reacts the same way when he doesn't get what he wants. These different aspects of Esteban Trueba's personality--from the man who tries to protect his fortune and preserve the status quo that helped him attain that fortune and the anger and rage he feels when someone or something threatens the order of things to which he has become accustomed--symbolize, on a micro-scale, the responses, as a whole, of the socio-economic class to which he belongs. It is what happened in Chile when the Socialists and Salvador Allende threatened the old ways. The armed forces, the most openly powerful representative of the status quo, staged a coup d'etat which brought down the Allende government--to supposedly "save the country" by destroying democratic institutions and brutally "disappearing" its own people.

Esteban Trueba gives us an idea of this way of thinking in which one hurts one's loved ones all the while claiming it is for "their own good." This mind-set becomes even more evident when the reader learns of Trueba's reaction to his

daughter's nocturnal adventures with a peasant, Pedro Tercero
García:

When he saw his daughter, Esteban Trueba was unable to restrain his evil character and he charged her with his horse, whip in the air, beating her mercilessly, lash upon lash, until the girl fell flat and rigid to the ground. (199)

Peter G. Earle describes Trueba's violent temperament, saying that he is

possessed by a terrible temperament, violent and arbitrary in his treatment of peasant girls, his sharecropping tenants, his wife and daughter, and his political enemies, and subject to furniture-smashing tantrums, he is not permitted to recognize--or forced to acknowledge--the consequences of his acts until he is close to death. (550)

With his wife Clara's death, we see one of the few other times in which Esteban Trueba shows his repressed feelings of love. These emotions are so profound that the author, to be true to the strong patriarchal character, says in the first person, in the voice of Esteban Trueba, "I can't talk about it. But I'll try to write it" (292). It is too difficult for Trueba to speak about his feelings. There is less risk in converting them into the abstract--letters/words--and manipulating them on a piece of paper. Mario A. Rojas describes Esteban Trueba and his relationship with his wife in the following manner:

Trueba, con su unidimensional amor de macho, es incapaz de dar a Clara el afecto que en algún momento le prodigan Pedro García Segundo y Ferula Trueba. (924)

From this perspective, Trueba represents what Alexander Coleman describes as

the classic Hispanic father, admirable in his consistency and stubbornness, it is true, ... but a homicidal dictator, an enemy of the common people, a violator of submissive women. (22)

The classic Hispanic father, like the dictator, demands total control over his charges. Esteban Trueba is the symbol of this 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'. (22)

Trueba classifies women as though he were talking about different grades of cattle at an auction. Within this hypocritical social division there are different expectations concerning social conduct for men and women--decent women

were those he would consider marrying. The others were for having "fun" with.

Trueba converts his dilapidated ranch, Las Tres Mariás, into an economic success with his "latifundista" tactics. He exploits the peasants economically and rapes whichever young peasant girl that strikes his fancy. This is justifiable in his mind since these women are not "mujeres decentes"--decent women. Peter G. Earle has commented on Esteban Trueba's activities on his country estate, saying:

One of his first rituals in organizing Tres Mariás as a community was to start populating it, ranging through the wheatfields on horseback in pursuit of the peasant girls, raping and impregnating more than a few. (547)

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 Mariás, Trueba commits a savage rape:

Esteban bent down and removed her burden, held it in the air for a moment, and then hurled it violently to the side of the path. He threw his arm around her waist, swept her up with an animal-like grunt, and placed her before him in the saddle. The girl did not resist. He kicked his heels in the stirrups and they took off at a gallop in the direction of the river. They dismounted without speaking and looked each other over. Esteban unfastened his broad leather belt and she stepped back, but he grabbed her with a single stroke of his hand. They fell arm in arm among the eucalyptus leaves.

Esteban did not remove his clothes. He attacked her savagely, thrusting himself into her without preamble, with unnecessary brutality. (57)

This 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 too much proof. Peter G. Earle refers to this cycle of revenge and continued abuses which begins with the rape of Pancha García and ends with the rape of Alba (Trueba's granddaughter) by Esteban García (Trueba's illegitimate grandson):

The most troublesome outcome of his sexual escapades in the environs of Tres Mariás was Esteban García, his natural grandson born of an offspring of Pancha García, his first wheatfield 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. (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 has commented 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. (1)

Aside from his reification of women, and the abuses he commits against them to satisfy his unchecked libido, Esteban Trueba exhibits his machista attitude towards all women when the subject of his daughter's education is brought up. His double standard concerning the educational opportunities offered his children is stereotypical. His twin boys attend a fine English school, but not his daughter, Blanca:

Blanca's case was a different matter, because her father did not interfere with her education. He believed that her destiny was marriage and a brilliant life in society, where the ability to converse with the dead, if kept on a frivolous level, could be an asset. (136)

This citation shows the traditional divisions between those things considered traditionally "masculine" and those which were left-over for the women. Juan Manuel Marcos, commenting on this aspect of Trueba's personal philosophy, says:

El viejo oligarca Esteban Trueba ... profesa unos sentimientos antisemitas con la misma pasión con que consideraba que la función de la mujer es la maternidad. (135)

Marcos draws 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 book as well as those which actually existed in Chile during that era. Alexander Coleman, 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 book, says:

[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. (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. In a contrast between Esteban and Clara, Earle 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. (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 it with its opposite. 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.

It was people like Clara who, during the 20th century, were responsible for many social and political changes. From the Mexican and Bolshevik revolutions (of 1913 and 1917, respectively) and the Second World War (1939-1945) to the Cuban revolution of 1958, the Prague Spring of 1968, the fight for civil rights in the United States and the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, it was *humanitarian resistance*, sometimes coupled with armed struggles, which brought about these changes. The influence of new and more liberal ideas in Latin America was feared by traditionalists. The wealthy looked at these ideas with trepidation, for they threatened their way of life. At the same time, those ideas gave hope to people with almost no possibility of social or economic advancement within that system where only the privileged had power.

Within this framework, Esteban Trueba is symbolic of the wealthier classes, those wielding power in the society. For the most part, they resisted humanitarian social change. Such changes would constitute an economic and political threat. Trueba, and those like him, invite no such changes. With reference to this patriarchal attitude and those progressive ideologies which threaten to change the social order, Alexander Coleman has said the following:

For Esteban Trueba and his class, socialism and Communism are all part of the same plot against his brand of productive capitalism. As he would have it, both are "Bolshevik ideas designed to turn the tenants against me." (22)

As a direct participant in this "brand of productive capitalism," albeit as one of the exploited workers, Pedro Segundo García suggests to Trueba that he should offer decent wages and hours to his workers. Trueba answers in accordance with his role as defender of those things traditional, recoiling from the perceived threat to his superior social position, saying that which was partially mentioned by Coleman:

"They're degenerate ideas," he muttered.
"Bolshevik ideas designed to turn the tenants against me. What they don't realize is that these poor people are completely ignorant and uneducated. They're like children, they can't handle responsibility. How could they know what's best for them? Without me they'd be lost--if you don't believe me, just look what happens every time I turn my back. Everything goes to pieces and they start acting like a bunch of donkeys. They're very ignorant." (64)

Earle expands on this theme:

History, for Trueba, was paternity and--whenever the situation called for it--aggression. (547)

Trueba's sense of "history," however, is in glaring contrast with Clara's missions of mercy to the "poblaciones" or poorer barrios:

"This is to assuage our conscience, darling," she would explain to Blanca. "But it doesn't help the poor. They don't need charity; they need justice."
(136)

It is clear that Clara's ideas are not her husband's. Nor are they shared with the majority of the wealthy who prefer that there be no change in the status quo--whether it be the position of women in the society or that of the less fortunate members of society. As to exactly what the poorer folk deserve--the ones that Clara and Blanca visit with their "regalos y consuelos" (presents and condolences)--Trueba's answer only solidifies his image as the defender of privileged power:

"Justice! Is it just for everyone to have the same amount? The lazy the same as those who work? The foolish the same as the intelligent? Even animals don't live like that! It's not a matter of rich and poor, it's a matter of strong and weak. I agree that we should all have the same opportunities, but those people don't even try. It's very easy to stretch out your hand and beg for alms! But I believe in effort and reward. Thanks to that, I've been able to achieve what I've achieved. I've never asked anybody for a favor and I've never been dishonest, which goes to prove that anyone can do it. I was destined to be a poor, unhappy notary's assistant. That's why I won't have these Bolshevik ideas brought into my house. Go do your charitable work in the slums, for all I care! It's all well and good: good for building the character of young ladies. But don't start

coming in here with the same half-cocked ideas as Pedro Tercero García, because I won't stand for it!" (137)

In a socially-Darwinistic 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." One's social circumstances are as irrelevant to Trueba as is the inherent unfairness of the economic system he and his cronies both control and to which they severely limit access.

While vehemently opposed to the rise of the left in his own country, his invective, like that of the Chilean conservatives of 1970, had little effect since, 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, a man who had tried various times before to be elected president. The anger Trueba feels when confronted with the possibility that the "Candidate" might win the election is representative of the conservative class in Chile when confronted with the real thing:

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. (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, in light of the growing unrest on the part of the "marginados"--those who live life in the margins of society and whose needs have been 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.

The political action in this novel parallels the 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 of which he is a representative, 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," he remarked mysteriously to his teary co-religionists. (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. (342)

Isabel Allende has commented 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. (qtd. in Coleman 22)

Esteban Trueba is the literal embodiment of these attitudes--attitudes which go hand in hand with the arrogance of power and a desire to control everything and everyone who threatens 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 Marías, 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 García, 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 García 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. (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 bombardment of the presidential palace, or the curfew instituted by the dictatorship, Trueba applauds 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. (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?" (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. (375)

Alexander Coleman has commented 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." (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 what he helped to get going--the destruction of the legitimately elected government--begins to fade precipitously. His daughter Blanca escapes into exile and his granddaughter Alba, the only person he really loves, is taken from his own house by soldiers. Trueba is forced to speak with one Tránsito 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. (420)

In this passage, Trueba experiences the powerlessness he had previously imposed on others. He has committed the same abuses as the military regime--violent attacks (against Blanca and Clara), rapes (Pancha García among others) and torture (Pedro Tercero García and his chopped-off fingers)--but he always could rationalize what he was doing, saying he was acting to protect the well-being of his family. However, when the same type of actions are directed at him by a power he has no hope of controlling, it is possible for him 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 for those who did not believe in the inherent superiority of a particular sex, family name, race or religion. Unfortunately, like Esteban Trueba, those people waited until the coup d'etat to open their eyes and see the injustices for what they really were/are.

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 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 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 doesn't 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. (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.

OF LOVE AND SHADOWS

Of Love and Shadows (1984), Allende's second novel, takes place during a single Spring and focuses on the activities of the two main characters, Irene Beltrán and Francisco Leal. Irene and Francisco, as the author's introductory paragraph suggests, embark on a journey through the shadows that have fallen on their country and their lives. They also discover the love which presents itself as their ultimate salvation. It is a personal story dealing with a personal tragedy with national implications. The book has been criticized as "predictable," "plodding" and even "preachy."⁵ But this book is not The House of the Spirits. Of Love and Shadows is written more in the style of a journalistic exposé than a novel. At the beginning of the book, Allende gives the reader a taste of the adventure which follows:

This is a story of a woman and a man who loved one another so deeply that they saved themselves from a banal existence. I have carried it in my memory, guarding it carefully so it would not be eroded by time, and it is only now, in the silent nights of this place, that I can finally tell it. I do it for them, and for others who have confided their lives to me, saying: Here, write it, or it will be erased by the wind. (1)

Of Love and Shadows was written in 1984 and was inspired by the discovery of a mass grave at the mines at Lonquén, outside of Santiago. The mine shafts were used by the military dictatorship as a dumping ground for the bodies of the tortured, mutilated and "disappeared." Allende was moved to write Of Love and Shadows after reading news accounts and speaking with friends and relatives who, because of their affiliation with organizations perceived as threatening or subversive to the military regime, were detained, sometimes tortured and, if not killed, then exiled or blacklisted.

What impressed me in the story was first, that it was the first case in Chile; second, that I knew it all the time--I had the feeling that I had known it always. And I had known always that there were bodies everywhere buried. That this was just one of the many, many people who had lived similar experiences. It was as if their ghosts were speaking to me. And that's why I left Chile in 1975--I couldn't stand it any longer. And I couldn't stand the denial of the people. I couldn't stand the fact that my neighbors and my in-laws were denying what I knew was true. And when I read this, it was like the confirmation of something that I had always known. ⁶

Isabel Allende has said that Of Love and Shadows was born "from impotence and anger" (qtd. in Gautier 15). Hence, this book, although fictional, has a grounding in reality, reflecting with some accuracy the socio-historical events surrounding an incident like many others which occurred under the Pinochet dictatorship.

As in her first novel, Allende makes no specific mention of Chile or Santiago. Nevertheless the historical, political and geographical references in both books provide enough clues that one can deduce that she is again writing about her homeland, while allowing all Latin Americans who have lived under repressive dictatorships (most of the region, actually) to see something of themselves in the story.

Whereas The House of the Spirits covers almost three-quarters of the 20th century, including the character of those forces behind the coup as well as those opposed to it, Of Love and Shadows deals with life (and death) under the dictatorship. Several strong themes present in Of Love and Shadows are representative of actual events which occurred in Chile. The events carry little significance without the accompanying context which gives them meaning and makes the message contained in the story all the more real. The first of these is the most insidious--denial. As in World War II Germany, much of the population of Chile denied that there were any atrocities committed.

The propensity for denial is most obvious in the principal character, Irene. She symbolizes this phenomenon quite accurately: that of a person (or persons) living a somewhat pampered, middle-class existence in which the realities of repression are denied, not believed. Irene's existence itself is a pattern of denying reality--from her relationship with her fiancé, Captain Gustavo Morante, to the

elaborate scheme she and her mother devise to maintain the appearance of a wealthy social standing to which, since the disappearance of her father, they no longer belong. This denial of reality in the book is no fluke--it occurred in Chile. Isabel Allende says:

Of Love and Shadows, which was considered a lie in Chile, and just fiction, is a testimony--it really happened. I mean, everybody knew that it had happened and it was denied. And now it's impossible to deny these facts, I mean, they're finding the bodies, thousands of them. ⁷

Irene is in a similar type of denial until a week after the episode between Evangelina Ranquileo and the Lt. Juan de Dios Ramirez. When Irene and Francisco return to the Ranquileo's, they learn of Evangelina's "disappearance" and the silence from her brother, Pradelio. Promising that she will help find out where Evangelina is, the search begins at the morgue, but they do not get access to the place without the assistance of Francisco's brother, Fr. José Leal. Although they do not find Evangelina there, Irene begins a transformation. She moves from being the perfect upper-middle class debutante who prefers to see the world with blinders to being directly affected by the "rumored" repression. Irene undergoes a profound change, finally coming to grips with the reality which she has for so long

been denying, much as a cancer patient will deny she is ill, refusing to accept such a life threatening, dangerous fact.

Until the day she visits the morgue, Irene Beltrán had lived in angelic ignorance, not from apathy or stupidity but because ignorance was the norm in her situation. Like her mother and so many others of her social class, she escaped into the orderly, peaceful world of the fashionable neighborhoods, the exclusive beach clubs, the ski slopes, the Summers in the country. Irene had been educated to deny any unpleasantness, discounting it as a distortion of the facts. (118)

This "angelic ignorance" is not a result of coincidence nor limited only to Irene Beltrán. As the religious inquisitors had done four hundred years earlier, the military inquisitors in Of Love and Shadows--working for Augusto Pinochet--did not want to let any information, this book included, into Chile for fear that knowledge of the incidents portrayed therein might give people ideas about questioning the military junta. The armed forces preferred that the populace remain as Irene was at the start of the book--blissfully ignorant. However, like the wall around the first story of her mother's house, this ignorance, this denial, was but a façade.

Well, they said the same thing in Germany. How could they not know that in one week they killed 17,000 people in Auschwitz? How can you deny that? I mean, that's impossible. How can you deny that millions of people were tortured and killed? ... This is something that you cannot, you don't have the right, to deny. I mean, how is it possible that I knew, and I was not even living in

Chile? The capacity for denial of reality that humankind has is to me amazing.⁹

However, denial is no longer plausible for the main character, Irene, when she is exposed to things she thought did not exist. Irene proves the adage that knowledge is power. Once she gains this knowledge, there is no stopping her. For Irene, along with Francisco, this power comes not just from knowledge but also from their faith that society can be restored, that there is a difference between right and wrong, that a standard of morality does exist. They set off on a quest, then, to expose the impostors for what they are: wolves in sheep's clothing, repressive generals playing public servants.

Another recurring and significant theme is the historical role played by the Catholic Church in the entire region. Priests and soldiers were the first to arrive and colonize what was to become Latin America.

the history of conquest in Chile and elsewhere must be seen on three levels: Church doctrine and official policy, administrative implementation or non-implementation, and the reality of everyday life--or death--for the native population.
(Loveman 47)

The Catholic Church became, since the very outset, firmly entrenched in the societal fabric of the region and, not surprisingly, continues to be a key player in the area's

ongoing social/historical evolution. This is also evidenced by the proliferation of missions started by the Catholic missionaries.

In trouncing the posturing machista Lt. Juan de Dios Ramirez, Evangelina--the "little saint," as she is referred to--is symbolically reasserting those religious forces opposed to the military and the lieutenant. As a supposed saint, Evangelina's actions affirm a type of holy power. Evangelina's magical experience is what leads to her death. The supernatural, the spiritual, threaten the military because they cannot control it. Faith, beliefs, ideas, desires--none of these can be easily controlled by a tyrant. Evangelina becomes a symbolic martyr to the cause of freedom, even if it is the freedom only to be considered a saintly, outside the influence of the dictatorship.

In contrast to the Church-inspired inquisition perpetrated by the Spanish Crown so many years past, the Church was one of the only institutions powerful enough to stand-up to the dictatorship--its influence and history far exceeding the transitory importance of Pinochet's junta. The Church was able to forcefully voice an opposing opinion to the actions on the Pinochet regime and to make public (if not in Chile, then internationally) the atrocities it had witnessed. The role of the Catholic church in repressive societies, however, is by no measure one of consistency. Allende says:

There are three Churches in Latin America. One, the Vatican. So removed from reality that it could be Martians, and we don't care. The "official" Church. That is, the Church that has been at the side of the powerful for centuries ... And then the third Church, the "real" Church, the Church of the poor, that has always existed ... when the first priests that came with the conquistadores realized the terrible abuses were made against the Indians, they became the first defenders of the people, of the poor, the victims of all this. And they were the first ones to force the monarchy to admit that the Indians had souls and they needed to be respected and they made the "leyes de Indias" ("the laws of the 'Indies'") to protect the Indians. They were never respected and they were always violated in many ways, but they were there to enforce it morally. Now, that Church is the Church that I had not known before, and I related to after the military coup. That Church is the Church of the Third World. The liberation theology. The Church of the poor. And that Church in Chile is extremely powerful. Much more powerful than the other one. ⁸

In Latin America, the influence of the Catholic church pervades every aspect of daily life and has had a profound influence in the formation of the Latin American psyche. Still, the Catholic Church, 400 years earlier, was responsible for the Spanish Inquisition in which the same type of repression and torture used by today's despots was perfected and practiced enthusiastically, all in the name of God. An example of the brutality wrought by the inquisition is found in Eduardo Galeano's Memory of Fire: Genesis:

The inquisitor general is arriving from Madrid ... Under his supreme authority heretics will be tortured or burned. Centuries ago Pope Innocent IV

ordered assassins of souls and robbers of the faith of Christ to be rewarded with torments; and much later Pope Paul III prohibited the torture to last more than an hour. Since then, inquisitors take a small break from their work every hour. (146)

On the other hand, it was men like Father Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1565), also known as the "Apostle of the Indians," who, in his writings, so eloquently protested the "cruelties suffered by the Indians at the hands of his countrymen." De las Casas

joined the religious order and dedicated the remainder of his long life to the protection of the new wards of the Crown from exploitation by the Spaniards. (Englekirk 16)

This citation shows clearly that when the power of the Church is focused on the troubles of the least powerful of their flock, the Church can be a potent agent for change in a society. Because most of the population of Latin America is Catholic, including the ruling elite (at least in name), the Church has occupied a position of power and respect, although some dictators have been loathe to recognize this position. A strength of the Church is its ability to define the behaviors which will jeopardize the fate of one's mortal soul. It may pass judgment on certain actions, or at least make them public knowledge (all in the effort to arrive at God's truth) with minimal worry of retaliation compared to the risks similar actions would have to the general

population. With this in mind, one can see the forces of opposition in Chile and the institutions representing them-- Pinochet was, as Esteban Trueba in The House of the Spirits, the brute force of nature. The Church, representing society (since any church is, by definition is a societal construct) is devised to separate and elevate man from common animals. The general has tanks, rifles and planes, while the clergy have the Pope, your soul and God. It is the involvement of the Cardinal, at the bequest of Francisco's brother, Father José Leal, who sheds some "official" light on the atrocities discovered by Irene and Francisco. The Cardinal successfully forces the issue into the public dialogue.

The Chief Justice knew the Cardinal. He recognized that this was not a skirmish and that the Cardinal was prepared to wage all-out war. He must have all the aces up his sleeve, because he was too astute to lay that pile of bones in *his* hands and challenge him to bring the forces of law to bear unless he was very sure. (227)

With the power of the Church behind him, the Cardinal takes one of the first official steps in re-establishing the more human society. He brings to bear the moral authority granted to the Church by that very society--a society violated by Pinochet and his minions. This part of the text mirrors the actual events which took place in Chile.

el 30 de noviembre, el obispo auxiliar de Santiago, Enrique Alvear, convocó a una reunión en su despacho ... El obispo Alvear propuso constituirse

como comisión *ad hoc* ... Ese mismo jueves de noviembre, la comisión partió hacia Lonquén ... [En] una antigua mina de cal ... agitó las manos hacia arriba: un tórax humano cayó sobre el piso ... La comisión decidió regresar a Santiago. Al día siguiente, volvió a reunirse y llevó hasta la Corte Suprema la denuncia formal. (Castro 261)

This citation underlines the reality that in Chile, as in most of Latin America, there is only one institution capable of reasserting those values which give a society its moral foundation: the Catholic Church. Political parties, with their shady reputations for deals made in smoke-filled rooms lack moral authority. A moral foundation for one's principles combined with an institution large and strong enough to support those principles is the most effective tool against the uncontrolled power of tyrants. The Chief Justice knows this is a power to be reckoned with and laments the side of the conflict on which he finds himself:

and since the Cardinal decided to intervene, these dead cannot be silenced as so many have been; I should have retired on the day of the military coup, the day they bombed the Presidential Palace, jailed the Ministers, dissolved the Congress, when the eyes of the world were focused on us, waiting for someone to stand up and defend the constitution; that is the day I should have gone home, claiming that I was old, that I was ill; ... instead of placing myself at the service of the Junta, instead of undertaking the purge of my own courts of law. (228)

The attitude portrayed by the Chief Justice is indicative of how many who early on applauded and admired the military

subsequently reacted to their brutality. This is the same military Esteban Trueba loved at the beginning of The House of the Spirits, but despised at the end. Again, the confrontation portrayed in Of Love and Shadows reflects the actions of the Church in Chile:

El hallazgo de Lonquén tuvo un inolvidable impacto público ... Aquel nombre se convirtió en un sinónimo de la barbarie ... La Vicaría decidió entonces abordar una tarea de ribetes lúgubres: recopilar y establecer las fichas antropométricas de los desaparecidos, para facilitar la tarea de reconocimiento de restos ... El 19 de diciembre, mientras Lonquén empezaba recién a develarse en toda su magnitud, otra denuncia consistente fue admitida por la Vicaría. (Castro 262)

Without an institution such as the Church to define their role and hold all accountable to certain principles of morality, the armed forces, unchecked, tend to behave like animals on the prowl.

When the book begins and Irene and Francisco are investigating the rumor of the little girl people call a saint, they arrive at the moment of one of the seizures which had convinced the peasants of Los Riscos of her saintliness. A truckload of soldiers then arrives and begins shooting the building and causing a scene which, according to Lt. Juan de Dios de Ramirez (the officer in command of the soldiers) will put an end to the problems that Private Pradelio Ranquileo's little sister, Evangelina, was having:

"Where the priests and doctors have failed, the armed forces will triumph." That's what I told him, and that's why we're here. "We'll see if she keeps having her fits once I've taken her prisoner!" (73)

Dios de Ramirez thinks that the social workers and psychologists--those representatives of institutions found in advanced societies--are weak and powerless. For him and his kind, might makes right and in any crisis, the armed forces will prevail. This first passage sets up the competing discourses of truth versus repression, justice versus injustice, the dictatorship versus the people.

The next Sunday, in an act of revenge for his humiliation, the lieutenant returns and takes Evangelina in for "questioning." She is never heard from again. Up until this point in the book there only appear sketchy examples and oblique references to repressive actions taken by the dictatorship. That changes quickly. Irene and Francisco are immediately involved in the seedier side of the military regime's repressive actions simply because they were there and they witnessed the humiliation of the lieutenant. Upon hearing of the bizarre disappearance of the little girl, Irene begins to ask questions--the first time she does so since the coup--further implicating both herself directly and Francisco by extension. Rene A. Campos comments on Irene's eye-opening experience, saying that, "La conformidad ... de Irene al orden simbólico/a la realidad se resquebraja a partir de ese encuentro" (Campos 199). While Irene is undergoing an education

in reality, it is made known to the reader that Francisco is involved in clandestine activity against the dictatorship. Because Irene is the main character and is still learning of the harsh realities of the dictatorship, the oblique references to Francisco's covert activities only prepare the reader for the many and varied types of repression represented in this novel.

One of the most prevalent forms of repression exerted by the military regime was the shutting down of any opposition newspaper, magazine, television, radio or any other form of disseminating information. Allende addresses this form of censorship from the point of view of a reporter working for a magazine whose content is highly controlled by the government. Before going to Los Riscos to investigate the so-called "little Saint," Irene is becoming discouraged by the press restrictions mandated by the dictatorship. Finding something to attract the readers' attention which would also make it to the press was getting harder and harder:

Every day it was more difficult to find appealing stories for the magazine. It seemed that nothing interesting was happening in the country, and when it did occur, it was censored. (63)

After the interesting scene with Evangelina and the lieutenant, Irene begins to worry about whether the facts of the story she has just finished covering will ever be published:

she was thinking about the title of her article, and wondering whether censorship would permit her

to mention the name of the officer who received the drubbing. (76)

With Irene's concern over the content of her article, Allende represents the fascist measures used by the regime to squelch any opinion not coinciding with its own. Irish journalist Peadar Kirby wrote of this practice after a 1982 visit to Chile:

The press is severely restricted. All the daily papers mirror the government's ideology which is shown up only by a weekly newsmagazine, *Hoy*, and a Jesuit monthly, *Mensaje*, read by an educated elite, (and a) fortnightly magazine of the Vicariate of Solidarity, called *Solidaridad*. Because of its strong anti-government line and its popular appeal it is constantly under harassment by the police and can only exist with the protection of the Catholic Church. (19)

As insidious as the stifling of free expression was the barbaric side of the regime which is exemplified by Lt. Juan de Dios Ramirez. He is just another soldier--one of the many, nameless, faceless soldiers who take advantage of the power he has as a soldier. Pinochet institutionalized a siege mentality where society's rules didn't matter. In Pinochet's Chile, it was survival of the fittest, of the most powerful and the best armed. This power was manifested by actions--in this case, with Lt. Dios de Ramirez' (mis)treatment of Evangelina: her abduction, rape, murder and cover-up.

When the lieutenant tries to take little Evangelina prisoner, he is tossed around, punched and humiliated by the diminutive girl--supposedly in the throes of a massive seizure--in a scene which fits the definition of magic realism but also serves as the turning point in the book:

Lt. Juan de Dios Ramirez marched over to Evangelina's bed. The mother made a move to stop him, but he pushed her aside. "Don't touch her!" the mother managed to scream, but she was too late: the officer had already reached out and grasped the afflicted girl's arm.

Before anyone could have predicted it, Evangelina's fist flashed out and cracked against the officer's ruddy face, striking him in the nose with such force that he tumbled backward to the floor. (74)

Evangelina picks the lieutenant up, throws him down and tosses his gun into the mud where it is nudged by a swine just before sinking out of sight in the mire. This passage is the one most often referred to as evoking images of "magic realism." As far as that definition goes, there may be some validity to the claim. Or, the fantastic strength exhibited by Evangelina might be explained away as having actually happened--much in the same way as a wiry teenager who has ingested the drug PCP is capable of tossing about four or five burly police officers with little effort at all. But more intriguing is the character of Latin American literature which, due to the unique history of the region, demands scenes such as these.

History and Literature--truth and falsehood,
reality and fiction--mingle in these texts in a way
that is often inextricable. (Vargas Llosa 4)

The above citation, by Mario Vargas Llosa, refers to the
propensity to mix what is real and what is not. Vargas
Llosa's comments about the veracity of the chronicles which
came out of Latin America during colonial times ring true
with regard to the testimonial-style novels which focus on
Chile since 1973, especially Of Love and Shadows:

Does this mean that its testimony must be
challenged from a historical point of view? Not at
all. Its exaggerations and fantasies often reveal
more about the reality of the era than its truths.
(6)

But the truth is that Of Love and Shadows tells the story and
gives the details a human face. No longer are the victims
mere statistics. Allende brings them to life so we can watch
them suffer and sometimes die. That is the truth and that is
the most important aspect of this book.

Allende remains true to the moral imperative behind
all her writing, which is to bear witness through
literature to a time and place in Latin-American
history: "All those of us who write and are
fortunate enough to be published ought to assume
the responsibility for serving the cause of freedom
and justice. We have a mission to accomplish in
the front lines. In the face of the obscurantism
that oppresses various countries on our continent,
we must offer words, reason and hope. Literature
must be placed at the service of mankind. Ideas

are the worst enemy of barbarism." (Meyer in "Exile..." 2)

Of Love and Shadows was indeed placed at the service of mankind. The primary elements of press censorship, torture, murder, cover-up and the denial of all these are part of the story. And, what is more, the story actually happened. Isabel Allende has said that "it is impossible to speak of Latin America without mentioning violence." (in Zinsser 46) 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 despot.

But why a novel? Why not glean this information from other sources? Allende makes the valid point that:

In a novel we can give an illusory order to chaos. We can find the key to the labyrinth of history. We can make excursions into the past, to try to understand the present and dream the future. In 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. (in Zinsser 45)

Of Love and Shadows does help make sense of an important part of Chile's modern history while not losing that ability to dream the future.

CONCLUSIONS

The novels analyzed accurately capture two important, but different, social and historical aspects 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. Of Love and Shadows is less sweeping in scope, focusing on a single event which, chronologically, takes place in a time frame subsequent to The House of the Spirits.

In The House of the Spirits, Esteban Trueba's social and economic ascendancy (both being complementary manifestations of power) mirrors that of, what will be referred to later in the twentieth century as, "el viejo orden" or the old guard--the protectors of a status quo which, since it served them so well, kept the majority of the population subjugated and without hope of moving out of their "caste." On a personal, individual level, Trueba's political opinions and abuses of the poor parallel the circumstances in which most of Chile's less fortunate found themselves at the hands of those more powerful forces.

In The House of the Spirits, there is a correlation between individual characters and the social and historical forces they represent on a larger scale. The trials and tribulations of the Trueba family and those around them are a microcosm of Chilean society--what happens to them happens to

the rest of the country, and for the same reasons. On a larger scale, it could be said that the forces which would inevitably collide--first, with the election of a socialist president, then the military coup--were analogous to forces which were destined to end in conflict in many parts of the world in the second half of this century. 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 this 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.

From Esteban Trueba's political views, his treatment of women and his overall conservative bent to those characters who would challenge Trueba and his cronies 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 in the character of Esteban Trueba and how those of his ilk since, throughout the text, the opposing discourses of justice and injustice, of rich and poor, of the empowered and disenfranchised, are constantly coming in conflict.

Of Love and Shadows, on the other hand, takes place during a single Spring and focuses on one main event: the disappearance, death and discovery of the body of, Evangelina Ranquileo. Of Love and Shadows does not have the same symbolic "flavor" to it as Allende's first book, although the events that occur in the book are representative of events which occurred over and over again in Chile (and other Latin American countries suffering under brutal dictatorships). Allende draws more heavily on her skills as a reporter in this book. It is a case study. It is a fictionalized account of actual events, put forth in a very realistic, almost journalistic style, quite different from the epic-like feeling one gets from most of The House of the Spirits.

Again, Allende successfully constructs sympathetic characters through whose eyes the brutality of the dictatorship can be seen. The opposition between power discourses is evident in this text as well. But, even more significant, is the debate created over the exercise of that power--a debate centered on issues of morality, or right and wrong.

In both books, 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 detail necessary to make them sympathetic (for the most part)

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 Irene 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. As for Irene, in Of Love and Shadows, the parallels are more obvious. Both were reporters for innocuous women's magazines prior to the coup. Both were living in the aforementioned "angelic ignorance" that was not shaken until each, in their separate ways, were confronted first-hand with the brutality of the politics of Chile.

This point, the fact that all events, characters, and actions portrayed in both books 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 poignant, 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.

NOTES

- ¹ See Volume I of Eduardo Galeano's Memory of Fire (1982). This book contains numerous, well documented accounts of what life was like in Latin America, and elsewhere, over great spans of time--including the colonial period.
- ² Loveman, Brian. Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism. Scobie, James P., editor. Second edition. Latin American Histories. New York: Oxford University Press. 1988. p.295.
- ³ A good source of information concerning the day to day workings before and immediately after the coup can be found in: Felippi, Emilio; Millas, Hernán Anatomía de un fracaso: La experiencia socialista chilena. 2a edición. Santiago de Chile: Empresa Editora Zig Zag, S.A. 1973.
- ⁴ Isabel Allende has also written two other novels, Eva Luna (1987) and The Infinite Plan (1993). As well, she has written a book of short stories, The Stories of Eva Luna (1990).
- ⁵ See Patricia Hart's Narrative Magic in the Fiction of Isabel Allende London: Farleigh Dickinson University Press. 1989. p.137-9. Also, Isabel Allende's article in William Zinsser's Paths of Resistance. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1989. p50; and interview which appears in this thesis.
- ⁶ See "A Conversation With Isabel Allende," p.78, in the appendix of this thesis.
- ⁷ See "A Conversation With Isabel Allende," p.68, in the appendix of this thesis.
- ⁸ See "A Conversation With Isabel Allende," p.87, in the appendix of this thesis.
- ⁹ See "A Conversation With Isabel Allende," p.71, in the appendix of this thesis.

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APPENDIX--INTERVIEW

A CONVERSATION WITH ISABEL ALLENDE

(The conversation begins with Isabel Allende showing me a newspaper her mother had recently sent her from Chile. The headline states that more bodies of the "disappeared" have been recovered. She asks me if I was aware of these discoveries as I turn the tape recorder on...)

JRW: No, I'm not aware of this.

IA: Well, eh, they are digging the country, and finding hundreds of bodies. They are these, I mean, people have been massacred for 17 years all over the country. And the soldiers that participated in these massacres have stepped forward to tell where the bodies are. And they are finding them, some of them intact, in the North, in the desert. So, Of Love and Shadows, which was considered a lie in Chile, and just fiction, is a testimony--it really happened. I mean, everybody knew that it had happened and it was denied. And now it's impossible to deny these facts, I mean, they're finding the bodies, thousands of them!

JRW: Can you imagine them going in there and having to identify the bodies?

IA: Well, in the North, they found a grave where the dry climate, the very, very dry weather kept them intact so they could not only identify them by sight, but they would also check all the signs of torture and mutilation--everything they did with them. This is happening now, in the last two months.

JRW: I rarely get a chance to get a Chilean newspaper.

IA: My mother sends me these clippings, and sometimes newspapers and we talk on the telephone two or three times a week. So I'm...she keeps me informed of what's going on.

JRW: When was the last time you were in Chile?

IA: In December

JRW: How did you find it?

IA: Well, it was a very euphoric moment, because it was the moment of the election. I was there for the election. I was there for the celebration of the people in the streets, and, although everybody was aware that the military structure and economic structure remains intact, this is the beginning of the loss of political power for the military. And the deterioration of the regime, of the aged regime, of the dictatorship, has been very fast because it is impossible to hide any longer the crimes they committed. So, they have lost face in every sense, in every aspect.

JRW: As you're saying that, it's bringing to mind something that's going on in the American press. I read about all of the political changes--this great democratic revolution that's taking place in Eastern Europe--and it seems that the American press, which has always been called liberal, is putting an enormous focus on the change of governments in Eastern Europe, from Socialist, totalitarian governments to this democratic revolution, while in South America there has been what could be considered a democratic revolution, but it has come from the other end of the political spectrum--by governments, supported by and large by the American government: military dictatorships--and the press puts it in on page seven, next to the gardening column.

IA: Well, but that is also, I mean, you are right. You are right, there is a political cost, but there is also another terrible cost: Latin America doesn't exist for the United States. We don't exist. I mean, Kissinger said it bluntly: "This is our backyard." They don't care, they don't give a shit. And so, it's very clear, I mean, these things are happening in Chile, the United States supported this government that has killed thousands of people and has

tortured and mutilated and done the most horrible things, and nothing of this appears in the press.

JRW: I read two newspapers a day and I haven't seen anything.

IA: Not a word, and this covers the titles of every newspaper in Chile. This is on TV everyday. And (in the US) you get the news of who is the last beauty queen, but you don't get this news.

JRW: Is this par for the course as far as the changes in freedom of the press?

IA: Well, the press was censored, everything was censored, and, apart from the censorship from the government, there was self-censorship, which is worse. Because the directors, or the people responsible for whatever was published, were, themselves, personally responsible after it was published so, in case they wouldn't like something that was already published, they would pay with prison, or sometimes with their lives. So, they were very careful about what they published. Now, this thing is finished, so, for the first time in seventeen years, you see people talking openly and publishing what's going on. Now, I know people are totally amazed, surprised at these things. (They say), "We never knew these things were happening right by our house, in our neighborhood, and we didn't know." How can they not know?

JRW: Do you think their surprise is feigned, that it's for public consumption, for the people to see that it's just easier to say that they didn't know what was going on?

IA: Well, they said the same thing in Germany. How could they not know that in one week they killed 17,000 people in Auschwitz? How can you deny that? I mean, that's impossible. How can you deny that millions of people were tortured and killed? That villages, complete villages, in occupied countries, occupied by Germany, were totally

destroyed? There was nothing left. All the men were killed. All the women were sent to prison camps. And all the children were disseminated in the orphanages. This is something that you cannot, you don't have the right, to deny. I mean, how is it possible that I knew, and I was not even living in Chile? The capacity for denial of reality that humankind has is to me amazing.

JRW: Relating that to what we were talking about with the democratic changes, you were saying that there's no way that the military can maintain the power that it has had up until this point, and it was slowly losing it. Do you think there's a possibility of them regaining it? Do you think this is just a passing phase right now? Do you think that the generals will come back?

IA: I think that the circumstances in Latin America are changing fast. A decade ago, you could predict that the military would take over any minute, anywhere. But now, we have democracies, practically everywhere. They are conditioned, and very fragile, but they are democracies, and I think we have learned a terrible lesson. We know that the military doesn't solve anything--it just adds to the problems that we have. And this is something that even the military knows, except the most fanatic. So, I don't think we will have another decade of this thing. On the other hand, the United States, who supported this kind of government, also learned a lesson, that it only creates more violence, and it increases the problems we are trying to avoid.

JRW: Do you really think the lesson has been learned?

IA: I think that in many ways, it has. In many ways, it has. Maybe not to the extent that it should, but, even the world has changed. How can you continue blaming Communists for everything? Don't you think that the United States will have to revise its policy in El Salvador, in Guatemala, in Nicaragua, all over Latin and Central America, after the

changes in Europe? Can you blame the Soviet Union for what's going on in El Salvador? Or will you have to face a reality that's a problem of ignorance and poverty and extreme misery and a very unjust distribution of wealth. Sooner or later they will have to face that, and I think that now, you don't have this umbrella of Communism, to put under that umbrella all of your mistakes. The paranoia will have to end.

JRW: The literary climate in Latin America: I've read some quotes when you said the military leaders don't read, so, literature going into Latin America was never considered a real threat, even though--I believe there's some truth in that--they had to smuggle your first book in, in pieces, and with the covers off, and, not openly walking in with it under your arm and saying, "yeah, I've got Isabel Allende's new novel here--it's gonna be great," while walking through the airport. Afterwards, there was more freedom, but the climate there, I've gathered, for artistic expression of what's going on, wasn't reflecting what was going on in the real world. It was oppressive. Is it still that way? Is there a fear...is there something that's been ingrained in the literary community that remained in Chile?

IA: I don't think so. During 16 years people talked about the "apagón cultural"--meaning this was a period of darkness where nothing happened in culture, because everything was repressed and there were also economic problems that made it very difficult to publish or to exhibit or to do anything, for most artists and intellectuals. Then, also, the fact that most of them lived in exile, and they produced their work in foreign countries, sometimes in foreign languages, like Antonio Skármeta, and others. So, this idea of the apagón cultural, in many ways benefited the military. It was a way of saying, "well, nothing is happening." People just assumed that this was reality and they were paralyzed by terror. And that's fine, and they

didn't react, but that didn't happen really. There was no apagón cultural, in a sense. People continued to work, to publish, to paint. The theater was just incredible, the things they did in theater. The most courageous ways you could imagine, under those circumstances. Unthinkable in countries like Argentina or any other country with a dictatorship--they did it in Chile. So, they defied the dictatorship, as far as they could. And they paid the price of that. People disappeared. Theaters were bombed. Actors were taken to prison. Many people had to fly to exile. All those things happened. And yet, there was a literature going on. I consider Chilean literature, everything that was written by Chileans, no matter where, and no matter in what language, and no matter what was the theme, that is Chilean literature during this period. Some of it was written in Chile, and some of it was written in exile.

JRW: Is there any argument that it wouldn't be if it was not written in the country (Chile)?

IA: Yes. There has been an argument, because many people consider that many people that remained in Chile had to face the terror or repression in Chile, consider that the people who left Chile, that is, people like myself, and other who lived all these years abroad, in a way skipped all that, and they didn't produce something that was really Chilean--they were not there. There were not talking about what was going on there, and that's not really Chilean literature. So that they're...in a way made the difference, and said, Chilean literature in exile. I don't think that we should segregate ourselves. I consider that what I have written about Chile in my two first books, as just as Chilean as anything that was published in the country. And maybe more, sometimes, because I had the freedom to do it. A lot of people didn't. I could say anything, and I didn't care. There was no risk for my life. Do you think that I could've

written those two books in Chile? Possible, but I wouldn't be telling you this story.

((interruption--her husband came into the office, introduced himself))

JRW: I've got my mother hooked on you. The books have gone from me, to my mom, to her sisters in Utah.

IA: Utah must be a pretty conservative place?

JRW: It is--that's why my mom doesn't live there. She was brought up in a Mormon family, but...

IA: She's a Mormon?

JRW: She's what you might call a "jack-Mormon."

IA: What's a "jack-Mormon"?

JRW: She's the kind that will give me coffee in the morning when I go over and visit her before I go to school.

IA: (laughs) And your dad is not a Mormon?

JRW: He's an ex-catholic. He was excommunicated for marrying a Mormon.

IA: (laughs, again)

JRW: That was before "Vatican II." It's interesting.

IA: And you were brought up as Catholics? or Mormons? or what?

JRW: We were never really indoctrinated into any particular religion. I attended certain Mormon services, but I haven't latched-on to either one. I was married by a Catholic priest. But I let him know I wasn't going to convert to Catholicism and there was no way I was going to promise that I was going to raise my kids Catholic. I think the Mormons are crazy to expect their kids to know what kind of religion they wanted to be when they're eight, much less baptizing a child when it's less than a year old, as the Catholics do. I think that's a decision that you have to be able to make yourself when you're of an age to do it. I don't think you should be devoid of any belief, whether it's in God, or Mohammed, the Oak Tree In The Front Yard, but

there should be some foundation for that. That's basically what we grew up with. I've gotten into discussions with this priest about this. He happens to be the priest who founded the Maryknoll school in Cochabamba, where my wife is from...

IA: She's from Bolivia?

JRW: Yes, she's a "cochabambina."

IA: Have you been there?

JRW: Yes, twice. I've been to Argentina and Bolivia.

O.K...general question: You've had an astounding success with your three novels. Is there a formula? What's the key to a successful novel?

IA: Well, when I wrote the first book, it became such a fast success... I was living in Venezuela, far away from the success, which was mainly in Europe, because the book was translated into English very late. And I was not aware, really, of what was going on with the book until a year later, when I received the first checks, and the first yellow envelopes with clippings. And, even then, I didn't realize that it was a success, because I have no experience in literature and I lived very isolated. I worked too hard. I was working two shifts in a school, twelve hours a day. I was exhausted.

JRW: What were you doing in the school? Were you teaching?

IA: I was administrating a school. I did it for a living. I really needed to support my family. And I was very, very tired, but I was already writing a second book, Of Love and Shadows, which is a totally different book. And I wasn't even tempted, at that point, to repeat the formula of The House of the Spirits, because it was a totally different story. This was a very journalistic story, based on a real massacre that had occurred in Chile in 1973. So, I didn't have the temptation of repeating the formula. When I wrote Eva Luna, I already knew how well The House of the Spirits

had done and, it was also a different story, placed in another part of the world, in another tone, with another color and smell, and intention and emotion. It was something different. So, the three books are different. And then the fourth book is a collection of short stories and, in this case, it's a different genre, so, you can't repeat the formula even if you wanted. So, I don't know, I mean, now I'm writing another novel which is totally different. Really, if there is a formula, I've not been able to find out what it is. It would be much easier if I could do that.

JRW: Do you think it would be easier?

IA: Oh yes! It would be much easier if I would write like some thriller writers: find the formula and then repeat it, and they tell different stories with that formula. I can't. First I get bored. And second, I think that every story has a tone, has a language, has a way of being told that is unique, and that is the challenge for the writer. And that's what I try to do.

JRW: You said that you don't choose a theme, that it chooses you.

IA: Yeah, I don't choose it. I need to feel the story inside me, like a child. And it has to be with me, inside me for many, sometimes, many years, for a long time. It has to be something I have had time to internalize, to let it grow inside, and then, all of a sudden, at a certain point, I provoke the moment, of course. The moment is always January the 8th. But, it has to...I mean, when January the 8th approaches, I just let myself be as relaxed as possible and I don't force the story because I already know what it is, I have it there.

JRW: Why January the 8th?

IA: Because it is to me--I'm very superstitious--this is a magic day. This is the day that I began The House of the Spirits. I began all my books on the same day. Of

course, not every year, because I don't produce a book every year. But, like, when I finished the short stories, it was August, 1989. I could have started the other book because I already had it inside, I waited until January of this year. And during all those months, I just let it settle there, and then, January the 8th, I sit down, and I don't have to think the story, I don't have to force it in any way, I just write the first line. And the first line gets me the tone of the whole book.

JRW: You...when we (my Spanish American Lit. class at SJSU) had come up for a final class--when you invited us to your house--you were mentioning that it was really getting difficult with the domestic...

IA: ...chores...

JRW: ...chores, to find the time, an uninterrupted hour, or three or five, to sit down...

IA: Well, I need eight...

JRW: ...or eight,

((Here there was an interruption...there was going to be a deposition given in that office, so we moved to another...))

JRW: O.K., back to not choosing the theme and it choosing you. How did that idea relate to the writing of De amor y de sombra?

IA: Well, it's very simple, I was living in Venezuela in 1978, and I was not a writer, when the mines where these bodies were buried was opened by the Catholic Church in Chile. It seems that the Catholic Church learned from a confession about the bodies, and they opened the mine before the police could stop them. And that is why, for the first time, the bodies were found, and the murderers were brought to trial. They were found guilty, and the next day, a decree

of amnesty by the dictatorship set them free. And this was published in 1978 while I was working in a school. I was in a very terrible moment in my life, a very unhappy moment, and I think it was the worst year of my life, in many aspects. And when I read the news in the Venezuelan newspapers, I didn't have any way of going back to Chile or getting in touch with what was going on in Chile at that point, but the story affected me deeply. It was not the first time that stories like this were published, not about Chile, but very many about Argentina and Peru. What impressed me in the story was first, that is was the first case in Chile; second, that I knew it all the time--I had the feeling that I had known it always. And I had known always that there were bodies everywhere buried. That this was just one of the many, many people who had lived similar experiences. It was as if their ghosts were speaking to me. And that's why I left Chile in 1975--I couldn't stand it any longer. And I couldn't stand the denial of the people. I couldn't stand the fact that my neighbors and my in-laws were denying what I knew was true. And when I read this, it was like the confirmation of something that I had always known. And then, also something very important, and that is that five members of the same family were killed, were among the bodies that were found. The Maureira family--the father and the four sons. One of them was just visiting. He didn't even live there. He had gone for the weekend. And they were all killed. And I couldn't stop thinking of the women in the family. The wives, the daughters, the mother, who looked for their men for five years, searching in concentration camps, and prisons and hospitals, everywhere. And they were very lucky, because they found them finally. Most of the relatives of *desaparecidos* never find any trace of them. And these women were able to bury them, and cry for them, to pray for them, to transform their anger and their anguish into

action, and start a new life, in a way. They were summoned to a courtyard, *medicatura forense*, where there were these long, wooden tables, with little pieces of what was a terrible puzzle. And they walked along the tables and they said, and they saw (their family members).

(end of side one of interview cassette)

IA: I feel like I've known this my whole life, my whole life. Sometimes I check it with my parents, and it seems that I've invented everything. So, in order not to forget, I make these little notes, and I put them in my files. And I know that there is something stored there that I can forget, because later, I can always go back to it.

JRW: And you wouldn't have put it there unless it was important in the first place...

IA: Yes, and then sometimes its just one word, and I read the word and it triggers the story. The recollection of the story. So, when I open my...when I decided I was going to write my second book, I knew that somewhere in these little pieces of paper, that I gather--I had a lot--so, I put it together, everything that concerned that case, and then I started a real research. Because much was missing. I only had there part of the story that was published in the newspapers, but I needed all the real information that was brought up in the trials. And I got that later.

JRW: How did you get access to the...

IA: Well, I didn't get all of it, because most of it was a military secret. But the lawyer that represented the victims. Máximo Pacheco, wrote a document about that--he wrote a book that is a documentary about part of the trial, and then, when I said that I was writing about this, some people sent me things that were not published. And I got them. Because, by that time, already The House of the

Spirits had reached Chile, in photocopies, and many people knew about the success of the book in Europe. So, I had become a sort of little celebrity among a small group of people in the opposition in Chile, and those people helped me.

JRW: When you went to Chile recently, or--how times have you...?

IA: Twice.

JRW: O.K., I'm curious to know what feedback you got from people who had read either of your first two novels prior to the elections. Did they say they had read them and that they had a significant impact on them, on their lives?

IA: Well, I received a--it's very strange, but when I left Chile, on a Winter day, in July of 1975, it was raining, it was a horrible day, and I was alone, running away. And when I came back, I came back in a beautiful Summer day, in a brilliant mid-day, with my new husband, and there was a crowd waiting for me in the airport. It was like a great metaphor of my life. (laughs) And, I had this incredible, incredible welcome everywhere I went. I would walk into a restaurant and people would clap. Or stand-up and cheer me. Everywhere in the streets people would stop me. So, I know that all the people that approached me had read my books and had liked them. Now, there must be lots of people who hate books and hate me, but they didn't come to say anything. They were polite enough to just ignore me.

JRW: Did you get any personal testimonies...

IA: Many, many, many...I went to see...I'll tell you just one little incident that I remember at this moment. I went to visit the house of Pablo Neruda. I had been with him a few days before his death in that house, and he, we were to have lunch there--the house has been closed since his death, and now a foundation has opened it to the public again, but very recently. The military held it for many, for many, many

years. And the house was closed when I went back to Chile the first time. But the foundation gave me the key and allowed me in, and there was a person, a housekeeper inside. So, I went into the house with my mother and my new husband and we walked in the house and I saw the collections and--I saw everything that reminded me of Neruda. And then, we came out of the house, this is a house in the beach, in the coast in Isla Negra, and my mother and the rest of the people that were in our party walked in the garden. And I was so impressed, I felt so touched by the memories of everything, of everything that had happened to all of us that I wanted to be alone, so I walked down the beach. There were some rocks where people had written things for Neruda before they could approach the house. There was...and I was just sitting there in one, on a rock, and there were other people scattered in the beach, it's not a very big beach, but few people, it was very windy, nobody was sunbathing or anything of the sort, and that...the sea is really rough there, you don't--it's not a proper beach--and a woman came over. And she came over, and she walked to me, slowly, and then she hugged me. And she started crying. And she said, "*Cuánto hemos sufrido, cuánto hemos sufrido, cuánto hemos sufrido*" ("How we have suffered, how we have suffered, how we have suffered"). That's the only thing she said. And she said, "Isabelita," as if she knew me, and I know that I had never met her before. But, in a way, maybe the books have just communicated us, or I don't know.

JRW: I think the reader develops a relationship with the book and the author.

IA: I have had that feedback often of people who...who tell me that something that I have written had changed their lives, or had changed the way they see things. I know people that have gone to Latin America because they've read (my books). Recently, a week ago, a friend, Tabra, she's a

jeweler--she makes beautiful jewelry--and she's very, very famous, well, all over the United States, and she said, "I'm going to the fair in L.A. because, every year, we give part of our jewelry, and artists give their work and everybody collaborates. And everything that is sold in this fair, is taken--they buy these big trucks full of different things that they take to the families of the victims of repression in El Salvador. And they do this every year. It has become very successful and celebrities from the movies also collaborate. And she said all this was started by a woman who read The House of the Spirits. And she, every year, she reminds the people that this book provoked all this. And this is growing and growing. I don't know anything about this. So, I hope that I will be able to go there next year. And I, I thought, well, you never know for whom you write. What will happen with the book? When Noriega was taken, he had two books with him--the Bible, and The House of the Spirits. And I commented at that moment, "you never know for whom you write." But then, it works the other way around too! Sometimes you write for wonderful people! And so that is...That gives a meaning to my life.

JRW: It must be very rewarding to hear...

IA: To me, it gives a meaning to my writing, to my life, to my, to the effort, because writing is a big effort. Everything changes when you realize that you can touch someone.

JRW: Have you always had such a facility with words, in expressing yourself with the written word? Is that something that you've had to develop over time or is that something that's always been--it's just come naturally to you throughout your life?

IA: I've been trained in writing. Every time...when I've been separated from my mother, since I was a child, we write a letter every day. It's a way of keeping a record of

life. And we used to call it "los cuadernos de anotar a la vida" ("notebooks that bore witness to life")--so that's why that is the way that the diaries called in The House of the Spirits. And, it's funny how things work. I'll tell you a story, off the record, later. Remind me.

JRW: I can do this...(I shut off the tape recorder.)

JRW: Patricia Hart: You're familiar with her dissertation: Narrative Magic in the Fiction of Isabel Allende? Never seen it? Never heard of it?

IA: Look, I receive piles of papers from students all over the United States and, some of them published, some not. I don't, maybe I've read it, but I don't recall it.

JRW: Well, she referred to your--using the buzz-word "magic-realism"--she refers to you as, your writing as "magic feminism."

IA: Oh, I've heard that. I've heard that, yes.

JRW: Is that...does any of that...

IA: I don't like labels. I don't like labels, because I think that they put you in a straight jacket. And, they've accused me of many things: of being a political writer, of being a feminist writer, a magic-realist writer, to copy García-Márquez, to not copy García-Márquez...all sorts of things.

JRW: I wanted to get to that one...

IA: And, what can I tell you...? I write the best I can and I'm very careful with what I write because I have a great sense of responsibility about writing. As I get this incredible feedback, I know how it can affect a person. Maybe not very many, but even if it affects one person, I want that person to be affected in a positive way. I want to give to that person everything that I have...my questions. Because I don't have answers. My anguish and my joy and the experience of my life and the experience of other people's

lives--and I want to share that. And that's what I do. I'm a storyteller. Now, if I write from this point of view or that point of view, if it's magic, if it's feminist, it's...I think it's a reflection of what I am. My writing is very much my own life and the way I am as a person. I can't make things up in the sense that, if I don't believe in something then I don't write about it. Because I'm not interested. I don't write about sports...you will never find any sportsman in any of my novels! No one jogs, no one runs,...(laughs),...no one vegetarian, no one, I mean, (keeps laughing), you will never find those people, because I'm not interested! I'm interested in other issues, and those issues that I'm interested (in), are always present in my books. Now, "magic feminism"...I've been a feminist all my life. And my life is magic. Everybody's life is. And my continent is such a wonderful mixture of things, that you just can't avoid having this baroque approach to life. So rich, so colorful, that if you want to call that "magic," well, call it--but it's just a label.

JRW: What do you say the people who have accused you of--I'm sure you're getting tired of hearing this question--of copying García-Márquez, of imitating García-Márquez?

IA: I think that if I was a dancer, and people said I danced as well as Pavlova, I would be very flattered. I think that he's the best Latin American writer that ever existed. And one of the greatest writers in any language in the world. If I'm compared to him...Oh my God! I feel very flattered.

JRW: Do you think there is anything to them saying that?

IA: Oh, I'm sure that there is. I mean, some people--reviewers, critics, professors--might think that I sit down to write my novels with all García-Márquez' work in front of me, and I go page by page taking sentences and...well, that's not the way I work. I'm sure that there is a great influence

of García-Márquez, as there is an influence of Pablo Neruda, and there is an influence of the American feminists that I've read and some Russian authors that...I love the complicated family sagas of Russian authors...that doesn't mean that I copy them. I'm not copying Brothers Karamasov when I write... Well, one of the things I' would need to be stupid not to be aware of is that male authors, especially those who belong to an older generation, hate me.

JRW: Why?

IA: For various reasons. One of them is because they have been writing for more than thirty years, and I have written only three books, and I have, I'm...this is very...this is very pretentious that I should say it, but this is the truth, I mean, my books have been translated into, I don't know, twenty-four languages, they are really very successful...

JRW: I don't think that's pretentious at all--it's the truth, isn't it?

IA: And, so that provokes resentment--especially in male authors, because they feel that, in a way, I have invaded their territory. I thought that I would...that I would have a better...a better attitude among women, but I went to a feminist, to a congress of feminine literature in Washington, not long ago, well, yeah, long ago, and I realized that I could never go there again, to any place like that because I perceived a lot of aggression. A lot of aggression. And writers that I admire and I quote and I--women writers I'm talking about--and I defend every time that I can, really attacked me.

JRW: Are these Latin American women writers?

IA: Mostly Latin American.

JRW: To what extent do you think that's an ingrained way of thinking--the subservience of the woman, the fact that the male should be dominant in all areas of literature...

IA: No, I think that's just jealousy

JRW: Jealousy?

IA: Jealousy of the success of another person instead of considering that if one of us succeeds, it opens the way, paves the road for the rest. I could have never published my book The House of the Spirits the way I did in a Spanish publishing house, untranslated, unreviewed, without success, if the whole "boom" of Latin American literature would have not come before me. They paved the way. I have this debt of gratitude with all of them. Because, thanks to them, I'm here now. I didn't have to invent anything. They created the voice, they opened the market, they knocked the doors of every publishing house until they were accepted and they created this boom that is considered all over the world as a miracle in literature. What, I didn't have to do anything. I just had to present a manuscript, but they had done all the job for twenty years. Now, you think that I can be jealous of them? I can only be grateful.

JRW: I like these, I put these...(shuffling pages of prepared questions) I thought I was being so organized, putting it in this order...

IA: (laughs)

JRW: We've been...I like the jumping around, actually, more... The Catholic Church and their role in...

IA: ...in the book or in Latin America?

JRW: Both.

IA: Well, in the book, I pay homage to the Catholic Church that I discovered after the military coup. I was brought up in the traditional, conservative Catholic Church and I hated it! And I left it when I was fifteen or less.

JRW: Does that branch (of the Church) still exist, by the way, now?

IA: Yes. It still exists everywhere.

JRW: Is there a schism...is there a schism in the Church right now?

IA: Yes. There is. There are three Churches in Latin America. One, the Vatican. So removed from reality that it could be Martians, and we don't care. The "official" Church. That is, the Church that has been at the side of the powerful for centuries. And that is the case for Argentina...many...Argentina is the worst case. Many places, where the Church has been always with the landlords and the wealthy. And then the third Church, the "real" Church, the Church of the poor, that has always existed, since the Jesuits...or before the Jesuits, when the first priests that came with the conquistadores realized the terrible abuses were made against the Indians, they became the first defenders of the people, of the poor, the victims of all this. And they were the first ones to force the monarchy to admit that the Indians had souls and they needed to be respected and they made the "leyes de Indias" ("the laws of the 'Indies'") to protect the Indians. They were never respected and they were always violated in many ways, but they were there to enforce it morally. Now, that Church is the Church that I had not known before, and I related to after, the military coup. That Church is the Church of the Third World. The liberation theology. The Church of the poor. And that Church in Chile is extremely powerful. Much more powerful than the other one.

JRW: Is there an inherent political ideology in that part of the Church, or is that a subset of what they're about?

IA: I think that it is just a com...the...la *comprobación*...I don't know how you say it...the realization of the terrible economic, political and social structures that sustain this part of the world. That sustain it in misery, in poverty, in all sorts of violence. And you cannot,

if you are a priest, I suppose, I don't know, but I suppose that if you choose to be a priest, it is because you have a spiritual vocation. It is something that is like a call of God. And, how can you ignore the body, and just wonder about the soul? You're seeing all this brutality--you have to interfere. I'm not a religious person, I'm not courageous, I was a very frivolous and very spoiled kid when the military coup happened. I, in twenty-four hours, had to grow-up. And, I had to take a position. And I had to, I had to risk my life to help other people because it was unavoidable. Not because I chose to do it, it was because...it was, "the problem was there, I've got to deal with it." It was impossible to ignore it and say, "I will continue with the life I have had until now, and just let them take care of that." I remember that I was working in the--I had never done that before--but I began working in the slums, trying to help people. First, the prisoners, the widows, the orphans, all that, but also feeding the hungry. And I would go to the bourgeoisie neighborhoods where I lived, trying to gather food to take to these places. I would talk with my friends, the people of my neighborhood, and the answer would be, "don't bother us, this is not your problem. This is the problem for the government. The government created this problem, let them take care of it. That's why we pay taxes." Or they would say, "this problem belongs to the Church, let the priests do it. We pay to the Church." Nobody wants to get involved. But then, when you see it, you get involved. And then you can't step back, when you realize that it's a risk, that you don't want to do it anymore, that it's making you sick, you can't step back. And I think that's what happens with most of the priests. They are there in the slums. They see the dead. They see the mutilated. They are there to console the widows. You think that they can ignore? They can't.

JRW: I'm going to skip around here a little bit too... One of the interviews I read that was done with you cites a line from (George) Orwell in 1984, about love not being able to exist in a repressive society and that your book kind of dashes that...that idea...that love can bloom...that there can be "amor con la sombra"...("love in the shadows")...

IA: They are...I mean, they are both together all the time. When I began my book, Of Love and Shadows, it was a testimony of horror. It was a book about death. And about impunity with power--what it means to be...to have this enormous amount of power and not be accountable. That was what the book was about...it was about shadows. And in the process of writing it, I realized that it was a love story. And I couldn't help it, because after interviewing people, after reading all the stuff that I had, after doing all the research, I realized that there were many people who had risked their lives for the love of truth, the love of freedom, love for their relatives that had disappeared, love for humankind. There were priests who had never met these guys before, or their families, and they risked their lives to get to the bottom of the truth, because they just loved people. They loved the poor, they loved the distressed. So I said, "oh my God, how can I ignore that for each torturer, there are a thousand people who will risk their lives to save the victims." How can I only talk about the torturer, and not talk about the other ones? How can I not talk about these women who had for--just for the sake of love--had been looking for their men for all these years, and will pray for them for the rest of their lives? This is love. This is an incredible, incredible quality of love. And the fact that I was writing the book, wasn't it an act of love, too? I thought at the beginning that it was an act of revenge. To take away, out of myself, all of that anger that I had. And

it turned out to be an act of love. Every minute of it was an act of love.

JRW: In the process of writing that, was it cathartic for you? Did it provide...

IA: It...in a way it exorcised the demons or the ghosts of those who had been haunting me for so many years. And when I say "haunting," I'm not being exaggerated. I felt very....I would wake up with nightmares...

JRW: I was going to ask you about that...

IA: ...dreams, awful dreams, and then sometimes I was just driving the car, for example, totally unaware of anything, just looking at the landscape and driving. And all of a sudden I would feel like this...*es como una descarga de adrenalina*...(it's like a surge of adrenaline)...but...you find yourself covered with sweat and...as if you had put the brakes on, and be on the verge of crashing, or something like that.

((side two of the first cassette ends and we pick up in mid-stream on side one of cassette two))

JRW: Your experience as a journalist must have lent itself very well to writing Of Love and Shadows because you...it's obvious you have a very good skill at taking facts and weaving them into a story. Was there any didactic function thought about ahead of time when you wrote this...

IA: Well, I wanted to tell this story...I always wanted...I always, I want to tell the story. Now, sometimes to tell the story I think that it helps to give information, and it's very difficult to do without sounding "preachy." Very difficult, and I think that I didn't achieve it in that book. One of the faults of the book is that it becomes "preachy" in many parts. And very often it's sentimental, and that is a terrible sin. I don't mind the sentimentality,

because I'm a very sentimental person, but I hate to be "preachy."

JRW: So, you did feel like it was...you were on your soapbox for a little while?

IA: No, I have felt that after...when the book was published, and I had to read the translation. When I read the translation in English, because I had to go through the translation, that was the only time that I read it after it was published. And I read it in another language, so it is as if I was reading another book. And then I felt the "preachy" part.

JRW: Did you like the translation...?

IA: Yes, very much.

JRW: Do you think it was just the difference between the languages?

IA: No, it's just that...it's my fault. It's my fault. I wanted to say everything, I said too much. I didn't suggest enough. I underestimated the reader, in the sense that I, maybe I was...I don't know...maybe...when I read it I say, "well frankly, who cares about all this stuff?! This is too much. Why not just tell the story?" And then, when I was writing the book I thought, well, maybe this which is so clear to me because I lived it, isn't clear for the rest of the people who have never experienced anything that is even similar to this. I don't know.

JRW: It's hard to see the picture when you are in the frame.

IA: Very hard...

JRW: I have only a couple more, a couple more...questions...I had something written here about that...it was actually a dissertation that was published by Patricia Hart about narrative magic...

IA: Yes...I have it...I remember now that you mention it...

JRW: And she says that De amor y de sombra is "predictable and lacking suspense." Do you agree with that or disagree?

IA: That's a very personal opinion. To some people it can be that way. To me, I don't know because I wrote it so it is predictable. But it's a...I don't think that for everybody. My husband read that book, he had never read The House of the Spirits, in fact he didn't know anything about me, and Celia Zapata gave him that book for his birthday. And he was so moved by the book, that when I came to, for a lecture in San José, he went to meet me, because he was very impressed with the book. He told Celia [Correas de Zapata] something very strange. He wrote her a little note, saying, "I'm very impressed with this author. I would like to meet her. She understands love the way I do." And this is a man who had a long list of bimbos in his life...(laughter)...you never know for whom you write! So, finally we were married.

JRW: Was this the Spring of 1987?

IA: Yes...

JRW: You know, that was my class that you went to speak at...

IA: I remember...I met John Benson there...

JRW: I skipped your lecture because my dad received an award from Utah State University and none of the rest of my family could fly back there and Dr. Zapata and I were wringing our hands because I was like, "why don't you just, well, I want to do this and I want to do that..." And she said, "you've got to decide." And I said, "I'm going to go with my dad." Yeah, that's why I heard everybody talking about it...

IA: We had a good time...

JRW: They were very, very impressed with you. To continue: The superhuman feat, when Evangelina beat up Lt. Juan de Dios Ramirez...

IA: I saw that...I saw it... That's an anecdote that I took from my time as a journalist. After the military coup, strange things happened in Chile because of repression. We had been a very free country. And when all of this incredible repression began, it exploded in different ways. One of the ways was that many people who had been atheists all their lives became very religious. And many people approached the Church. Many people went into spiritual sects, or...there was a tremendous increase of people going to the mountains in groups, in communities, sects...trying to get away from this awful reality. And many people became very hysterical. The press couldn't report anything that had to do with social, political or military events. So the press started reporting just funny or strange or weird things, and sports--what else?--and movies.

JRW: Something safe.

IA: Always safe territory. One of the things that the press reported at that time, I don't remember the name of the girl, but I have it written somewhere, is that there was a girl, somewhere near Santiago, that was having these fits, and she was like a saint, and the people worshipped her. And, there was a whole thing going around it. When the press reported it, she became famous, a celebrity, and people came from all over the country to visit her, asking for advice. People needed...were very needy at that time--very needy and very repressed. And then the girl disappeared. I don't know if she was killed or what happened, but... All that I reported, the first part, is true. The second part is made up--the part that she was among the bodies that they found, that was not true. Because the bodies that were found were all males, all men.

JRW: To United States' readers, somebody here, what...is there any era in U.S. history that can be compared to what

the Chilean people have experienced during the Pinochet dictatorship?

IA: Of course, with everything that the Americans have done with the Indians, with the native Indians; everything that they have done with the blacks; everything that they are doing now in Central America...so what's the difference? People are the same everywhere. And what they're doing now with the poor...

JRW: They're not going to pay attention to it.

IA: It is because we are not important. We are not important. We don't weigh in the balance of power, at all. And as long as it remains that way, we will be ignored.

JRW: As time passes, are your memories of what went on during the dictatorship--I know it's just been, recently since the elections--is now the time to look back and reevaluate, reinterpret...?

IA: I think it is for Chileans, in general. It is the time to revise, to find out, to search for the truth, to get even maybe, to...to exorcise the demons in order to be able to reconstruct a country that has been morally corrupted. And, morally saved by its own strength. Because it is a country where, in spite of all these terrible things that happened, there was a group of people who kept burning a torch of something, that now, achieved the miracle of defeating the military. At least, beginning to defeat them.

JRW: This may be a presumptuous question... Why do you think it took so long or did you think it took too long?

IA: I did think it took too long. I think it is very long in my lifetime. But it's not long in the history of humankind, and the history of the country. Events take their time. You have to...things get the point where they are ripe enough to happen, and you cannot provoke them before. It took...how many years did it take for Eastern Europe to react against Communism? Would you say it was too long? Would you

say it was not too long? They came from a feudal state. Was it too long, after centuries of feudalism? Maybe it was not. Who knows? In our lifetime, it seems so long, half a century is all our lifetime. But, you cannot measure history in lifetimes. No. So I think that...it's terrible to say so, because seventeen years is a long, long time in my life--it is all my life, all my adult, conscious life was shaken, broken, changed, in every sense, because of this. It affected my life in every aspect. It affected my marriage, my family, my children, my future, my writing, my career, my personality--everything. But I'm just a person. You have to take the big picture in this case. Now, what was the question at the beginning? (laughs)

JRW: Uh...mainly just the...when...I was just asking about how long, the period of time it took for the changes...for the people to...

IA: ...but before, you asked something about myself...if I thought that...uh...

JRW: ...to reexamine...

IA: ...ah, to reexamine...Well, in my case, in my personal case, I think that I was examining it in a very obsessive way, possibly, for years. I could only write about that. I could only talk about that. I could only...my eyes and all my heart was in Chile during all those years. And, after I wrote those two books, my two first books, I cut with it. I said, "OK." I didn't say it, it just happened. Enough is enough. Eva Luna is a quite different book. And now I don't find myself inspired to write about Chile anymore. None of the stories in the collection of short stories is Chilean. None of them. Only one has to do with Chile. And that was written before. I didn't write it now.

JRW: Was the transition easy for you? Did it just come?

IA: To Eva Luna?

JRW: To not using the events in Chile?

IA: It just happened.

JRW: It just happened?

IA: It just happened. And in the same way, I think that is will happen someday, that I won't be able to write about Latin America. Because, because I'm living here, I'm speaking in English, I'm living a quite different reality. It will also happen someday that I won't be able to write anymore. And then I will start doing other things. That will be wonderful. I will do...I don't know...necklaces!

JRW: Maybe you can teach other people...

IA: I hate teaching...(laughs)...I hate to teach. But, I don't know could be able to grow roses!

JRW: Why don't you like to teach?

IA: Oh, it's so demanding! I mean, it's exhausting to teach. I had a course in Berkeley, and I had the feeling that I was, that I grew older, like thirty years older, after that course. I got so involved with the students, with each one of them, everything that they wrote, I couldn't write one word for myself. My own writing was totally postponed. Oh it's very demanding.

JRW: But it's a thrill being up in front of the class. Don't you think?

IA: Yes, but then you have to take these piles of work home! And then evaluate--they don't deserve A's but you can't give them a B. (laughter)

JRW: Well, in Cochabamba, this is a little removed from here, but I bought a book, I guess it was a compilation of articles, essays called, Nueva Sociedad...?

IA: Yeah.

JRW: And, I really didn't read it--I gave it to Rosario, my wife. I come home from work dead tired and went to sleep, I was trying to go to sleep, I'm dozing, and she was reading. All of a sudden: "ha, ha, ha!" You had written..."El sexo y yo"?

IA: Ah, yes...(smiles)...that was in Nueva Sociedad?
That's amazing. I never thought they would publish *that*.

JRW: She woke me up, and we ended up reading this,
together, because, you had not seen it published there? Oh,
I have that book by Patricia Hart.

IA: It's a book?

JRW: She got her dissertation published and...

IA: It's a book...I should get this... Where did you
get it?

JRW: Farley-Dickenson Press. Actually, I have...If you
like, I'll send you a copy?

IA: Oh, could you...please...I'd love it...

JRW: It's the least I could do after...

IA: (reading through the book...) Oh my God!

JRW: Is it surprising to see yourself, your pictures,
in...

IA: I never...they published this and I never got it...

JRW: I went on a book buying binge when I was in Latin,
South America. I felt like I'd died and gone to heaven I
have two: one of them is radios, the other one is books. My
wife says, "as long as those are your only vices, fine."

IA: (laughs)

JRW: I have a number of questions... Did you, do you
write long-hand? Or do you sit down on a word-processor.

IA: I have a word-processor, and, actually, recently, I
just lost a chapter, in the computer. A whole chapter. And,
I have two computers, one at home and one in the office. The
same, Macintosh, and I commute with a disk. And I did
something stupid, and I saved in the floppy disk, the wrong
version. And I lost everything that I had been working on
for ten days. I didn't realize, and I did the...I took the
floppy and I copied on the other computer the same thing.
So, the three versions were wrong. I lost everything. And I,
this was before the 4th of July, last week, so I spent the

whole week trying to get it back, to remember. But it was very difficult, because it was like a...like a nightmare of a person who's drugged, so it's in fragments. I hadn't...it was not a very articulate thing, very difficult to remember. And I know that I'd lost at least half of it. And then I started thinking, "this is so weird...maybe it was just wrong from the beginning, and my grandmother, or some spirit, is just, just, trying to say something! So maybe I should pay attention! Maybe this is just shit! I should get rid of it! (laughs)

JRW: While you're saying that, it's reminding me of a novel I'm reading right now called A Prayer for Owen Meany. by...I can never remember his name...he wrote The World According to Garp...and The Hotel New Hampshire...why isn't it coming? John Irving...

IA: Yeah, John Irving...

JRW: Have you read anything...

IA: I read, I read, uh, The World According to Garp recently. I didn't read the whole book, I read part of it because someone told me that there's a scene there that resembles very much a scene in Eva Luna...

JRW: John Benson told you that...!

IA: John Benson...

JRW: I know that, because he and I were the only people in the class with Dr. Zapata that knew about it. It was the part...

IA: ...but I had not read the book...I found it...

JRW: That is one of the most hilarious parts...when the, Garp, starts losing his ability to say his name, and that's how Garp became Garp... That was also a book that championed, I think, from Irving's point of view...there was an element of feminism in that also... And, Dr. Zapata hadn't read it, so John Benson and I carried on about a half-

hour discussion, on similarities between Eva Luna and The World According to Garp.

IA: That's very strange, because I have not read it. And then, the other thing that people pointed out was that Eva Luna, belongs to the tradition of *la picaresca del siglo del oro en España*. I'd never read any books from the picaresca because I was brought up, not in Chile, but in different countries, always in British schools. So I never studies Spanish literature. I didn't know that a *siglo de oro*, well I had heard, but I didn't know anything about *el siglo de oro*--I had read Cervantes just because I loved *El Quixote*, but, the *only* thing that I've ever read in Spanish, of Spanish literature. Because I was reading mainly Russians, French, American, British writers. And when they mentioned this thing--in the first interview, they said-- "*bueno, este libro, sacado de la picaresca del siglo de oro...*" (well, this book, taken from the picaresque novels of Golden Age Spanish Lit...) I didn't know what they were talking about! It was just terrible! (laughs)

JRW: What do you think of a lot of these critics who develop their own vocabulary, and seem to find things that you may not have thought were there?

IA: Well, critics...the study of literature has nothing to do with literature as a craft. You can do one or the other, I think. And, this is another field. It's like, to me, like sports. I don't understand the language, I don't care about what they say, and I think that these people have another field of action. It's like being in politics and economics and things that I don't understand. It's not that I underestimate them, it's just that it has nothing to do with my job. So, I try, as long as...I mean, as much as I can, not to get involved with that. Because if you do, then you start writing for the critics. And I don't want that at all. I have some papers from some critics, some reviews,

that I can't read. I swear that I don't understand what they're talking about. I don't understand what the words mean. I would have to look them all in the dictionary.

JRW: It's almost...yeah, it's almost as though they sometimes write for their colleagues and nobody else. Would you like that copy (of Patricia Hart's book), or would you like me to send a copy that's not marked? Because I've marked on certain pages...

IA: I don't care, I don't care if it's marked...

JRW: You keep that one then...

IA: Oh, thank you very much...

JRW: I appreciate all your time...

IA: Does she destroy me, or...? She destroys me in this thing?

JRW: She's looking for the magic/feminist slant in there, and she...

IA: The whole thing? All this is about the same thing?

JRW: Yes, it's the narrative magic in everything you've written...

IA: ...oh God...

JRW: ...that she's been able to get her hands on. She, in De amor y de sombra...

IA: "La gorda de porcelana" she has here...this is a book that I never talk about.

JRW: In De amor y de sombra she's...she splits it-- amor, sombra, and then...

IA: ...magic abjured? What means "abjured"? Abjurado? Is that is?

JRW: I honestly don't know.

IA: I'll take a look at this. It's very interesting.

JRW: The House of the Spirits--I would say that that section is very complimentary. The element of magic, she says it's useful to read De amor y de sombra if you're looking for those magic elements, but it doesn't...she didn't

want to get into a comparison, but, nonetheless, she compares them. She...it's one of those disclaimers, "This is not going to be a study where I compare," and then she proceeds to compare. I really haven't read past that point. I only wanted to look at what she had written about those two novels because those two have the basic thing that I was interested in.

IA: It's funny to see things published about my writing. There are books...there's a book called, How To Read Isabel Allende. It's so simple. You just take it home and read it! (laughs) You open to page one, and read! That's it! (more laughter)

JRW: Did you expect to have this kind of success? Were you prepared for it?

IA: No. And, to tell you the truth, this part of the success (the literary criticism), I don't care. I care about the readers.

JRW: Who is your audience?

IA: When I lecture, or when I read, I get, usually, very young people. Or very old. I get more women than men. And the audience is always...it's not the housewife. It's not the yuppie. Ever. Ever. It's funny people. Sometimes you get these bearded, long hair, with beads--that kind of guy. You get homosexuals. The women are, not at all, the fashion fans. You get these wonderful women, with gray hair, overweight. And these young women, who are very eager, and they think that you know something that they don't know. And they have this naive attitude of trying to get a message. And you have no message to give.

JRW: Or maybe you say something they want to but haven't been able to put into the words. I've heard that said. "She's saying something that I've felt, but I just couldn't find the words." A lot of people don't have the ability to express themselves either verbally or in writing. And I've

seen a lot of...I've seen a lot of people talk about authors as, "yeah! that's exactly the way I wanted to say that!"

IA: It happened to me in a spectacular way with a book by Germaine Greer that I read when I was young. The book is called, The Female Eunuch. And it is...I was living in Chile. I had felt the anger of the male-chauvinist, patriarchal society that I had...was forced to live (in). I had rebelled all my life against that, and had done things, angry things, funny things, subversive things against it, but I couldn't articulate it. I couldn't say what was going on. It was just anger! Dressing myself in a different way; painting my car with naked people and angels and flowers--I was just outrageous. But I didn't know why I was and what was going on. And then I read this book and all of a sudden, there was someone who was putting in words all of the anger, in a funny, detached way. Putting it in a very intelligent way. And this book gave me a language to express the anger. It gave me the words. I could say, "OK, this is what's going on!." For example, when I got married, I was nineteen. In Chile you use the man's name. You say, "Isabel Allende de Frías." And I said...I saw my mother printed cards saying: "Miguel Frías e Isabel Allende de Frías agradecen su regalo de matrimonio" (...thank you for your wedding gift...). And when I came back from the honeymoon, my mother had classified the gifts, had a list of the people I had to send these cards, and she had the cards printed. And I said, "What is this shit! I'm not "de Frías," because he's not "de Allende." Because everybody said, "this is the name of the family." "Why? Why is it that I'm bearing the children, why is the name of the family his name?" "Well, this is the way it's done." "Well I'm not going to do it." "What do you mean?" "We will print cards that say, "Isabel Allende"--because A is the first letter in the alphabet and F is not the first letter in the alphabet, so we're going to put it in

alphabetical order--"Isabel Allende y Miguel Frías agradecen el regalo de matrimonio." And, so, my husband didn't care. But everybody objected. And, this was a big discussion and then I realized that I had made an issue of this thing and then I could never again...I've always been Isabel Allende. And I had to struggle with this for my documents, for everything, because in Chile, you don't do it that way. So, all my life I've been struggling to be just Isabel Allende. I didn't know why. I couldn't explain why, until I read this book. And I realized how stupid it is that you lose even your name when you get married. You become less than a retarded child in marriage. She (Germaine Greer) puts it that way.

JRW: I really appreciate you taking this time...

IA: You are most welcome.

(At this point I turn the machine off. Off the record, she starts to tell me a few things about some reviews done of her work by Chilean authors/critics. Then she signals to put the recorder back on. I told her I had no more questions and that I appreciated her time.)