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Identity and Exile

In Isabel Allende's Trilogy

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Abstract:

In this paper I examine the characteristics of exile as they appear in Isabel Allende's novels *The House of the Spirits*, *Daughter of Fortune* and *Portrait in Sepia*. I argue that each of her protagonists is in exile and seeks identity through the act of writing. The impact of external factors on the exile, such as setting, movement, and family, is minimal in comparison to the effect of writing on her protagonists. Allende, herself an exile, finds identity through writing, and her protagonists do the same.

INTRODUCTION.

Exile is not only the political condition of being forced from one's homeland, but a social, cultural and psychological displacement. Exile literature has emerged as an attempt to address the impact of this experience, both individually and universally. Marked by specific characteristics, works of exile literature often seek to create a sense of identity out of a feeling of displacement. Since exile is by definition an imposed condition, the specific events or circumstances behind it are closely linked to the reactionary literature. Isabel Allende is a Latin American

author who belongs to a cadre of exiles resulting from a 1973 military coup in Chile. Having spent years in exile in Venezuela and since migrated to the United States, she is often labeled an “author of exile” both for her personal experience and the subject matter of her work. I will discuss her trilogy, *The House of the Spirits*, *Daughter of Fortune*, and *Portrait in Sepia*, in order to examine how Allende portrays the exile’s search for identity through the act of writing itself.

What makes Allende’s work distinctive in the genre of exile literature is the way in which she presents the exile’s search for identity: utilizing the technique of “metaliterature,” the exile defines herself and reclaims her homeland through writing. In my first chapter, I introduce the condition of exile and characteristics of exilic writing, and explore how these characteristics emerge in Allende’s literature. I argue that each of her protagonists in the trilogy, Alba in *The House of the Spirits*, Eliza in *Daughter of Fortune*, and Aurora in *Portrait in Sepia*, is in a form of exile, and uses writing to find identity. In my two following chapters, I examine the external factors that shape identity for Allende’s characters, arguing that these factors are minimized in comparison to the formative act of writing. In my second chapter, I discuss setting and movement, arguing that interaction with setting and movement itself seem to influence identity but not define it. I acknowledge the close relation between homeland and family, examining Allende’s portrayal of family in my third chapter. I argue that the family structures she depicts are unconventional, and that in fact the very absence of traditional family ties facilitates identity formation for the individual. Her characters, freed from the restrictions of family and convention, find identity through the self-definition of writing.

The exile, lacking a homeland and sense of “roots,” constantly searches for identity and place. Allende suggests through her protagonists that the act of writing is formative to identity, and that in fact one may create a homeland in language. In my fourth chapter, I argue that writing is Allende’s posited method of identity formation, and through her characters she illustrates how the act of writing effects creation of self and homeland. What defines and sets Allende apart as an exile writer is her creation of the protagonist as writer, to illustrate the power in this creative act. As does Allende, her protagonists create a definition of self in writing, not only writing a testimony or record, but fictionalizing and *creating* their histories, thus truly defining their own identities. The exile, stripped of physical homeland, uses invention to find a sense of place.

CHAPTER 1: EXILE AND THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

Michael Ugarte explores the relationship between exile and literature in his work, *Shifting Ground*. He identifies the unique characteristics of exile as “displacement, the importance of correspondences and relations, comparisons, temporal and spatial disunity, self-duplication and division” (19). These characteristics surface in the literature of Allende, specifically in her trilogy *The House of the Spirits*, *Daughter of Fortune*, and *Portrait in Sepia*, marking her work as a product of exile. Not just Allende’s status as an exile, but the characteristics of the works itself, suggest her work to be exilic. Her characters are in constant movement, and the majority of them are “displaced.” Her protagonists, Esteban, Clara, Alba, Eliza, Tao, and Aurora, all live in a foreign location or are in a state of transition; they are in literal or figurative exile. The “importance of correspondences and relations” is more than evident in Allende’s work: writing itself is a dominant theme, and much of the communication between characters occurs through letters or other written records, such as Clara’s notebooks in *The House of the Spirits*. By “comparisons,” I believe Ugarte refers to an analysis of the “new” based on the “old.” These comparisons may include land of origin versus adopted homeland (including culture and people), self versus other, and old self versus new self (the self as other), and various other assessments. Allende makes such comparisons by contrasting settings and cultures in her trilogy: among others, she presents city in contrast to country, England (or English customs) in contrast to Chile, and Latin America in contrast to California.

The separation of the exiled in time and space, Ugarte’s “temporal and spatial disunity” is especially present in *The House of the Spirits*, in which narration jumps from the present to the past, and in *Portrait in Sepia*, where the narrator, Aurora, recounts her past and constantly struggles to put together the story of her history. These disunities also characterize *Daughter of Fortune*, specifically spatial disunity in Eliza’s journey from Chile to California. Ugarte’s term “self-duplication” suggests both the reinvention of self and doubling of self and occurs with Allende’s characters. Many of her characters play dual roles or seem to have dual identities, such as Eliza Sommers (alias Elías Andieta) and Aurora del Valle, known as Lai Ming for the first few years of her life. Self-

duplication by re-naming does not serve just as a disguise in Allende's text but represents different personality traits and different cultural influences on a character. "Self-duplication or division" also occurs on the level of the author, as several of Allende's characters have been thought to represent the author, including Alba of *The House of the Spirits*, Eva Luna of *Eva Luna* and *Stories of Eva Luna*, Eliza of *Daughter of Fortune* and Aurora of *Portrait in Sepia*.

Memory is a prevalent focus of exile literature, which Ugarte attributes to the need to "ground" oneself. To preserve something in writing is to instill it in the collective memory. This recording of one's existence serves to counteract the psychological stripping of identity caused by exile, because more than just wanting to be remembered, writing is the expression of a desire to be validated as a human being and a confirmation of one's existence as an individual. Ugarte saliently identifies the opposite of memory as "oblivion," stressing that the act of remembering is especially important in exile writing. In fact, Allende has said that her novel *Of Love and Shadows* was written "to save from oblivion the story of 15 people who were murdered in Chile" (Sanoff 67, emphasis added). Preserving history, often personal family history, is a primary focus in this genre partly out of reaction to leaving one's homeland. An intent focus on memory surfaces out of a need to assert and affirm one's identity.

Ugarte describes the source of identity as "grounding," a synonym for origins or metaphorical roots. He describes displacement as a state of being "ungrounded," not just uprooted, he emphatically states, but left "without ground." To elaborate, he distinguishes between different Spanish words for exile: *exilio* and *destierro* refer to the state of exile, and *exiliado* and *desterrado* refer to the person who is exiled. Yet there is a linguistic difference:

Exilio, from the Latin *exilium*, which is the same root for the other Romance variations (French - *exile*, Italian - *esilio*, Portuguese - *exilio*), is ironically a Gallicism. *Destierro* carries certain connotations specific to Spanish sensibilities. To be "unearthed" (*desterrado*) is to have lost the essential link between land and soul. Exile is punishment by expulsion. *Destierro* is also punitive, but in addition it signifies the loss of a necessary and integral human component. Thus one who is *desterrado* is only partially human. (Ugarte 10).

Ugarte's analysis points to the importance of language in discussing exile. He indicates that most "Spaniards and Latin Americans" prefer the term *destierro* to *exilio*, noting its heavier connotation. *Destierro* suggests not just an act of banishment but a loss of land. When one is exiled, he must leave his homeland; when one is "unearthed," he is uprooted and left without a sense of place, which is fundamental to a sense of identity. This loss of land, a "necessary and integral human component," illuminates why exile has not only a political and geographical effect

but also a psychological impact. The separation of land from soul effects a profound divorce within the self and demands a search for and redefinition of identity.

Defining “identity” in exile depends, among other things, on personal history, relation to one’s homeland, and one’s role in his new environment. As Carmen Galarce writes in *La novela chilena del exilio: el caso de Isabel Allende*, for a *desterrado*, “el vivir transcurre dividido entre dos culturas que se excluyen o que tratan de conciliarse con el pasar del tiempo” (life passes divided between two cultures that either exclude one another or try to reconcile themselves with the passage of time) (15). Galarce notes that two cultures either continue to conflict or “reconcile” themselves to a balance. The structure of her sentence is of note because her use of the passive tense attributes power to the words “life” and “cultures,” stressing the profound force of external factors in shaping one’s identity and experiences. Allende explores the impact of external factors on identity formation through her characters, who are often exiles, emigrants, adventurers, or members of a multi-cultural family, forced search for a sense of identity amidst a blend of different cultures.

It is important to note that Ugarte does not regard exile literature as an entirely unique kind of writing. He acknowledges the particularity of exile as an experience but claims that exilic writing does not set its own precedent in the field of literature; rather, he claims that it clearly exemplifies the “workings of literature itself” (20). I would argue that exilic writing does have its own “language” and contribution to literature because it goes beyond the boundaries of simple invention and involves the characters in a reinvention of self and humanity. What is particularly evident in Allende’s work is the need to define oneself, to become “grounded” by telling one’s story. Ugarte pinpoints why the need to tell a story is inherently linked to exile:

The independent nature of exilic experience, its position both in collective and specific realms of human thought and conduct, informs one of the most constant features of exile literature: the propensity for testimony, even when the writer’s apparent intention is otherwise. The I of exile needs evidence for having experienced something, and it is the nebulous nature of this evidence, the fact that it is a linguistic creation, that gives exile literature its characteristic tension. The gap between the reality and the description of what happened seems to grow wider as the exile writes (20).

Allende addresses this gap in *The House of the Spirits* when she talks about Clara’s notebooks. The history recorded in these notebooks, both “important events” and “trivialities,” become Alba’s story as she analyzes and rewrites them; in doing so, she is able to “reclaim the past” and find a sense of stability for herself (1). Essentially, the reader receives a third-hand version of the Trueba history: the records in Clara’s notebooks are a second-hand account of

“reality” while Alba’s version is a third-hand account, increasing the gap. The gap between history and interpretation may be unavoidable, but in Allende’s work, her characters fill the gap with “invention,” thus creating history and memory with their narrative. Her characters write to affirm their existence; it is less important to them that the record be true than that the record exists: a portrayal of one’s life, albeit inaccurate, still reaffirms one’s existence.

As further support for the necessity of testimony rather than accurate portrayal of history, Ugarte cites a ‘typically exilic apology for not recalling an event exactly as it took place’ (20). Allende begins *Portrait in Sepia* with this type of apology as Aurora implores the reader to trust her because “this is a long story, and it begins before my birth; it requires patience in the telling and even more in the listening. If I lose the thread along the way, don’t despair, because you can count on picking it up a few pages further on” (3). In her introduction to *My Invented Country*, Allende makes similar remarks: “I’m not sure what direction [this book] will take. For the moment, I’m wandering, but I ask you to stay with me a little longer” (xii). As to her attempt to discuss nostalgia, she gives the warning: “It is nearly impossible to approach [the topic of nostalgia] without sounding insipid, but I am going to try. If I fall and slip into cloying vulgarity I will climb out of it a few lines later” (xiii). These apologetic statements are not just disclaimers or excuses for poor writing; rather, they serve a literary function. Allende’s warning that she may “wander,” “slip,” “fall” or “lose the thread” of her story foreshadows the weaving quality of her narrative. In *Portrait in Sepia*, this technique also shows the murkiness of Aurora’s background and sense of identity, which are explored and developed in the novel.

As exilic testimony, the essential elements of Allende’s narrative are not organization or accuracy, but rather the story itself, character development, and themes. Allende’s narratives are about recalling and retelling, driven by a common exilic need:

...the existential need to recover something lost (a land, an identity, a place of origin) results from the absence of an integral part of one’s being – a fact which causes the exile to perceive of him or herself as something less than human, as the Spanish word, *destierro*, suggests. Introspection is the natural consequence of the nebulous testimony as well as of exile itself (Ugarte 20).

Ugarte says that introspection is the consequence of exile, and Allende indicates that writing is part of the reclamation process. For an exile, the loss of homeland means both a loss of identity and diminishment of humanity. Such diminishment demands that the exile explore and then reclaim the self. Unless something is written

down, it disappears, says Alba in *The House of the Spirits*; that is why Clara wrote in her “notebooks that bore witness to life” because without a witness, a testimony, it is as if one had never existed.

The exile struggles to reconcile himself not only to the absence of his homeland but also to the culture of a new and foreign land. The search for identity stems from the original loss and also from the attempt to adapt and acculturate to new surroundings. An individual may reconcile himself to the influences of different cultures to a certain extent, yet many authors write about the permanent state of “marginality” faced by persons living “between two cultures.” Allende herself has said, “I’m marginal; I’m a foreigner, and I will always be a foreigner here [in the United States]. A foreigner in the language, in the culture, in the way people live, in the values, in everything” (Crystall 591). The author notes that “distance” from society benefits her as a writer. Despite the advantages, however, being “marginal” has implicitly negative connotations, indicating a permanent residence on the border or fringe of society. It also raises the question of one’s individual significance or contribution to society since someone “marginal” is not considered a full part of society; in their writing, Allende and her characters combat the label of “marginality” by defining their roles in society. In *Daughter of Fortune* and *Portrait in Sepia*, Eliza and Tao Chi’en remain marginalized in California even after several years; especially as a multi-racial couple, they are not fully integrated into society:

Over the course of the years, the small white woman and the tall Chinese man became a familiar sight in Chinatown, but they were never completely accepted. They learned not to touch in public, to sit apart in the theater, and to walk down the street with some distance between them.... They were married in a discreet Buddhist ceremony, but their union had no legal standing. Lucky and Lynn were registered as illegitimate children recognized by the father” (*Portrait* 48).

Even in California, a land of cultural fusion and discovery, a multiracial couple was not accepted at that time. The contrast Allende makes between how Eliza and Tao sleep together, “in a tight knot,” and how they walk together, “with some distance between them,” illustrates the intrusion of society into their relationship. Though they are in a land full of foreigners, Eliza and Tao remain foreign and marginalized because they create an unusual blend of cultures. In her letter writing, Eliza gives shape and form to the land and society of California. As she retells the details of her journey across physical, social, racial and gender borders in her correspondence, she overcomes “marginality” to integrate herself into society.

In *The Anatomy of Exile*, Paul Tabori discusses the case of San Francisco exiles in particular. He notes that exiles were accepted into society more easily in San Francisco than in other places, stating: “everyone arrived with

the Gold Rush in 1848 and after – Irish, Italians, Jews, Chinese, along with the WASPS. In other words: the pecking order was not solidified; the exile and the emigrant alike could fit into a flexible society” (15). *Daughter of Fortune*’s protagonist, Eliza Sommers, however, does not immediately find society “flexible” enough to welcome her. She finds San Francisco, though a world of adventure and opportunity, still limiting to women. Once in California, she must disguise herself as a Chinese boy to be accepted and allowed to work, creating a new identity for herself in order to cross borders of race, gender and culture in her exile. The blend of cultures in San Francisco does not make Eliza’s exile easy but does serve to universalize the experience. The setting of the San Francisco Gold Rush at once trivializes and magnifies the importance of Eliza Sommer’s exile. She is just one adventurer amongst many, yet her acquaintances and surroundings serve to amplify and universalize the themes of exile and emigration. Eliza is surrounded by other exiles and emigrants, in a world yet lacking a definitive culture. It is a world of creation, rather than assimilation, in which Eliza must create her own future rather than simply adopt what is around her. Entering a world of cultural fusion, Eliza must forge a new identity for herself not based on her history in Chile or any established culture in San Francisco, simply based on herself, her own memory, experiences and desires.

Yet the plight of the exile is more complex than simple reinvention of self in a new culture. Such an invention implies a kind of constancy not enjoyed by the one in exile; as such, the state of the exile consistently defies categorization. Paul Tabori notes that “the status of the exile, both materially and psychologically, is a dynamic one – it changes from exile to emigrant or emigrant to exile. These changes can be the results both of circumstances altering in his homeland and the assimilation process in his new country” (37). In *Daughter of Fortune*, Eliza leaves Chile as an exile but keeps traveling, thus resisting the label of exile or emigrant. She is forced into exile by two psychological factors: love and shame. Her love for Joaquín Andieta drives her to follow him to California, and the shame of her pregnancy leads her to flee rather than suffer the disapproval of her family and society. By the time she reaches California, she has miscarried and soon realizes it is close to impossible to find Andieta: “She felt that with every day that went by she was farther from her goal, and that Joaquín Andieta was plunging deeper and deeper into unknown territory, maybe toward the mountains, while she was wasting time in Sacramento passing herself off as the slow-witted brother of a Chinese healer” (240). Driven by a sense of desperation, Eliza decides to leave Sacramento in search of her lover. For months, Eliza travels under the alias of Elías Andieta, asking after her “brother,” Joaquín. She becomes fairly well known, enough that people recognize her as Joaquín’s brother before she needs to identify herself; yet, she hears no word from Joaquín himself. “Since he

had no brothers,” she reasons, “he must be wondering who this Elías was, and if he had an iota of intuition... he would associate that name with hers” (271). Yet she continues for a long while with no news of him. Without much hope of finding her lover, Eliza’s exile becomes prolonged by different factors.

For some time, Eliza alternates between exile and emigrant, as she adjusts to life with Tao, then travels in search of Joaquín, and finally returns to live with Tao. Even when they marry and settle in Chinatown, Eliza is not definitively an emigrant (which implies a more complete and permanent state of adjustment than does “exile”). Paul Ilie provides a semantic distinction between the two terms, indicating that what identifies an exile is the persistent desire to return home (5). Eliza does not constantly want to return to Chile; in fact, she rarely considers it, but she does leave California after Tao’s death. Though she does not return home, she returns to her family, visiting Miss Rose in England and still defying categorization as an exile or emigrant. As Tabori maintains, “the conflicting demands of establishing a clear dividing line and of accepting the undoubted fact of refugee, emigrant, immigrant, and expatriate blending into the same or similar categories show the deep dichotomy, the search for a stable identity, that is an integral part of exile itself” (37). Tabori makes a vital point: an exile is not just in search of identity, but a stable identity, which is nearly impossible to achieve with constant movement, persistent nostalgia, homesickness, and the feeling of being a constant traveler (33). Eliza and Allende’s other characters are not easily categorized as exiles or emigrants because their experiences show the complexity and changeability of displacement.

Allende’s characters demonstrate the search for identity described by Tabori; each of them experiences exile and finds a sense of place in writing. In *The House of the Spirits*, Alba refuses territorial exile, although she is in danger under the military regime in Chile. Alba experiences what Paul Ilie terms “mental exile.” Exile, says Ilie, is a “state of mind whose emotions and values respond to separation and severance as conditions in themselves” and may be experienced even if one is not a “territorial exile” who physically leaves his native country (2). Exile creates a dichotomy, Ilie argues, of those who have left and those who remain behind, many of whom have similar mindsets and values. Those who remain in their native land but are “disaffected” from “national culture” experience an “inner exile,” meaning they are opposed to or rebellious towards the dominant culture or political system (4). Ilie regards resistance and activism as a kind of inner exile (97). For Alba, identity lies in establishing and creating herself as a revolutionary, which she does first in action, then in her narrative. After a coup in which the president is killed, she helps people find asylum by hiding them in the “big house on the corner” and driving them to embassies for protection. Eventually, she is sought by the military, held as a political prisoner, and subjected to torture and rape. Though her grandfather encourages her to flee, she chooses to remain in Chile and responds to Chile’s

political chaos by testifying to her experience of torture in writing. She redefines her role and her sense of place through the written word, rejecting physical exile or more violence: “[my revenge] would just be 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” (432). Cognizant of a cycle of violence, Alba resolves to reject hatred and revenge by “filling the pages” of her narrative, creating a “homeland” for herself in text after her physical homeland is usurped by the military.

Eliza in *Daughter of Fortune*, unlike Alba, avoids a “stained identity” by choosing territorial exile over social stigma, although it puts her personal health and safety at risk. She comes very near death on the journey to California, has a miscarriage, bleeds for hours, and is “delirious with fever” (206). For Eliza, a chosen exile and a search for a new identity is preferable to staying in Chile and dealing with the loss of Joaquín as well as the shame of pregnancy. She “would rather die” than be “branded with a shameful stigma, shunned by her family and living in poverty” (135). As an exile, Eliza escapes social “stigma” and gains freedom: “riding across the golden landscape of California she felt she was flying free, like a condor” (276). Despite her liberation, however, Eliza, like Alba, has lost the homeland that was familiar to her. She experiences nostalgia during her travels, longing for a sense of place:

She thought about the little board and canvas shack in Sacramento, where at that hour Tao would be meditating or writing... She smiled, amazed that her nostalgia did not evoke Miss Rose’s peaceful sewing room or Mama Fresia’s warm kitchen. How I have changed, she sighed, looking at hands blistered and burned by the harsh sun (263-64).

In California, Eliza finds freedom; however, her sigh at the realization of having “changed” conveys ambivalence and a remaining sense of loss. Her sense of longing reveals her “homelessness,” and she writes as she travels to create a “homeland” in her words.

In *Portrait in Sepia*, Aurora del Valle experiences an internal exile, in that she has no memory of the first years of her life and little sense of her own identity. She has been “exiled” from her place of birth and her heritage by seeing her grandfather, Tao Chi’en, beaten to death, the trauma of which erases her early memories. In leaving Eliza and Tao, as well as California, with her grandmother Paulina, Aurora is both mentally and physically exiled from her origins. Oblivious to the circumstances of her birth, Aurora is left longing for a sense of place. From historical documents and her grandmother Eliza’s words, Aurora is able to record and create the history of her family and her birth (283). She creates a narrative to “elucidate the ancient secrets of [her] childhood, to define

[her] identity, to create [her] own legend” because “the only thing we have in abundance is the memory we have woven” (304). She creates and solidifies memory for herself in her writing. By recording and inventing the history of her family, Aurora creates a “homeland” for herself and her family.

Exile functions in Allende’s text as a state of constant change and vacillation, permeated by nostalgia and yet inherently linked to travel, adventure, and emigration. Ilie bases his analysis of exile on the assumption that it is “an incomplete concept without its antithesis: return and reintegration” of the exile into his native country (158). He examines the dual effects of exile (external and internal) in light of the idea that exiles will return and become part of their national culture again. In the order they were written, Allende’s novels depict internal (mental) exile, territorial (physical) exile, and finally a reintegration of both. The trilogy seems to present a progression of attitudes and perspectives towards exile, from Alba’s refusal to leave Chile in *The House of the Spirits*, to Eliza’s decision to leave in *Daughter of Fortune*, and Aurora’s return to Chile and discovery of self in *Portrait in Sepia*. Chronologically, *The House of the Spirits* occurs last in the saga, but according to the order in which the novels were written, they present a panoramic view of exile. Yet they are not a simple progression of the exilic experience; rather, these works examine the changes and complications inherent in exile, the relationship of identity to place, and the borders one crosses by leaving home. Chile is the “homeland” for Allende and for the extended Trueba and del Valle families in her novels, but not for Aurora del Valle, who is born in California. Her discovery of identity is not resultant of her emigration to Chile, but the writing process itself as she creates the narrative of her family history. “Reintegration” is not the goal of the exile-protagonist in Allende’s work; rather, the writer integrates herself in language and text to reclaim a sense of homeland.

When the exile is not reintegrated into his homeland, he often continues to long for home or the past. Allende describes how this feeling of nostalgia serves as an impetus for an exploration and definition of identity through writing. She says that she writes “as a constant exercise in longing” (xi). Her discussion of nostalgia shows a sense of incompleteness that is also conveyed in her text; although her text deals with reintegration, there still is a feeling of having lost something unsalvageable. Allende’s method of combating this feeling is to write, which she speaks about directly and is also presented through her literary characters. As she writes to create a sense of place in her text, so her protagonists all write and create a “homeland” in their writing. Writing, as a creative act (or an act of *creation*) is a personal method of compensation for the losses of exile; it is a continual process. As exiles in Allende’s work continue to move, grow, change, and explore their identities, they continue to write.

CHAPTER 2: CROSSING BORDERS

CITY AND COUNTRY, MOVEMENT AND TRANSITION

In her trilogy, Allende explores the factors that may impact the exile's sense of identity; in all three works, setting and movement play a vital role in the search for homeland and identity. Setting is dynamic and movement is constant. In her treatment of setting, Allende rejects stereotypical characterizations and depicts both city and country as complex interactive agents that may stimulate or frustrate identity formation. Often in literature, urban and rural areas are contrasted according to stereotypes: the city is presented as modern, complex, and dynamic, while the country is traditional, simple, and static. Critics Michael Handelsman and Jorge Enrique Adoum concur that there is a tradition specific to Latin American literature of contrasting city and country to portray the struggle between "civilization and barbarism" (Adoum 24). According to Handelsman, much of the writing about Latin American

nationality and identity is derived from this distinction: “intellectuals have tried to articulate a concept of Latin American nationality(ies) beginning with the distinction between civilization and barbarism” (69).¹ While such portrayals stereotypically characterize both city and country, Allende’s trilogy eschews these simplistic portrayals, illustrating the intricate character of both locales. Imbued with the power to interact with characters, the city and country in Allende’s work shape and influence identity. Moreover, Allende more than juxtaposes the two. Going beyond the limitations of simple comparison, she moves the borders between city and country, examining the multi-dimensional relationship between them, and between setting and the individual.

In addition to being characterized as one-dimensional in literature, city and country have often been credited with specific characteristics. In analyzing the portrayal of city versus country in social theory, Bonner comments that for Marx, “the real issue is which place best helps us recognize our potential for freedom” and wealth (168). In addition to suggesting that place determines freedom and the money necessary for freedom, this same theory identifies the city as “civilized” and country as “barbaric”: “the town makes human independence recognizable as a possibility and actuality where the country makes domination (of humans by nature, of humans by each other, e.g., landlord/serf) seem natural and necessary” (167). In Allende’s work, however, she does not indicate either city or country as a place of freedom. Neither place nor money translates to freedom for Allende; the complexity of her work resists stereotypes. Both city and country have freedoms and restrictions, and it is the movement of characters and changing situations that allows them to seek their freedom, as well as money, at different times. At first glance, this “city versus country” stereotype appears to be present in *The House of the Spirits*, but upon further examination we see that the city becomes home to violent political persecution, and peasants in the countryside assert their right to freedom; setting is dynamic. Allende reverses stereotypes to illustrate the complex role played by city and country in forming identity.

In order to controvert the stereotypical portrayal, Allende creates a character in *The House of the Spirits*, Esteban Trueba, who believes identity, freedom, and wealth can be found in a particular place. He is a character completely unable to adapt to change and, instead, holds fast to traditional roles and beliefs. Constantly oscillating between city and country, he alternately seeks change of place as an opportunity for wealth or escape from responsibilities. Believing freedom lies in the countryside, Esteban relocates mainly to escape his familial responsibilities to his mother and sister, Férula. He also believes that the opportunity for wealth and power resides in the land. When Esteban decides to move to the country, Férula suggests he sell the land instead, to which he

¹ Handelsman and Adoum trace this tradition to Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s biography of Facundo Quiroga in 1845.

replies: “Land is something one should never sell. It’s the only thing that’s left when everything else is gone.” Féruela disagrees, saying “Land is a romantic idea. What makes a man rich is a good eye for business” (44). Féruela focuses on the monetary aspect of land, while Esteban does not directly mention money, but rather the importance of possessing something and having power over it. For him, land is not just an “opportunity for wealth” as Bonner had described nor just a place to live. Land is a pathway to identity for Esteban, and at Tres Marías, his family’s old property, he assumes the role of *patrón*, both landowner and supervisor. However, the countryside is not just a static place or symbol; it has its own vibrant character. As a result, Esteban encounters conflict as he tries to possess and control Tres Marías and find identity as *patrón*.

As Esteban wrestles for control of the land and attempts to “ground” himself by assuming the role of *patrón*, he seems to undergo change or alteration. At first, this alteration of identity might be mistaken for a validation of Adoum’s and Handelsman’s stereotypical characterization of the country as “barbaric,” but in reality, it is not the country that is barbaric, it is Trueba. He does not become barbaric because he resides in a particular place but because of the way he interacts with the land and its people. Through the character of Trueba, Allende erases the boundaries between city and country; “civilization” and “barbarism” are found in both locales. Critic Philip Swanson identifies Trueba’s attitude toward the country with the Spanish invaders of Latin America: “In a specifically Latin American context, Trueba’s world-view restates the basic values underlying the Spanish conquest and the emergence of the civilization-versus-barbarism ethic.... Trueba clearly sees himself as bringing civilization to a backward countryside” but this idea is a “myth” (116). Although Trueba does try to dominate and control the countryside much like a “conquest,” Allende creates in him, and in the land he enters, a much more complex character than simple conqueror.

Trueba has more than one motive in coming to Tres Marías: Trueba comes to the countryside grieving for his dead fiancée, Rosa del Valle, reacting to his irreparable loss by reclaiming a forgotten property. By reclaiming this land, he seeks a sense of possession, control, and identity. Trueba works hard to renew Tres Marías and make it more productive because “if there was anything that could alleviate the grief and rage of Rosa’s loss it would be breaking his back in this ruined land” (50-51). Trueba interacts with the land by trying to dominate it and the tenants. As he abuses the aspects of the country he can master, the struggle begins to impact on his identity. In the countryside he “was slowly becoming a barbarian,” “conquered by rusticity” (55). He leaves behind his usual hygienic routines and table manners, but his barbarism becomes most evident in his treatment of the peasants. He habitually rapes peasant girls and is thought to have killed several peasants as well; his violence and temper

“became legend” in the countryside. Peasants “hid their daughters and clenched their fists helplessly” because the powerful patrón had “immunity” in the face of the law (63). His foreman, Pedro Segundo García, tries to convince Trueba to give his workers a “decent salary” and “a little respect and dignity,” but Trueba rejects the suggestion, attributing such ideas to Communism (63). Trueba justifies his domination and abuse of the countryside by insisting that he knows what is best for the peasants, that they are “like children,” and that the “only thing that works” with them “is the stick” (64). For Trueba, controlling the land means controlling the people as well, yet later we see that he can control neither land nor people. Natural disasters cast doubt on his control of Tres Marías, and the eventual rebellion of his tenants effectively brings an end to his identity as patrón.

For some time, Trueba seems to control the peasants through fear and domination, but his power in the countryside is challenged by natural disasters, as the land itself seems to struggle for its freedom. Tres Marías experiences an unstoppable invasion of ants, a “dark shadow that glided everywhere, devouring everything in its path” even live chickens, that tunnels into the houses of Tres Marías (110). Esteban hires an “agricultural technician,” supposedly an expert at dispelling pests. The “gringo’s” methods of studying and poisoning the ants, however, promise to take a month to complete, so Pedro García, an old peasant, seems to cajole the countryside and merely talks to the ants and “leads them out” (111). The land resists Esteban’s intention to destroy the ants, while García, a man from the land, is able to persuade them to leave. Later, the land reacts to Esteban’s domination even more vigorously when an earthquake strikes Chile. It nearly claims Trueba as one of its ten thousand victims, burying him under debris and breaking nearly every bone in his body (160). His incapacitation by the earthquake symbolically indicates the country's resistance to his power; the land metaphorically rejects his efforts to “ground” himself in the land. After the quake, he is unable to move or work but tries to regain control over his surroundings by having his house rebuilt in exact replica, holding onto the past despite the impractical narrow windows and outdated adobe instead of brick (164). Clara tries to make him realize he cannot prevent change, but he tries to hang onto his power as *patrón*. Esteban wants the country to remain static, especially in its social structure of *patrón* and tenants, but the natural disasters demonstrate the uncontrollable character of the countryside.

By identifying himself as *patrón* of Tres Marías, Esteban assumes control of the property and creates rules and restrictions for his tenants, while he is free to do as he pleases. He confuses freedom with lack of responsibility and power with brutality. He feels free in the countryside because it is an evasion of responsibility for him. Nor does Esteban assume any personal responsibility for his tenants. While he is disciplined and works hard on the land, he is also uninhibited and wild in the country. He mistakes its serenity for passivity and mistakes power and

authority for intimidation and brutality. The country is a place of financial opportunity for him, where he can reap the benefits of the tenants' and his own hard labor. As a bachelor, he sees the country as a place of wanton freedom and limitless power. Upon returning to the city, Esteban feels "oppressed by it. He hated the city much more than he had remembered. He recalled the open meadows of the countryside, days clocked by the fall of rain, the vast solitude of his fields, the cool quiet of the river and his silent house. 'This city is a shithole,' he concluded" (83-84). Ultimately, however, he comes to feel as imprisoned in the country as he did in the city. Real freedom eludes him. When he returns, newly wed to Clara, the land no longer has its old appeal to him:

The property, which had once seemed to him like paradise and had been his pride and joy, was now a nuisance. As he watched the expressionless cows chewing their cud, the sluggish labors of the peasants repeating the same motions day after day throughout their lives, the unchanging background of the snowy cordillera, and the frail column of smoke rising from the volcano, he felt like a prisoner (97).

Trueba's new dissatisfaction in Tres Marías makes it more evident that in Allende's work freedom cannot be attributed to one setting or place.

Trueba must struggle to hold onto tradition and his role as *patrón* when socialism begins to spread and the people start to rebel just as the land itself seemed to earlier. Pedro Tercero García, a young tenant on Tres Marías and son of Trueba's foreman, begins spreading socialism and revolution among the peasants. Pedro Tercero is particularly known for a song about a group of chickens who come together to overpower a fox, a metaphor for the socialist ideas he later introduces directly with pamphlets and newspapers (154, 164). Esteban sees Pedro Tercero's revolutionary ideas, as well as his romantic relationship with Esteban's daughter, Blanca, as threats to his identity and power as *patrón*. He banishes the boy from his property and vows to kill him if he returns; later, he finds and attacks but does not kill Pedro (206). Pedro Tercero's ejection from the countryside ironically serves to further frustrate Trueba, as Pedro gains notoriety and access to a network of revolutionaries in the city, making him a "hero" to the rest of the peasants (174). Trueba's severity does not give him control; he cannot stop the spread of ideas any more than he could stop the invasion of ants.

When the rest of the peasants adopt revolutionary ideas, Esteban again tries to use force to subdue the land and people. He hears from his foreman that "things are getting stormy in the countryside... the peasants are up in arms. Every day there are new demands. It seems as if they want to be *patrones* themselves. The best thing you can do is sell the property" (309). Esteban soon discovers for himself the "storminess" of the country when he hears that he is going to lose his land to the tenants, who under agrarian reform take title to the property (355). The land

itself, the peasants, and government agrarian reform policy act to “unground” Esteban, challenging his power. He returns in a fury, armed and ready to regain his authority and identity by force, but the peasants take him hostage. When Tres Marías is returned to him by the government two years later, he returns with hired help and destroys everything in a fit of revenge:

...they gathered humans and animals in the courtyard, poured gasoline on the little brick houses that had once been Trueba’s pride and joy, and set fire to them and everything inside them. They shot the animals to death. They burned the fields, the chicken coops, the bicycles, and even the cradles of newborn babies... He dismissed all the tenants, warning them that if he ever caught them prowling around his property they would suffer the same fate as their animals (386).

He wants to regain his power, but ends up “disgusted with himself” (387). His land, without the peasants who had always lived there, is scorched and dead. He tells himself he will rebuild, but in reality his struggle for power has left him with nothing. His struggle with Tres Marías ends in his desolation and loss of control; his violent interaction with the land and people has blurred the distinctions between “civilized” and “barbaric,” city and country. Esteban’s sense of identity is based on power and authority, which he tries to achieve in the countryside through his position as *patrón*, and in the city by his involvement in government as a senator. Trueba’s brutality in the countryside does not give him the control or authority he hopes to gain by assuming the role of *patrón*; his position as senator does not grant him power when he needs it to rescue Alba. Ultimately, Trueba attempt to assume the role of *patrón*, and thus find identity or freedom in a place, leaves him powerless.

The elusive, mutable quality of homeland and identity is not peculiar to country. Whereas in the country the Truebas interact with the land and peasants, in the city they engage in a dynamic exchange with their immediate environment, the “big house on the corner.” The house is not just a place to live but, instead, a meeting point where different worlds converge. Even its physical position “on the corner” indicates its role as a crossing of different people and paths. The Truebas live at a juncture between the physical and spirit world, opposite political realms of left and right, a center for change and at times a pit of stagnation. The house, a place of transition, is described by Carolyn Pinet as a “battleground”:

:

The house becomes a battleground as the family fights over its space. The political joins forces with the personal and Allende has us witness the tensions between ideologies and generation. Esteban Trueba hides arms there for the right; Alba and her Uncle Jaime cart them off and bury them. Blanca hoards provisions

as the shortage of goods grows; Alba gives them away to the needy. Blanca sequesters her lover, Pedro Tercero, in a room in the house. Alba uses the abandoned wing to hide political refugees of the left and then gets them out of the country (Pinet 61).

The tensions Pinet describes arise between family members as they interact with the house. The house itself is a living force, a mysterious “labyrinth” that hides and protects weapons, food, and people. Beyond these tangible items, the house shelters spirits and ghosts with whom Clara communicates; her interactions with the house arise from these spiritual encounters. For Clara, the house brings together the spirits for her to commune with the spiritual world. To the house, Clara is the “soul” that keeps the house in movement, maintaining its “flowers, its nomadic friends, and its playful spirits” (283). Clara’s interactions with and within the house develop an “otherworldliness” to her character.

Clara, matriarch of the Trueba family, has two distinct aspects to her personality which evidence themselves in direct response to the varying rhythms of both city and country settings. In the city, she is generally an otherworldly character who communes with spirits and appears absent or distracted most of the time:

Clara seemed to be flying in an airplane... unmoored from land, seeking God through Tibetan sciences, consulting spirits with a three-legged table that gave little jolts – two for yes, three for no – deciphering messages from other worlds.... Once they announced that there was a hidden treasure beneath the chimney. First she had the wall knocked down and then, when it was not found, the staircase and half of the main sitting room (127).

Clara communes with her environment, rather than trying to control or possess it. The city setting does not make Clara ethereal; rather, it is the way she interacts with others in the house that allows her this spiritual plane of existence. When her environment demands it, however, she is practical and focused: during an outbreak of typhus, Clara refuses to take refuge in the countryside as Esteban suggests. Instead, she ceaselessly serves the poor, bringing them clothing and food, even asking Pedro Segundo García in the country to send some of the harvest from Tres Marías. When the epidemic passes and Clara is “able to get some rest, her tendency to escape reality and lose herself in daydreams became more pronounced... she immersed herself [again] in the world of apparitions and psychic experiments” (135). Clara’s ethereal and earthly qualities emerge in response to the demands articulated by her surroundings.

Whereas Esteban engages in a struggle with his environment and is eventually rendered powerless, Clara is empowered by her interactions in both city and country. In *Tres Marías*, Clara is increasingly practical, hard-

working and even politically active. Clara integrates herself into country life, becoming involved in a “sewing workshop, the general store, and the school, where she established her headquarters for treating mange and lice, untangling the mysteries of the alphabet, teaching the children to sing... and the women to boil milk, cure diarrhea, and bleach clothes,” even spreading ideas about women’s equality (105-106). Carolyn Pinet describes “the movement of her [Clara’s] life” as “an ebb and flow between being a detached, ethereal creature of the spirits and a practical pragmatic woman who is a survivor of earthly calamities” (60). Pinet attributes this back and forth motion to a resistance to growing up, which Clara is forced to do as politics and history become more invasive in her life. I propose, however, that Clara’s different roles emerge in relation to her interactions with her environment. She does not simply move from ethereal to practical, but rather goes back and forth between the spiritual and “real” worlds, in both city and country settings. After the earthquake that immobilizes Esteban, “Clara changed enormously,” taking charge of “material things” rather than ethereal, adopting more responsibilities at Tres Marías, and tending to Esteban (164). When she and Blanca return to the city, Blanca notices the lack of ghosts and spirits in the house and comments to her mother that she has changed and seems to be “an ordinary, down-to-earth woman” (168). Clara responds that she has not changed, but rather that the world has; in fact, it seems to be that the world at times is undemanding of Clara and leaves her to the spirits, while at other times poverty and necessity demand she be “down-to-earth.” She interacts with both city and country by constantly “deciphering messages” from the ethereal and material worlds, reacting as necessary and acting with respect and generosity. In developing Clara’s character, Allende rejects Adoum’s theory of civilization and barbarism. Clara demonstrates that she is a spiritual medium and yet socially aware and politically active in both city and country. Her ethereal quality and her pragmatism do not belong only to one locale, or to “civilization or barbarism.”

Just as identity is not determined by city or country, it is not restricted to social class; Allende’s characters move fluidly among classes, indicating the importance of movement itself in forming identity. While Clara moves back and forth between the spiritual and the real, interacting with the dead as well as all social classes of the living, Allende’s character Tránsito Soto in *The House of the Spirits* embodies social movement itself. Her name is symbolic of her role: she is “tránsito” or movement, always changing and adapting, while at the same time, she is “soto,” a grove of trees. She is able to maintain her “roots” and remain figuratively planted in the soil of Chile, while others are imprisoned or exiled. She is a prostitute, yet a heroine, and through her Allende rejects social stereotypes: Tránsito’s identity is not defined by her social position, but rather her ability to adapt and react to her environment, maintaining influence despite the changes around her. As madam of a brothel she is more influential

than Trueba, who is a senator, and is able to save Alba from torture when Trueba cannot. When the military come to the “big house on the corner” to take Alba, Trueba has no power. His political connections fail him:

‘I’m Senator Trueba! For God’s sake, don’t you recognize me?’ the grandfather shrieked in desperation. ‘You can’t do this to me! This is an outrage! I’m a friend of General Hurtado’s!’

‘Shut up, you old shit! You don’t open your mouth until I tell you to!’ the man replied brutally (402).

Trueba cannot rely on his political position to aid him under the dictatorship and turns to Tránsito, admitting “I’m powerless... and that’s why I’ve come to see you, Tránsito” (420). After visiting every political office and begging for help, Trueba throws himself at the feet of a prostitute, the only person with enough political connections to save Alba. She retains her power under the new government just as the old because she knows the top officials in the military, “organizes their parties” and has access and knowledge that Trueba is not privy to. Within two days, Tránsito procures Alba’s freedom (421).

Allendes's character Tránsito, the prostitute as heroine, moves effortlessly between social classes. In contrast to Esteban, who attempts to find identity in tradition, Tránsito’s identity is connected to adaptation and change. Subverting the “traditional” system of brothels, Tránsito envisions and creates a “whores’ cooperative,” giving equality and protection to the prostitutes, as she tells Esteban: “the thing to do is form a cooperative and tell the madam to go to hell. Haven’t you ever heard of that? You better be careful. If your tenants set up a cooperative, you’d really be finished.... What do we need a patrón for?” (118). Unlike Esteban, Tránsito envisions and embraces change. She first rejects tradition by creating a “whores’ cooperative” but then later when “times had changed” she adapts to “the modern ways – free love, the pill, and other innovations.” Cognizant of her changing surroundings, Tránsito realizes “that what was really needed was a hotel for rendezvous” and thanks to her creative vision... the Hotel Christopher Columbus had become a paradise of lost souls and furtive lovers.” Since many of her customers are members of the police and government, she has an “excellent relationship with the new government, just as she had with the preceding ones” (417). Her innovative ideas and business mind give her power and influence no matter what her environment or government; the way she interacts with her surroundings is to anticipate and serve her clients’ needs, which gives her the advantage of powerful connections. She counteracts the “barbarism” that belongs to the “civilized” world by saving Alba from torture by the military. Tránsito, easily adapting to changes in her surroundings, is able to move and influence while others are trapped by the smoke screen of the dictatorship. Tránsito does not try to “ground” herself in one physical, social or political environment. Her

power and influence, acquired through her easy adaptation to change, suggest that movement and change are central to finding identity, since identity itself is fluid and constantly changing.

Movement, adaptation and crossing of social barriers figure dominantly in all of Allende's work. In *Daughter of Fortune*, transition itself is the dominant external force on identity formation for Eliza Sommers. Eliza crosses social and cultural borders as a child and later crosses physical borders as well. Growing up in a blend of English and Chilean cultures, Eliza learns to adapt easily to different surroundings: from her adoptive mother, Miss Rose, she receives "the broadest possible education" and "skills appropriate for a young lady" and from her nanny, Mama Fresia, learns "Indian legends and myths, how to read signs of the animals and the sea, how to recognize the habits of the spirits, and the messages in dreams, and also how to cook" (11-12). The Sommers' house provides an "eternal illusion of being in England rather than Valparaíso," although Eliza embraces both cultures: "she did all her assignments, practiced her piano lessons, and walked straight as a candle... but at night she slipped barefoot down to the servants' patio and often the dawn found her sleeping on a pallet with her arms around Mama Fresia" (52). Eliza not only moves effortlessly across the borders between English, Chilean and Mapuche cultures, but she also penetrates all social barriers when she dates a servant boy, Joaquín Andieta, despite the fact that she belongs to the upper class. Andieta lives in the very slums of Chile, in stark contrast to the English colony in which Eliza resides: they are "separated by a social and economic abyss" but, nevertheless, form a romantic relationship (106). Eliza, who is described by Jeremy Sommers as someone who has no sense of her "place in society," seeks identity and homeland, not in land or culture, but in relationship to Joaquin when she follows him to California (47).

After Eliza separates from her homeland to pursue her lover, her identity seems even more nebulous. She crosses gender boundaries as she disguises herself and sheds her "young English lady's clothing" for the "baggy trousers and a worn smock" of a man (*Daughter* 151-52). She breaks gender barriers by dressing as a man to stow away on a ship to California; once she arrives, she continues disguising herself, first as an Asian boy and then a Chilean. In addition to changing her appearance, she renames herself: Eliza takes an alias conducive to her purpose of finding Joaquín, going by Elías Andieta for the obvious similarity it has to her given name and his surname. Despite Eliza's efforts, the alias does not help her find him; rather, it only serves to indicate that she continues to love him and define herself in terms of this love. When she stops searching for him, she stops using her alias, marking her new sense of independence. Eliza realizes that identity does not lie in relationships and sheds the label of "lover" as her identity. While traveling the countryside of California, she goes by simply "Chile boy" amongst her friends in a traveling brothel, retaining veritable anonymity and ambiguity in her identity. This ambiguity

permits Eliza to simultaneously cross gender and social class barriers. Dressing as a man and traveling with prostitutes, she demonstrates her ability to slide easily into new roles by joining a group of actors: “If we could find a piano, I played, but if not, I was the ingénue of the company and everyone was amazed by how well I played the part of a woman” (274). Pretending to be a man acting the part of a woman, Eliza slides back and forth over gender lines. She adopts new appearances, names and personas in her travels, having many identities and no identity simultaneously. Eliza originally tries to seek identity in a relationship but eventually defines herself through movement and travel. Later, in defiance of racial barriers, Eliza falls in love with and marries Tao Chi'en, a Chinese cook and doctor. Throughout her life, Eliza maintains a fluid identity by crossing cultural, social, racial and gender boundaries.

In Allende's work, external factors such as setting and movement influence but do not determine identity. In *The House of the Spirits*, Esteban attempts to find identity and homeland in a role and place. He assumes a role and holds fast to traditions but ultimately fails to achieve the identity of patron. In the end, he finds himself stripped of both the land and his identity as landowner and politician. Clara, on the other hand, moves in and out of roles and in and out of place, her identity changing and altering in response to need and demand. For Tránsito, identity seems to involve constant adaptation, implying that identity develops in the very act of movement itself. In *Daughter of Fortune*, Eliza first restricts her identity to a relationship, then finds freedom and self-discovery in travel. Yet is identity simply movement and change? If so, can there be identity?

What really gives form to identity? What role does family play in the process of defining self and homeland?

CHAPTER 3: FAMILY

The ideas of homeland, identity, and family are closely associated, yet Allende's work raises questions about the role of family structures in forming individual identity. Namely, she seems to suggest that the absence of conventional family ties aids, rather than inhibits, self-discovery. In her texts, she traces familial ties between generations and explores the influence of blood relations on individual identity and questions the importance of traditional family structures to individual identity. The value of having a stable foundation in the immediate family is rejected in favor of mystery and self-discovery. Allende's novels, more often than not, depict unusual and non-traditional familial structures. Her trilogy is full of couples breaking social and racial barriers, orphans and adopted children, and mystery surrounding parentage. Moreover, she focuses on the influence of extended family and relations among generations, rather than the immediate family. Allende's trilogy indicates that familial influence is inevitable, yet conventional family structures are minimized in her texts in order to emphasize the role of the individual. The unusual family structures she presents serve to tie individuals together among generations and yet do not restrict their discovery of personal identity.

Blanca Trueba, Pedro Tercero García, and their daughter, Alba Trueba, in *The House of the Spirits* constitute an unconventional family in their defiance of class boundaries and the secrecy surrounding their relationships. Childhood friends, Blanca and Pedro Tercero grow up together in Tres Marías and secretly become lovers under the noses of Esteban and Clara Trueba. They are an unconventional couple and break social stereotypes: not only are they of different social classes, but they defy society twice by dating and then refusing to accept the social convention of marriage. Instead, they remain clandestine lovers for most of their lives. When Blanca's father, Esteban, discovers their relationship, he banishes Pedro Tercero from his property. Later, Esteban's continued opposition to the relationship and Pedro Tercero's continued political involvement keep him away from

Blanca most of the time, although they continue their affair. When the political climate becomes a threat to Pedro Tercero's life, Blanca helps him hide and get asylum and chooses to go with him to "live out in exile the love she had postponed since her childhood" (393). Blanca and Pedro Tercero's relationship is marked by his exile from Tres Marías and then cemented by their exile from Chile. Their family structure is unusual because they defy social convention for so long, and also because of the secrecy employed by Blanca about their relationship and his identity as Alba's father.

Blanca intentionally raises their daughter, Alba, in ignorance of her parentage, which influences her sense of identity. Alba is one of several "fatherless" figures in Allende's texts. Although Blanca and Pedro Tercero are romantically involved throughout their lives and he is the father of Alba, the three are not a family in the traditional sense; they do not reside together, and Alba and Pedro Tercero do not develop a conventional familial bond. Pedro Tercero has some contact with Alba, but she does not know he is her father until much later, and he is not a consistent presence in her life:

[Pedro Tercero] tried to be close to [Alba] but never came to think of her as his daughter, because on that point Blanca was inflexible. She said that Alba had withstood many shocking things and that it was a miracle she had turned out to be a relatively normal child; the last thing she needed was any additional confusion about the circumstances of her birth (310).

Instead, Blanca has Alba believe she is the daughter of Jean de Satigny, a man Blanca unhappily marries at Esteban Trueba's insistence and runs away from shortly thereafter. Blanca tells her that "her father was a distinguished and intelligent aristocrat who had unfortunately succumbed to fever in the northern desert," creating a layered lie; not only is Satigny not her father, but he is not yet dead. He dies much later of a stroke, and Alba is called on to identify the body. Blanca not only lies about who Alba's father is but further obfuscates her origins by refusing to talk about Satigny; in fact, she purposely destroys all the pictures and evidence of his existence in their house and "never spoke of him again" (265). Alba is given no sense of her paternal origins; while she is denied some knowledge of self by Blanca's obfuscation of her history, Alba is also freed by this lack of hereditary ties to define her own identity outside the conventional family structure.

Allende does not deny the existence of blood ties; she acknowledges patterns and traits through generations but does deny them power. The thread of similarities among individuals surfaces but does not bind or restrict these individuals. Alba emulates some traits of her biological father, Pedro Tercero, indicating their blood tie, yet her self-discovery is independent and not bound to him. As Alba searches to define herself, she unwittingly emulates

Pedro Tercero through her political rebellion. Pedro himself notes some similarity, as he observes “the child’s free spirit and rebellious nature,” much like his own despite his lack of direct influence on her (310). Yet this similarity to his revolutionary disposition does not prevent Alba from finding her own identity. Growing up in an unconventional household, Alba is not subject to typical restrictions on women in her society. It is the very absence of a conventional family structure that allows her the freedom to become involved in politics. Precisely because she does not know Pedro Tercero as her father, Alba’s decision to participate in the revolution is a genuinely independent route to self-discovery.

As she seeks to define herself, Alba dabbles in politics, and eventually comes to find political revolution to be central to her identity. At first she is not interested in politics, but rather becomes involved out of love for her boyfriend, Miguel (319). She moves from idealism stemming from long discussions with other students, “her mind burning with heroism, convinced that when the time came she would give her life for a noble cause,” to disillusionment at their first protest. As the students begin a demonstration, Alba swears “victory or death” but realizes her oath “sounded false as soon as she said it” because she is not yet completely dedicated to the cause; in fact, she leaves because she is ill and hears from her grandfather that the military will soon respond to the students with violence (319, 321). Yet her dedication to revolution and justice grows, and when she is held as political prisoner under the dictatorship, Alba proves this dedication by not revealing any information to her torturers despite brutality and rape (408-409). Free of the traditional shaping forces of family and a father’s influence, Alba independently comes to adopt political revolution and class struggle as an integral part of her identity.

In Allende’s work, the non-traditional, even broken family structure does not harm one’s sense of identity; in fact, these ambiguities lead her protagonists to question and explore their sense of self. In *Daughter of Fortune*, Eliza, like Alba, is raised with an ambiguous sense of her own origins. As an infant, she is orphaned and left on the steps of the British Import and Export Company, Ltd. owned by Jeremy Sommers (7). Rose Sommers, Jeremy’s sister, names and raises Eliza, purposely hiding her knowledge that Eliza is actually the daughter of the Sommers’ brother, John. To Eliza, the circumstances surrounding her birth are a mystery:

“You have English blood, like us,” Miss Rose assured Eliza when she was old enough to understand.

“Only someone from the British colony would have thought to leave you in a basket on the doorstep of the British Import and Export Company, Limited. I am sure they knew how good-hearted my brother Jeremy is, and felt sure he would take you in. In those days I was longing to have a child, and you fell into my arms, sent by God to be brought up in the solid principles of the Protestant faith and the English language.”

“You? English? Don’t get any ideas, child. You have Indian hair, like mine,” Mama Fresia rebutted behind her *patrona*’s back.

But Eliza’s birth was a forbidden subject in that house, and the child grew accustomed to the mystery (4).

Rose assures Eliza she is English, while Mama Fresia believes her to be Indian. From her adoptive mother and her nanny, Eliza receives two opposing beliefs about her origins, and her abandonment is the only fact Eliza has about her past.

Eliza is raised not only in a non-traditional family structure, but also in a non-traditional cultural environment, a blend of English and Chilean culture. The Sommerses live in an English colony in Chile, encompassed in their own world of English traditions despite being in a Latin American country. Her “parents” are not a couple, but rather brother and sister. Rose and Jeremy Sommers “had a no-nonsense domestic relationship but had little in common except the mutual dependence that sometimes seemed closer to a hidden form of hatred” (13). Rose and Jeremy are not conventional mother and father figures. Rose treats Eliza as a “play toy,” dressing her up and taking her out, then “forgetting” about her from time to time and sending her to Mama Fresia. This mixture of affection and neglect leaves Eliza in the care of her nanny, Mama Fresia, half of the time; in a sense, Eliza has a double childhood, even a double identity. Her first language is English, which she speaks with Miss Rose and Jeremy, but she speaks a mixture of Spanish and Mapuche with Mama Fresia (11). With Miss Rose, she dresses and acts “like a duchess” but alternatively plays “with hens and dogs, barefoot” and half naked (11). Eliza almost lives in two different worlds at once, one of restriction and proper manners, and the other of nature and freedom.

Free from fact and traditional family ties, Eliza begins to create her own history. She imagines that she is “the child of a shipwreck and not of an unnatural mother capable of abandoning her” and that “a fisherman had found her on the beach amid the debris of a beached ship, wrapped her in his sweater, and left her at the finest house in the English colony” (6). She trades the idea of purposeful abandonment by an “unnatural” mother for the idea of losing her mother to a shipwreck. Nevertheless, her story still incorporates abandonment; she is left by the fisherman. She appreciates her own story, associated with things washed up by the sea, for the “poetry and mystery” although it is essentially equal in tragedy and mystery to the little she knows about her true origins. Even in her imagination, Eliza does not change the fact that she was abandoned but only romanticizes and elaborates on what she knows. She does change her identity, from simply abandoned child to lone survivor of a shipwreck, applying significance and wonder to her own life. She creates her own identity as a survivor against great odds and

solidifies this created identity in her journey to San Francisco. Without knowledge of her origins, Eliza is given the freedom to form her identity outside of convention.

In California, Eliza becomes enamored of the freedom she finds, which she contrasts with the restriction of her childhood:

In the Sommers' home she had lived shut up within four walls, in a stagnant atmosphere where time moved in circles and where she could barely glimpse the horizon through distorted windowpanes. She had grown up clad in the impenetrable armor of good manners and conventions, trained from girlhood to please and serve, bound by corset, routines, social norms, and fear (275).

Yet the narrator also says that after many years away from Chile, "Eliza concluded that the erratic Englishwoman had been a very good mother and that she was grateful to her for the large spaces of internal freedom she had given her" (12). Yet these two different reflections on her childhood can be reconciled; despite the restrictions of the Sommers's household, Rose's perennial absences allowed Eliza some personal freedom, which she later realizes fully in California. Eliza notes that Miss Rose would be shocked at the immorality of California, "the vices of gambling, liquor and brothels," but for Eliza "this land is a blank page; here I can start life anew and become the person I want" (280). Without a definite sense of where she comes from, Eliza reaches outward to create a sense of self. She realizes this possibility in her physical journey to California, reaching far beyond Chile to find her self and her home. Eliza is ignorant of her origins and as a result, explores the unknown and tries to define herself based on new adventures and experiences rather than the buried past.

Rather than being "grounded" in Chile, Eliza chooses to explore, and even in California does not stay still for long. She journeys alone and later joins up with a traveling brothel; this band of nomads is the "closest thing to a family" for Eliza, and they provide food, shelter, support and love (297). They also provide security for her sense of herself as a traveler or migrant. She is at home amidst constant movement; critic Z. Nelly Martinez calls Eliza a "nomad" rather than an exile or emigrant, because she refuses to settle in one place. She says that Eliza resists forming "roots" in one place, but rather, her sense of grounding is like a rhizome:

Distinct from roots, these underground, root-like stems progressively branch out in every direction and forever escape the overdetermining power of a center. Metaphorically speaking, a rhizome may be regarded as an arrangement or alternatively deterritorializing and reterritorializing movements, privileging neither an end nor a beginning, and relativizing the idea of foundations (55).

Eliza does not have permanent “roots,” says Martinez, but spreads root-like structures out in all directions like a “rhizome.” Eliza, free of traditional family ties, is also free of the “overdetermining power of a center” to her identity. Foundations are “relative” to Eliza because she does not base herself in one place, but rather keeps moving. She “deterritorializes” and “reterritorializes,” meaning she leaves one land and adopts another, without a specific blood relation or other restriction to tie her to a specific land.

Allende’s novels are not the only works that depict the possible advantages to having mysterious or missing parentage. According to María Claudia André, Eliza’s story is one example of a literary tradition of “matrophobia.” André argues:

Allende’s novels join a corpus of narratives in which orphanhood or the lack of a mother’s presence is depicted as potentially having a beneficial effect on the female protagonist, in that daughter escapes the anxiety of having to mirror the maternal figure or to differentiate her own image from that of her progenitor... Allende’s protagonists are given the agency to articulate their own personalities (78).

In the absence of a true mother, Eliza is able to define her identity without basing this definition on a comparison. She is given the freedom to define herself and her homeland. The lack of a mother applies not only to Eliza, but to several of Allende’s other female protagonists. In *Portrait in Sepia*, Eliza’s daughter, Lynn, dies in childbirth and her daughter, Aurora, never has children herself. Eliza and Tao raise Aurora for the first five years of her life, but at Tao’s death, Eliza leaves her to be raised by her paternal grandmother, Paulina del Valle. Eliza and Aurora both have mother figures, though not a mother they are expected to “mirror” or rebel against.

Aurora in *Portrait in Sepia*, like Alba and Eliza, is raised by her grandmother who purposely conceals the girl’s origins. Aurora is born an orphan: her mother, Lynn Sommers, had died in childbirth, and her father, Matías de Santa Cruz, abandoned Lynn long before Aurora was born. Her biological uncle, Severo del Valle, had married Lynn but leaves Aurora in the care of her grandparents after Lynn dies. Years later, when Aurora asks who her father is, Eliza tells her: “who conceived you is not really important... anyone could do that” (283). It is not blood that defines family in Allende. Aurora grows up with Eliza and Tao Chi’en as her primary caretakers until age five and, like Eliza, is exposed to different cultures as a child; she speaks Spanish and Chinese and goes by either Aurora or Lai Ming. Her paternal grandmother, Paulina del Valle, acquires custody of Aurora when her maternal grandmother, Eliza, leaves California to bury Tao Chi’en’s remains in China. Eliza, who has no permanent roots, determines that she wants roots for Aurora: “I am a foreigner everywhere,” Eliza says, “but I want Lai Ming to have roots: a family and good education” (125). Eliza and Paulina agree that “to avoid confusing their granddaughter

even more, it would be best to make a definitive break with her mother's family, and that she would not speak Chinese again or have any contact with her past... [she] would forget her origins and the trauma of recent events" (126). Paulina consciously hides the girl's past from her, refusing even to call her "Lai Ming," but insisting on "Aurora" (129). In fact, she tells her stories of family history "without ever clarifying the question of [Aurora's] father's identity" and if she asked about her parents, Paulina would reply "that they were dead, and that it was all right because having a grandmother like her was more than enough" (136). Aurora criticizes Paulina's enigmatic treatment of her past, saying:

...despite her defiant stance in the face of convention, she was never able to overcome the prejudices of her class. To protect me from rejection, she carefully hid my one-quarter Chinese blood, my mother's modest social position, and the fact that in truth I was a bastard. This is the only thing I can ever criticize my giant of a grandmother for (139).

Her Uncle Severo also participates in the blurring and obscuring of Aurora's past. When she meets him, Severo lavishes her with affection and calls her his "adopted daughter," answering her questions about her real father by saying "let's pretend I am [your real father]." Aurora, exasperated, complains to Paulina that she cannot stand so much "mystery" surrounding her past, but Paulina only says such mystery will make her more creative (153).

In truth, Paulina's obfuscation of Aurora's parentage does make her more "creative," as it gives Aurora the freedom to explore her identity. Much like Alba and Eliza, Aurora is not bound by traditional family structures and becomes an unconventional woman. Aurora's method of creative self-discovery is photography, more than a hobby but a lifetime occupation: it is "fundamental to [her] life" (227). Plagued by nightmares about her grandfather Tao Chi'en's disappearance, Aurora is driven to photography to "photograph those demons" and "drive them away" (97). The obscurity of her past acts as an impetus for Aurora to discover her talent and identity as a photographer. Her art allows her to understand her own identity and that of others: later, as a married woman, she discovers in her photographs "language of body, gestures, gazes" invisible to the human eye that alerts her to her husband's infidelity (257). She is unconventional not only in her photography, but also in her attitude towards marriage. In Chile, she says, marriage is "eternal and inescapable," and yet she leaves her unfaithful husband, choosing to accept the social stigma of being a "separated woman" rather than stay in a loveless marriage. She describes her position in society as being in "limbo":

I am not alone – I have a secret love, with no ties or conditions, a cause for scandal anywhere but especially here [in Chile] where we happen to live. I am not a spinster, or a widow, or a divorced woman. I live in

the limbo of the “separated,” where all the wretched creatures end up who prefer public opprobrium to living with a man they don’t love. How else can it be in Chile, where marriage is eternal and inescapable? (96).

Aurora chooses public scorn over unhappiness, accepting the fact that even some relatives will not speak to her, unable “to tolerate a woman who left her husband” (277). She defies societal convention again by living with a lover and refusing to marry. She prefers the lack of contract and commitment in their lovers’ relationship to the bond of marriage: “the advantage of being lovers is that we have to work hard at our relationship, because everything conspires to drive us apart. Our decision to be together has to be renewed again and again; that keeps us on our toes” (288). Aurora views working against standards of convention as an “advantage,” despite social and cultural forces “driving them apart.” Aurora actively rejects the traditional female role in her society: she refuses to give up her passion for photography even when she marries and is expected to do so. She leaves her husband, and she takes a long-term lover whom she refuses to marry, for which she is shunned by family and society. Beyond all this, Aurora is unable to have children; she is the opposite of a stereotypical female figure in that she does not play the roles of wife and mother. Unrestricted by traditional ties in her upbringing, Aurora later refuses to be restricted by the ties of marriage and societal or cultural expectations.

Allende’s characters are all confronted with the ambiguity of their origins from birth. In *The House of the Spirits*, Blanca raises her daughter, Alba, to believe she is the daughter of a dead French count, rather than Pedro Tercero, her lifetime lover and Alba’s real father. In *Daughter of Fortune*, Miss Rose Sommers raises Eliza to believe in purposeful “mystery” and forbids talking about her origins, though she knows Eliza is her niece. In *Portrait in Sepia*, Paulina del Valle raises Aurora and purposely tries to “erase her past,” not telling her about her parents or grandparents, Tao Chi’en and Eliza. There is a pattern in Allende not just of orphaning, abandonment and adoption but of purposeful concealment of origins. Her protagonists must search to uncover their pasts and reveal their identities. Allende’s non-traditional family structures are complicated by the older generation’s intent to obscure the identity of the younger descendants. On the part of the older generation, this is an attempt to ease the child’s transition to their care or spare them the complications of confusing origins. This obscurity, however, merely spurs an exploration of self for the protagonists. The pattern of abandonment and obscuring of origins in Allende results in a particular focus on personal identity formation and self-reliance.

Allende’s work emphasizes individualism and self-definition; however, she does not deny the existence of blood ties. She merely denies them power. Throughout her trilogy, she acknowledges the mark of blood ties through

her mention of inherited traits but does not empower them with the ability to shape the person or character. These ties, though present, are not binding or restricting for the individual characters; their similarities to one another exist but do not determine their identities. In *The House of the Spirits*, Allende depicts an inherited creativity: Rosa creates a tablecloth, Blanca makes clay crèches, Alba paints on her wall; all of their talents are creative expressions of self. This tradition of creation is said to be genetic:

[Blanca created] imaginary animals, gluing half an elephant to half a crocodile, without realizing that she was doing in clay what her Aunt Rosa, whom she never knew, had done with thread on her enormous tablecloth. Clara decided that if craziness can repeat itself in a family, then there must be a genetic memory that prevents it from being swallowed by oblivion (174).

The patterns through generations are evident, but they do not define each individual. An important aspect to note is that Blanca never knew her Aunt Rosa, and follows her creations “without realizing” she emulates her. Across generations, a genetic imprint connects individuals in the same bloodline without restricting identity and creative talent. Similarly, both Eliza and Aurora are said to have inherited Captain John Sommers’ taste for adventure: Sommers himself notes that Eliza has emulated him in her adventure in California (*Daughter* 324). Whereas the captain travels as a career, however, Eliza migrates for personal reasons. Aurora relates that “I never met Captain John Sommers, the father of Eliza Sommers, my maternal grandmother, but from him I inherited a certain bent for wandering” (*Portrait* 4). Both observations are made by looking back at the past and drawing connections between these characters. Although similarities can be seen among them, Eliza and Aurora’s decisions to “wander” and travel are not directly influenced by Sommers. Genetics may play a role in their adventurous dispositions, but these women make their own choices and define themselves without being restricted or tied to a certain path. Heredity does not determine identity for Allende.

In Allende’s work, knowledge of hereditary links is no more formative than heredity itself. Each of Allende’s protagonists in the trilogy has her origins hidden by her caretakers and later experiences a “revelation” of her real parentage, but it fails to produce a significant effect. These revelations are not as dramatic or impressive as the word “revelation” suggests. In *The House of the Spirits*, Blanca flippantly reveals Alba’s parentage to her by addressing Pedro Tercero in front of her: “your daughter and I are going to Tres Marías...” (358). When Alba asks why she had never told her the truth, Blanca simply says, “better a dead father than an absent one” (359). Blanca reveals no motive for having revealed Alba’s parentage to her at this particular moment; indeed, for her it serves no real purpose. For Alba, the revelation of her father’s identity still leaves her fatherless; Pedro Tercero never plays

the role of father for her, and he and Blanca soon leave in exile. We cannot know Blanca's reasons, but it is easier to speculate on Allende's purpose. The pattern of revelations in her narrative and, specifically, their lack of impact, implies that knowledge of one's bloodline is not essential to the formation of one's identity. Her protagonists forge their own identities free of the restrictions of conventional family ties; later, the knowledge of their parentage does not impact these identities or tie them any more strongly to their homeland.

Even less dramatic than Alba's revelation is the revelation of Eliza Sommers about the identity of her father, Captain John Sommers. In *Daughter of Fortune*, Sommers laments that he has not yet told Eliza he is her father, and it is implied that he wishes to do so (323). In *Portrait in Sepia*, Aurora mentions Sommers, implying that Eliza knows he is her father, but she does not relate how or when this knowledge came to Eliza (4, 14). The revelation of Eliza's parentage, however, is not dealt with in the text, and her reaction is not even voiced, illustrating the lack of impact it has on her identity. Not only is the revelation not directly addressed, but Captain Sommers dies soon after the implication of Eliza's knowledge, eliminating any interaction or influence (16). In a like manner, Aurora discovers her father's identity immediately before his death. Matías Rodríguez de Santa Cruz resides with Paulina and Aurora during his last stages of life. Calmly and without any dramatic pretense, he reveals the truth to Aurora: Matías says to her "I am *ton père*. Your father" to which she responds, "Are you sure you're my father" and he says "*Absolument.*" Aurora comments on the lack of impact: "he told me he was my father, and the revelation was so casual that it didn't even shock me" (186). Not only is this revelation of truth without drama or "shock," but it is in a foreign language. Matías, after spending time in Europe, addresses his daughter in French, illustrating that while he is her closest blood tie, he is the farthest from an intimate relative; they do not even prefer the same language. The knowledge of her blood makes little difference in terms of her identity; the immediate impact is little more than surprise, and any long-term impact is prevented by his immediate death. Legally, Matías recognizes her as his daughter, which protects her finances later on (188). In a practical manner, the revelation benefits her, but formatively it does not shape her identity.

Similarly, Eliza's revelation to Aurora about the first five years of her life, in which she was cared for by Eliza and Tao Chi'en, does not have a formative impact on her identity. Aurora had been plagued by "nightmares" about the death of her grandfather, without being able to identify him in the dreams or know their meaning; Eliza's revelation allows her to understand the dreams, and in that way must bring Aurora some relief. Yet in terms of forming her identity, we are given little indication that this information has shaped or changed Aurora: Eliza's revelation of her past ends the novel, aside from the epilogue, and we are left with no more interaction by which to

judge the impact. Her knowledge of the past allows her to “tell this story,” but she has already grown and defined herself (303). The knowledge of her past allows her to compile her narration and fit herself into the family history like a piece in a puzzle; she knows her “roots” and where she fits into the story. It is not the knowledge or Eliza’s story that creates an identity for Aurora; it gives her a starting point of understanding, from which she defines herself. She achieves this sense of identity through *writing* the story of her family.

Land and family influence the individual but do not determine the whole of identity. In Allende’s work, often the lack of family allows a character to explore her identity and define a homeland for herself; certainly, the lack of convention spurs this self-discovery. Nevertheless, through the creative process of writing, her protagonists create familial ties, creating the characters of self and family within their narratives. Alba’s writing is the continuance of a family tradition begun by Clara, and her narrative records and creates patterns and bonds among generations. Eliza writes to Tao and their children, forging connections while also creating her identity through words. Family in Allende does not define or create identity for the individual: it spurs the writing through which self and homeland are formed.

CHAPTER 4: WRITING, HOMELAND AND IDENTITY

“Language is our only homeland”

- Czeslaw Milosz²

In Chapters 2 and 3, I discuss external factors that may influence identity, arguing that Allende dispels traditional beliefs about the influence of setting and family structure on the individual. For Allende, neither setting, movement, nor family defines identity; so what does? It appears that for Allende and her characters, writing creates and defines identity. Most of her characters in the trilogy write regularly, whether in notebooks or letters, and this writing is a method of self-discovery and preservation of memory. Earlier I noted Ugarte’s description of “correspondences” as characteristic exilic literature; correspondence between characters, as well as the protagonists’ writing of the actual narration, allows each character to define her identity and the identity of her family. The literary technique of letter writing is not unique to Allende, yet in her work it serves to do more than develop the plot and characters’ relationships: it emphasizes the active role of writing in self-definition and lends complexity to the work by creating texts within a text. In *The House of the Spirits* and *Portrait in Sepia*, Allende’s protagonists write the narrative rather than “tell” it and are conscious of themselves as writers and creators of identity. In *Daughter of Fortune*, letter writing is used to affirm identity and create a sense of homeland.

Writing empowers the writer with the ability to create a sense of origins and stability and “grounds” the *destierro*, to use Ugarte’s terms. Writing gives Allende’s characters a sense of place and identity, allowing them to claim possession of a history, both personal and collective. The *destierro*, only “partially human” for having lost his homeland, as Ugarte interprets the word, regains his identity and his humanity through writing. This creative act is particularly important to the *destierro*, whose roots are “absent,” and who must otherwise rely on memory for a sense of origins:

Memory’s ability to engender knowledge is particularly significant in the development of a multiethnic historical record... Because identity originates in one’s knowledge of personal and group history – that is, in accounts of events involving known actors in particularized places – the multiethnic³ person defines him-

² Qtd. in Umpierre 132.

³ “For self or community to be identified as multiethnic, it must derive from at least two places, locales that are either literally (spatially) or figuratively (culturally) distinct, and often at great distance from one another. The self or group then resides at significant remove from at least one of the home places, real or symbolic” (Shostak 234). For my purposes, considering the exile’s distance from his homeland and culture, I will regard the “multiethnic” individual as similar or equivalent to the exile.

or herself in part by what he or she is absent from. In general, memory is *about* absence... (Shostak 234-35).

We understand ourselves within a specific context; when we are “absent” from our familiar context, identity requires redefinition, and writing is the creation of context and character. Memory seeks to bring the past, what is “absent,” to the present, yet memory is a flawed and ever-diminishing version of the absent past. The importance of the act of writing is to preserve events in memory. Memory and writing have a symbiotic relationship: memory provides material for writing, and writing preserves the memory; they are critical to one another. This reconstruction of events on paper halts the passage of time and allows an understanding of relations between occurrences. For this reason and to preserve memory, Alba in *The House of the Spirits* echoes her grandmother Clara’s attempt to provide a “witness” for their lives through writing:

I write, she wrote, that memory is fragile and the space of a single life is brief, passing so quickly that we never get a chance to see the relationship between events; we cannot gauge the consequences of our acts, and we believe in the fiction of past, present, and future, but it may also be true that everything happens simultaneously.... That’s why my Grandmother Clara wrote in her notebooks, in order to see things in their true dimension and to defy her own poor memory (432).

Alba presents writing as a truer way to view reality, as if the passage of time were a falsehood. The act of writing involves reinterpreting time because events must be organized and put in a certain order, though in reality events often seem to occur “simultaneously.”

Since “memory is fragile,” containing repetitions, omissions, interpretations and misinterpretations of events, it may, as a source for writing, necessitate the use of imagination to fill in the remaining spaces and interpret events. Writing is a creative process, which Allende depicts as a combination of realism and imagination that allows one to record as well as invent one’s existence. Allende’s characters write to preserve their place in the world and to establish their identity and worth. The way Clara’s notebooks are referred to, as “bearing witness to life,” serves to emphasize the importance of the written word: it is not Clara but the notebooks themselves that “bear witness to life.” The writing itself is what is of value because, despite the subjectivity of Clara’s interpretations, what is written becomes the history that remains. Whatever lens it is recorded through, the words become reality. By putting pen to paper, the writer affirms his identity, place, and existence. Recording one’s life on paper provides a method of creating and stabilizing reality in a particular shape and context, giving a sense of pause and control

amidst the constant movement and change of reality. Each writer, as he creates a context for a story, defines his identity and attempts to understand his existence.

In *The House of the Spirits*, Alba, like Clara, attempts to preserve her memory through writing. Spurred by the desire to remember, she begins to write stories told to her by her mother, Blanca: “when Alba asked to hear these bizarre stories again, Blanca could not repeat them, for she had forgotten them. This led the little girl to write the stories down. She also began to record the things that struck her as important, just as her Grandmother Clara had before her” (304). As Alba records her mother’s narratives, she discovers the preservative power of writing; she then continues Clara’s tradition of recording “important events.” Writing, a derivative of the desire to preserve memory, leads to definition of self and identity: “Identity, as well as the implicated self-definition and self-narrative, almost certainly will be activated from memory” (Xu 262). Writing, for Clara and Alba, is a lifelong activity, a constant process of “self-definition.”

Alba advances beyond recording “events” and the narratives of others when she becomes a political prisoner; it is then that she begins to create a narrative, defining herself as a revolutionary. Alba illustrates how writing empowers her when she relates how it “saves” her from torture under the dictatorship: as a political prisoner, Alba uses writing as a form of resistance and hope. Her first method of resistance is to transport herself into a pleasant memory, but her efforts are overcome by the violent power of her reality: “Alba heard the screams, the long moans, and the radio playing full blast. The woods, Miguel, and love were lost in the deep well of her terror and she resigned herself to facing her fate without subterfuge” (406). Memory alone does not free Alba from the pain of her surroundings; her next approach is to purposely “forget everything she knew,” and her refusal to divulge information lands her in solitary confinement of the “doghouse” (408). Unaided by either memory or forgetting, Alba chooses death over resistance, “deciding to end this torture once and for all,” until she sees an apparition of her grandmother, Clara (413). Clara instructs her to survive by writing: “Clara also brought the saving idea of writing in her mind, without paper or pencil, to keep her thoughts occupied and to escape from the doghouse and live” (414). When Alba is taken out of the doghouse and returned to Colonel García for more torture, she is “beyond his power,” saved by the process of her own writing (415). The act of creating a narrative of her experience in her mind allows her to transcend her perilous reality:

...as soon as she began to take notes with her mind, the doghouse filled with all the characters of her story, who rushed in, shoved each other out of the way to wrap her in their anecdotes, their vices, and their virtues, trampled on her intention to compose a documentary, and threw her testimony to the floor,

pressing, insisting, and egging her on. She took down their words at breakneck pace, despairing because while she was filling a page, the one before it was erased. This activity kept her fully occupied. At first, she constantly lost her train of thought and forgot new facts as fast as she remembered them. The slightest distraction or additional fear or pain caused her story to snarl like a ball of yarn. But she invented a code for recalling things in order, and then she was able to bury herself so deeply in her story that she stopped eating, scratching herself, smelling herself, and complaining, and overcame all her varied agonies (414).

Alba overcomes her “agonies” by actively recording her memories. Writing gives her the freedom and empowerment to keep living. No longer a victim, she gains control and freedom by narrating her own history.

Alba discovers the freedom inherent in writing as a political prisoner and later extends her practice of control and creation to reconstruct her family’s history. Alba writes her narrative at the suggestion of her grandfather, Esteban: he tells her to write so that “you’ll be able to take your roots with you if you ever have to leave” (430). Esteban’s words reaffirm the idea of “grounding” oneself in language; by retelling her family history and affirming her own place in it, Alba gives herself “roots” in a narrative form. Through language, she creates her homeland, her context for self and family, and thus her identity. To do so, Alba uses Clara’s notebooks, Blanca and Clara’s correspondence, “the ledgers of Tres Mariás” and “many other documents” (432).

Alba, as narrator, designs a pattern or order to the events of her family’s history, becoming the architect of their story and blending reality with invention. Clara, throughout her life, “grounds” herself by keeping a written record of events; nevertheless, her records are a subjective history and are then reordered and reinterpreted by Alba. Clara does not keep her notebooks in chronological order nor does she keep them all together until she gathers them together in preparation for her death:

She put her papers in order, and salvaged her notebooks that bore witness to life from the hidden corners of the house. She tied them up with colored ribbons, arranging them according to events and not in chronological order, for the one thing she had forgotten to record was the dates, and in her final haste she decided that she could not waste time looking them up (288).

Clara organizes her notebooks by “events” rather than chronology; Alba does not specify if this organizational method refers to types of events (e.g., births, deaths, marriages, political occurrences) or the objective or subjective importance of events. One must also wonder if Clara really “forgets” to record dates or considers the chronology unimportant; if she had had time, where would she have looked up the dates to the events of her life? Alba takes

these disordered records and arranges them into a narrative, creating a chronology out of her grandmother's notebooks.

Allende lends an aspect of credibility to her narrator by having Alba rely on ostensibly legitimate documents for her history; nevertheless, Allende displays a definite comfort with deliberate invention on the part of her narrator. In making Alba writer of the text, Allende gives her the freedom to emphasize or trivialize different aspects, showing through her character the creative process of writing:

Allende shows herself to be conscious of the problems of a writer who is trying to reclaim her past, of the shifting narratives and interpretations, of the stories jostling for recognition, of the topsy-turvy nature of interpretation which may or may not privilege the 'important' over the 'trivial' (Pinet 56).

Alba's narrative is inspired by memory but expands to include her own invention. Although Alba is able to begin forming her narrative with the help of Esteban, whose "memory remained intact down to the last second of his ninety years" (431) and the aid of Clara's notebooks, when Alba does not have a source or memory to rely on, parts of her narrative are formed with her imagination. Alba says of Jean de Satigny that not a trace of his existence remains (except for her own narrative), such that she doubts his existence: "...Jean de Satigny, of whom no scientific trace remains and whose very existence I have begun to doubt" (431). Blanca writes to Clara of Satigny, says Alba, but does not reveal the truth about his identity, a drug addict and pornographer:

...her letters described her secluded, melancholy life, and she referred to her husband with blind sympathy, as a fine, discreet, considerate man. Thus, without ever setting out to do so, she set in motion the myth that Jean de Satigny was practically a prince, never mentioning the fact that he spent his afternoons inhaling cocaine and smoking opium (251).

Particularly in sections of narrative such as these, where Alba acts as omniscient third person narrator, we must attribute parts of her story to invention. In the beginning of the novel, Alba describes an episode in church, detailing what Nívea is thinking: "She wished the ceremony would end at once so she could return to her cool house, sit down among the ferns, and taste the pitcher of barley water..." (4). Alba could not have gathered knowledge of Nívea's "wishes" during that particular moment from Clara's notebooks, Esteban's memoirs, or her own memory. Alba also reveals an episode about her uncles losing their virginity, which Clara "never knew about" and "so she could not write it in her notebooks that bore witness to life, for me to read one day. I found out from other sources" (128). There is some obscurity in how Alba puts together this story: how much is reality and how much is invention? Alba expands and fictionalizes her family history, combining record, memory and imagination. Her writing preserves

memory while at the same time allowing her to reconstruct history freely, creating a context or “homeland” and identity for her family within her text.

Aurora in *Portrait in Sepia*, much like Alba in *The House of the Spirits*, establishes her identity through writing a family history based on reality and invention. In order to preserve her memories, she “grounds” herself in a family history and constructs her identity. Also like Alba’s, Aurora’s narrative is formed from documents and other sources, Eliza’s stories, and photographs of the family. Aurora uses historical documents to research her family: “paging through old newspapers in the library, I discovered many mentions of the family in the social pages... Without those printed testimonies, most of the protagonists of this story would have been borne away on the winds of oblivion” (132). First exploring her identity through photography, she tries to understand herself with self-portraits and portraits of others:

I devoted hours and hours to shooting self-portraits, some before a large mirror I had brought to my studio, others standing before the camera. I took hundreds of photographs... I examined myself from every angle, and the only thing I discovered was a crepuscular sadness (256).

The camera, reluctant to define Aurora, however, exposes her husband’s affair through signs visible only to the lens: “his foot against hers, his hand on her elbow or her shoulder, and sometimes, as if coincidentally, at her waist or her neck, unmistakable signs the photographs had revealed to me” (260). She captures reality in her photographs and redesigns it in her narrative, writing not only to preserve but also to interpret and give shape to her identity. When Eliza returns from England and tells her the story of her childhood, “illuminating” her past, Aurora is inspired to record the events of those years:

If it weren’t for my grandmother Eliza, who came from far away to light the dark corners of my past, and for the thousands of photographs that have collected in my house, how could I tell this story? I would have to create it from my imagination... reality is ephemeral and changing... with these photographs and these pages I keep memories alive (303).

She does not remember the events herself; she is recording the memories of Eliza, the knowledge she gains from newspapers, and ties it into a narrative with imagination. She puts images into words, making them at once more tangible and yet more fluid, as she attempts to create a context for herself and define her identity. Through the process of recording words and capturing images, she communicates her family history and creates a role for herself in it. Both Alba and Aurora create circular narratives, mimicking the “ephemeral” nature of reality. Aurora begins

with her own birth but then jumps to the history of her grandparents and parents, and later returns to her own when it fits in chronologically to her family history, ending with her early childhood and separation from her grandparents.

Like Alba, Aurora narrates in first and third person, blending apparent reality with pure imagination. Since her Grandmother Paulina will tell Aurora nothing about her past, she gathers her story from Eliza, her Uncle Lucky, newspapers and photographs. Yet, like an omniscient narrator, Aurora describes intimate details of other characters' experiences, such as when her Uncle Severo is about to leave for Chile: "he slept without dreaming for the first time in a long while" (78). She is also privy to intimate thoughts and feelings, such as Severo's at her own birth: "every moan from Lynn bored into his soul" (79). Narrating a love scene between her biological father, Matías, and her mother, she reveals not just physical details but knowledge of Matías' deepest thoughts: "Matías had experienced an intimacy that until then he had avoided without knowing even that it existed... he had never lost control in that way, lost irony, distance, the notion of his own inviolable individuality" (64). Matías does not reveal these feelings to anyone within Aurora's narrative; she, like, Alba, has discovered the freedoms of writing as a creative process. She is not simply recording a history, but creating characters and settings, giving her family an identity in her text with her invention.

In Allende's works, correspondence has an essential function for the exile, who, always in search of homeland, uses letter writing to define self and homeland. In *The House of the Spirits*, during the months that Blanca is married to Jean de Satigny and living away from home, Blanca and Clara's letter writing allows Blanca to stay "grounded" in the context of her family:

[Blanca and Clara's] abundant correspondence took the place of Clara's notebooks that bore witness to life. Thus Blanca was kept abreast of everything that happened in the big house on the corner, and could entertain the illusion that she was still with her family and that her marriage was only a bad dream (218). Much like Alba, who writes in her mind to free herself from the reality of imprisonment, Blanca and Clara write to create an alternate reality. Their correspondence lends Blanca the "illusion" of being with her family; she and Clara create a feeling of "home" and "homeland" in their writing. Clara's letters "ground" Blanca, giving her a sense of place, transporting her to the big house on the corner. Correspondence also serves to preserve memory, much like Clara's notebooks: "had it not been for the letters Clara and Blanca exchanged, that entire period would have remained submerged in a jumble of faded, timeworn memories. Their abundant correspondence salvaged events from the mists of improbable facts" (246).

Similarly, in *Daughter of Fortune* and *Portrait in Sepia*, Eliza Sommers uses correspondence to create a sense of “homeland” and affirm her identity. When Eliza first begins her journey to California, she experiences “the clear sensation of beginning a new story in which she was both *protagonist and narrator*” (152, emphasis added). Through her correspondence, Eliza narrates her travels and her discovery of self. Eliza narrates her life through her letters to Tao Chi’en and her children. She also writes in a diary but “only to remember,” and when she mentions the diary she does so in a letter to Tao: “I’m writing everything that happens to me in my diary so I can tell you all the details when we see each other” (*Daughter* 109, 280). Through her correspondence, Eliza relates anecdotes about her travels, in doing so drawing the character of the land and reflecting on her own self-discovery:

I am finding new strength in myself... I don’t know at what turn in the road I shed the person I used to be, Tao. Now I am only one of thousands of adventurers scattered along the banks of these crystal-clear rivers and among the foothills of these eternal mountains. Here men are proud, with no one above them but the sky overhead; they bow to no one because they are inventing equality. And I want to be one of them (277).

Eliza affirms her self-discovery and “invention” through her correspondence. She conveys the state of constant change in which she finds herself, having “shed” her old self and become an “adventurer,” also communicating what she “wants to be”: proud and free, “inventing” herself. A constant traveler, Eliza “grounds” herself through writing about her experiences and reaffirms her identity as a “rover” through the movement conveyed in her letters, as she writes to her son: “At heart I have always been a rover; what I want is to travel with no fixed course” (*Portrait* 285).

Allende’s narrative style in the trilogy reflects the ambiguity of history and the continual process of defining one’s identity. Identity is a constantly developing idea and the exile’s search for a “stable identity” is complicated by its inherent fluidity and change: “identity is neither simple nor stable. Instead, it ‘is always a structure that is split; it always has ambivalence within it.’” It is a “process,” a “dynamic construction that adjusts continually to the changes experienced within and surrounding the self” (Hall qtd. in Singh 17). Allende’s narrative reflects this conflict: everything is in motion – identity, setting and the very structure of the narrative. In *The House of the Spirits*, while Alba arranges the events of Clara’s notebooks in a particular order, she resists a straightforward linear narrative, instead creating a history that is fluid and circular. The circularity of time in Alba’s narrative reflects the idea of writing and identity as continual and is marked by the line “*Barrabás came to us by sea...*” which both begins and ends the novel.⁴ The novel, beginning and ending in the same place, alternates between

⁴ Carmen Galarce also notes the circular structure of events in the novel, relating the repeated phrase to a cycle of political crime: “La estructura es circular: el relato se abre con un crimen político -la muerte de Rosa- y se cierra con otro, masivo y sangriento... la novela se abre y se cierra con la misma frase indicando un ciclo inexorable que es

events and settings, and flashes forward and backward, constantly referencing past subjects of narration. Critic Eliana Rivero has documented Allende's use of "prolepsis," marked by Allende's reoccurring phrase "many years later...." This "temporal device" allows a blending of past, present and future within the narrative: the narrator, writing about the past, refers to an event to take place in the future, though that event actually occurs before the present time of narration (Rivero 98). As with Clara's notebooks, events become more important than the chronology or linear passage of time in Allende's work. For Allende, writing connects one event to another, allowing life to be seen in its "true dimension," with intricately woven threads.

In *The House of the Spirits*, Allende constructs her narrative from two very different voices: that of Alba, usually presenting herself as a third-person omniscient narrator, and Esteban Trueba, speaking always from first person perspective. Alba begins in the first person but does not reveal her identity until the end of the novel; Esteban does not identify himself immediately, but we know who he is because of Alba's corresponding narration of the same events. Alba narrates events that take place before his relationship with Clara, and events that Clara does not know about; by absorbing Esteban's narrative into her own, Alba weaves his story into hers and achieves total narrative control over the story. Esteban, unable to find identity in place or role, finally "grounds" himself when he records his memoirs immediately before his death: "he wrote a number of pages, and when he felt that he had written everything he had to say, he lay down on Clara's bed. I sat beside him to wait with him, and death was not long in coming" (431). In Allende's text, writing saves Alba from death and is Esteban's last occupation before death; writing is an urgent task for her characters, granting them survival and immortality. The lasting power of writing is further emphasized in Allende's text by her description of "the Poet's" death: "the Poet," implied to be Chilean Nobel Prize winner Pablo Neruda, is a visitor at the big house on the corner in *The House of the Spirits*, and later dies under the dictatorship. His death marks the loss of freedom for Alba and his other admirers, but his words live on to carry his message: "The Poet's funeral had turned into the symbolic burial of freedom" yet they lower him into a grave "shouting his verses of freedom and justice" (388). While the writer of freedom has died, and freedom is dying under the dictatorship, it lives in their memory of his written words. In addition to creating a sense of place and identity for the writer, the written word takes on an importance of its own.

necesario romper" (The structure is circular: the tale opens with a political crime –the death of Rosa- and ends with another, massive and bloody... the novel opens and closes with the same phrase, indicating an inexorable cycle [of violence] that needs to be broken). Alba's decision to write, in Galarce's interpretation, is a breaking of this cycle of violence.

CONCLUSION.

Allende creates within her text a feeling of movement and change peculiar to the state of the exile. In her trilogy, she creates almost epic stories of self-discovery, in which the act of writing provides the arena for her characters' journeys. Critic Patricia Hart notes Allende's "capacity for forging phrases with the sonorous memorability of epic epithets" (5). Allende's repeated phrases, "Rosa the beautiful," "the big house on the corner," "Clara, clearest, clairvoyant," give her narrative the feeling of an epic, an oral history finally recorded, while also constantly reaffirming the identities and roles of her characters. Through the process of writing, Allende affirms her identity and creates her "legend": "we are the legends we elaborate from our memories and experiences" (Correas Zapata x). In writing, she preserves history but also creates it, recalling and inventing, and not distinguishing between the two processes: "memory is as subjective as imagination" (xi). Allende, as exile, creates a "homeland" within a text. Allende has said she belongs to the "Chile of memory" or the Chile that surfaces in the poetry of Pablo Neruda, but not the current, actual Chile: "Maybe I don't belong in today's Chile, but to the Chile of Neruda that I carry in memory, a personal homeland that no longer exists in reality" (Correas Zapata 23). The place she knew as her homeland, the Chile before the 1973 military coup, no longer exists. Through her fiction, Allende, like her protagonists in *The House of the Spirits*, *Daughter of Fortune* and *Portrait in Sepia*, conveys the desire for a sense of place.

In Allende's autobiography *My Invented Country*, she reflects on her own experience as an exile, revealing that her writing originates from nostalgia, her longing for a sense of place-- for "roots":

I write as a constant exercise in longing. I have been an outsider nearly all my life, a circumstance I accept because I have no alternative. Several times I have found it necessary to pull up stakes, sever all ties, and leave everything behind in order to begin life anew elsewhere; I have been a pilgrim along more roads than I care to remember. From saying good-bye so often my roots have dried up, and I have had to grow others, which, lacking a geography to sink into, have taken hold in my memory (xi).

Although Allende says her “longing” leads her to “root herself” in memory, she describes her own memory as faulty. Commenting on the power of invention rather than memory, Allende has said, “I have a terrible memory. I’m always inventing my own life, so I find that in different interviews I tell different stories about the same subject.... My life is fiction too” (Crystall 594). Writing seems to take the place of memory for Allende, allowing her to preserve a history, fictional or not, of exile, politics, travel, and personal identity. By writing and retelling her stories, Allende reveals she is “inventing myself all the time, and at the same time I am inventing fiction, and through this fiction I am revealing myself” (Rodden 3). Allende conveys the continual process of identity through her constant “invention.” Critic Carmen Galarce has commented, “La fractura de la cultura letrada chilena motiva a los escritores exiliados a reinsertarse en la colectividad a través de la palabra” (the fracture of Chilean written culture motivates the exiled writers to reinsert themselves in the collectivity through words) (17). Allende blends memory and imagination in language, “reinserting” her sense of self by creating a homeland with words. Invention in language is Allende’s tool used to create a sense of place and overcome the “displacement” of the exile.

Through the act of writing, Allende and her characters create identity and homeland. All of Allende’s protagonists, Alba, Clara, Esteban, Eliza, and Aurora, “ground” themselves through writing. The trauma of exile impels a search for self. In Allende’s work, the exile’s identity is shaped by external factors – land and setting, movement or adaptation, and family – but she finds stability and grounding in language. By creating a text, Allende and her protagonists give form to the otherwise ambiguous self and homeland of the exile.

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