

**COUNTER-HEGEMONIC POETICS IN THE WORK OF
ISABEL ALLENDE**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of Oxford Brookes University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

October 1996

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ABSTRACT

Isabel Allende is one of the most widely read writers from Latin America this century. Her work has been translated into 26 languages and has sold over 10 million copies worldwide. Her success has been, however, somehow double-edged. Serious academic scholarship has tended to shun Allende on the grounds that her work is little more than a form of best-selling literary pastiche that panders to the bourgeois values of the mass market. While ambiguous in her use of the paradigms of mass culture, I argue that Allende's work should yet be read with shared reference to a Latin American tradition of politically committed literature. It is in advancing this adverse argument that I seek to make an original contribution to literary study.

In the first chapter of the thesis I seek to develop a strategy for reading Allende's work that takes into account the multiple contexts upon which it draws. The second chapter suggests the continuities between Allende's work and the tradition of the political novel in Latin America, suggesting an often ignored network of affiliations to popular causes and popular aesthetics within her oeuvre. Contrary to a somewhat repressive post-colonial orthodoxy, the third chapter seeks to place Allende's use of magical realist technique in relation to the Brechtian technique of alienation, an influence resolutely at odds with the hegemonic values of bestselling fiction. The argument that Allende's fiction makes use of Marxist insight and argument - which I term "counter-hegemonic poetics" - is sustained in chapters four and five. These chapters explore Allende's critique of the hegemonic narratives of bourgeois historiography and subjectivity respectively.

The concluding chapter seeks to examine the arguments of Allende's detractors. It traces a submerged strand of conservative thought that shadows Allende's ostensibly radical project from her first novel to the efflorescence of petit-bourgeois values in her latest work. It seeks to question Allende's commitment to the radical project outlined, and to determine the efficacy of such a project within the *recherché* form of the best-selling literary novel.

NOTE ON REFERENCES AND TRANSLATION

After the preliminary discussion of the introduction I refer to each of Isabel Allende's novels throughout by its English title. Each reference to the text of Allende's works cites *both* the standard English translation and the Spanish original throughout. Allende's children's story *La gorda de porcelana* has never been published in English so the translation cited in the text is my own. Only one of these texts regularly cited, "Writing as an Act of Hope," appears only in English throughout since it was originally published as an English language piece. The particular English and Spanish editions of Allende's works that are referenced are noted below. All page references to works cited throughout the thesis are placed in brackets at the end of each quotation to save unnecessary notes.

The House of the Spirits, Magda Bogin (tr.), (London: Black Swan, 1985.)
La casa de los espíritus, (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 1985.)

Of Love and Shadows, Margaret Sayers Peden (tr.), (London: Black S 1988.)
De amor y de sombra, (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 1995.)

Eva Luna, Margaret Sayers Peden (tr.), (London: Penguin, 1989.)
Eva Luna, (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 1991.)

The Stories of Eva Luna, Margaret Sayers Peden (tr.), (London: Penguin, 1991)
Cuentos de Eva Luna, (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 1995.)

The Infinite Plan, Margaret Sayers Peden (tr.), (London: Harper Collins, 1993.)
El plan infinito, (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 1995.)

Paula, Margaret Sayers Peden (tr.), (London: Harper Collins, 1995.)
Paula, (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 1994.)

La gorda de porcelana, (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1983.)

"Writing as an Act of Hope," William Zinnser (ed.), *Paths of Resistance*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989.)

Where reference to supplementary material such as author interviews has required translations of my own, such translations are noted within the text. Works by other critics, writers and commentators first published in Spanish, French and German are referred to solely in standard English translation for the sake of access and brevity.

Introduction

In an essay on Third World cinema Homi Bhabha remarks that the conceptual separation of First and Third Worlds along lines of exploitation and domination is quite legitimate in what he calls 'the language of political economy.'¹ John King, writing in response to Bhabha, questions however the appropriateness of borrowing from such paradigms to account for the broad field of cultural production. 'It is still unclear,' he writes 'whether it is possible to premise some sort of unitary aesthetic for non-American and non-European cinema.' (p.4.)² While the language of political economy has a broad explanatory power at the level of productive forces, at the cultural level such a claim is almost certainly more problematic.

The problem of theorizing a 'Third Cinema' raises questions that are also relevant to the study of literature. Ought writing by Third World writers be homogenized? Should such writing, by dint of being from the far side of the spatialized separation of classes that the terms First and Third World announce, be assumed to be a unitary weave of oppositional proletarian discourses? What are the problems that attend this attractively simple methodology? Such a view is predicated upon an analysis that locates class conflict between First and Third Worlds, locating the forces of capital in the former and labour in the latter. It fails to recognize, however, that class society is not simply inter-systemic but *intra*-systemic. The fact of class society *within* Latin America - the area of this study - suggests that literature could be other than the unitary expression of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls 'subaltern experience'.³ Even if it could be assumed that Latin America were uniformly proletarian, it would nevertheless still be inadequate to suppose that its literature would be of a consistently radical outlook. Any such understanding would be predicated upon a vulgar and economistic conception of literary production. A rudimentary conception of the insidious functioning of ideology would call into question the purity of such a culture's self understanding. There can be little doubt from even the most cursory glance at the broad field of Latin American literature that this is so. The wide variety of genres and texts from within the corpus of the continent's literature reflect the full gamut of class relations and

consciousness.⁴ It should be assumed that Latin American literature is as subject to what Louis Althusser has called 'overdetermination' as that of the First World.⁵ It needs to be stated here that my critical reading of the Chilean writer Isabel Allende for her adept and insightful use of the theoretical aperçus of Marxism - which I term 'counter-hegemonic poetics' - does not rely upon placing her as that monolithic and somewhat chimerical thing, a Third World writer. As a basis for producing a scrupulous textual reading, I have tried to establish a flexible yet rigorous methodology that locates Allende's work outwith a simplistic topos of class. In order to do as much, I believe it is important to lay some of the ghosts of a facile Third Worldist criticism and appreciate the flawed reality of Allende's success for what it is.

Any attempt to place Isabel Allende in the stable signifiatory context that the term Third World suggests is in any case flawed from the outset. While Allende is a Chilean author, her biography begins to resist the incipient metonymic extrapolation that such a placing implies. Allende was born in 1942 in Lima, Peru where her father was serving in the Chilean diplomatic corps. Shortly afterwards her parents' marriage broke down and her mother returned with the children to the Chilean capital Santiago. The young Isabel Allende was raised in her maternal grandparents' house until her mother remarried. Allende's stepfather, like her own father before, was in the Chilean diplomatic service. Travel inevitably followed. A posting to the Chilean embassy in La Paz in neighbouring Bolivia was followed a few years later with a posting to the Lebanon. Isabel's subsequent return to Chile in her teens and the early years of her first marriage provided a period of settled life in the Chilean capital. This stability was cut short in 1973 by the coup d'état which deposed the Marxist government of her relative Salvador Allende. The subsequent terror of the Pinochet regime placed Allende's life - like that of thousands of other Chilenos - in danger. In 1975 she and her family fled into exile in Venezuela. Allende spent more than a decade in exile in Caracas until the success of her first novel, *The House of the Spirits* (first published as *La casa de los espíritus* in 1982) brought more travel and

upheavals. In the late 1980's, Allende left her first husband and went to live in Berkeley, California, where she married a North American lawyer. The final, self-imposed upheaval is perhaps the most significant for any critical attempt to locate her in terms of the Manichean dichotomization of First and Third Worlds. The movement between the mixed fortunes of Chile in the 1970's - a time in which the Chilean government attempted to realize truly radical socialist reforms - to voluntary exile in the United States at the height of the Republican era - an era which saw the government's role to be that of the facilitation of capital accumulation in the hands of the few - is eloquent of the difficulty that besets any attempt to assimilate Allende's work to the category 'Third World'.

Allende's life in Chile was certainly very far from what Spivak has called the experience of the subaltern. Her maternal grandparents, while neither as wealthy nor patrician as their fictional counterparts the Truebas in *The House of the Spirits*, were solidly bourgeois. Like countless members of their social class, they lived in some comfort and employed indigenous servants. Allende's credibility as a Third World writer is nevertheless greatly augmented by her connections to President Salvador Allende, the deposed socialist President of Chile whose stature in the Third World Imaginary is second only to that of Mao Tse Tung and Fidel Castro. There is a certain slippage, seemingly authorized by the Allende name and the details of exile, that confuses the biographies of the president and his literary namesake. Isabel Allende is however a distant relative of Salvador - a second cousin - and cannot necessarily be produced out of the smoke of the bombed Palacio de la Moneda as the spokeswoman for Latin American oppression.⁶ While the President attempted to reform the economy Isabel wrote what she herself has described as 'frivolous magazine articles' for a review published by one of the government's leading opponents.⁷ If Allende is a Third World Writer, the assumption extended by such a claim that she is proletarian is immediately annulled by these simple biographical facts.

Mindful of Roland Barthes essay "The Death of the Author", that sought to do away with biographically based and intentionalist criticism, it

could be argued that there is a certain validity to be found in placing Allende's work in relation to its readership.⁸ One fact that cannot be overlooked in an assessment of Isabel Allende's work is the enormous international success that it has enjoyed. Since the publication of *The House of the Spirits*, Isabel Allende has produced a steady stream of books. At the time of writing she has produced three further novels - *Of Love and Shadows* (*De amor y de sombra*, 1984), *Eva Luna* (1987), *The Infinite Plan* (*El plan infinito*, 1991) - a collection of short stories, *The stories of Eva Luna* (*Cuentos de Eva Luna*, 1990), and a work that most approximates to autobiography, *Paula* (1994). While it has been difficult to put an exact figure on the sales of Allende's work world wide, rough estimates can be found.⁹ Dr Celia Zapata of San José State University suggests that Allende has sold over ten million copies of her books worldwide. This astonishing figure, Zapata concludes, "[makes] her the most widely read hispanic women writer of the century."¹⁰

While Zapata's claim has proved difficult to support in strictly numerical terms, an analysis of the publishing history of Allende's works both in Spanish and in translation is revealing. It begins to suggest a truly phenomenal popularity among a diverse international readership. Allende's most famous work, *La casa de los espíritus*, is available in 26 languages. The least translated of her works, *El plan infinito* is available in 15, suggesting that even Allende's lesser works have an extraordinarily large readership. This readership is in fact larger, in demographic terms, than the facts of translation suggest. Each of the major languages in which Allende's work is available also represents a number of other countries in the same language group. (See appendix 2.) The Spanish language edition does not simply designate a Spanish readership: co-editions of the novel are available throughout the hispanophone world. A rights deal between Allende's Spanish publishers Plaza y Janés and Sudamericana allows for the publication and distribution of her works in another 15 or so countries in Latin America. This makes Allende one of the most widely published writers in the Spanish-speaking world. The English language editions of her work also mask a truly global anglophone readership. English language rights to

her work have been variously realised by Knopf, Jonathan Cape, Text Plus, Hall, Harper Collins, Atheneum, Lester & Orpen Denys, Book of the Month Club and Bantam Books. This remarkable list of publishers ensures the publication and distribution of her work throughout the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, South Africa and the commonwealth countries of Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The Portuguese editions of Allende's work, available through Difel, Circulo do Livro and Circulo de Leitores also covers the vast territories of Brazil, while the German editions available through Aufbau, Suhrkamp and Bertelsmann cover a significant Swiss and Austrian readership. Whereas these languages form just a small number of the twenty-six language editions, they form a disproportionate majority of Allende's readers. Beyond these major language editions, Allende's work has been published in translation in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, China, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Holand, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Norway, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and Turkey.

While Allende's success can be grasped in terms of the broad demographic reach of her readership, it is also attested by the large number of honours that she has received from many different quarters. Allende has either won, or been nominated for, 25 awards in nine countries. (See appendix 3.) The awards that Allende has received fall into different categories. She has received an honorary doctorate from the New York State University (1991) and an honorary professorship from the University of Chile (1991). She has received prestigious literary awards such as the "XV Premio Internazionale I Migliori Dell'Anno" (1987) and the "XLI Bancarella" (1993) in Italy, the "Grand prix D'Evasion" in (1984) and the coveted "Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres" in France (1994) and the "Gabriela Mistral" prize in Chile (1994). To these can be added lesser awards for "Best Novel" in Chile (1983), the "Novel of the Year" and "Book of the Year" awards in Germany (1984) and "Best Book" in Mexico (1985), the "Mulheres" prize for best foreign novel in Portugal (1987) and the "Independent Foreign Fiction Award" in the United Kingdom (1993). Literary awards have also

been accompanied by a series of book trade prizes such as the "Quality Paperback Book Club New Voice" (1986) and the "Library Journal's Best Book" (1988), both in The United States. This serendipitous sweep of awards and honours gestures to the fact that Allende has been acclaimed - claimed even - by a wide group of readers both within and without Latin America.

The facts of Allende's publication, as indeed the facts of her biography, present a challenge to critical interpretation. They raise a series of awkward yet important methodological issues. What interpretative strategies are appropriate in approaching her work? Should it be located in a Latin American literary and social context or should any attempt to place her work be mindful of her transcontinental success? On the strength of Allende's international reception, should she also be read with respect to the tropes, paradigms and expectations of the literary bestseller? Should it be read with reference to the codes of Latin American literature or to those of dominant anglophone criticism? Need her work be referenced in Spanish or does its eminent translatability legitimate its reception in the reader's own language? If comparative literature as a discipline has to face the problems of decidability and attribution in critical interpretation across language and culture, Allende's work is almost paradigmatic of the problems that it faces. Rather than belonging to one or other of two opposed totalities, it blurs the categorical boundaries that separate them, demanding that comparative method gaze into the hinterland and raise its game. The first chapter, as a prelude to a Left reading of Allende's work, attempts to do just that.

NOTES

1. Homi Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory", in Jim Pires and Paul Willemen (eds.), *Questions of Third Cinema*, (London: British Film Institute, 1989.)

2. John King, *Magical Reels: A History of Latin American Cinema*, (London: Verso, 1990.)
3. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography", *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Methuen, 1987.) The term 'subaltern' first arises in Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, Joseph Buttigieg and Antonio Calleri (trans). (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.)
4. While the Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchú could, as a writer of indigenous testimony, be claimed as an exemplar of a Left tradition, the Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa, could equally be claimed for the Right, since at one time he stood as a neo-liberalist candidate for the presidency. Such polarities illustrate the problem of claiming an ideologically unified tradition.
5. Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970.)
6. The Moneda is the president's palace in Santiago de Chile where Salvador Allende met his end. It was bombed by the Air Force on the morning of September 11th 1973.
7. Isabel Allende records her memories of President Salvador Allende in *Paula*, frankly noting the distance between them: 'I was not involved in politics and in fact continued to work at the publishing house he considered his worst enemy, without any idea of what was happening in the country. Who was Salvador Allende? I don't really know, and it would be pretentious of me to offer a definitive portrait of him.'(p.170.) [No participé en política y seguí trabajando en la editorial que él consideraba su peor enemigo, sin comprender realmente lo que sucedía en el país. ¿Quién era Salvador Allende? No lo sé y sería pretencioso de mi parte intentar describirlo. (p.190.)] She continues: 'All this time, I was on another planet, doing my frivolous magazine articles... never suspecting the true proportions of the violence gestating in the shadows.. (pp.171-2.) [Entretanto yo andaba en la luna, escribiendo frivolidades... sin sospechar las verdaderas proporciones de la violencia que se gestaba en la sombra.. (p.191.)]
8. Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, Richard Howard (trans)., (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972.)
9. The most reliable source for this information, Allende's literary agent Carmen Balcells of Plaza y Janés in Barcelona, will not be drawn into a discussion of sales since it has what she describes as a 'confidential character.' A copy of my brief, but otherwise useful correspondence with Carmen Balcells is set down in Appendix 1.
10. Release on the internet to announce a forthcoming visit to San Jose State by Isabel Allende. <http://www.sjsu.edu/depts.forlang/allende.html>

Chapter 1

Placing the Text

This chapter is a conspectus of some of the issues that have concerned me in attempting to place Isabel Allende's work. The multiplicity of historical, formal, aesthetic, linguistic and political contexts that Allende's work draws upon requires some kind of interpretative theoretical framework to produce any kind of adequate critical reading. The need for an interpretative framework has a strictly practical dimension in such a work as this. How, for example, should Allende's work be cited and referenced? Should all references be in Spanish? What validity is there for referring to her work in standard translation? Should Latin American or anglophone critical traditions be invoked to settle questions of interpretation? While these questions might be easier to settle for other Latin American authors, Allende's considerable readership in translation subtly alters the interpretative terrain. The complexity of Allende's work requires an exploration of the labyrinthine ethical and theoretical issues that beset comparative criticism.

These are gloomy times in which post-colonial guilt in its academic form has led to the mute aporia of cultural relativism in which the Western critic has taken a vow of silence. To say anything of the 'other' is inevitably an act of epistemic violence, a transgression of an irreconcilable difference. Contemporary ethnography - consistently at the vanguard in issues of theory - is beset by the methodological incertitude that such an insight imposes. James Clifford in the collection of essays *Writing Culture*, laments that ethnographers can at best produce accounts of other cultures as little more than allegories of our own, compromised by the very act of representation itself.¹ Stephen Tyler, writing in the same collection, despairs of the totalistic illusions of mimesis and suggests an act of cultural evocation to inscribe the failure and violence that is ethnography within the ethnographic text itself.² It is as if the discipline feels honour bound to a utopian quest for what Michel Foucault has called 'a history of the referent [freed] from the tyranny of the text.' (p.49.)³ While I share a sense of the difficulties that surround comparative work, I do not believe in the fundamentalism of cultural relativism. If cultures are wholly incommensurable as Anthony Pagden, a historian of early European encounters with the New World maintains, then

such everyday accomplishments as learning another language would presumably be impossible.⁴ While rationalist epistemology has taken many knocks recently, and perhaps rightly for its stridency, it should not be abandoned altogether. I maintain in this chapter that it is possible with effort to understand the productions of another culture, although I would argue that this calls for the adoption of a circumspect approach toward the systematization of such a knowledge. The difference that Allende's texts encode should not be regarded as conceptually off-limits from the outset.

Several times in the course of researching this chapter, I have found myself referring to critical essays on ethnographic exhibitions. It is the nature of these events that they necessarily abstract and recontextualize artifacts or exhibits. In so doing they often refigure the cultural significance of the exhibit and place it in an estranging collocation. They are fabulous heterotopias in which the organising principle is perhaps the most germane, if hidden part of the exhibition. As such they serve as paradigms for some of the choices faced by comparative literature in theorizing its approach to difference. Foucault captures this process with customary eloquence in the introduction to *The Order of Things*:⁵

Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way that they confront one another, and also that which has no order except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression. (p.xx.)

Roland Barthes addresses the 'blank spaces' in these conceptual grids in his essay "The Great Family of Man."⁶ He discusses the assumptions that underlie the selection and grouping of photographs for an exhibition in Paris in the 1950s. It is a collection of photographs spanning dozens of different cultures from around the world, arranged according to the unifying similarity of the culturally disparate subjects' actions in the pictures. The aim

of the exhibition was, Barthes asserts:

[T]o show the universality of human actions in the daily life of all the countries of the world: birth, death, work, knowledge, play, always impose the same types of behaviour; there is a family of man [...] Then from this pluralism, a type of unity is magically produced: man is born, works, laughs and dies everywhere in the same way; and if there still remains in these actions some ethnic peculiarity, at least one hints that there is underlying each one an identical 'nature', that this diversity is only formal and does not belie the existence of a common mould. (p.107.)

Out of the blank spaces of the exhibition, Barthes produces the hidden desire to overwrite the specific cultural codes of each exhibit with an ulterior truth about human nature. Barthes goes on to suggest that far from articulating a universal truth they reveal a strident ethnocentrism at work in Western culture. The dangers that attend ethnography throw into focus similar perils that confront comparative literature. René Wellek's essay "The Crisis of Comparative Literature, Its Definition and Function," a summation of post-war comparative practice, suggests, somewhat problematically, that literature - like 'human nature' in the Paris exhibition - is a universal category rather than one that is subject to the vagaries of history.⁷

[Comparative Literature] is identical with the study of literature independent of linguistic, ethnic, and political boundaries. It cannot be confined to a single method [...] nor can comparison be confined to actual historical contacts. There may be [...] as much value in comparing phenomena such as languages or genres historically unrelated as in studying influences discoverable from evidence of reading or parallels [...] [C]omparative literature can and will flourish only if it shakes off artificial limitations and becomes simply the study of literature.
(pp.20-21.)

As the essence of the literary is universal, criticism has only to proceed inductively from its existing premises. The 'literary' is already there awaiting discovery in the foreign text, albeit in an inchoate form. It is a very attractive

methodology because it requires no real effort on the part of the critic to attempt to understand or theorize difference. Rather, Wellek is calling here for the suppression, the flattening of extra-textual differences so that 'literature' may continue to flourish. Needless to say, the criteria for inclusion in this universal category of literature are correspondingly narrow. Texts that do not satisfy the categorical imperatives are excluded, and, any extra-textual supplement that might contextualize the instance of the literary in a way that disrupts the stylistic unity that these imperatives enforce, is suppressed. However, the historically specific literary text is a spectre that returns to haunt literature as a transcendental category in much comparative literary work, up to the present. In the field of Latin American fiction it is especially so.

One work often cited in critical anthologies on Latin American fiction is A.J. MacAdam's *Modern Latin American Narrative: the Dreams of Reason*.⁸ MacAdam assumes a universal literary essence, in much the same way that Wellek had. For him, 'literature' is a pan-cultural category. All great works of literature will exhibit a common set of literary characteristics:

This study examines a limited number of Latin American narratives, all published within the last ninety or so years, in an attempt to determine the distinctive features of what may seem to be a literary chaos. [...] Since the subject of the essay is literature, not literature and society or literature and philosophy, extraliterary matters will be referred to only as adjuncts to literary speculation. "Final causes" for literary phenomena shall be drawn from the juxtaposition of Latin American texts and their Western Counterparts, so that Latin American narrative may be seen as a part of the Western literary tradition, not as a *lusus naturae*[.] (p.1.)

It is clear that the category of literature as a universal is problematic for MacAdam. He establishes the bounds of the discipline with a weary juridicism by stating that literature is a category precisely because it isn't sociology or philosophy. History, he states, is an extraliterary matter that will only be called on to settle disputes within the text. In so arguing, he is

advocating a New-Critical textual practice that establishes a hierarchy between text and context, in which context is only ever taken to be relevant in as much that it assists the text's self-understanding. It is this ordering of priorities that leads MacAdam to his eschatological conclusion that the 'Western literary tradition,' as a discursive practice, should be the final cause to which Latin American fiction is adducible. Nevertheless, MacAdam was advocating an orthodoxy that was by the time of the works' publication (1977) on the defensive. MacAdam continues by allowing history *manqué* a place in his analysis:

At the same time to divest these texts of their local resonance is equally impossible. For example, critics have tried to deal with Jorge Luis Borges as if he were a man without a country. However, Borges's nationality must be taken into account if his work is to be appreciated to the fullest [...] And what is true of Borges is certainly true of the writers presented here. (p.3.)

This reasonable gesture towards a little bit of local detail is not sufficient to support the crumbling edifice of his doxa. History, the repressed 'other' to his textual practice makes an uncanny return despite his lightly made protests as to its dispensability. It cannot simply be sloughed off as a question of 'local resonance', but raises broader methodological questions that he just will not, or cannot, respond to.

Built into the concept of literary genres is one irresolvable problem: do the generic terms have a significance that is purely historical, or do they transcend literary periods? That is, are genres bound to a specific moment in cultural history [...] or [are they] Platonic ideals, are all problems that defy solution. Because of this, one is tempted to regard Lukacs' history-bound view of the genres as a distortion of genre theory [...] since it is the text as a verbal artefact (not as a historical phenomenon or reflection of a historical moment) that is under scrutiny. (p.7.)

MacAdam dismisses history with a New-Critical refrain: like Cleanth Brooks, he places the verbal artefact alone under scrutiny.⁹ To suggest that he

should be looking at something else is simply a category mistake.

New-Critical textual hermeticism, is, of course, now out of vogue. However, the insistence on the primacy of textuality over history is still being advanced in the criticism of Latin American literature. History has taken something of a battering in the years since MacAdam's book was published, with the institutional ascendance of post-structuralist and postmodern critical schools. Postmodernist criticism avoids the question of history with the argument, after Jean-Francois Lyotard, that the 'grand narratives' have had their day.¹⁰ Similarly, post-structuralism has achieved a neat chiasmus that turns the historicity of the text into the textuality of history.¹¹ Between the two movements, textuality has again moved to the fore: history is not so much off limits as unknowable. In the shadow of this aporia, exactly the same kind of conceptual violence is being visited on Latin American fiction as before, now with powerful epistemological warrant.

Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* proceeds from the premise that we are at the end of history.¹² Everything has been homogenised by something that might be called late capitalism to the point where there is no longer a class in which to locate historical agency. All that can be done is to enjoy the seamlessness of the contemporary and spot the poetics of this aporia such as inter-textuality, meta-fiction and so on where we can. There is at the heart of McHale's critique the axiological assumption that such tropes demonstrate a certain maturity, they flaunt a sort of millenarian sassiness. I shall argue that like the organisers of that notorious exhibition in Paris, like Wellek, and MacAdam before him, McHale assumes a universal typology that he then seeks to vindicate. In the Introduction McHale states that 'the book falls into the category of descriptive poetics.' (p.xi.) It is a checklist of postmodern tropes and figures. Since postmodernism places both reader and critic at the end of history there is no longer any need to establish the provenance of these descriptive poetics. McHale thereby makes a truly astonishing sweep for examples to substantiate his arguments about the post-modern, without pausing to consider the appropriateness of any such critical compatibility. McHale's reference to the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes

points to the limits of this practice:

This pattern I have been tracing can also be discerned in some of the writers of the so-called Latin-American "boom." [...] Each of [Fuentes] novels employs a *topos* associated with the interior monologue convention, a different type of distortion of the mental grid. In the case of *Artemio Cruz*, this is the deathbed monologue *topos*, to which *Malone Dies*, incidentally, also belongs, and which may be traced back through Broch's *Death of Virgil* and Hemingway's *Snows of Kilimanjaro* ultimately to Tolstoy's *Ivan Ilyich*. (p.15.)

Here Fuentes, Beckett, Broch, Hemingway and Tolstoy are brought together, across time and culture, in a genealogy of something called the postmodern 'deathbed monologue topos.' McHale's vulnerability to charges of essentialism is clear. In the Introduction to his latest work *Constructing Postmodernism* he states that 'some readers seem to have come away thinking that I had attributed to postmodernism [a] kind of fixed essence.'¹³ (p.1.) Yet, it does indeed proceed from just such an essentializing premise and constitutes the object of its enquiry in those terms. Leaving aside the epistemological questions that postmodernism raises, in practice this is indistinguishable from the other forms of critical ethnocentrism we have encountered. McHale, in almost exactly the manner of which Barthes forewarned, assumes that in postmodernity 'man [...] dies everywhere in the same way; and if there still remains [...] an ethnic peculiarity, at least one hints that [...] this diversity is only formal.'

The errors of comparative literature are themselves instructive. From the shortcomings of these various critical attempts it is possible to begin to develop more appropriate strategies. In his essay "Representation and the Colonial Text", Homi Bhabha outlines a distinction between metaphor and metonymy for approaching colonial texts.¹⁴ When writing about colonial texts, that is to say books written by subjects under colonial rule, the critic should be wary of approaching figures and tropes as metaphor. This would

be, Bhabha suggests, to commit the text to a universalist interpretation. He proposes that tropes in texts should be read as metonymic. This, he maintains, will open up the text in question to a symptomatic reading that picks up on the social, cultural and political forces which traverse it. It is important in reading a colonial text to 'conceive of the subject of difference, of an-other history and an-other culture. [...] That is to say a process which conceives of meaning as a systemic production within determinate institutions and systems of representation - ideological, historical, aesthetic, political.' (p.98.)

While I have some difficulty with the term 'colonial text' as it implies a strictly periodized relationship of subordination, I believe that Bhabha's observations raise some very pertinent issues concerning protocols for reading work from other cultures. He broaches the question of the commensurability of Western critical models and non-western texts since, he argues, they are both metonymies: parts of large and to an important degree discrete ideological, historical, aesthetic and political wholes. This simple yet scrupulous methodological precept encodes the possibility of difference that other erstwhile strategies clearly ignore. In approaching Isabel Allende's work, it seemed both prudent - and differentially post-colonial - to assume that her work would present difficulties to a Western literary critical practice that produces textual interpretations within certain structures of determinacy. The search for 'difference' is, however, beguilingly simple.

The search for difference requires that a text be placed in its original context and understood with respect to the critical values that obtain to that context. In an essay on method in the writing of literary history, the reception theorist H.R. Jauss outlines this practice in dealing with works from different eras. Jauss' remarks about language hold clues to one of the problems that confronts comparative literature.¹⁵

The reconstruction of the horizon of expectations, on the basis of which a work in the past was created and received enables us to find the questions which the text originally answered and thereby to discover how the reader of the day viewed and

understood the work [...] It brings out the hermeneutic difference between past and present ways of understanding a work [...] and thereby challenges as platonizing dogma the apparently self-evident dictum of philological metaphysics that literature is timelessly present and that it has objective meaning, determined once and for all and directly open to the interpreter at any time. (pp.11-19.)

Jauss takes issue with a metaphysical conception of language which tacitly affirms that the meaning of a text is somehow manifest, objective and open to the interpreter at any time. While he locates this problematic diachronically - between a text in the era of its production and subsequent reception - it can equally be taken to function synchronically as a problematic for work in translation. To see textual meaning as immanent is to fail to see the semantic slippage - obscured by philological metaphysics - that occurs between eras, and, of course, between languages. As Edward Sapir states in *Culture Language and Personality*:¹⁶

No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. (p.69.)

Comparative literature has to address the problems of a platonic conception of language that somehow persists when translation is insufficiently theorized. The critic Anibal Gonzalez draws attention to one of the assumptions that is problematically implicit in much translation. 'Translation,' he writes 'foretells or announces the existence of a *pure language*, a kind of communicative essence freed from the contingent variations imposed upon it by the various tongues and by the author's intentions.' (p.69.)¹⁷ Translation in the shadow of this understanding is assumed to be a process carried out in what André Lefevre has called 'an airlock where [translations] and their originals, can be checked against the *tertium comparationis* in the purest possible lexical chamber, untainted by power, time, or even the vagaries of culture.'¹⁸ (p.7.) If language existed in

a plane of ideality alone, that is to say a realm of pure signifieds, then this would of course be adequate. The 'logocentric' assumption that language is made up of positive terms, that each word is bound to its meaning, and that this semantic unity can therefore be transferred from one language to another is, however, compromised by dissemination. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her recent essay "The Politics of Translation", engages with the implications that dissemination raises.¹⁹

How does the translator attend to the specificity of the language she translates? There is a way in which the rhetorical nature of every language disrupts its logical systematicity. [...] The ways in which rhetoric or figuration disrupt logic themselves point at the possibility of random contingency, beside language, around language. Such a *dissemination* cannot be under our control. Yet in translation, where meaning hops into the spacey emptiness between two named historical languages, we get perilously close to it. By juggling the disruptive rhetoricity that breaks the surface in not necessarily connected ways, we feel the selvages of the language-textile give way, fray into *frayages* or facilitations. (p.181.)

The terms *frayage* and *facilitation* are translations into French and English of the term *Bahnung*, used to describe a neurological model of the functioning of what Freud calls rather sonorously "the psychical apparatus". When electrical excitation runs into resistance between neurons, excitation will follow a facilitated pathway rather than one in which no facilitation has occurred. To paraphrase, Spivak is saying that the act of translation is one of closure in which the rhetoricity - the indeterminacy of a text - is committed to a certain path. The excess of a text in one language - the beyond of its logical systematicity - is denied, and, in the cratylistic moment of equivalence passes over into another language in which it enters a differing economy of excess. As Spivak concludes, 'without a sense of the rhetoricity of language, a species of neo-colonialist construction of the non-Western scene is afoot.' (p.181.)

Comparative study must be wary of routinely assuming a continuity between linguistic realms. It must be open to the possibility that a translation

is not the exact and faithful transposition of terms of equal value from one language to another. If not actually taken from one language and rendered in another, then in a figurative sense they are 'translated' as they are produced within the structures of determinacy of another culture. It is possible, in this broader understanding of translation, to read a work in Spanish while 'translating' the work into the critical paradigms of an anglophone tradition. In this sense 'translation' designates both a process of linguistic transposition and a process of transcoding a work's ancillary network of correlatives. In producing readings of Isabel Allende's work, it is important to grasp the complex issues that this sense of translation raises. The reader of any text in translation must bear in mind that the translation has something of the quality of the palimpsest. Almost all works that are read in comparative literature are translated in some way. Without such an awareness, the differences present in the cultural penumbra of Allende's work can, with the best will in the world, be lost.

While translation theory injects a timely reminder of the ethics of alterity into comparative method, it also has further implications for method that are often either finessed or ignored. The theorization of the problematics of translation is in fact premised upon a quite un-Derridean understanding. While translation is compromised as a task by dissemination, the same disseminative effects at work in the source language are absolved. The original texts, it should be recalled, are not in full possession of their own meanings, they are heterogeneous by nature. Derrida is forthcoming about this point in an essay on translation:²⁰

If the translator neither restitutes or copies an original, it is because [...] at the origin it was not there without fault, full, complete, total, identical to itself. (p.188.)

The original text, as Derrida forbids us to call it, is not in possession of its own meaning, as meaning is not the sum total of the positive terms of the words that comprise a text. It is an effect of a process of dissemination. The translation theorist Lawrence Venuti takes Derrida's articulation of the

problematics of translation a little further. For Venuti, the supplementarity that haunts the original challenges any notion of fidelity in translation.²¹

Neither the foreign text nor the translation is an original semantic unity; both are derivative and heterogeneous, consisting of diverse linguistic and cultural materials which destabilise the work of signification. [...] A translation is never quite "faithful", always somewhat "free", it never establishes an identity, always a lack and a supplement, and it can never be a transparent representation, only an interpretative transformation that exposes multiple and divided meanings in the foreign text and displaces it with another set of meanings, equally multiple and divided. (p.7.)

In this sense the notion of the original text becomes deeply problematic. While the assumption of semantic and linguistic difference is an important heuristic for approaching texts from different cultural settings, the assumption that the text is one of pure difference, however, retains the sort of binaristic opposition that deconstruction seeks to undo. The twin concepts of 'translation' and 'original' mark the points of a false opposition. That the realm of the original is posited as one of integrity and pure cultural identity, in opposition to the ersatz simulacrum of the translation, betrays a method that is still stuck in the first stage of deconstruction. While translation theory marks the partial reassessment of method in the light of recent theory it also preserves the polarities that these post-structuralist insights seek to problematize.

This is not simply important from the point of view of deconstructive orthodoxy. The partial lesson that translation learns from deconstruction begins to frame broader questions of comparative literary method. Does comparative literature in its way of operating, assume a domain of originality discrete from that of the translation? Upon this assumption does it not in fact erect a doxa of cultural and aesthetic purity that forecloses upon the possibility of hybridity? In Philip Swanson's *Landmarks in Modern Latin American Fiction*, a fairly typical work of criticism that exemplifies the axioms of comparative method, certain strategies become apparent.²² In this text,

critics offer a variety of readings of contemporary Latin American writers. Each writer is quoted in the Spanish original. The original text sits in between critical metalanguage and has, I will argue, a complex and unacknowledged function as a kind of second order signifier. It announces the presence of an original, untransgressed by the violence of translation. The presence of the original text functions as subtle reinforcement of an enduring conceit that opposes a world of originality to one of displacement, inauthenticity and loss. It also acts as a metonym for a domain of original literature that stands across a linguistic and cultural divide from that of the translation. The axiomatics of this critical encounter are further defined in Jean Franco's seminal work *Spanish American Literature*, first published in 1969.²³ Franco refers to Latin American literary texts in Spanish, footnoting a translation in a much smaller typeface. This protocol for referencing tellingly recreates the discrete and hierarchized domains of the original and the work of translation. Predicated upon a partial understanding of deconstruction, it places a bar to recognizing the play between the cultural codes of the Latin American text and the codes of the translation. This incomplete reappraisal of method amounts to little more than a half-way adequate practice. It is, in effect, tantamount to the atonement of a fetishized 'original' text in compensation for colonial guilt.

How appropriate is this method in reading the works of Isabel Allende, a Spanish American writer whose work is enjoyed so abundantly in translation around the world? Should her oeuvre be treated as a body of work that belongs to the codes of reference of Latin American culture on the one hand, or as a work that belongs in a special and honorific sense to the cultures that claim it, as a body of work in (anticipation of) translation? Perhaps there exists a more dialectical method of reading that is able to keep track of the subtle dialogistic interplay of original and translation, an effort of criticism that is alive to indeterminacy and the possibility of bicultural codes of reference.

The critic D. Emily Hicks observes in her work *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text* that some texts of chicano literature occupy a space

that can be claimed by two cultural traditions at once.²⁴ In writing of the border, Hicks is referring not so much to an actual border (for instance between First and Third Worlds at Tijuana) but as a metaphor to describe writing that negotiates the frontier between two cultures:

I am speaking of cultural, not physical, borders: the sensibility that informs border literature can exist among guest workers anywhere [...] in which the country of origin does not share a physical border with the host country. (p.xxv.)

In expounding her method, the ancillary metaphor of the reader as 'guestworker' is somehow particularly appropriate in a conception of Allende's work. As I stated in the introduction, Allende's works are read in as many as 26 languages and in a considerably greater number of countries. Allende's readers, while not necessarily sharing a literal border, make a crossing in the act of reading, from the paradigms of their own culture to those of a different culture that are encoded in the text.

Hicks suggests that certain texts - which she terms 'border texts' - are, properly speaking, bi-cultural. To describe the situation of the border text Hicks uses the metaphor of the hologram, an optical effect produced by the convergence of two parallel beams of light. Although the metaphor tends to suggest - somewhat erroneously - a heightened form of mimetic textual practice, it yet captures the distinct duality of a text that is produced by two cultural traditions. The border text cannot be understood as belonging to one or other culture, but must be understood in terms that are taken from each:

[B]order writers ultimately undermine the distinction between original and alien culture. Border writers give the reader the opportunity to practice multidimensional perception [...] the ability to see not just from one side of the border, but from the other side as well. In Roland Barthes' terms, this would mean a perception informed by different sets of referential codes. (p.xxiii.)

While Allende's work - and her life experience - cannot be adduced simply to a linguistic and social uniformity that Latin American attribution confers,

similarly it cannot be grasped - as some critics maintain - as an entirely ersatz body of Latin American work that is more properly adduced to the bestselling codes of European and North American fiction. Allende's texts, drawing on the paradigms of mass culture and yet marked by the counter-hegemonic traces of a popular left tradition, have a curiously bicultural quality.

The assertions that I make about Allende's work in the following chapters are predicated upon an understanding of her as a 'border writer.' I take as a working assumption that her writing exists somewhere between the conception of an impure translation and the full plenitude of an original. I suppose that the act of reading Allende's work does not seek to produce some kind of determinate interpretation within the paradigms of either anglophone criticism or its Spanish American equivalent, but one that is somehow reliant upon a knowledge of both. In attempting to accomplish this, I have abandoned the practice common to anglophone criticism of Latin American texts of leaving textual references in Spanish alone. As I have argued, this practice uncritically asserts the erstwhile binary of original and simulacra that post-structuralism calls to account, and unhelpfully hinders any attempt to explore the possibilities of textual syncretism. When I cite Allende's work, I use the standard available translation in tandem with the standard Spanish text, to suggest (after Hicks) that a critical reading should be locked into the 'connotative matrices' of both cultures.

In referring to Allende's work I place the translation before the Spanish text. This is not an attempt to suggest, in the modish spirit of postmodernism, that the simulacrum precedes the text.²⁵ I do it to literalize a metaphor, that of the hegemonic text that is somehow susceptible to a counter-hegemonic subtext. I argue that Allende's texts, while ostensibly self-substantial in translation, are nevertheless susceptible to the traces of a parallel cognitive tradition present to the text, forever implying an alternative and 'other' dimension that undoes the unified assertion of an hegemonic reading. As Hicks states in terms drawn from Deleuze and Guattari:

If the border is a machine, then one of its elements is the bicultural smuggler, and to read is to cross over to another side where capital has not yet reduced the object to a commodity - to a place where a psychic healing may occur. (p.xxxi.)

I argue that in Allende's work there is a cultural ambivalence. While it is read in translation it yet observes some of the cognitive rules of a Latin American tradition. These rules shadow an hegemonic reading, subjecting some of its assumptions to a subtle form of immanent critique. In the chapter that follows I attempt to suggest that Allende's work, situated as it is in a cognitive hinterland, undermines some dominant assumptions as to the signifiatory function of literature.

NOTES

1. James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory", in Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986.)
2. Stephen Tyler, "Postmodern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document." *Ibid.*
3. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (London: Tavistock, 1972.)
4. Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993.)
5. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970.)
6. Roland Barthes, "The Great Family of Man", *Mythologies*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972.)
7. René Wellek, *Discriminations*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970.), cited in Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993.) (p.36.)
8. A.J. MacAdam, *Modern Latin American Narrative: The Dreams of Reason*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.)

9. See Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947.) and also William K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954.)
10. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.)
11. Some of the issues that surround the post-structuralist critique of history are explored in Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington and Robert Young (eds.) *Post Structuralism and the Question of History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.)
12. Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, (London: Methuen, 1987.) This type of thesis has gained a great deal of credibility from work such as Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992.). I return to consider this in some depth in Chapter 4.
13. Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, (London: Routledge, 1992.)
14. Frank Gloversmith, (ed). *The Theory of Reading*, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984.)
15. Jauss, H.R. "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory", *New Literary History*, #2, 1970, (pp.11-19.) Cited in Susan Bassnett, (p.135.).
16. Edward Sapir, *Culture, Language and Personality*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1956.) Cited in Susan Bassnett, (p.145.).
17. Anibal Gonzalez, "Translation and Genealogy: One Hundred Years of Solitude", (p.69.) Bernard McGuirk and Richard Caldwell, (eds), *Gabriel García Márquez, New Readings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.) Gonzalez is responding to the metaphysical tradition outlined in an essay by Walter Benjamin, in which he describes the task of the translator as that of redeeming 'in his own tongue that pure language exiled in the foreign tongue, to liberate by transposing this pure language in the work.' Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator", *Illuminations*, (London: Fontana, 1973.)
18. André Lefevre "Proust's Grandmother and the Thousand and One Nights", Bassnet and Lefevre, *Translation, History and Culture*, (London: Pinter, 1990.)
19. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993.)
20. Jacques Derrida "Des Tours De Babel" in Joseph F. Graham (ed)., *Difference in Translation*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985)

21. Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992.)
22. Philip Swanson (ed.), *Landmarks in Modern Latin American Fiction*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1990.)
23. Jean Franco, *Spanish American Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.)
24. D.Emily Hicks, "Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text". *Theory and History of Literature Volume 80*. (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis and Oxford, 1991.)
25. Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" in *Simulations*, Paul Foss, Paul Patton, Philip Beitchman (trans). (New York: Semiotext(e) inc., 1983.)

Chapter 2
Popular Novels, Popular Causes

Over the course of the Introduction and Chapter One, I have suggested that Isabel Allende's work needs to be read with a degree of interpretative caution. This Chapter - Popular Novels, Popular Causes - seeks to establish, with similar circumspection, a set of theoretical foundations upon which to base a reading of Allende's work in respect to her adept use of Marxist poetics. I shall argue that Allende is preoccupied with complex questions of literary aesthetics and textual politics. The issue of politics - and what it is to write politically - is a preoccupation that arises again and again in Isabel Allende's work. Conceptualizing politics, however, is a thorny and problematic issue. That which emerges from the miasma of the text as 'political' is subject to a number of subtle and complex determinations between the place of the text's writing and that of its reception. In Latin American literary history there has been no cultural interdiction that forbids a connection being made between 'literature' and 'politics'. As the critic Doris Sommer states, 'the "unacknowledged" ties between writing and legislating that Shelley wanted to reveal are no secret in Latin America.'(p.73.)¹ Sommer goes on to note in support of this that in the early years of independence there was already a page-long list of Latin American writers who were also presidents of their countries. However, the literary tradition that informs the large European and North American readership of Allende's work is not so comfortable with a fusion of the categories of the literary and the political. At the point at which Allende's work is read in English translation there prevails a subdued and formalistic sense of the political. Politics is generally subjected to a dichotomization, between a public domain in which it is located in the impersonal functioning of the state, and a private, subjective world that is largely unpenetrated by the political. Since literature belongs to this second private domain, it is conceptually bracketed from any external political intrusion.

This conceptual separation is apparent in *The Penguin History of Latin America*, Edwin Williamson's quincennial commemoration of the 'encounter' between Europe and the New World.² Williamson attempts to evaluate the literature of the socially turbulent years following independence

from Spain. In his view, the turmoil of the moment was not conducive to good literature. The private world of the writer had become lamentably confused with politics to the extent that political concerns found their way into the literary texts themselves. Since this intrusion transgressed the unspoken separation of conceptual domains, that which followed could not be considered literature:

In Spanish America [...] cultural life was weakened by political turbulence and economic uncertainty. Polemics tended to overwhelm invention and, in the circumstances, no great writer emerged [...] Towards the end of the century, when the major republics had become integrated into the world economy and their ruling classes began to cohere and prosper, literary creation was better able to flourish. (p.286.)

I will argue that there is a danger that the connection between politics and narrative in Allende's work will be consistently finessed - if not refused altogether - within a hermeneutic tradition that treats literature and politics as largely incommensurable entities. Within such a practice of reading, the political range of Allende's work cannot but emerge as an anaemic set of references, flattened in the process of their dissemination.

The hegemonic model of literary criticism, of which Edwin Williamson's criticism is an example, has certain strategies with which to manage the political text besides the ultimate sanction of excommunication from the burgeoning canon. When the political has the temerity to appear within the literary work, it emerges not as a problematic strategy that challenges an established conception of literature, but in certain prescribed ways. In a reading that requires the separation of politics and literature, the two elements have to be assigned a place within the reading. The elements are separated out and arranged in a hierarchical relation to one another. In such an hegemonic reading of Allende's *The House of The Spirits*, the ostensible subject of the novel becomes the interactions of the characters; their loves, hopes and betrayals over the course of several generations.³ This preserves the literary merit of the novel as something that might be

essentialized as the indomitability of the human spirit, while the political events, tensions and preoccupations of the novel - which I consider at length in subsequent chapters - become displaced as a form of contextual detail, like a theatrical back-drop. The discrete categories of literature and politics remain unchallenged, since the political has been displaced, serving a predominantly indexical function as a form of Latin American local colour.

This strategy of normalization - whereby the aesthetic disinterested status of the text is saved by reading the political as the adumbration of a mimetic process - is not the unique response offered in an hegemonic reading of Allende's work. There is another to hand which provides an alibi for those tendentious elements that remain within the sanitized narrative of the text. This we might call the 'Allende connection.' Wherever readers come by a copy of *The House of the Spirits*, they know through interviews, reviews and press releases that Isabel Allende is related to the former president of Chile - Salvador Allende - who was deposed in the coup of 1973. She is often thought to be either the daughter or the niece of the former President, something that she herself has not discouraged.⁴ This relationship is not, however, as strong as is so often believed. Salvador Allende was in fact the first cousin of Tomás Allende, Isabel's father, making her a second cousin to the former president. Why then is the author awarded a stronger familial relationship to the president than the true relation she actually bears? The filiation has two functions. It acts as both a guarantee of access to the dramatic events of the novel - the political as mimetic effect once more - and as an alibi for the novel's ideological interests. Allende's straying from the novel - conceived as a disinterested form in a hegemonic notion of the literary - is excusable given the extraordinary circumstances of its conception and the strong filiation of the author to the martyr of its pages. The terror of post Allende Chile is a unique circumstance which might allow certain ideological considerations to stray into the text.

The House of the Spirits, then, has been read internationally in a way that saves the disinterested status of the literary text by appending the political to a realist strategy, and by making the remainder the subject of a

unique special pleading. This indelicate mode of reception has the effect - to use a visual metaphor - of throwing such a narrow conceptual band into focus that the less easily visible sense of the political is left obscure and formless. To produce an adequate reading of Allende's oeuvre it is important to pause and consider other ways of conceiving the political in her work. This labour of recuperation is one that Allende urges her readers to make in her essay "Writing as an Act of Hope": 'If my books are going to be classified as political,' she states, 'I hope that readers will find out that they are not political for ideological reasons only, but for other more subtle considerations.' (pp.50-51.) What are these other 'more subtle considerations' and how are they to be understood? To gain an understanding of the political processes that are so intimately tied up with questions of narrative in Allende's work, it is important to place it in the context of a Latin American political tradition that it also occupies.

Making the political visible in Latin American literary history is difficult for its apparent ease. Doris Sommer's observation that many Latin American statesmen of the last century - and indeed of this - were novelists as proof of a political narrative practice is perhaps misleading. The fact that the novelist Rómulo Gallegos was also the first democratically elected president of Venezuela could be countered with the point that the British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli wrote fiction.⁵ A more recent example that cited Alejo Carpentier, the novelist who coined the phrase 'lo real maravilloso' (the marvellous in the real) as a member of post-revolutionary Cuba's National Assembly, could be met with the example of a recent British conservative foreign secretary, Douglas Hurd, who writes thrillers, or that of a current Junior Minister, Edwina Currie, who writes best-sellers.⁶ It is to misunderstand the nature of political writing to suggest that it is so simply because it is written by a serving politician. The fact that politicians write does not necessarily mean that their work subscribes to a political theory of narrative. A roll-call of writer-statesmen will clearly not do in itself as an attempt to understand political writing.

Within her fiction, Allende provides a series of little narrative

vignettes that begin to suggest ways that political writing might usefully be theorised. In *The House of the Spirits*, she considers the privileged life of Blanca Trueba who - like many young women of her social class in that particular historical moment - was encouraged by her family to take an interest in painting and reading. 'By day,' we are told, '[Blanca] embroidered, read, or painted insipid watercolours around the house, under Nana's approving glance.' (p.185.) ['En el día ella bordaba, leía y pintaba insípidas acurelas en los alrededores de la casa, ante la mirada feliz de la Nana.' (p.185.)] What is, we might ask, the assumed function of such artistic activity? To work at cross-stitch, to read works of literature and to paint - all within the confines of the home - are activities informed by bourgeois artistic mores. They are activities that do no more than mark the sombre passage of the hours while transforming women themselves into aesthetic objects, valorized - like their art - for their beauty and lack of utility. An interest in the arts, conceptually rinsed of politics and controversy by bourgeois aesthetics, adds to Blanca's social capital at the expense of her personal efficacy. That Allende should characterize this conception of artistic activity as 'insipid' is telling. It carries with it intimations of a conceptual break with bourgeois aesthetics.

Allende builds on this insight in "Two Words," the somewhat gnomic introduction to *The Tales of Eva Luna*. She remarks in *Paula* that the story was written as 'a kind of allegory about the hallucinatory power of narration and language...' (p.295.) ['una especie de alegoría sobre el poder de la narración...' (p.326.)] It is set in the post-independence era of Latin American history that Edwin Williamson finds so problematic. The tale's protagonist, Belisa Crepusculario, has a narrative gift from which she makes her living. She sells stories and creates bespoke words for a fee. Her fame as a storyteller and neo-logician spreads, eventually reaching the Colonel, a roving militiaman whose fierce reputation needs to be ameliorated if his ambition to become president is to meet with success.⁷ He sends his feared henchman, El Mulatto to fetch Belisa to write a political speech for him. This she does and the speech meets with a success that could scarcely have been imagined:

While he spoke [...the people] were dazzled by the clarity of the colonel's proposals and the poetic lucidity of his arguments [...] and when finally they rode off, they left behind a wake of hope that lingered for days on the air, like the splendid memory of a comet's tale. (p.11.)

Mientras hablaba [...] estaban deslumbrados por la claridad de sus proposiciones y la lucidez poética de sus argumentos [...] y cuando por fin se retiraban, quedaba atrás una estela de esperanza que perduraba muchos días en el aire, como el recuerdo magnífico de un cometa. (p.19.)

His prestige and political influence grow through the mesmerizing effect of these words. Before long he reaches wider audiences through the attentions of newspapermen who interview him and repeat his winning phrases in the press. With time, and the constant reiteration of Belisa's speech, he wins the Presidential elections. The allegorical message of the tale is clear. Literary narrative should not be understood through the axioms of bourgeois aesthetics as an end in itself. It should be grasped as a polemical process that can accomplish the most exalted external ends.⁸

In her essay "Writing as an Act of Hope" Allende directly addresses the issue of politics and literature. She returns to the bourgeois literary tradition to reject unequivocally the notion that literature should be understood as a self-regarding and belle lettristic practice. She suggests that such a precious autotelic conception of literature is self indulgent and untenable in the turbulent conditions of Latin American society:

Writers navigate in these agitated waters. They don't live in ivory towers; they cannot remove themselves from this brutal reality. In such circumstances there is no time and no wish for narcissistic literature. Very few of our writers contemplate their navel in self-centred monologue. [...] A book is not an end in itself [...] it is a way of winning other people to our causes. (p.48.)

In making a clear distinction between a narcissistic and a polemical conception of literature, Allende hints at a more radical literary practice. Her

distinction, drawing as it does upon a notion of 'us' and 'them', appears to invoke an alternative aesthetic tradition to that which authorizes hegemonic critical discourse. In its polemical stridency her appeal is less consonant with contemporary theory than with an earlier era of movements and manifestos. Her call for a persuasive form of art is reminiscent of the manifesto of the Mexican muralists of the 1920s. While such a comparison might seem rather fanciful there are good grounds for making it. We learn, in Allende's autobiographical work *Paula*, that she painted murals as a child, and, that she is familiar with the work of the muralists.⁹ That aside, there are overwhelming reasons for citing them for the similarity of the arguments they propose. The muralists' - most notably Diego Ribera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siquieros - musings sound remarkably familiar to Allende's own. They rejected highly fashionable forms of modernism on similar grounds to those with which Allende dismisses 'narcissistic literature.' The muralists also sought to do away with the private, interior world of bourgeois art to replace it with an artisan practice informed by polemic. The painters' manifesto, published in the workers newspaper, *El Machete* is much like Allende's:¹⁰

We repudiate so-called easel painting and every kind of art favoured by ultra-intellectual circles because it is aristocratic, and we praise monumental art in all its forms because it is public property [...] [A]t this time of social change from a decrepit order to a new one, the creators of beauty must use their best efforts to produce ideological works of art for the people; *art must no longer be the expression of individual satisfaction which it is today, but should aim to become a fighting educative art for all.* (p.39.) (italics my own)

Allende's conception of artistic activity, like that of the muralists, involves an acknowledgement of its importance as a polemic. Artistic activity has external ends, and these ends, like those of Belisa Crepusculario, should be understood as political in nature.

Isabel Allende's work tends, however, to be read in ways that are hostile to

its political intent. Allende's rejection of literature as an aesthetic domain is, to many of her critics, a tiny, almost quietistic, gesture of radical purpose that is immediately cancelled out by the deadening demands of the best-seller form. A recent straw poll of opinions on Allende's work in a specialist group on the internet garnered fairly standard rejections.¹¹ Alessandro Fornazzar of the University of Santiago de Chile records the academic dismissal of Allende in her native country on the grounds that she 'writes for the market,' while the Uruguayan writer Ana Valdés curtly dismisses Allende as the 'Latin American Jackie Collins.' The assumption that any work in a best-selling form cannot have any radical textual politics or insights is predicated upon the assumption of what Pamela Baccarisse has called the 'spurious nature of the social paradigms found in mass culture.' (p.1.)¹² However, is the observation that mass cultural paradigms are spurious always and everywhere true? Could it not be argued, in the spirit of the Mexican muralists, that there is something 'monumental' about the mass-market?

The work of the Argentine writer Manuel Puig, perhaps most famous for his novel *The Kiss of the Spiderwoman* (*El beso de la mujer araña*), suggests the value of popular forms.¹³ Puig's work draws on an extraordinarily wide range of mass-cultural texts from film, newspaper, women's magazines (and their agony columns) to boleros, tangos and even astrological consultations. These references should not be understood as a purely realist strategy deployed to evoke a faithful picture of lower-class life through a montage of its ephemeral forms. Puig was not interested in simply raiding mass culture to lend an air of verisimilitude to the literary novel, but was sympathetic to the lives, hopes and values of the people who were informed by it. One of his novels, *Boquitas Pintadas*, was published in the mass-market form of the *folletín*.¹⁴ The identification with the culture of the popular classes - and the use of mass forms such as the *folletín* - amounted to an attempt on Puig's part to redress the dismissal of mass culture by theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer.¹⁵ Far from being the medium for the dissemination of the culture of reification it has a positive value as the discursive domain through

which the majority of people come to articulate their experiences and lend significance to their lives. For that reason it should be courted by an intelligentsia - particularly an intelligentsia with a progressive agenda - and not dismissed with an almost reflex parnassian disdain. In consideration of Puig's work in her book *Impossible Choices* Pamela Baccarisse tellingly records the process of this rejection:

[Adverse criticism] sprang from the prejudiced and short-sighted viewpoint of those who were unable to discern the positive and innovative value of Puig's refusal to observe [...] the "Great Divide" between mass culture and the canon of high modernism. (p.1.)

Puig herself addressed this distinction between mass culture and the canon in a rebarbative manner. For Puig, the eschewal of popular forms that obtained within a critical reception of his work reflected the kind of disavowal common to the strongly masculine - or *machista* - cultures of Latin America. 'I have the impression,' he states, 'that there is a parallel between the popular genres and the situation of women in countries with a *machista* culture: everyone enjoys themselves with them, but nobody respects them.' (translation my own.)¹⁶ Puig addressed the hypocrisy that attends the dismissal of mass-cultural forms, suggesting that people take a furtive pleasure in them while at the same time according them little respect. Should not mass culture be taken seriously, he implies, because it is so prevalent, so penetrating, and so integral to the lives of so many people? While a literary novel will have negligible impact moving solely within the recondite circles of the progressive academy and a that of a narrow bourgeois readership, popular forms - such as the *folletín* and the best-selling paperback - will be read by thousands if not millions of people. Puig suggests that they are of greater importance than examples of what Adorno has called 'autonomous art.' Writing such as that of Puig - and I shall argue Allende - has the possibility of a greater impact for its attempt to reach a wider readership than other writers who adhere to an austere, high-cultural agenda.

Laura Esquivel is another writer who uses popular form to advance

social critique. Her novel *Like Water for Chocolate* (*Como agua para chocolate*) also courts popular form, one somewhere between the *folletín* and women's magazines.¹⁷ It is written in chapters that correspond to the months of the year. Each chapter is prefaced by a recipe for the season that also ties in with the narrative weave of the text. It is, therefore, a novel that makes use of a range of popular forms of publishing that both cater to women's interests and articulate a set of cultural codes that seek to shape women's self-understanding. However, Esquivel's novel, like those of Puig, is not as bland as its hegemonic form might suggest. Esquivel uses the form to explore a culture of domination and exploitation within the home. The central and oppressive figure of the novel, Momma Elena, is a woman. Her expectation that her youngest daughter, Tita, should give up her life and love to devote herself to her mother's care exposes a subset of exploitative feminine expectations within *machista* culture. Tita has to work from dawn until late at night cooking and doing all the household chores. These unjust demands colour every aspect of the text, upsetting the warmth of the kitchen and even creeping sorrowfully into the dishes that are prepared from the text's recipes. *Like Water for Chocolate* became a bestseller in Mexico and beyond in translation. It also became a Spanish-language film that has showed throughout Latin America. In spite of the slightness of its form, one cannot help but speculate that it has achieved far more for women than the more literary narratives of such writers as the Argentinean Luisa Valenzuela and the Brazilian Clarice Lispector.¹⁸

Allende, like Puig and Esquivel, addresses important and often complex issues of a progressive nature within the form of the best-seller. If the function of literature is to persuade, then to persuade effectively - as Allende well knows - requires that the cultural forms of the majority are taken seriously. Just as the Mexican muralists hoped to break free of the *recherche* confines of salon art to reach a broad number of people, so Allende grasps the importance of breaking with an elitist form of literary practice so as to reach and communicate with a greater number of people: She directly addresses this issue in "Writing as an Act of Hope":

The opportunity to reach a large number of readers is a great responsibility. Unfortunately, it is hard for a book to stand against the message of the mass media; it's an unfair battle. Writers should therefore look for other forms of expressing their thoughts, avoiding the prejudice that only in books can they make literature. All means are legitimate, not only the cultivated language of academia but also the direct language of journalism, the mass language of radio, television and the movies, the poetic language of popular songs and the passionate language of talking face to face with an audience. These are all forms of literature. Let us be clever and use every opportunity to introduce ourselves in the mass media and try and change them from within. (pp.59-60.)

Allende states that there are good and persuasive arguments for a strategic use of mass media forms. Rather than write an austere literary novel with a radical political agenda, it would be to much greater effect to use the 'mass language of radio, television and the movies' intelligently, weaving serious political concerns in with the light narrative touch that the form requires. She comments in "Writing as an Act of Hope" that a large number of Latin American writers have tried knowingly to court popular forms expressly in order to communicate serious ideas to a wider public:

Many of the most important Latin American writers have been journalists, and they go back to it frequently because they are aware that their words in a newspaper or on the radio reach an audience that their books can never touch. Others write for the theatre or the movies, or write lyrics for popular songs. All means are valid if we want to communicate and don't presume to be writing for an educated elite or for literary prizes. (pp.60-61.)

Allende refers in this essay to the work of the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano. Galeano is just such a writer who has used mass forms to communicate important progressive ideas to a non-specialist readership. His work *The Open Veins of Latin America*, is a volume of Marxist-Leninist history - known popularly in Latin America as 'dependency theory' - that uses the tropes of the best-seller to try and reach a broad readership.¹⁹ 'This book was written,' he states in the epilogue, 'to have a talk with people. A non-

specialized writer wanted to tell a non-specialized public about certain facts that official history, history as told by the conquerors, hides or lies about.' (p.287.) Somewhat improbably for a work of social and economic history, it sold large numbers of copies in Latin America, owing at least in part to Galeano's use of the pacy, highly readable style most often associated with the best-seller.²⁰

Like Galeano, Allende is aware of both the possibilities and problems that are posed by mass culture. Since much criticism of Allende's work dismisses her as the dupe of mass cultural forms, I would like to suggest some of the inventive and knowing ways in which Allende explores different mass cultural forms, both acknowledging the opportunities that they present and the difficulties that they entail. In "Writing as an Act of Hope," Allende refers to Latin American soap opera. She acknowledges that soap opera - or the *telenovela* - is perhaps the most important cultural form in Latin America for its very popularity.²¹

In Venezuela, Jose Ignacio Cabrujas, a playwright and novelist, one of the most brilliant intellectuals in the country, writes soap operas. These shows are the most important cultural phenomenon in Latin America. Some people watch three or four a day, so you can imagine how important that kind of writing is. Cabrujas doesn't elude reality. His soap operas show a world of contrasts. He presents problems such as abortion, divorce, machismo, poverty and crime. (p.60.)

In *Eva Luna* Allende addresses the possibility of the *telenovela* as a medium through which to communicate serious political ideas. Towards the end of the novel *Eva Luna* has become the author of a new and experimental *telenovela* called *Bolero*. While *Eva* has some important news from her contacts in the *guerilla* about a prison break-out, she realizes that the true story will never emerge in the government censored press since it tells a tale of laughable incompetence on the government's part. She writes the events into an episode of *Bolero*, retelling the story as it in fact occurred. The successful transmission of this episode is foiled by one of the members of the ruling military *junta*. General Tolomeo Rodríguez reads the script and calls

Eva into his office and tells her that she must rewrite it. Bolero, then, is a meditation on the possibilities of radical form. It is in the thinking through of the problems that circumscribe Bolero that Allende runs up against the limits to the *telenovela* as a potentially radical cultural form.²²

If the *telenovela* disappoints, Allende remains undeterred in her attempts to identify a mass-media form that can be used for the effective dissemination of progressive political ideas. Radio, a medium that involves lower capital costs for both broadcasters and listeners is not as subject to the hegemonic demands that distort the *telenovela*.²³ In *The House of the Spirits* Allende explores the role of the radio as the means by which the popular songs of the communist singer Pedro Tercero García are disseminated.

One day he was invited to appear on a radio program, which was the beginning of a giddy popularity he had never expected. His voice began to be heard often on the radio and his name became known. But Senator Trueba never heard it, because he did not allow radios in his house. He viewed them as instruments for the uneducated, and purveyors of sinister influences and vulgar ideas. No one was further removed from popular music than he was... (p.263.)

Un día lo invitaron a un programa de radio y ése fue el comienzo de una vertiginosa popularidad que ni él mismo esperaba. Su voz comenzó a escucharse a menudo en la radio y su nombre se hizo conocido. El Senador Trueba, sin embargo, nunca lo oyó nombrar, porque en su casa no admitía aparatos de radio. Los consideraba instrumentos propios de la gente inculta, portadores de influencias nefastas y de ideas vulgares. Nadie estaba más alejado de la música popular que él... (p.203.)

Radio broadcasts find a much wider audience for the radical songs of Pedro Tercero García than they would otherwise have had. The genuine popular possibilities of the radio are also indicated in the anxiety it provokes in Senator Trueba, the *patrón*. It is precisely because they are instruments of the uneducated brought to life by vulgar ideas that they pose such a threat to him. His suspicion is quite justified. As the political tensions of the novel mount, it is through the medium of radio that Pedro Tercero is able to reach an audience throughout the country:

The foreman was right: those were stormy years. And that was precisely what Pedro Tercero García was proclaiming in his velvet voice, which thanks to the miracle of radio, now reached the most remote corners of the country. (p.353.)

El administrador tenía razón: las cosas estaban muy revueltas en esos años. Así lo andaba pregonando la voz de terciopelo de Pedro Tercero García, que gracias al milagro de la radio, llegaba a los más apartados rincones del país. (p.274.)

Cut off from this spurned medium, Senator Trueba is rarely confronted by the growing popularity of his ideological enemy Pedro Tercero. Allende describes a chance occasion in which the *patrón* happens across one of his seditious broadcasts. His only response is one of ineffectual rage:

Alba liked to sit with the cook at siesta time, listening to popular singing on the radio, especially the songs of [Pedro Tercero]. One day Senator Trueba entered the pantry and when he heard the voice on the radio he attacked the machine, smashing it with his cane until it was a pile of twisted wires and loose knobs, before the frightened eyes of his grand-daughter, who could not understand her grandfather's sudden fit. (p.319.)

A Alba le gustaba sentarse con la cocinera a la hora de la siesta, a escuchar por la radio canciones populares, especialmente las de [Pedro Tercero]. Un día entró el Senador Trueba al repostero y al oír la voz de la radio, se lanzó contra al aparato dándole de bastonazos hasta dejarlo convertido en un montón de cables retorcidos y perillas sueltas, antes los ojos espantados de su nieta, que no podía explicarse el súbito arrebato de su abuelo. (p.247.)

The translation of *canciones populares* as "popular singing" fails to make a distinction that exists in the Spanish. The term *popular* refers not so much to the pleasure that the songs afford but to the fact that they are of the popular classes and as such politically tendentious. This perhaps better explains the extreme reaction of Esteban Trueba who realizes that this is a form of political expression that he - as a representative of his class - cannot hope to control. It is neither centralized nor expensive and as such better characterizes the kind of medium that Allende had hoped for in the

telenovela.

Allende's interest in, and awareness of, her work's mass readership is not simply apparent in her reflections on the progressive possibilities of the *telenovela* and of popular radio. It can also be recognized in an analysis of Allende's adaptive use of the novel form, and in her changing linguistic and narrative style. Her first novel, as she states in "Writing as an Act of Hope," was written without an idea of its likely success:

In 1981, in Caracas, I put a sheet of paper in my typewriter and wrote the first sentence of *The House of the Spirits* [...] At that moment I didn't know why I was doing it, or for whom. In fact, I assumed that no one would read it except my mother, who reads everything I write. (p.41.)

Allende has said - with a degree of *faux naïveté* - that she did not know that what she was writing was in fact a novel, as if it were written in some kind of creative trance. The knowing integration of tropes and themes within the novel, and undeniable continuities with the tradition of the Latin American novel, place this claim in question.²⁴ What we may be surer of is that Allende had less of an idea of whom its readership - her mother aside - would consist. However, by the time that she sat down to write her second novel, *Of Love and Shadows*, her situation was very different. *The House of the Spirits* had been published not in Latin America but in Spain, only to recross the Atlantic after European success. Its critical and popular success led to translation and, subsequently, to triumph in a further twenty-five languages. Reflecting on this situation after the publication of her third novel, *Eva Luna*, Allende acknowledges that this success had made her acutely aware of both what and for whom she writes:

Six years and three books have passed since *The House of the Spirits*. Many things have changed for me in that time. I can no longer pretend to be naive, or elude questions, or find refuge in irony. Now I am constantly confronted by my readers, and they can be very tough. It's not enough to write in a state of trance, overwhelmed by the desire to tell a story. One has to be

responsible for each word, each idea. (p.44.)

Allende no longer pleads ignorance of the international trajectory of her novels nor of the sophisticated, cosmopolitan profile of her readership. This awareness is also apparent in her fiction. *Of Love and Shadows* is quite clearly written with regard for a foreign readership.

Allende states in "Writing as an Act of Hope" that *Of Love and Shadows* is a novel about the *desaparecidos* - 'the disappeared ones'. It is a *roman á clef* to a political massacre in Chile, in which four members of the Maureira family were killed at Lonquén in 1973, and similarly abandoned in a hidden grave. In the novel Allende seeks to tell the story of this act of terror so as to denounce 'repression and the impunity of the murderers[.]' (p.50.) The novel, then, could be considered a form of fictionalized testimony that seeks to make use of the empowered readership that it enjoys in the First World through translation. The Guatemalan indigenous leader Rigoberta Menchú's work, *I Rigoberta*, is the paradigm for the testimonial form.²⁵ Parallels between *Of Love and Shadows* and the genre-setting testimony of Rigoberta Menchú are not perfect. The comparison between the harrowing first-hand account of Menchú and Allende's ostensibly romantic novel is perhaps superficially in poor taste, a comparison that runs the risk of trivialization. While the two women's experiences of terror are qualitatively different, and their access to forms and modes of expression even more so, there yet exists a similarity in terms of the two very different works' ostensible strategies as texts. As with Menchú's text, Allende seeks to guide the reader through the unpalatable truths of political violence. In the course of the novel the experience of Evangelina Flores, the mother of the family that has witnessed the appalling violence of the terror, becomes a kind of discursive *mis-en-scene*. She leaves the country and goes on a world tour to denounce the repression before important and influential bodies.

She had a mission to fulfil. [...] [She] travelled throughout the world, denouncing the tragedy that had befallen her nation. She appeared before an assembly of the United Nations, in press conferences, on

television, at congresses, universities - everywhere - speaking about the desaparecidos, to ensure that the men, women, and children swallowed up by that violence would never be forgotten. (pp.279-80.)

Tenía un misión que cumplir. [...] [viajaba] por el mundo denunciando la tragedia de su patria. Se presentó en la asamblea de las Naciones Unidas, en ruedas de prensa, en foros de televisión, en congresos, en universidades, en todas partes, para hablar de los desaparecidos y para impedir que olvido borrara a esos hombres, mujeres y niños tragados por la violencia. (p.252.)

Just as Evangelina Flores' testimony acts as a kind of parallelism for the novel itself as a testimonial form, so the heroine of the novel acts as a cypher for the bourgeois reader, the addressee of such a form. Irene Beltrán is a figure with whom an international readership can identify. In the course of the novel she is taken on a journey from a life of comfortable, if not complacent, bourgeois ignorance to an understanding of the terror. This process of a coming to knowledge is a complex one. It requires that Irene be disabused of the consoling values of her social background - such as a tacit belief in social justice in bourgeois society - as she is initiated into a world that can no longer afford these illusions:

Until the day she visited the morgue, Irene Beltrán had lived in angelic ignorance, not from apathy or stupidity but because ignorance was the norm in her situation. Like her mother and so many others of her social class, she escaped into the orderly, peaceful world of the fashionable neighbourhoods, the exclusive beach clubs, the ski slopes, the summers in the country. Irene had been educated to deny any unpleasantness, discounting it as a distortion of the facts. (p.123.)

Irene Beltrán vivió hasta entonces preservada en una ignorancia angélica, no por desidia o por estupidez, sino porque ésa era la norma en su medio. Como su madre y tantos otros de su clase social, se refugiaba en el mundo ordenado y apacible del barrio alto, los balnearios exclusivos, las canchas de esquí, los veranos en el campo. La educaron para negar las evidencias desfavorables, descartándolas como signos equivocados. (p.113-4.)

The social class that Allende writes about here is also the one she is writing for, and the one for whom this testimonial is being fashioned. It is a

readership that she wants to persuade and to influence. Elsewhere in the novel, we begin to discover through Irene's reaction how it is that the bourgeois reader is supposed to respond to the revelations of the text. Francisco, Irene Beltrán's lover, begins to recognize her coming to knowledge and responds in a sympathetic manner.

That night Francisco noticed something different in Irene's eyes; he did not find the usual laughter and wonder. Her eyes had become dark and sad, the colour of dead eucalyptus leaves. Then he understood that Irene was losing her innocence, and that nothing should prevent her now from beginning to see the truth. (p.119.)

Esa noche Francisco notó algo diferente en los ojos de la joven, no encontró la risa ni el asombro de siempre. Sus pupilas se habían tornado oscuras y tristes, del tono de las hojas secas del eucalipto. Entonces él comprendió que estaba perdiendo la inocencia y ya nada podría que se asomara a la verdad. (p.110.)

These textual examples suggest ways in which Allende's novels encode her radical sense of popular form. This is also born out in analysis of her use of language. Just as the Nobel Laureate Rigoberta Menchú pragmatically abandoned Q'iche (an indigenous language of the Guatemalan altiplano) for Spanish in order for her testimonial to reach a wider audience - so Allende adopted certain pragmatic textual strategies that would find favour with a broader international readership. One such example is the reduced dialogue in *Of Love and Shadows*, which lends to the work a less localized feel. What the critic Patricia Hart has called her 'neutral tone' is a device which deliberately flattens the differences in speech between city and rural characters to accomplish a broader strategic effect.²⁶ Allende explicitly states that she wanted to typify the experience of a large number of indigenous and popular groups throughout Latin America in an interview with Marcelo Intili (translation my own): 'The lack of dialogue is a literary expedient. In literature dialogue is always colloquial and situates people within specific limits, and I wanted to flee this type of identification. How do you make a Chilean *campesino* speak unless you speak like that? Therefore

I avoided it because my intention was to invoke all of Latin America.²⁷

In addition to a more 'neutral' form of Spanish, *Of Love and Shadows* has a more straightforward narrative structure. Gone is the metafictional style that bridges four generations, mixing family and national history in the daring and original style of *The House of the Spirits*. *Of Love and Shadows* has a more linear narrative structure, almost as if it does not wish to beguile and confuse its readership with large helpings of Latin American invention and narrative magic. While it opens with a magical episode - the possession of Evagelina Ranquileo - the episode has an uncomfortable feel that does not seem at ease with the straightforward storytelling of the novel. It is almost as if this episode was *de rigueur* for a Latin American writer in the international market, beginning a novel a few months after Gabriel García Márquez had won the Nobel Prize for literature.²⁸

Of Love and Shadows explores the possibilities for the best-selling novel as a form of mass-cultural testimony. How successful has it been? Has the attempt to smuggle a form of testimony into the light form of the romantic novel worked? The answer has to be no. In many important respects Allende has been too accommodating. The novel's testimonial function is in a certain sense burlesqued by its light romantic plot. Far from sugaring testimony's bitter pill, she creates an unhappy and failed synthesis. One reviewer in the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* directly confronted Allende with the kind of misgivings that most readers interested in its politics feel: 'You describe in your latest novel burning kisses in front of mutilated corpses. Do you believe that one can bring down in this way a dictatorship like Pinochet's? Isn't the brutality rendered harmless when you adorn it with romantic love scenes?'²⁹ While the reviewer recognizes the intent that Allende has in the novel, he rightly questions its efficacy. It is my feeling that while the work is both an artistic and political failure, it should at least be accorded some credit for its attempt to introduce serious political issues into popular form. It amounts to a transgression of the codes of hegemonic fiction.

While I am far from convinced that Allende should be claimed as an adept manipulator of mass culture - for reasons that I shall discuss in

Chapter Six - I firmly believe that some of the bolder and more radical assertions of her work are overlooked in a dismissal of her as one who writes 'for the market.' To dismiss her in this way fails to recognize an enduring and intelligent interest in the politics of popular form that runs through her work. Furthermore, it also preempts a more careful reading of her work for the more complex and challenging ideas that it explores. Pamela Baccharisse makes a similar observation in *Impossible Choices*, her excellent criticism of the works of Manuel Puig:

The frequent and obtrusive references to works of art, artists, films, actors, composers, operas, plays, philosophers, philosophical systems - even to politicians, political events and ideologies - in the novels of Manuel Puig create a revealing auxiliary network of correlatives. [...] It is significant that the allusions that have been ignored are those made to areas outside the field of mass culture. (p.1.)

Beyond the dazzling banality of Allende's clinches and embraces, and against the *de rigueur* exoticism of her magical realist technique, there is an exploration of some genuine and involving political concerns. It is important to grasp that Allende's work, like Puig's and to a lesser extent Esquivel's, draws upon a dense substrate of resolutely counter-hegemonic ideas. No criticism that I have yet read on Allende mentions, for instance, her extraordinarily adept and sympathetic handling of Liberation Theology. I should like to draw this chapter to a close with an exploration of Allende's handling of Liberation Theology as an example of - or even a metonym for - a rich network of 'auxiliary correlatives' that exist in her work.

The role of the Catholic Church in Latin America has been ambivalent in political terms. The Church as an institution has traditionally colluded with the wealthy, projecting a spiritual landscape that is instrumental in shaping a compliant and acquiescent form of subjectivity. The promise of a life to come is used in mitigation of hardship and the inequitable distribution of resources in this world. In the first few pages of her first novel, *The House of the Spirits*, Allende uses the child Clara's astonishing lack of guile to acknowledge the social ends to which this heavenly narrative is put. While

the Del Valle family sits in its pew listening to the thunder of Padre Restrepo, Clara makes a penetrating observation about christianity:

'Psst! Father Restrepo! If that story about hell is a lie, we are all fucked aren't we...'

The Jesuit's index finger, which was already raised to illustrate additional tortures, remained suspended like a lightning rod above his head. People stopped breathing, and those whose heads had been nodding suddenly woke up. (p.17.)

- ¡Pst! ¡Padre Restrepo! Si el cuento del infierno fuera pura mentira, nos chingamos todos...

El dedo índice del jesuita, que ya estaba en el aire para señalar nuevos suplicios, quedó suspendido como un pararrayos sobre su cabeza. La gente dejó de respirar y los que estaban cabeceando se reanimaron. (p.14)

The furious priest calls her *endemionada* - possessed - for daring to question orthodox belief and the serviceable cosmology of terror that is spun from it. Further into the novel, Allende returns to Father Restrepo, noting that the brand of Christianity that he promulgates is that favoured by the Church as an institution. Restrepo, the priest who condemns Clara's free-thinking with the full arsenal of terror at his disposal, Allende assures us, is the one who will go farthest in the spiritual hierarchies of the church: 'Someone had uncovered the story of Clara's childhood muteness and the curse of Father Restrepo - that saintly man who the Church was hoping would become the first in the country to attain beatitude.' (p.148.) [Alguien desenterró la historia de la mudez de Clara durante su infancia y la acusación del Padre Restrepo, aquel santo varón que la Iglesia pretendía convertir en el primer beato del país. (p.114.)] Father Restrepo is marked for canonization, in spite of his lack of what we might think of as saintly qualities, since his brand of belief supports the extant social order. In this sense it could be argued along Althusserian lines that the Church is an ideological state apparatus, a kingpin that keeps in place the inequitable distribution of material resources in this world, by displacing aspirations to a spiritual domain, and besetting the course of dissent with all manner of metaphysical terrors. The passivity

that this brings about in the Christian subject is one that tellingly Allende raises later in the novel. Jaime, Esteban Trueba's socialist son, makes this connection explicit: 'He [Jaime] felt that Christianity, like almost all forms of superstition, made men weaker and more resigned, and that the point was not to await some reward in the sky but to fight for one's rights on earth.' (p.255.) [Decía que el cristianismo, como casi todas las supersticiones, hacía al hombre más débil y resignado y que no había que esperar una recompensa en el cielo, sino pelear por sus derechos en la tierra. (p.197.)]

The way in which the established church reinforces the message of conservative social formations has been the subject of theological schism. Disillusionment with a theology that showed little concern for the plight of the poor led to the development of a radical strand of Catholic thought known as Liberation Theology. Liberation Theology finds, extraordinarily, common ground with Marxist critique of relations of production. The theologian Paulo Friere's descriptions of poverty and powerlessness among the masses found utility in Marx's analysis of wealth and power specific to capitalism.³⁰ Liberation theologians began to speak in terms that defied the privatized interior world of the conscience, mobilizing social categories with concepts such as 'structures of oppression' and 'structures of sin.' Whereas the concept of sin had previously been placed within the context of the individual conscience, Liberation Theology uses it descriptively of the social world. Leonardo Boff, for example, breaks out of dominant theological paradigms to speak of a 'human and social hell.' (p.3.)³¹ In so doing, the classical Manichean drama of good and evil was taken from the subject to the world at large. The defining tenet of this theology is that it involves direct social action of redress. Boff makes the pun that renames liberation 'libera(c)tion' to stress the continuity of theory and praxis.

In *The House of the Spirits* Father Restrepo represents the fire-and-brimstone orthodoxy of the Catholic Church which serves the nexus of interests held by the Vatican and the state in Latin America. Father José Dulce Maria - the priest to the *campesinos* - represents the more radical interests of Liberation Theology. He quite clearly distinguishes between the

conservative function of the church and the radical potential of Liberation Theology's reading of the Christian message: 'My son,' he states, 'the Holy Church is on the right, but Jesus Christ was always on the left' (p.182.) [Hijo mío, La Santa Madre Iglesia está a la derecha, pero Jesucristo siempre estuvo a la izquierda - (p.139.)] In *The House of the Spirits*, Pedro Tercero García - the young campesino who later becomes a singer of insurgent songs - comes to radical consciousness through Liberation Theology and the radical exegesis of Father José Dulce María:

He also stole away at night to the bar in San Lucas, where he met with certain union leaders [or with] Father José Dulce María, a Spanish priest with a head full of revolutionary ideas that had earned him the honour of being relegated by the Society of Jesus to that hidden corner of the world, although that didn't keep him from transforming biblical parables into socialist propaganda. (p.163.)

También se escapaba en las noches al bar de San Luca donde se reunía con unos sindicalistas [o con] padre José Dulce María, un sacerdote español con la cabeza llena de ideas revolucionarias que le valieron ser regalado por la Compañía Jesús a aquel perdido rincón del mundo, pero ni por eso renunció a transformar las parábolas bíblicas en panfletos socialistas. (p.125.)

Allende's interest in Liberation Theology is not passing, but is sustained in her second novel *Of Love and Shadows*. The novel has a somewhat fastidious ideological topography that locates bourgeois values in the Beltrán family of the *barrío alto* - the rich neighbourhood - and radical argument in the Leal family of the poorer part of the city. The father of the family, Professor Leal, carries the radical bloodlines of the Spanish Republican movement of his native Spain to the next generation in the New World. His erstwhile communism - abandoned after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 in favour of Bakunin and anarchism - is complemented by the radical pastoral work of José Leal, his worker-priest son. The novel seems to resolve the oil-and-water mix of radical theology and historical materialist critique through the simple fact of their propinquity, both thriving under the same roof. Allende's handling of the two ignores the apparent contradictions at the level

of theory, remaining content to unite the two forms at the level of practice, in terms of what they actually *do*. This is itself an enactment of one of the defining tenets of libera(c)tion theology. While Professor Leal circulates radical pamphlets produced on his printing press, at the end of the novel it is the Catholic Church that acts to denounce the actions of the government in its covert campaign of political assassination.

In the course of this chapter, I have argued that Allende calls into question the assumptions of hegemonic aesthetics. I have suggested that Allende reassesses the signficatory function of the literary novel. It is important in reading Allende's work, not to be beguiled by the seemingly shallow nature of the best-selling form that she uses. Allende grasps the best-selling literary novel not as an 'end in itself', but as a potentially rich form with which to reach and persuade readers to a progressive cause. I have argued with the example of her adept handling of Liberation Theology that her work accomplishes the feat of combining mass-cultural form with counter-hegemonic content. In the following three chapters I shall consider Allende's use of similarly counter-hegemonic insights to persuasive political ends.

NOTES

1. Doris Sommer, "Irresistible Romance," in Homi Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, (London, Routledge, 1990.)
2. Edwin Williamson, *The Penguin History of Latin America*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991.)
3. A review from *El Pais*, cited on the back of the paperback English edition of *The House of the Spirits* is characteristic: 'This is a novel like no one writes any more: thick with plot and bristling with characters who play out their lives over four generations of conflict and reconciliation. A novel to be read for its brilliant craftsmanship and narrative of inescapable power.'

4. See for instance Peter Lewis, "Making Magic," an interview with Isabel Allende in the *Independent*, 3rd April 1993. Lewis describes her as a niece of President Allende.

5. Among other works Rómulo Gallegos wrote *Doña Barbara*, (Buenos Aires: Espasa Calpe, 1975.). Benjamin Disraeli published *Venetia*, (London: David Bryce, 1853.) and *Vivien Grey*, (London: Longman, 1881.). While Gallegos' novels considered issues of national identity, Disraeli is better remembered for his somewhat 'purple' prose.

6. While Alejo Carpentier is renowned for such sonorous and discursive works as *The Lost Steps* (London: Minerva, 1991.) and *The Kingdom of this World*, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1990.), the former British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd has written politically anodyne thrillers such as *Scotch on the Rocks* (London: Collins, 1971.) and *Truth Game* (London: Collins, 1972.) with little intellectual range. Former Conservative Health Secretary Edwina Currie recently published what she herself has described as a 'bonkbuster,' *A Parliamentary Affair*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1994.) in which politics is little more than intrigue.

7. Written during Allende's period of exile in Caracas this figure could be based on General Paez, the wild horseman known as 'el centaur de los llanos' [the centaur of the plains] who controlled Venezuela in the middle years of the 19th century.

8. Allende's short story in fact alludes to a moment in Latin American history in which exalted claims were routinely made for the practice of writing novels. Doris Sommer's "Irresistible Romance" describes the conditions of post-independence literature in which writers sought to provide both a cultural archive for the nation's new polity and consolidate allegiances between antagonistic social groups. It was, in Somer's account, an extraordinary moment in which literature was ascribed a giddily performative function. She cites the Argentinean José Mármol's *Amalia* (1851) and the Chilean Alberto Blest Gana's *Martín Rivas* (1862) as examples of novels that sought to accomplish ameliorative social objectives.

9. Allende recalls this mural in *Paula*. Interestingly it represented her first foray into artistic endeavour since Allende only began to write later when the family moved house: 'For years I painted [...] a complex mural in which were registered my desires, fears, rages, childhood doubts, and growing pains [...] When we left that house my mother gave me a notebook to record my life.' (p.55.) ['Durante Años pinté (...) un complejo mural donde quedaron registrados los deseos, los miedos, las rabias, las preguntas de la infancia y el dolor de crecer (...) Cuando nos fuimos de esa casa y me despedí del mural, mi madre me dio un cuaderno para registrar lo que antes pintaba. (P.67.)] Elsewhere in the text Allende makes reference to the Mexican muralists: 'My memory is like a Mexican mural...' (p.23.) ['Mi Memoria es como un mural mexicano...' (p.31.)]

10. David Siqueiros' 1922 "Manifesto of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors," published in *El Machete*, cited in Desmond Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros*, (London: Lawrence King, 1993.)
11. The post-colonial theory group referred to is managed by the Spoon Collective and can be found at "postcolonial @jefferson.village.virginia.edu"
12. Pamela Baccharisse, *Impossible Choices*, (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1993.)
13. Manuel Puig, *The Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Thomas Colchie (trans). (London: Vintage, 1991.)
14. The *folletín* is a cheap serial novel form that is enjoyed throughout Latin America. Puig's *Boquitas Pintadas* (Barcelona: Biblioteca de Bolsillo, 1991.) is not available in translation, possibly on account of its extraordinarily idiomatic use of localized forms of mass culture.
15. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973.)
16. Pérez Luna, "Con Manuel Puig," cited in Pamela Baccharisse in "Manuel Puig: *Boquitas Pintadas*," Philip Swanson (ed). *Landmarks in Modern Latin American Fiction*, (London: Routledge, 1990.) (p.104.)
17. Laura Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, Carol and Thomas Christensen (trans). (London: Black Swan, 1993.)
18. While Valenzuela and Lispector are more generally respected for the greater pedigree of their cultural references, one suspects that their works reverberate with nothing more genuinely challenging than a modernist iconoclasm of form, enjoyed by a narrow, highly literate readership. Valenzuela's novel *Lizard's Tail* suggests the homicidal turmoil of Argentina under the Generals through abstruse allusions to Latin American mythology and Lacanian psychology. Written in a prohibitively obscurantist stream-of-consciousness style, it alienates all but the most erudite and determined reader. Lispector's highly praised novel *The Apple in the Dark* explores the crime and punishment of a fugitive in a prolix narrative style that owes something to both Virginia Woolf and Albert Camus. Its pretensions to iconoclasm amount to little more than a late comer's rebuttal of the assumptions of 19th century realism. Luisa Valenzuela, *The Lizard's Tail*, Gregory Rabassa (trans). (New York: Farrar Strauss, 1983.), Clarice Lispector, *The Apple in the Dark*, Gregory Rabassa (trans). (London: Virago, 1985.)
19. Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, Cedric Belfrage (trans). (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973.)

20. A recent entry on dependency theory in Tom Bottomore (ed.), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought: Second Edition*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.) attests to the success of writers such as Eduardo Galeano in popularizing an otherwise abstruse theoretical discourse. Bjorn Hettne writes: 'This approach originated in Latin American writing, especially in the two decades ending in 1980, and although it is in decline as an academic school, similar ideas continue to inform radical popular movements [...] there is no doubt that *dependencia* ideas have passed into general political discourse and continue to thrive there.' (p.137.) It could be inferred from this that mass cultural forms - the often demonized forms of hegemonic culture - can and have been used to counter-hegemonic effect in Latin America.

21. William Rowe and Vivian Schelling provide an astonishing example to illustrate the influence that the *telenovela*, or soap opera, has in Latin America. They record that in the 1980's 40 million Mexicans - half the population - tuned in to watch a *telenovela* called *Cuna de Lobos* (Cradle of Wolves). When the last episode was shown, the capital came to a standstill. The underground drivers refused to work and most of the city stayed at home. See William Rowe and Vivian Schelling, *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America*, (London: Verso, 1991.)

22. While Allende describes these limits within a sovereign model of power in which a censor forbids the production of a particular work, Gramsci's concept of hegemony more accurately accounts for the way in which *telenovelas* reproduce reified cultural values. Rowe and Schelling comment on an interesting poetics of hegemonic consolidation at work within *telenovelas*: 'The *telenovela* offers a simplistic analysis of the problem [of class relationships] which is posited on the character of certain individuals and not the socio-economic reality of the country which is the real issue [...]' Rowe and Schelling go on to describe the way in which material inequality is finessed through an emphasis on the similarities of the feelings of the rich and poor characters. '[T]here is the democratic world of the emotions, where everyone is capable of the same intensity and in this sense class distinction disappears.' ("The telenovela: From melodrama to Farce," pp.108-111.)

23. William Rowe and Vivian Schelling, who are dismissive of the possibilities of the *telenovela*, respond differently to the progressive possibilities extended by the medium of radio. Unlike television, they argue that radio is a much less expensive medium in which to produce, broadcast and receive programs. As such radio is a form of media that is much more open to the dissemination of popular politics. They give as examples projects such as Radio Clandra in the Peruvian shanty town of Alta Pamplona and the People's Radio in Vila Aparecida near Rio in Brazil. The cheap technology involved in transmitting and receiving radio signals enables the stations to produce and broadcast on local issues in the languages and dialects of the region. Rowe and Schelling remark that these stations even broadcast soap operas written and recorded by local people.

24. *The House of the Spirits* in many respects answers to the traditions of the foundational romance of which Doris Sommer has written. The theme of romance in Alberto Blest Gana's *Martín Rivas* (Chile: 1862) is informed by the Comtian positivism that was popular in Latin America among ruling elites of the era. Positivism argued that a progressive society would naturally unfold from the synthesis of its antithetical elements. In *Martín Rivas*, the mining wealth of the north of the country is 'married' to commercial interests in the capital. In only seeing a need to reconcile capitalist elites, romance was purblind to the conflictual nature of class society. In a certain sense *The House of the Spirits* can be read as an interrogation of the omissions of romances such as *Martín Rivas*. In Allende's novel, the patrician romance (between Clara del Valle and Esteban Trueba) is contrasted with Esteban's continued rape of the *campesinas* on his estate. In spite of the elite's unwillingness to recognise the issue of class, the history of class exploitation that continued in the shadow of positivism's bland prescriptions comes back to haunt it. Esteban's bastard line through Pancha García takes its revenge on his legitimate grandchildren after the coup. There is, also, the whole issue of the novel's use of magical-realist tropes that are so suggestive of García Márquez. I consider these at length in Chapter Three.

25. See Rigoberta Menchú, *I Rigoberta*, (trans.) Ann Wright, (London and New York: Verso, 1984). Some of the theoretical issues surrounding testimonial literature that have arisen through Menchú's work are discussed in a recent publication. Allen Carey-Webb and Stephen Benz (eds.), *Teaching and Testimony: Rigoberta Menchú and the North American Classroom* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996.)

26. Patricia Hart, *Narrative Magic in the Work of Isabel Allende*, (London: Associated University Press, 1989.)

27. Marcelo Intili, "Una historia de amor sobre el fondo tragico de latinoamerica." *La Prensa*, (Buenos Aires), 5th June 1985, 5., cited in Patricia Hart., *Narrative Magic in the Fiction of Isabel Allende*.

28. Isabel Allende began *Of Love and Shadows* on the 8th of January 1983, months after García Márquez received the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature.

29. Cited in Patricia Hart, (p.137.)

30. Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (1970.)

31. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (trans.) Paul Burns, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987).

Chapter 3
**Making Strange: The Politics of Magical
Realism**

As I have argued in the first two chapters of this thesis, Allende's writing needs to be approached with reference to the hermeneutic codes of both a Latin American and an hegemonic critical tradition. Nowhere is this precept more important than with respect to Allende's use of the magical realist form. Far from being a wholly autochthonous movement, Latin American magical realism was first defined against a background of European artistic theory. The Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier - the figure who is generally credited with inventing the term - was resident in Paris for many years and was familiar with the French avant-garde and its luminaries. When Carpentier coined the phrase 'lo real maravilloso' ('the marvellous in the real') in the prologue to *The Kingdom of this World* (*El reino de este mundo*) he did so in an attempt to re-invent a form of cultural politics out of the failed iconoclasm of surrealism.¹ By 1949, the time in which he wrote the prologue, he felt that surrealism was a spent force:

[D]etermined to invoke the marvellous at any cost, the miracle workers turn into bureaucrats, calling on timeworn formulae which reduce certain paintings to a predictable jumble of drooping time pieces, dress makers dummies and vague phallic monuments, the marvellous is consigned to the umbrella or lobster or sewing machine, or whatever it may be, on an operating table, in the interior of a desolate room, in a desert of rocks. Imaginative poverty [...] consists in learning codes by heart. (p.ii-iii.)

Far from accomplishing the kind of social or cognitive transformation set out in its manifesto, surrealist work was becoming a routine exercise in form which could scarcely even manage to *épater la bourgeoisie*. In Carpentier's view it had become satisfied with a purely formal revolution which it endlessly rehearsed at the expense of its political goals. '[T]he marvellous born of disbelief - as in the long years of surrealism - was never more than a literary ruse, as tedious after a time as a certain brand of "ordered" oneiric literature.'(p.v.) The disruptions and displacements of surrealist technique had lost sight of their external ends, becoming satisfied instead with the bland autotelism of the bourgeois tradition. However, to Carpentier, the

similarly disruptive vision of Latin American indigenous culture had yet to be fully realized. In the novel to which this exposition of magical realism forms a prologue, the magical, almost hallucinatory, experience of Caribbean voodoo culture is ascribed the radical function that surrealism had lost. Just as the magical precepts of voodoo culture provided the focus for the slave revolts in late eighteenth-century Haiti - the subject of *The Kingdom of this World* - so the 'magical' religions, cults and cultures of contemporary Latin America offered a perspective from which to critique the intellectual values of the Enlightenment that had been somehow complicit in the colonial project. While Carpentier's experience of the magical sensibility was drawn from time spent in Haiti, he stated that it was 'the patrimony of the whole of America, where there has yet to be drawn up [...] a complete list of cosmogonies.' (p.vi.)

This sense of 'lo real maravilloso' as something more than the kind of formal iconoclasm of surrealism is suggested within the narrative of *The Kingdom of this World*. Following the slave revolt, the dissipated plantation owner Lenormand de Mézy realizes that the slaves drumming may possibly be something other than an appreciation of rhythm for its own sake: '[I]n certain cases a drum might be more than just a goat skin stretched across a hollow log. The slaves evidently has a secret religion that upheld and united them in their revolts.' (p.58.) A magical cultural inheritance could become both a continental rallying point around which the cultural inheritance of the old imperialist centres could be challenged and a kind of secret and seditious language in which to formulate some form of cultural resistance. In his subsequent novel, *The Lost Steps (Los pasos perdidos)*, Carpentier extended the practice that he had outlined.² In this novel he sought to move away from the heavily determining climate of European ideas - albeit modishly radical ones circulating in contemporary Paris such as surrealism and existentialism - toward an indigenous perspective. Within the novel, a journey is made to find a remote tribe in the far reaches of the Amazon basin. The integrity of the tribe's cultural beliefs, its conception of 'reality' and of time is taken by Carpentier to critique Western conceptions of temporality and epistemology.

While nothing actually 'magical' takes place in the novel, the text functions as a critique of deeply ingrained habits of cognition and social organization.

This project of Carpentier's was not, primarily, literary. That is to say it did not seek the enrichment of the formal repertoire of Latin American literature so much as the opportunity to give voice to alternative cultural perspectives as a part of a larger political project of emancipation. The political project contained in the term "lo real maravilloso" has, however, tended to be ignored in a Western critical celebration of the highly imaginative qualities of the form itself. In the period of little more than two decades that elapsed between Carpentier's formulation of "lo real maravilloso" and the publication of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* the cultural politics of the technique have become somewhat opaque.³ For example, Leonard Klein's guide to Latin American literature reverses the polarities of Carpentier's formulation, rendering the political a function of a primarily aesthetic project.⁴ '*One Hundred Years of Solitude*,' he writes, 'is not primarily a novel of social protest. Rather it is a poetic depiction of man's solitude in a labyrinthine universe he can never understand or dominate.' (p.137) This strategy is one that is often deployed in readings of Márquez's work, as the critic William Rowe has argued:⁵

In Britain, Márquez is usually thought of as a writer of fantasy. Critics and reviewers have again and again drawn attention to the "fantastic" and "magical" qualities of his work, and in so doing have to an important extent obscured the principal concerns of his writing. There are cultural reasons for this emphasis on the marvellous and the exotic. (p.191.)

Recent work in the study of Latin American culture by Michael Taussig, Neil Larsen, William Rowe and Vivian Schelling has variously sought to return the phenomenon of magical realism to its roots in popular culture. With the term 'popular culture', Rowe and Schelling refer not to the emanations of corporately owned mass culture, but the shared beliefs of the ethnically mixed popular classes of Latin America. In his studies of popular belief within indigenous groups in Columbia, the ethnographer Michael Taussig

has sought to define magical realism in epistemological terms rather than as a literary technique.⁶ His definition of magical realism, like that of Carpentier before him, seeks to place magic as an oppositional form of knowledge.

[Magic and religious faith] constitute an imageric epistemology splicing certainty with doubt, and despair with hope, in which dreaming - in this case of poor and country people - reworks the significance of imagery that ruling-class institutions such as the church have appropriated for the task of colonizing utopian fantasies. (p.165.)

William Rowe and Vivian Schelling also choose to define magical realism in terms of a popular 'magical' epistemology that reassigns the assumptions, functions and values of capitalist modernity.⁷ It is into this understanding of the cultural politics of a magical sensibility that Rowe and Schelling insert the work of Gabriel García Márquez. Márquez, they remind us, spent the first eight years of his life in the town of Aracataca where he was alive to the magical sensibility that permeated the oral tradition of the area, and, of particular significance, the stories that his grandmother told him. The magical qualities of Márquez's work, they argue, are derived from the magical epistemology of the peoples of the Caribbean coast of Columbia, whose Enlightenment cast of mind has been suffused with indigenous tradition and African religion. It is to this context that magical realism should be returned so as to be fully understood.

[Magical realism] has been removed from its sources in popular culture and as a result dehistoricized. [...] The magic that continued to be practised by the lower orders of society became an alternative knowledge, from below [...] located in the interstices rather than the official structures of society[.] [T]o legitimate magic can be a vindication of pre-capitalist culture, against the logic of capitalist accumulation and positivist social engineering. When García Márquez presents a world governed by magic he is breaking with those rationalist philosophies of nationhood which exclude popular culture as superstitious and valueless. (p.214.)

A magical epistemology is therefore celebrated as a critique of contemporary capitalist social relations and the forms of thought that are derived from it. It is almost as if, in these conceptions, a form of indigenous irrationalism has been charged with unthinking the work of rationalist modernity that has placed the world at the disposal of capitalist forces of production. It becomes the sign of epistemological difference, championed with a view to challenging capitalism rather than enriching its literary canon. This conception is very much contained within the work of the Peruvian anthropologist Rodrigo Montoya (cited in Rowe and Schelling) in his conception of 'magical socialism,' wherein 'the mythical dimension of Andean culture is deployed not as populist identity but as a critique of rationalism as the supposed basis of Western political practice. [...] The contribution of the indigenous peoples would be their tradition of reciprocity, solidarity and non-Cartesian thinking.' (p.165.) As a project it is consonant with the work of Deleuze and Guattari who argue that rational thought is not the harbinger of Enlightenment but the instrument of man's enslavement: 'it is not the slumber of reason that engenders monsters,' they conclude, 'but vigilant and insomniac rationality.' (p.112.)⁸

Ought it to be assumed, however, that this radical project -that seeks to use the indigenous sensibility as a means to undo reason as the instrument of capitalism - is what is being feted in international critical acclaim, and is that which operates as the impulse behind sales of millions of books? Is it not extraordinarily ironic that such a critique of capitalism should itself end up as a fast-selling commodity in the international market of the book? It could be that a more sophisticated analysis is required that is able to separate the radical intent of Carpentier and his followers from the process that makes magical realism so attractive a commodity within the venal world of international publishing. Magical realism as a *textual* form is always and already a much more complex mediation of signifiatory practices, influences and effects. It has a set of associations that can no longer be produced as identical to its 'origins' in indigenous culture. To understand magical realism, particularly that of late-coming and popular practitioners

of the technique such as Isabel Allende, it must be understood in a more dialectical way. Allende's magical realism has a distinct textual politics but it is much more heterogeneous in nature.

While Alejo Carpentier derived his formative conception of magical realism from the voodoo culture of Haiti and Gabriel García Márquez from the rich cultural mix of the Caribbean coast of Colombia, Isabel Allende has much more tenuous links to the world of magical popular culture.⁹ She is from Chile, not only that, from the capital Santiago. Allende has herself remarked that Chileans regard themselves as a case apart, more European than the rest of Latin America in terms of their culture and polity.¹⁰ While it could be argued in the manner of Rowe and Schelling, that indigenous culture lurks in the fissures of the Enlightenment discourses of hegemonic culture and could, therefore, find its way into Allende's texts, that is not the social position from which Allende wrote. Allende is, I will argue, as remote as one could be from such popular sources, coming as she does from middle to upper class metropolitan Chilean society.¹¹

The indigenous peoples of Allende's native Chile - taken as the cultural group within which a magical sensibility could be located - have a kind of alterity in her work, and appear as figures of frightening, untransgressable difference. In *Paula*, Allende recalls a train journey from a port in northern Chile to Santiago, that is revealing of her attitude to the indigenous peoples of Latin America:

We travelled in the last car of the train, in the company of an enigmatic Indian who never spoke a single word and spent the entire trip kneeling on the floor beside a small stove, chewing his coca, scratching his lice, and gripping an archaic rifle. Day and night his small, oblique eyes watched us, his expression impenetrable. (p.61.)

Ocupábamos el último vagón del tren en compañía de un indio enigmático, que no hablaba palabra y permanecía siempre en cuclillas en el suelo junto a un estufa, masticando coca y rascándose los piojos, armado con un rifle arcaico. Día y noche sus ojillos oblicuos nos

observaban con expresión impenetrable. (p.73.)

The Indian emerges as a culturally remote figure within Allende's description. His being remains an enigmatic secret maintained by his impenetrable stare. Time spent together in the railway carriage is not, however, time shared. The description begins to trace the boundaries of Allende's cultural experience, placing her - and her social group - to one side, and that of indigenous people to the other.¹²

In *The House of the Spirits*, that which can scarcely be described as Allende's relationship to the world of indigenous culture is further elaborated. The Indians are not a part of the social milieu of the Trueba family, but are the distant figures who labour in the fields of Tres Marias and who wait at the table of Blanca's husband Jean de Satigny. As the narrator comments, they seem 'to exist in some other dimension.' (p.291.) ['que parecía existir en otra dimensión.' (p.225.)] Allende's access to this 'other' dimension is strictly limited. Like the subject of an early imperial letter home, the Indians of the novel have generalized features and not ones specific to individuals.¹³ When ordered to fetch some candied papaya, the Indian servant who waits at Jean de Satigny's table 'set off,' we learn 'at the slow trot typical of his race.'(p.97.) ['El indio se fue con el trote lento de los de su raza.' (p.230.)] As the novel develops, the Indians' cultural difference is not lessened with familiarity but intensified. In writing of the dark sexual experiments of Blanca's husband Jean de Satigny, it is the presence of the Indians that tip the balance of the sexual encounters from the erotic, to that of a terrifying alterity.

Blanca was slow to react, and it was a while before she realized what she saw, because she had no experience in such matters.[...] These chaotic, tormented scenes were a thousand times more disconcerting than the scandalous mummies she had expected to find. She recognized the faces of the household servants. There was the entire Incan court, as naked as God had put them on this earth, or barely clad in theatrical costumes. She saw the fathomless abyss between the thighs of the cook, the stuffed llama riding atop the lame servant girl, and the silent servant who waited on her at table, naked as a newborn

babe, hairless and short-legged, with his expressionless stone face and his disproportionate, erect penis. For an interminable second, Blanca was suspended in her own uncertainty; then she was overcome with horror. [...] She also glimpsed the sinister power of the Indian and the subtle mockery of the servants, and felt herself a prisoner in the anteroom of hell. (p.297.)

Blanca era de reacciones lentas y tardó un buen rato en asimilar lo que estaba viendo, porque carecía experiencia en esos asuntos. [...] Esas escenas desordenadas y tormentosas eran un verdad mil veces más desconcertante que las momias escandalosas que había esperado encontrar. Reconoció los rostros de los sirvientes de la casa. Allí estaba toda la corte de los incas, desnuda como Dios la puso en el mundo, o mal cubierta por teatrales ropajes. Vio el insondable abismo entre los muslos de la cocinera, a la llama embalsamada cabalgando sobre la mucama coja y al indio impertérrito que le servía la mesa, en cueros como un recién nacido, lampiño y paticorto, con su inmovible rostro de piedra y su desproporcionado pene en erección. Por un interminable instante, Blanca se quedó suspendida en su propia incertidumbre, hasta que la venció el horror. [...] Vislumbró también el siniestro poder del indio, la burla solapada de los sirvientes y se sintió en la antesala del infierno. (p.231.)

The 'expressionless stone face' of the Inca recalls the impenetrable expression of the Indian in the railway carriage. The coca leaves, the oblique eyes and strange squat as incipient signs of cultural difference are amplified in this passage. The Inca has a disproportionately large erect penis, an attribute that nudges cultural difference into a nightmarish dimension. This realm of unfathomable difference is described as 'the evil kingdom of the Incas,' a domain that is wholly beyond the familiar everyday reality of the narrator.

From this I would argue that magical realist tropes in Allende's work do not arise from a shared, working knowledge of the magical sensibility of Andean culture. What then can the sources of the magical be taken to be in her work? Allende's experience of the austere life of middle-class Santiago de Chile does not, in itself, amount to the entirety of her experience of Latin American indigenous culture. It could be argued that Allende had further direct experience of the kind of popular Caribbean culture common to Márquez and gestured to by Carpentier as an exile in Venezuela. Allende's contact with the popular 'magic' of the Caribbean seems, however, to have

been intermittent and somewhat anecdotal. In *Eva Luna*, Eva's *madrina* - or godmother - practices a religion common among the popular classes of the Caribbean known as *santería*. It is a syncretic mixture of belief in the catholic saints, religions of African origin and in the case of *la madrina*, 'various others of her own invention.' (p.44.) ['y en varios más de su invención.' (p.51.)] This gives the novel a magical Venezuelan feel while not ultimately assuring the reader of Allende's own access to a magical world view. In *Paula*, Allende describes her own relationship to Caribbean popular magic in terms that retain, on the contrary, an ironic distance. She describes an occasion in which she scrubbed the school building in which she worked with a foul-smelling potion recommended by the school's Columbian cleaner. The magical charm, which Allende calls *Quitapava*, was believed to bring back business.

[We] scrubbed the floor on our hands and knees, murmuring the ritual words and smothering our giggles, because if we openly made fun the whole enterprise would have been shot to hell: seriousness and good faith are required if you want sorcery to work. (p.269.)

[L]avamos a gatas el suelo con unos estropajos, murmurando las palabras rituales y conteniendo la risa, porque si nos burlábamos abiertamente se iba todo al carajo, las brujerías sólo funcionan con seriedad y fe. (p.297.)

Scrubbing the school with the magical preparation was not an endeavour undertaken with faith but with an amused curiosity, alive to the exoticism of its system of belief. Within the urban, middle-class setting of Caracas, the practice of popular magic, while sharing a certain contextual propinquity, is yet the far side of the race/class divide first marked by Allende's experience in Chile. As a point of contact with which to connect Allende with the sources of popular culture it is at best tenuous, since her interest is simply that of a curious observer from another culture. It does not amount to a position of cultural difference from which magic is produced in the strictly mimetic terms that are supposed in Rowe and Schelling's argument.

The other indigenous peoples who appear in Allende's fiction pose

similar problems for an attempt to locate the author within a discrete 'magical' culture. The Indians of the Venezuelan jungle that appear in *Eva Luna* and her short stories "Walimai" and "Ester Lucero" from *The Tales of Eva Luna* have a distinctly chic alterity. They are the *cause celebre* who have received the benediction of such Western institutions as the *Body Shop* and Sting. The position of this kind of Indian has been well shaped within a long tradition of metropolitan discourse dating at least as far back as the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.¹⁴ This tradition places the Indians of the forest outside the social contract in a world without alienation, conceived in either Marxist terms as 'labour power', or, in deconstructive terms as the lapse from 'speech' into 'writing'.¹⁵ While Allende celebrates the Indians for their implied critique of capitalism - which I comment on at length in Chapter Four - Mario Vargas Llosa's novel *The Storyteller* (*El hablador*) uses them to champion what Derrida has characterized as a wavering metaphysics of presence.¹⁶ Allende's knowledge of, and interest in, the Indians of the forest is not that of first-hand participant in their culture and modes of belief. Her references to the Amazonian Indians in her short stories are largely shaped by a metropolitan inheritance.¹⁷

Allende, seemingly in anticipation of criticism that she is remote from indigenous culture, has variously attributed her use of magical realist tropes to other, more specific influences. She has stated in an interview with Peter Lewis of *The Independent* that the character of Clara del Valle was based on her clairvoyant grandmother who would hold seances in the house in which she grew up.¹⁸ The figure of Allende's 'magical' grandmother, then, acts as the guarantor of access to this alternative cognitive realm, a realm that membership of a patrician elite in a developed metropolis otherwise renders unconvincing. But, how reliable a witness is Allende to her own experience? Is she to be believed in her insistence on the magical aspects of her family life? The two versions of the following anecdote taken from the author's notes to an early Spanish edition of *The House of the Spirits* would suggest that truth is, on occasion, subjected to the demands of expedience in Allende's self-mythologization. (translation my own)¹⁹

When I packed the suitcase to leave Chile I threw a few handfuls of earth from the garden in a bag. In Caracas I put it into a flowerpot and planted a forget-me-not in the Chilean soil. Over the years it has done nothing but grow and grow, like my nostalgia.

Cuando hice la maleta para irme de Chile eché unos puñados de tierra del jardín en una bolsa. En Caracas la puse en un macetero y planté en la tierra chilena un nomeolvides. Durante estos años no ha hecho más que crecer y crecer. Como mi nostalgia.

The event described, while deeply romantic and somehow gnostic in its characterization of exile, is not in fact true. Allende returns to the forget-me-nots in *Paula* to tell a very different story.

One day in the bottom of a suitcase, I found a small plastic bag containing handful of soil and remembered that I had brought it from Chile with the idea of planting in it the best seeds of memory [...] in a quiet, very personal, ceremony I mixed Venezuelan earth with the dirt from my old garden, filled a flowerpot, and planted a forget-me-not. The spindly plant that came up was ill-suited for that climate and promptly died. (p.265)

Un día encontré en el fondo de una maleta una pequeña bolsa de plástico con un puñado de tierra y recordé que la había traído de Chile con la idea de plantar en ella las mejores semillas de la memoria [...] en una discreta ceremonia íntima mezclé la tierra de mi antiguo jardín con otra venezolana, la puse en un macetero y planté un nomeolvides. Brotó una planta raquílica, inadecuada para ese clima, y pronto murió chamuscada. (p.293)

Truth - in this instance - is not allowed to spoil an anecdote filled with the literary resonance of exile. Similarly, the truth of - one suspects - a distinctly ordinary childhood is not permitted to jeopardize Allende's credibility as an author in the magical realist style. Allende has the habit in interview of sketching in details of an other-worldly childhood in a way that is distinctly reminiscent of characters from García Márquez who relate the most fantastic occurrences with a kind of *sang froid*. In an interview with Marcelo Intili Allende characterizes the supernatural world of her childhood in a an off-hand way, as if it were a quotidian reality scarcely worth the mention:

(translation my own)²⁰

My mother [...] when she separated from my father, went to live in my grandparent's house, and I grew up there [...] with [...] a clairvoyant grandmother who moved objects with the power of her mind, and is the character of Clara in *The House of the Spirits*.

Mi madre [...] al separarse de mi padre, fue a vivir a la casa de los abuelos, y yo me crié allí [...] con [...] una abuela clarividente que movía objetos con el poder de la mente, y que es el personaje de Clara en *La casa de los espíritus*.

Similarly in her interview with Peter Lewis of *The Independent*, Allende forthrightly states that her grandmother 'held seances every day with her spiritualist friends,' and that '[n]obody thought it was weird.' (p.26.) As with the forget-me-nots, the veracity of these claims appear to be subordinate to romantic expediency. In *Paula*, Allende experiences another unguarded moment of self-revelation from which her grandmother's prodigiously magical world emerges as pure invention:

This marvellous woman left no physical trace of her presence [...] Neither did she leave me many memories, and those I have are surely deformed by a child's view of that time and by the passing of the years. [...] I have heard people talk about her, and I heard her few remaining relics in a tin box. All the rest I have invented, because we all need a grandmother. (p.27.)

Esta mujer prodigiosa no dejó rastro de su paso por este mundo [...] Tampoco me dejó muchos recuerdos y los que tengo deben estar deformados por mi visión infantil de entonces y el paso del tiempo [...] He escuchado hablar de ella, conservo en una caja de lata las únicas reliquias tuyas que han perdurado y el resto lo he inventado porque todos necesitamos una abuela. (p.37.)

In spite of Allende's repeated statement of the reality of the spirits of her childhood and of her grandmother's clairvoyance there is strong textual evidence that she has fabricated it. Allende begins to emerge not so much as a writer whose life is touched by the magical but as writer who romanticizes her life to render it less prosaic, in keeping with the principle she outlines

in *Eva Luna* 'that we can construct reality in accordance with our desires.' (p.271.) ['al principio de que es posible construir la realidad a la medida de las propias apetencias.' (p.303.) Elsewhere in the course of her work there are consistent refusals of the powers of the supernatural, that seem to establish Allende as more sceptical, if not decidedly rationalist in outlook. Elsewhere in *Paula* - a book that is at once autobiography and an account of her daughter's fatal illness - Allende emerges as someone without conviction in the magical. Writing of her daughter's coma in a Madrid clinic, Allende dismisses the contribution to her recovery made by a stream of alternative practitioners. 'We need,' she states, 'more science and fewer exorcisms.'(p.160.) ['necesitamos más ciencia y menos exorcismos.' (p.179.)] The sense of magic as the inefficacious domain of charlatany is also to be found in her second novel, *Of Love and Shadows*. The heroine Irene Beltrán is shot by the security forces and ends up under intensive care in hospital. Among her visitors is the astrologer from the magazine for which she works, who arrives in theatrical costume with a balm to relieve weakness:

It was useless to argue that Irene's prostration had been caused by bullets, not debility. The astrologer insisted on blaming the zodiac: Scorpio attracts death. It was similarly pointless to remind her that Scorpio was not Irene's sign. (p.265.)

Fue inútil explicarle que la causa de esa prostración eran balas de metralla. Insistió en culpar al zodiaco: Escorpión llama a la muerte. Tampoco sirvió recordarle que Irene no pertenecía a ese signo. (p.239.)

Astrology - in the context of the lethal politics of the repressive state - appears as a ridiculous and inappropriate form of knowledge, stripped of any esoteric charm.

If Allende's magical realist technique cannot be derived from any direct experience of the magical - whether through a knowledge of indigenous culture or an experience of clairvoyance - its provenance should perhaps be sought elsewhere. Since indigenous and biographical sources

have been exhausted, quite counter-intuitively one has to begin to look away from the text's point of origin for to its point of reception for an adequate answer. While aware of the irony, I would suggest that one 'source' would be the market's taste for Latin American magical realism as a regional inflection of modernism.

The account of magical realism offered by some authors of the Latin American 'boom' apparently marks a telling difference from the project conceived by Carpentier. Mario Vargas Llosa, for example, suggests that a magical narrative strand in Latin American fiction owes to the suppression of the novel in colonial times by the Inquisition. Fiction - conceived as fabulation deriving from romance - thereby insidiously contaminated the fabric of everyday experience, only to emerge later by some obscure process of osmosis in the fantastic novels of the 'boom' era.²¹ Vargas Llosa's literary history produces magical realism as an adjunct to a European literary tradition stemming from the medieval romance. Absent from Vargas Llosa's account is any mention of critique implied by Carpentier's strategic championing of indigenous modes of 'magical' cognition. Similarly, when Allende gives account of magical realism in an interview (with Peter Lewis of *The Independent*) she does so in terms that are far far from specific to Latin America.

Let's be clear what magical realism means. It's not a literary device that applies to Latin American writers alone. [...] Magic realism really means allowing a place in literature to the invisible forces that have such a powerful place in life [...] dreams, myth, legend, passion, obsession, superstition, religion, the overwhelming power of nature and the supernatural. All these are present in African poetry, Hindu sagas, Arab tales, and used to be present in Western literature up to the Gothic novel and Edgar Allen Poe. Only in the past few decades have they been excluded by white male authors who decided that whatever cannot be controlled doesn't exist. (p.26.)

Allende describes magical realism as a practice that is common to a number

of narrative traditions. She defines it as an attempt to evoke the noumenal mysteries of life that are masked by the strident realist narratives of 'white male authors.' She suggests that through a rupture with hegemonic form it might yet evoke these intractable mysteries more faithfully. In many respects, this argument shares a great deal with dominant literary modernism (such as the writing of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce) that sought to sunder hegemonic form so as to present a more faithful representation of a fragmented modernity. It is important to note that the radicalism of such an understanding is only superficial. The revolution that it heralds is only formal; literature's end remains mimesis rather than critique. In this respect, Allende is much closer to the literary values of hegemonic literary criticism than to the political ends envisaged by Carpentier.

There comes a distinct and uneasy sense from reading Allende's work that she is somehow complaisant: eager to satisfy hegemonic expectations of what Latin American literature should be. It could be argued that Allende's use of a magical realist technique is not so much autochthonous as a response to an hegemonic demand for reinfections of modernism from the periphery. There is certainly evidence in her work that magical realism is not so much a narrative style that she feels comfortable with, but one that she adopts in response to an international readership. In *The House of the Spirits* magic takes the form of whimsically fantastic touches that have a distinctly *de rigueur* feel to them. The text opens on to a world marked by magical, or at least other-worldly circumstances, that do not feel particularly integral to the narrative. Rosa the beautiful has - somewhat improbably - green hair and the air of a mermaid about her; Tio Marcos' aeroplane defies standard aerodynamics and flies with capricious beats of its wings, and, the family dog Barabas is more a kind of mythical beast since it grows to a prodigious size. These opening events are oddly isolated and somehow gratuitous to the subsequent development of the novel. The narrative soon abandons the fantastical direction of its beginnings and treats the impending military coup in a markedly realist style. The effect that this has is to confuse the reader since the congruity of a realist structure that rises so assuredly from such

fantastical foundations is somehow thrown into question. It is, as Paul West writing in *The Nation* had noticed, almost as if Allende felt obliged to write in a certain favoured style before acceding to a form to which she was better suited: 'As *The House of the Spirits* advances, it calms down into the book Allende probably wanted to write and would have if she had not felt obliged to tow the line of magical realism.'²² A second reviewer, Marion Glastonbury of *The New Statesman*, noticed the uncomfortable movement between magical and realist narrative modes in *The House of the Spirits*. This she characterises not so much as a problem of influence as an uneasy yet knowing accommodation on the author's part with the expectations of a market created by García Márquez's prior success: 'No doubt necrophily and necromancy sell well, but they are not what Isabel Allende does best.'²³ Allende's second novel *Of Love and Shadows* - also published by Plaza and Janes in Spain to a large European readership - begins very awkwardly with a magical realist episode that appears to have been conceived in the most *de rigueur* manner before being abandoned for straightforward realist narrative. At the outset of the novel, a peasant girl Evangelina Ranquileo is discovered to have miraculous powers that attract the sick and the curious. Her powers also attract the attention of the army who come to investigate and then arrest her. During the arrest, Evangelina becomes possessed of a superhuman strength that enables her to manhandle the arresting adjutant, and throw him out of the house. Far from establishing a sense of the marvellous, Allende achieves incredulity, a different effect altogether. The incident's lack of credibility proves Allende to be a poor copyist who does not understand the first rules of the technique that is purported to be the continent's patrimony.²⁴

Allende's third novel, *Eva Luna*, while not strictly magical realist in style, has a fabulous setting and certain tropes derivative of García Márquez. It too attracted reviews that felt uncomfortable with the juxtaposition of a wide ranging and discursive narrative style with oddly incongruous magical touches. As the reviewer Ignacio Valente of the Chilean newspaper *El mercurio* noted (translation my own):²⁵

From the beginning one can appreciate the formal dilemma of *Eva Luna*, which fluctuates between the discoveries and energies of the best current Latin American narrative on the one hand, and the popular vaguely García Márquian story on the other, that sells like hot-cakes or exotic liquor in the international market of the book.

The review, entitled "*Eva Luna: Between Quality and Success*" ("*Eva Luna: entre la calidad y el éxito*,") dichotomizes literary quality and market success. The implication is that magical realism has become a kind of textual requirement for commercial fiction, quite apart from a Latin American conception of literary quality. Allende is certainly aware of the powerful commercial appeal to magical realism. There is a knowing acknowledgement of the inducement to write commercial fiction in *Eva Luna*:

Mimí had begged me to leave that unproductive job and dedicate myself to writing. Ever since she had seen a line of people outside a bookstore waiting to have their books signed by a thickly mustached Colombian writer on a triumphal tour, she had showered me with notebooks, pencils and dictionaries. (p.201.)

Mimí me había rogado que dejara ese empleo de pacotilla y me dedicara sólo a escribir. Desde que vio una cola de gente ante una librería, esperando turno para que un bigotudo escritor colombiano en gira triunfal firmara sus libros, me colmaba de cuadernos, lapiceras y diccionarios. (p.224.)

The mustachioed Colombian is of course an allusion to Gabriel García Márquez, an author who is tellingly valued more for his market success than for his literary originality. This anecdote, that posits the market as the end to which magical realism is oriented, should in fact be taken a little more seriously with respect to Allende's own work. The commodity status of 'magic' is something that Allende shows an awareness of in her most recent novel, *The Infinite Plan*. In the novel, the Russian mystic Olga is a clairvoyant of commercial variety who peddles magic as a form of merchandise. Allende explicitly acknowledges the commercial aspect of this magic in a passage in which Olga makes a distinction between types of magic that sell and those

that do not. 'She had never dabbled in black magic,' Allende writes, 'because it was not good business; she earned much more helping her clients than she did putting curses on their enemies.' (p.272.) ['Jamás le había interesado la magia negra porque no representaba un buen negocio, ganaba mucho más ayudando a sus clientes que maldiciendo a sus enemigos.' (p.249.)] In this passage the radical project of Carpentier's "lo real maravilloso" has been forgotten. It gestures with scarcely perceptible irony to the way in which magic - and magical realism as its textual variant - has become a commodity. It is the indispensable characteristic of a Latin American novel, a hallmark of the regional authenticity of the text in question. It is this hybridity, if not straightforward ersatzness that criticism fails to contend with.

There is a tendency in comparative literary criticism to work within certain binaristic oppositions such that any conception of the ersatz within the original text is not so visible. The notion of the source language of the literary work, which is generally opposed as a domain of original plenitude to the translation's somewhat lacking simulacra. Similarly, the textual domain of original literature is often grasped as one of authenticity, in which terms and concepts have an oppositional integrity. William Rowe's argument for the special origins of magical realism - as an example - reproduces this by collapsing the categories of literature into those of the epistemology of the popular classes.²⁶ Latin American literary production is seen therefore as an authentic autochthonous form of expression self-identical with popular (in the sense of oppositional) culture. This action generally serves to suppress criticism of conservative strategies operating within the literary text itself. The charge of conservatism tends to become displaced onto the foreign readership as the forces of reaction who persistently misconstrue the original meaning of the text through the application of hegemonic protocols of reading. The undialectical desire to champion Latin American literature as oppositional becomes blinded to the reactionary influences inherent in that work. Magical realist literature - at least that of Allende and arguably that of García Márquez - should not be conceived as original, complete and oppositional in this way. It shares, I have argued, much more with a

hegemonic understanding of literature exemplified by the market's taste for modernism than with an oppositional politics of identity. Allende, I would argue, cathects - that is to say occupies in response to a desire - a position assigned the Latin American writer by the market. A position from which only homespun and exotically indigenist truths are enunciable in accordance with an international (and 'post-colonial') taste for regional inflections of modernism. William Rowe's remark that 'we need to acknowledge the part played by our own escapism' (p.192.), aimed as a reproach to readers, should be opened up to a more inclusive use of the first person plural to include critics. A wholesale and uncritical embrace of the previously derided is a gesture that is yet locked into the Manichean binarism's of colonial thought.

I have argued so far that magical realism does not live up to its promise as a radical form of representation that champions cultural difference, as has often been claimed for it. The politics of magical realism as a form of writing becomes completely confused as it draws not simply from indigenous sources but also from the repertoire of modernist literature. Even in Márquez's work the relationship to modernism appears stronger than an affiliation to popular knowledge, and in Allende's work the relationship to popular knowledge is so attenuated as to be negligible.²⁷ Furthermore, the possibility of a politics of cultural difference emerging from magical realist writing is compromised by the perverse expectations of a large foreign readership, to whom difference panders to an extant taste for the exotic shaped along largely metropolitan lines. What place remains, then, for magical realism in a consideration of counter-hegemonic strategies in the work of Isabel Allende? Is the project so utterly compromised by its unacknowledged influences, false affiliations and systematically aberrant decoding as to be without prospect? I would argue that in a certain sense a refusal of the standard attribution of magical realism to indigenous sources opens up the technique to other influences that are normally placed off limits. I would argue that magical realism has potent political possibilities albeit drawn from an unlikely quarter.

In spite of the awkward - if not cynical - deployment of touches that have been described as vaguely *garciamarquista*, Allende uses magical devices in ways that are in keeping with the radical conception of magical realism offered by Alejo Carpentier. In *Eva Luna* there is evidence to suggest that Allende uses magical realism in a way that is much closer to Carpentier's original conception. Carpentier had originally envisaged it not so much as a technique to replenish hegemonic art's formal repertoire but one that accomplished external ends. Towards the end of the novel, the narrative tension mounts as Eva gets drawn ever deeper into the intrigues of the guerilla movement. While involved with the guerillas in the jungle Eva returns to the remote village of Agua Santa to retrieve the jewels that had been given to her by Riad Halabi. On her return to the capital however, Eva tells her *madrina* Elvira that she had come by the jewels in the mythical city of Eldorado as an expedient way to cover for a story that is too complex and delicate to tell.

I didn't steal them, abuela. Out in the jungle there is a city of pure gold. The cobblestones of the street are gold, the roof tiles are all of gold, the carts in the market place are gold, and all the benches in the plaza - even peoples teeth are gold! And there children play with coloured stones like these. (p. 257.)

No me lo robé, abuela. En medio de la selva hay una ciudad de oro puro. De oro son los adoquines de las calles, de oro las tejas de las casas, de oro los carretones del mercado y los bancos de las plaza, y también son de oro los dientes de todos sus habitantes. Allí los niños juegan con piedras de colores, como éstas. (p.286.)

The myth of Eldorado - the fabulous golden city that so beguiled the conquistadors - is used as an alibi to save explanation in a difficult though very real predicament. The magical, therefore, is not reproduced as an appropriate mode of representation for an exotic continent but is used to accomplish external ends. As if to emphasize an abandonment of this autotelic aesthetic Allende subjects its earnest expectations to bathos. In *Eva Luna*, Elvira states quite emphatically that she has seen a ghost that has

appeared on the patio. The matter-of-fact assurance with which Elvira describes the event begins to lull the reader into a certain decidedly deferential response. All conventional expectations of the real are suspended in deference to the charm of a magical testimony woven from the rich warp of subaltern experience, yet all is not as it seems:

"It's dressed like a person, and black as San Martin de Porres, but it isn't human. When I see it I get goose bumps all over, little bird. It must be someone who's lost and looking for his way. Maybe it hasn't finished dying." [...] [W]e were not being haunted by an errant ectoplasm, however, as we learned that day when El Negro finally rang the doorbell. Elvira was so terrified when she saw him that she fell flat on the floor. (p.236.)

[A]nda vestido de persona y es moreno como san Martín de Porres, per no es humano, cuando lo vislumbro la piel se me pone de gallina, pajarito. Ha de ser alguien perdido que busca un camino, tal vez no ha acabado de morirse - [...] Pero no se trataba de un ectoplasma trashumante, como se supo ese mismo día cuando el negro tocó el timbre y Elvira, espantada al verlo, cayó sentada al suelo. (pp.261-2.)

The ghost turns out to be none other than El Negro, the envoy of the guerilla movement. For once, Latin American reality provides a banal explanation with which to lance the inflated grandiosity of its most celebrated textual form. Through her use of magical realism to create bathetic effect Allende creates a certain critical distance from which it becomes possible to understand it not so much as the autochthonous narrative voice of Latin America, but as a technique. *Eva Luna* appears to be the gentle chastisement of the error of thought that placed magical realism in such a sonorously exalted position.

The notion of magical realism as having an extrinsic function - rather than being an end in itself - is one that is present in the prologue to Alejo Carpentier's to *The Kingdom of this World*. While advancing a project that seeks to revalorize an indigenous form of magical knowledge, Carpentier does so to an end: that of producing European habits of mind as somehow alien.

[T]he marvellous becomes unequivocally marvellous when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality, an unaccustomed or privileged revelation of reality, an unaccustomed or singularly favourable illumination of the previously unmarked riches of reality, an amplification of the measures and categories of reality, perceived with peculiar intensity due to an exaltation of the spirit which elevates it to a kind of "limit state." (p.iv.)

In Carpentier's conception, the magical sensibility is valued not so much for itself but for its instrumentality. It is capable of producing an effect of estrangement, unexpectedly altering an aspect of reality to a renewed or elevated perception. Magical realism is conceived, in Carpentier's work, in much the same way as the process of *ostranenie* or 'making strange', outlined by the Russian formalists.²⁸ It is certainly conceivable that Carpentier - as a Marxist and sometime resident of Paris - would have come into contact with the ideas of the Russian formalists or the practice of alienation evidenced by Brechtian theatre. Whether or not an explicit connection can be made is perhaps of lesser importance: the fact of a shared practice is indisputable. Shklovsky argued that the reader becomes habituated to his or her everyday perception of the world.²⁹ The special gift of literature was to render those habituated objects of awareness fresh once more, through a process of defamiliarization. It is this process of defamiliarization that is at work in *One Hundred Year's of Solitude* when Aureliano Buendía encounters the 'magic' of ice and the wonders of both the telescope and magnifying glass.³⁰ These habituated objects of the reader's awareness are produced anew to perception through the device of Buendía's response of astonished unfamiliarity. García Márquez's use of the technique is much as Shklovsky had conceived. The triviality of the objects rendered strange foregrounds not so much the renewed perception of the object as the process of estrangement itself. As such, estrangement becomes a device to attest to the powers of literature rather than a tool to reawaken habituated responses in the reader.

While Allende, in a disquietingly derivative gesture, uses Eva Luna's encounter with snow in a department store's extravagant Christmas display to the same effect, she also uses defamiliarization in a less formalistic way.³¹

The critic Patricia Hart presents a typology of magical realist techniques within Allende's body of work, and the effects they seek to create. In it she suggests that magical realism works by juxtaposing the real and the magical in a way that is narrated matter-of-factly. The apparently impossible event, she continues, leads to the understanding of a deeper truth that holds outside the novel. In the course of the magical episode, conventional notions of time, place, matter and identity are challenged. The effect of reading the fiction may be, she concludes, to change the reader's prejudices about what reality is.³² Magical realism in Hart's conception is, therefore, not simply a technique that seeks to produce a thrilling testament to the power of literary language as sufficient end in itself. On the contrary, it is conceived as an end-oriented process with a didactic function that seeks to challenge habituated assumptions held by the reader. In important respects, the project that she identifies as underpinning Allende's technique is very similar to that of ideological critique developed out of Russian formalism by futurists such as Mayakovsky and, later, the dramatist Bertolt Brecht.

Allende's children's story *La gorda de porcelana* is a fantastic tale in which an ordinary character, Cornelio, is taken outside his everyday experience.³³ The porcelain doll takes Cornelio flying over the city in which he lives and allows him different perspectives from which to view his life and situation. (translation my own)

Fantasy taught him to put himself in the place of the ants, to see the world from below, to hover like the bees, to see it from a certain height, to be like the fish, to slip about under water, and to whistle like the wind through the leaves.

Fantasía le enseñó a ponerse en el lugar de las hormigas, para ver el mundo desde abajo, a revolotear como las abejas, para apreciarlo desde media altura, a ser como los peces, para deslizarse bajo el agua, y a silbar como el viento entre las hojas. (p.23.)

While it is just a playful story for children it carries with it intimations of the value of the 'marvellous in the real.' Over the course of his estranging experiences Cornelio returns to his life with a renewed sense of its value and

significance. The detour from the habituated is not purely to delight in the effect of making strange, as does Márquez's Shklovskian formalism, but to produce an enabling change in the way Cornelio has understood his life. Allende's use of a magical technique to bring about extrinsic ends is more consonant with the work of Brecht, to whom estrangement became a tool.

Brecht's use of estrangement - or the "alienation" effect - sought to challenge habituated perceptions of social relations so as to make apparent once more their purely conventional character that had become reified under capitalism.³⁴ Brechtian theory recognized the way in which capitalist relations of production were produced by ideological sleight of hand in such a way that structural inequality disappears. Society does not appear as a consensual object made - and therefore un-makable - by its members, but as a necessary structure as a consequence of natural laws. Brecht recognized the way in which ideology produced 'the price of bread, the lack of work, the declaration of war as if they were phenomena of nature: earthquakes or floods.' Just as Brecht sought to lay bare the way in which unjust relations were often taken to be categories of nature - therefore invariable and beyond critique - so Allende uses magic to invert the immutable laws of nature upon which social relations are predicated.³⁵

Allende takes the sexual difference between men and women as an important area in which 'nature' is used to authorize socially generated relations of inequality. In a passage from *The House of the Spirits* Clara addresses the assembled *campesinas* of Tres Marias to rouse them with the feminist politics she learned from her suffragette grandmother in the capital. The response is one of puzzlement which attributes gendered roles to the essential difference marked by sex:

Since when has a man not beaten his wife? If he doesn't beat her, it's either because he doesn't love her or because he isn't a real man. [...] Since when has a woman ever done the same work as a man? Besides, she was born with a wound between her legs and without balls [...] (p.128.)

Nunca se ha visto que un hombre no pueda golpear a su propia

mujer, si no le pega es que no la quiere o que no es bien hombre. [...] [D]ónde se ha visto que una mujer pueda hacer las mismas cosas que un hombre, si ella nació con marraqueta y sin cojones [...] (p.99.)

Social patterns predicated upon sexual difference - the distinct identities of men and women - are particularly powerful in the *machista* cultures of Latin America. Just as the *campesinas* have introjected the expectations of *machista culture* to their disadvantage, so Esteban Trueba's sister Férula naturally assumes the responsibility of caring for their mother in response to the expectations of society.

Férula had accepted the role of her mother's nurse. She slept in the room that adjoined her mother's, ready at any moment to run in and administer her potions [...] She seemed so perfect that word spread that she was a saint. (p.57.)

Férula había aceptado el papel de enfermera de su madre. Dormía en la habitación contigua a la de doña Ester, dispuesta en todo momento a curar corriendo a su lado a darle sus pócimas [...] Parecía tan perfecta, que llegó a tener fama de santa. (p.45.)

While Férula accepts the role assigned to her predicated upon sexual difference, she is embittered. She has to renounce her own hopes and ambitions in exchange for the meagre compensation of society's tacit approval for her saintliness. In a revealing passage, Férula's brother Esteban catches her off-guard when he announces that he is leaving the city for life on the family *hacienda*. Férula replies that she would have liked to have been born a man so that she too could leave. The scene suggests that the capacity to change one's situation is hampered by the axiomatic assumption that sexual difference incontrovertibly assigns roles as a matter of course. In *Eva Luna*, however, Allende deploys a Brechtian effect of alienation that challenges the distribution of these characteristics, through the invention of the character Mimí. Mimí somehow unsettles the essentialized distribution of values associated with gender. In the eyes of Elvira, Eva's *madrina*, Mimí is somehow magical:

..Elvira was studying Mimí. She had never seen anyone like her [...] when she put on her eyeglasses to see her better, she was convinced beyond any doubt that Mimí was not a creature of this world. She's an archangel, she concluded. (p.230.)

..Elvira contempló a Mimí, nunca había visto nada parecido [...] luego se puso los anteojos para observarla mejor y entonces ya no le cupo duda alguna de que no era criatura de este mundo. Es un arcángel, concluyó. (p.256.)

Mimí, far from being an archangel is a transsexual, a character who appears as magical because she has somehow fantastically undone the work of nature. Her magical transformation from male to female destabilizes the essential categories of nature, and begins to produce the conceptualizations of gender roles that have been predicated upon them as somehow arbitrary. These insights are extended by the reflections of Mimí's lover. The otherwise *machista* character of Señor Aravena is spellbound by the appearance of Mimí, a fabulous creature whose ambiguous appearance allows him something of a revelation about the dialectical construction of sexual identity. Aravena declares that Mimí

"...is the absolute female. We all have something of the androgyne about us, something male, something female, but she has stripped herself of any vestige of masculinity and built herself those splendid curves. She's totally *woman*, adorable," he said wiping his forehead with his handkerchief. (p.237.)

- Es la feminidad absoluta, todos tenemos algo de andróginos, algo de varón y hembra, pero ella arrancó de sí misma hasta el último vestigio del elemento masculino y fabricó esas curvas espléndidas, es totalmente mujer, es adorable - dijo secándose la frente con su pañuelo. (p.252.)

Mimí's 'magical' occupation of the identities of both male and female afford an insight into the way in which sexual differences are not naturally exclusive categories but some how counter-imbricated. It is only through the knowing exclusion of the masculine that Mimí is able to begin to fabricate the feminine, and it is exactly this sense of gender as artifice that Aravena

thrills to as its defining characteristic. The sense of nature as a transformable category enables Allende to raise further questions of other seemingly immutable social laws. The magical reauthoring of nature begins to suggest that nature might have been after all a social category all along.

Nature is similarly produced as an ideological sign in other areas of Allende's work. In *The House of the Spirits* Allende points to the ways that the inequality of the majority is also produced as a state of nature. As a wealthy landowner Esteban Trueba takes arguments based on natural authority to support his unequal share of the riches of the land, and his position as the *patrón* regulating the lives of the tenants who work his *hacienda*.

Is it just for everyone to have the same amount? The lazy the same as those who work? The foolish the same as the intelligent? Even animals don't live like that! It's not a matter of rich and poor, it's a matter of strong and weak. (p.163.)

¿Es Justo que todos tengan lo mismo? ¿Los Flojos lo mismo que los trabajadores? ¿Los tontos lo mismo que los inteligentes? ¡Eso no pasa ni con los animales! No es cuestión de ricos y pobres, sino de fuertes y debiles. (p.125.)

Trueba resorts to the natural world as the final arbiter of the question of whether a state of equality is an ethically desirable one. The answer he finds there is that relative strength and weakness are natural states. By analogy, the unequal relations of class society are produced as a fact beyond question. This issue is not however settled by Trueba's characteristically abrupt dismissal of it, and returns persistently throughout the novel. In an argument his socialist son Jaime has the temerity to question the basis of class society in nature.

'You are a hopeless loser, son,' Trueba would say, sighing. 'You have no sense of reality. You've never taken stock of how the world really is. You put your faith in utopian values that don't even exist.'

'Helping one's neighbour is a value which exists.'

'No. Charity, like socialism, is an invention of the weak to exploit the strong and bring them to their knees.'

'I don't believe in your theory of the weak and the strong,' Jaime

replied.

'That's the way it is in nature. We live in a jungle.'

'Yes, because the people who make up the rules think like you!' (p.340.)

- Usted es un perdedor sin remedio, hijo - supiraba Trueba - No tiene sentido de la realidad. Todavía no se ha dado cuenta de cómo es el mundo. Apuesta a valores utópicos que no existen.

- Ayudar al prójimo es un valor que existe, padre.

- No. La caridad, igual que su socialismo, es un invento de los débiles para doblegar y utilizar a los fuertes.

- No creo en su teoría de los fuertes y débiles - replicaba Jaime.

- Siempre es así en la naturaleza. Vivimos en una jungla.

- Sí, porque los que hacen las reglas son los que piensan como usted... (p.264.)

Jaime argues that these laws are not natural but conventional, the product of a particular class characterization of historically formed relations as natural ones. The discourse of the social as the natural becomes an ideological strategy for affirming continued relations of material inequality. It is not, however, an insight that the majority of the population share with Jaime. In another example, Allende acknowledges the hegemonic status of this ideology, acknowledging its penetration of *campesino* consciousness. Whereas the young *campesino* Pedro Tercero is able to question social relations, his father can only see his own poverty as a natural condition.

Pedro Tercero had to give up his excursions in to town because his father needed him to help in the work. He came unwillingly, letting his father know that he was breaking his back to restore the patrons wealth while the rest of them would remain as poor as before.

'That's the way it's always been, son. You can't change the law of God,' his father would reply. (p.192.)

Pedro Tercero tuvo que renunciar a sus paseos al pueblo, porque su padre lo requería a su lado. Lo secundaba de mal humor, haciéndole notar que se partían al lomo por volver a poner en pie la riqueza del patrón, pero que ellos seguían siendo tan pobres como antes.

- Siempre ha sido así, hijo. Usted no puede cambiar la ley de Dios - le replicaba su padre. (p.147.)

Allende clearly suggests that arguments that sanction social relations as a

state of nature are a compelling mystification of purely conventional relationships. The difficulty lies in disrupting habituated patterns of understanding to produce these naturalized relations as socially transformable. Just as Mimi's change of sex rewrites the laws upon which 'nature' predicates assumptions about gender, so in *The House of the Spirits*, Pedro Tercero writes songs that question the immutability of natural relations of subordination. His songs take natural themes and begin to reverse the 'natural' hierarchies that they assume.

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

'And that fox escaped with his tail between his legs, with all the hens chasing after him,' the old man finished.

Blanca laughed at the story and said it was impossible, because hens are born stupid and weak and foxes are born astute and strong, but Pedro Tercero did not laugh, he spent the evening absorbed in thought, ruminating on the story of the fox and the hens, and perhaps that was the night when the boy started to become a man. (p.167.)

Un día el viejo Pedro García les contó a Blanca y Pedro Tercero el cuento de las gallinas que se pusieron de acuerdo para enfrentar a un zorro que se metía todas las noches en el gallinero para robar los huevos y devorarse los pollitos. Las gallinas decidieron que ya estaba hartas de aguantar la prepotencia del zorro, lo esperaron organizadas y cuando entró al gallinero, le cerraron el paso, lo rodearon y se le fueron encima a picotazos hasta que lo dejaron más muerto que vivo. - Y entonces se vio que el zorro escapaba con la cola entre las piernas, perseguido por las gallinas - terminó el viejo.

Blanca se rió con la historia y dijo que eso era imposible, porque las gallinas nacen estúpidas y débiles y los zorros nacen astutos y fuertes, pero Pedro Tercero no se rió. Se quedó toda la tarde pensativo, rumiando el cuento del zorro y las gallinas, y tal vez ese fue el instante en que el niño comenzó a hacerse hombre. (p.128.)

The story of the fox and the hens imagines an insurrection in nature which seeks to rewrite the natural laws of domination and subjugation. This

disruption in nature seeks a magical reversal of relations, arguing that even natural hierarchies can be grasped as conventional, and as such they can be envisaged as subject to transformation. The recourse to magical disruption of natural laws is seen in Allende's work as a strategy for a critique of naturalized, or reified social practices. Social relations - even those grasped as natural - can be redefined once it becomes apparent that natural laws are not immutable.³⁶

There is a sense, then, in which capitalist society has certain magical qualities of its own. It manages to confound its members with compelling myths that keep them compliantly in the place ascribed them by relations of production. There is a sense running through Allende's work of the way that capitalism succeeds through an array of almost magical tricks and illusions. While in the country the *campesino* will not take his hand from the plough as it has been ordained by nature that he should be its steward, so in the cities the art of illusion prevents the explosive realities of the inequitable distribution of wealth from becoming apparent. In *The House of the Spirits*, Allende notes the way in which the military regime after the coup makes the slums disappear as if by magic:

Cement walls were erected to hide the most unsightly shantytowns from the eyes of tourists and the eyes of others who preferred not to see them. In a single night, as if by magic, beautifully pruned gardens and flower beds appeared on the avenues, to create the illusion of a peaceful spring. [...] Soon the beggar children disappeared, and Alba noticed that the stray dogs and piles of garbage were gone too. (p.434.)

Pusieron panderetas para tapar las poblaciones marginales, ocultándolas a los ojos del turismo y de los que no querían ver. En una noche surgieron por encantamiento jardines recortados y macizos de flores en las avenidas, plantados por los cesantes para crear la fantasía de una pacífica primavera. [...] Al poco tiempo desaparecieron los niños mendigos y Alba notó que tampoco había perros vagos ni tarros de basura. (p.336.)

The translation of the verb *ocultar* as 'to hide' fails to pick up on the metalinguistic sense that the word had in Spanish, that of the disappearance

of the slums as an effect created by the malefic magic of the state. The characterization of the process of making poverty invisible as a magical one is carried on in the work of the Uruguayan historian Eduardo Galeano. In Galeano's *The Open Veins of Latin America* he describes the way in which the governments of both Brazil and Argentina hide the recalcitrant spectacle of destitution as a form of conjuring:³⁷

[T]he system prefers to hide the dirt under the rug. It is clearing the favelas from the bay area and the villas miserias from the national capital at gun point, sweeping the human surplus out of sight by the thousands upon thousands. Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires conjure away the spectacle of the poverty the system produces. (p.271.)

Capitalism as a process that magically makes its contradictions disappear is a theme that Allende returns to, adding further metaphors to the rhetoric of capitalist magic. Elsewhere in *Of Love and Shadows* Allende refers to 'the mirage of progress that affected the rest of the country.' (p.40.) Progress is an effect created by the confluence of a desire for economic and social amelioration and the distortions created by the political state. In *The House of the Spirits*, Allende returns to the theme adding one more trope - illusionism - to its lexicon of magical effects produced by the state:

Along the way I could see the city in all its terrible contrasts: the huts surrounded by makeshift walls to create the illusion that they do not exist [...] and the High District, with its English gardens, its parks, its glass sky-scrapers, and its fair-haired children riding bicycles. Even the dogs looked happy to me. (p.487.)

Por el camino pude ver la ciudad en su terrible contraste, los ranchos cercados con panderetas para crear la ilusión de que no existen [...] y el Barrio Alto, con sus jardines ingleses, sus parques, sus rascacielos de cristal y sus infantes rubios paseando en bicicleta. Hasta los perros parecieron felices. (p.377.)

Of course, in this novel, as in Allende's subsequent work *Of Love and Shadows*, it is not just poverty that the state causes to disappear but also its opponents. The Spanish word *disaparecido* that is used to describe one who

has been 'disappeared' (transitive) characterizes political murder itself in illusionistic terms. In Allende's second novel, *Of Love and Shadows*, she continues with the theme of the states of illusion that are required of the subject under capitalism. The press photographer Francisco Leal, who moves between the smart, peaceable confines of the *barrio alto* and the less salubrious parts of the town in which the poor live, speaks suggestively of having 'one foot in compulsory illusion and the other in secret reality.' (p.87.) ['Tenía un pie en la ilusión obligada y otro en la realidad secreta.' (p.91.)] In what sense, one begins to wonder, is this illusion compulsory? Is it required of the authoritarian state, or is it a feature that goes to the heart of capitalist relations?

Beatriz Beltrán, the bourgeois mother of Irene, is perhaps the most interesting character in Allende's oeuvre in terms of analysing the magical qualities of capitalism. As a prosperous resident of the *barrio alto*, she refuses to believe any of the leftist rumours of the state's violence. 'Beatriz,' we learn, 'was incapable of dealing with the truth; [she] lived in an unreal world... divorced from reality.' (p. 277.) ['una incapacidad para hacerse cargo de la situación, [ella] estaba fuera de la realidad, había perdido su lugar en este mundo.' (pp.249-150.)] The bourgeois denial of poverty and political murder amounts to a willed acceptance of the unreal over and against the unpalatable truth. From Beatriz Beltrán's ready acceptance of illusion a broader and more penetrating question can be asked of capitalist relations: is unreality and illusionism an aberrant subjective experience of capitalism or is it the required norm? Is capitalism perhaps magical in and of itself in its practices?

Marx argued that just as fetish worshippers ascribed powers to a fetish to which in turn they become beholden, so under capitalism the unnatural relations of exchange that the worker is thrown into at the demands of commodity production, instates the commodity as a kind of fetish.³⁸ In such a relation, the powers of the commodity, like those of the fetish, are invisible yet penetrate every aspect of the workers life. 'Real' relations exist only between commodities while those between people are

mediated by the wage relation and become tinged with unreality.³⁹ It is not so much a question of 'voodoo economics' (to paraphrase George Bush in his evaluation of 'Reaganomics'), as one of a fundamentally voodoo mode of production. Michael Taussig's *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in Latin America*, foregrounds the ironic similarities between what Marx called 'commodity fetishism' and the practice of fetish worship among the peoples of the semi-subsistence economy of the Cauca valley in Colombia.⁴⁰ The Colombian fetish worshippers, Taussig argues, have a more sophisticated and telling understanding of capitalism through the analogy of their religion than many successfully socialized labouring subjects.

The insights that Marx and Latin American fetishism afford, characterize Beatriz's willed, bourgeois requirement of the unreal as the *sine qua non* of the capitalist mode of production. Capitalist illusionism is also one of the themes that is broached with Clara's clairvoyant ability. The property of clairvoyance is defined as 'the alleged power of seeing things not present to the senses.'⁴¹ While Clara's psychic powers allow her some trivial domestic insights such as the ability to predict the winner in a horse race for the gardener, she also has powers of insight into the hidden reality of social relations. Clara and Esteban's relationship suffers at least in part because she is able to see the exploitative relations that the *patrón* extends over the *hacienda* and its workers. Esteban, who is made sullen by Clara's rejection, lets it be known that he is off to the local brothel for some sort of consolation. Clara's response is, however, unexpected:

To hurt her feelings, I pretended I was going to the Red Lantern, but all she said was that it was a lot better than raping peasant girls, which surprised me, because I didn't know she knew about that. (p.211.)

Para herirla, hice ostentación de ir al Farolito Rojo, pero su único comentario fue que eso era mejor que forzar a las campesinas, lo cual me sorprendió, porque no imaginé que supiera de eso. (p.163)

One of Clara's powers is the ability to see through the illusions of the

patronal system to the suppressed reality of relations between the *patrón* and the women of the estate. Far from being relations of beneficial dependence they are characterized by a hidden exploitation and fear. When Clara moves to Tres Marias for the first time, her powers enable her to see through the illusion of happy acquiescence that cloaks relations of production, to a very different reality beyond:

She was not impressed by the brick houses, the school, and the abundant food, because her ability to see what was invisible immediately detected the workers' resentment, fear, and distrust; and the almost imperceptible noise that quieted whenever she turned her head enabled her to guess certain things about her husband's character and past. (p.127.)

No le impresionaron las casas de ladrillos, la escuela y la abundancia de comida, porque su capacidad para ver lo invisible detectó inmediatamente el recelo, el miedo y el rencor de los trabajadores y el imperceptible rumor que se acallaba cuando volteaba la cara, que le permitieron adivinar algunas cosas sobre el carácter y el pasado de su marido. (p.99)

Clara's insights do not simply belong to an order of powers that might be called 'feminine intuition.' Her ability to see the exploitation of the hacienda is not simply a compassionate empathy for the campesinas who bear the brunt of Esteban's sexual appetite. Clara's clairvoyant ability allows her to see beyond the small confined world of Tres Marias to the causes of poverty in the capital.

Just as she had gone with her mother in the days when she was mute, she now took Blanca with her on her visits to the poor, weighed down with gifts and comfort.

'This is to assuage our conscience, darling,' she would explain to Blanca. 'But it doesn't help the poor. They don't need charity; they need justice.' (p.162.)

Igual como ella lo había hecho con su madre en tiempos de la mudez, llevaba ahora a Blanca a ver a los pobres cargada de regalos y consuelos.

- Esto sirve para tranquilizarnos la consciencia, hija - explicaba Blanca
- Pero no ayuda a los pobres. No necesitan caridad, sino justicia.

(p.124)

Clara grasps that poverty is not simply to be alleviated by charity. She subjects the prevalent view that charity marks the munificent response of the rich to the conditions of the poor to a reversal in the manner of Feuerbach.⁴² The alleviation of poverty is not through the charity of the rich, but the existence of poverty is the condition of riches. It is with this understanding that Clara characterizes the poor as wanting justice and not charity. In this sense, it is almost as if clairvoyance is the necessary optical correction to be able to see subject and predicate in their correct relation in the mystified distortion of social relations through capitalist ideology.

The connection between clairvoyance and the political is explicitly made in the special qualities that Esteban attributes to Alba. She has inherited her grandmother's psychic abilities which enable her to see clearly the character of the regime that follows the coup:

My granddaughter Alba, however, saw the true nature of the dictator long before I did. [...] She recognized him right away, because she had inherited Clara's intuition. (p.429.)

Mi nieta Alba, en cambio, vio perfilarse al dictador mucho antes que yo. [...] Lo reconoció al punto, porque ella heredó la intuición de Clara. (p.332.)

There is a sense in which the clairvoyant ability that the women of the del Valle family line share is used throughout the novel as a sustained political metaphor. The contradiction that Chilean society contains is only resolvable in some kind of cataclysmic conflict. It is not an opposition that can be endlessly finessed and hidden with the mystificatory magic of ruling class ideology. In that sense there is an almost ominous inevitability in the movement toward conflict. As Patricia Hart notes:

This idea of determinism is crucial to a novel about an important historical event (the Chilean coup of 1973) because one of the most important questions political scientists ask even today is whether or

not the event was inevitable, given the circumstances. (p.45.)

Clara's ability to foresee a variety of future events acts as a salutary reminder of the almost inevitable fatality of Chilean history that was already latent within the polarity of its social relations. In this sense the clairvoyance of the del Valle women acts as a sustained analogue to a disaster that awaits throughout the temporal duration of the novel. While Clara predicts her sister's poisoning, her brother's horse riding accident, the death of her parents and the earthquake that almost kills Esteban, the reader has a sense of another implied calamity that is already latent within the possibilities of the present, although as yet unannounced. The sense of foreboding and the dark presentiments that accompany the unfolding narrative of the novel act as a kind of metaphor for the inevitable resolution of class conflict announced in historical materialist method, for Clara can see Althusser's 'beautiful contradiction', whereas all around her remain the dupes of ideology.⁴³

Latin American magical realism is a complex textual phenomenon that needs to be approached with a certain interpretative caution. It is extremely tempting to regard it as the post-colonial form *par excellence*, that is to say, as an autochthonous challenge to the narratives of the Enlightenment (as a synecdoche for colonialism) and a politically vigorous regional strand of literary modernism. In a broader context however, it must be noted that movements about which similar claims to iconoclastic virtue have been made, have never achieved anything other than a revolution in form. Dada and surrealist works, far from accomplishing social, cognitive and political changes have succeeded only in expanding the formal repertoire of the artistic canon, and witnessing the substitution of extraordinarily high prices at sale for the project of social transformation. While radical claims are made for the literary and political character of magical realism, one important fact is often overlooked: rather than shaking the very foundations of capitalism (as the global mode of production that problematizes the "post" in post-

colonial), it has been quietly assimilated to it. Magical realist texts such as those of García Márquez and Isabel Allende sell by their millions in the developed nations that were once colonial powers. These novels, I argue, far from challenging capitalism have an important signficatory function within it. The co-presence in a contemporary literary canon of works redolent of exotic literary and cultural settings lends a displaced experience of plurality in a world increasingly homogenized by the relentless globalization of a single mode of production. As a radical project then, magical realism is perhaps still-born. It serves instead as a topos to a world of cultural and cognitive difference that is fast disappearing. If magical realism has a political virtue, that can be located through the Brechtian politics of alienation advanced by Carpentier and still present in Allende's work beneath the false affiliations and overdeterminations that bear so heavily upon the technique.

NOTES

1. Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of this World*, Harriet de On'is (trans). (London: Deutsch, 1990.)
2. Alejo Carpentier, *The Lost Steps*, Harriet de On'is (trans). (London: Minerva, 1991.)
3. Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gregory Rabassa (trans). (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991.)
4. Leonard Kline, *Latin American Literature in the 20th Century: A Guide*, (Harpندن: Oldcastle Books, 1988.)
5. William Rowe, "Gabriel García Márquez," John King (ed)., *Modern Latin American Fiction: A Survey*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1987.)
6. Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.)

7. William Rowe and Vivian Schelling, *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America*, (London: Verso, 1991.)
8. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (London: Athlone Press, 1984.)
9. For full accounts of García Márquez's links with popular Caribbean culture see James Higgins "Gabriel García Márquez: *Cien Anos de Soledad*", in Philip Swanson (ed). *Landmarks in Modern Latin American Fiction*, (London: Routledge, 1990.), also William Rowe and Vivian Schelling, *Memory and Modernity*, (London: Verso, 1991.) (p.214.), and William Rowe "Gabriel García Márquez", in John King (ed.), *Modern Latin American Fiction: A Survey*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1987.)
10. Allende writes in her autobiographical work *Paula* that '[w]e [Chileans] considered ourselves the Swiss of the continent.' (p.186.)
11. The almost Orwellian taxonomy necessary to place Allende in terms of social class is indicative of the highly stratified Chilean polity from which she comes.
12. The sense of cultural demarcation is emphasised by Allende's telling use of the word *indio*. In Latin America *indio* is used almost exclusively by the social elites of Spanish descent in a careless, if not openly pejorative sense. Indigenous peoples tend to self identify using the term *indigena*.
13. See Mary Elizabeth Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, (London: Routledge, 1992.)
14. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvres Complètes*. (Paris: Seuil, 1967.)
15. This is drawn from Jacques Derrida's sustained reading of Rousseau's "Essay on the Origins of Languages", cited in *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (trans.), (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976). Derrida examines Rousseau's deployment of a phonocentric argument to shore up a metaphysical tradition premised upon a notion of 'being' as 'presence'.
16. See Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller*, Helen Lane (trans.) (London: Faber and Faber, 1991.) Vargas Llosa opposes the inauthentic language of the mass-media to a rich spoken tradition of a remote Amazonian tribe. The title in Spanish *El hablador* - literally 'the speaker' - is suggestive of the novel's phonocentric strategy.
17. This is covered in "Representing the Amazon," an essay forthcoming in *Environmental Literature: An International Handbook*, (Pennsylvania: Garland Publishing, 1997), in which I examine the Amazon as a topos in colonial thought.

18. Peter Lewis "Making Magic," *The Independent Magazine*, 3rd April, 1993.
19. Isabel Allende, *La casa de los espíritus*, (Barcelona,: Plaza y Janes, 1985)
20. "Una historia de amor sobre el fondo tragico de Latinoamerica," *La Prensa* (Buenos Aires) 5th of June 1985, 5., cited in Patricia Hart, *Narrative Magic in the Work of Isabel Allende*, (London: Associated University Press, 1989.)
21. Mario Vargas Llosa, "Fiction and Reality", John King (ed)., *Modern Latin American Fiction: A Survey*, (London: Faber, 1987.)
22. Paul West, "The House of the Spirits", *Nation*, 20 July 1985, 52., cited in Patricia Hart, *Narrative Magic in the Fiction of Isabel Allende*, (p.33.)
23. Marion Glastonbury, "Isabel Allende: *The House of the Spirits*," *The New Statesman*, 5th July 1985, 35., cited in Patricia Hart, (p.33.)
24. If Márquez's magical realism works it is because he locates it within a community such as Macondo which appears to be somehow hermetic since it obeys different physical and cognitive laws from the world beyond. Magical events flourish in this world as the norm, precisely because it is an heterotopia. In Márquez's work, magic rarely strays out of the charmed locale of the text and into the contemporary world beyond, a world that responds to different sets of cognitive expectations. One of the few exceptions to this unwritten rule, García Márquez's "The Saint" *Strange Pilgrims: Twelve Tales*, (*Doce Cuentos Peregrinos*) Edith Grossman (trans). (London: Penguin, 1993.)] succeeds through its special circumstances. It is the story of a father's quest to achieve beatification for the miraculously preserved corpse of his daughter, set in present-day Rome. It succeeds because the magical narrative inhabits the corridors of the Vatican, an antediluvian Western institution that specializes in superstition and in settling questions of the esoteric. In locating magical events in the recognizably contemporary world of urban Latin America Allende, however, creates a poorly handled effect which produces not wonder but discord.
25. Ignacio Valente, "*Eva Luna*: entre la calidad y el éxito," *El Mercurio* (Santiago de Chile), 25th October 1987, (p.6.), cited in Patricia Hart, (pp.167-8.)
26. William Rowe, Gabriel García Márquez," John King (ed.), *Modern Latin American Fiction: A Survey*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1987.) (p.191-2.)
27. To the much vaunted narrative influence of Márquez's grandmother can be added the international literary figures of William Faulkner and James Joyce. The influence of James Joyce, the modernist's modernist, is strongly evident in Márquez's novella *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (*El otoño del patriarca*) in its stream-of-consciousness style, its rejection of standard punctuation such as the paragraph, and its fragmented, multiply-authored narrative. Criticism that seeks to produce Márquez out of popular Caribbean

culture also ignores the influence of Ernest Hemingway on his earlier work. *No One Writes to the Colonel* (*El coronel no tiene quien le escriba*) is marked by the sparest narrative style that clearly suggests Hemingway's own.

28. Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (London: Methuen, 1979.)

29. Victor Shklovsky "Art as Technique" (1917), in David Lodge (ed.), *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, (London and New York: Longman, 1988.) (pp.16-30.)

30. Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), Chapter 1.

31. Marquez's rediscovery of the wonders of ice seems to have acted as a circuitous route for a European reacquaintance with the techniques of Russian formalism. In the German film director Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), the film's eponymous hero has an ice machine in the remote Amazon. Fitzcarraldo's Amazonian ice plant marks him as a kind of visionary genius able to see the magical in the everyday. Hollywood, as so often a decade or so behind European cinema, does much the same thing in Peter Weir's *The Mosquito Coast* (1990) in which Harrison Ford plays an obsessive visionary taking ice to the Indians.

32. Patricia Hart, *Narrative Magic in the Fiction of Isabel Allende*, (London: Associated University Press, 1989), (p.27.)

33. Isabel Allende, *La gorda de porcelana*, (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1983), cited in Patricia Hart, (p.160.) I am indebted to Patricia Hart for this quotation since I have been unable to obtain a copy. It has never been translated and is currently not in print in Spain.

34. John Willett (ed.), *Brecht on Theatre*, (Methuen: London, 1964.)

35. It is perhaps pertinent to note that Allende makes reference to Brechtian theatre in a recent interview on the internet. *Coversación con Isabel Allende*, (http://ponce.inter.edu./vl/revista/a_proposito/isabel.html.)

36. This myth that rewrites the text of nature is not one of Allende's fabrication. It has been current in the Latin American popular tradition at least since the Sandinista revolution. The song of the Sandino's forces in 1932 Nicaragua sought to persuade the *campesinos* of the possibility of changing their situation. The words 'In Nicaragua, gentlemen, the mouse kills the cat.' were sung to the tune of *Adelita*.

37. Eduardo Galeano, *The Open Veins of Latin America*, Cedric Belfrage (trans). (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973.)

38. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol.1, Chapter 1, section 4.

39. Commodity fetishism is eloquently captured in the Brazilian novelist Jorge Amado's *Cacao*, (1936) (cited in Eduardo Galeano, p.106.). 'Not even the children touched the cacao fruit,' writes Amado, 'They were afraid of those yellow berries, so sweet on the inside, which enslaved them to this life of breadfruit and dried meat.[...] Cacao was the great *señor* feared even by the colonel.'
40. Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in Latin America*, (North Carolina: 1980.)
41. *Chambers Concise 20th Century Dictionary*. (Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers, 1985.)
42. Karl Marx, "Concerning Feuerbach," *Early Writings*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992)
43. Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, Ben Brewster (trans)., (New York: Schocken Books, 1979.)

Chapter 4
Historiography: Allende, Marx and the Liberal
Tradition

Isabel Allende's first book, *The House of the Spirits*, is in certain respects an historical novel. In it, Allende does not so much seek to create a rich historical tableau, littered with fascinating contextual and biographical detail, as focus on the determinants that shape the historical epoch of which she writes. Biography, to Allende, is no substitute for broader historical understanding.¹ Similarly, Allende's subsequent novels, *Of Love and Shadows* and *Eva Luna*, are more concerned with issues of historiography than with the minutiae of historical experience. The actions of the military government of the former novel, and the guerilla insurgency of the latter, play out a meditation on the broader patterns that shape history itself. In this sense, it is possible to argue that Allende is not so much an historical novelist, as an historiographical writer, interested in the larger historical picture.

In her essay "Writing as an Act of Hope", Allende has described her work as a search for a meaningful pattern within history. She states that, through her fiction, she hopes to find 'the key to the labyrinth of history.' (p.45.) The central labyrinthine problem that besets historical writing is, for Allende, the need for *interpretation* itself. Historical writing, it should be recalled, is not simply replete in its empirical facticity, but requires that selections are made from raw data, and that these selections are in turn narrated. Historical writing does not simply provide a straightforward description of the past, but an often heavily mediated account. It is in the selection and fashioning of the facts that ideology enters the text.

In the course of this chapter I shall argue that Allende takes the method of historical materialism, advanced by Marx and Engels, as 'the key' to history. To understand the form that the argument of this chapter takes, it is important to recall that Marx developed the theory of historical materialism from a critique of Hegelian historical idealism. Allende, much like Marx himself, locates her argument *within* the distinctly Hegelian assumptions that inform much historical writing. Allende's reading of history is not, however, a kind of elaborate Borgesian anachronism. She does not seek to resurrect the historiographical argument of the 19th century as a form of curio for the ironic gaze of postmodernism. Allende uses historical

materialist critique in a continuing and very earnest duel with the neo-Hegelians of the post Cold-War era. Since the collapse of communism in the former Eastern Block, the political Right has looked triumphantly to Hegel's thought to drape the historical moment in the serviceable ideals of the Enlightenment. Francis Fukuyama, in particular, has chosen to revive the Hegelian tradition to make explicit once more the assumptions that inform hegemonic historical narrative.² Allende's interest in Left historiography is, therefore, very much a timely reprise of an old philosophical conflict.

While the concept of universal history has pretensions to being the Ariadne's thread to the totality of historical experience, it obviously courts controversy and dissent. It amounts to the search for a totalizing historical theory that co-opts all varieties of historical experience to its explanatory process. It becomes, therefore, the sort of master term that immediately sets alarm bells ringing in departments of literature, cultural studies and ethnography that are interested in the mushroom-fragrance of cultural and semantic difference. Before making explicit reference to Allende's understanding of universal history, I shall account for the way in which she approaches it through the ethical minefield of post-modern knowledge. Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* has been an influential work that articulates a critique of 'meta-narratives', such as those of Marxist and Hegelian history, from a relativist position.³ Lyotard seeks to abandon totalizing analytical schemas in favour of 'paralogies'. Paralogy refers to localised bodies of knowledge such as those collectively held by small integrated communities, such as a tribal group. It seeks to preserve the integrity of such a culture's self-understanding over and against the homogenizing tendency of historical metanarratives.

Allende's response to this challenge is a complex retention of the concept of paralogy as an ethic of difference within a concept of universal history understood along Marxist lines. Allende retains throughout her work a sense of the necessity for Marxist history in a world in which the capitalist mode of production has achieved total global penetration. Capitalism, as Fukuyama gleefully notes, has achieved hegemony throughout the entire

world, but for the debatable exceptions of China, North Korea and Cuba. Fukuyama accurately, if chillingly, describes the process of this penetration in *The End of History and the Last Man*.

This process guarantees an increasing homogenization of all human societies, regardless of their historical origins or cultural inheritances. All countries undergoing economic modernization must increasingly resemble one another: they must unify nationally on the basis of a centralized state, urbanize, replace traditional forms of social organization like tribe, sect, and family with economically rational ones based on function and efficiency [...] Such societies have become increasingly linked with one another through global markets and the spread of a universal consumer culture. (p.xiv-xv.)

Fukuyama describes a world in which differing cultures and forms of social organization have been transformed by the encroaching demands of capitalism. This process of homogenization has also been remarked upon by the Latin American Marxist historian Eduardo Galeano. He discusses the way in which even the most isolated of social groups are being drawn into capitalist relations. The experience of such groups as tribal people - the very groups that Lyotard might describe as a paralogical - are becoming more and more of an exception as they become inexorably drawn into the world economy.⁴

Indian society in our time does not exist in a vacuum, outside the general framework of the Latin American economy. There are, it is true, Brazilian tribes still sealed within the jungle, *altiplano* communities totally isolated from the world, redoubts of barbarism on the Venezuelan frontier; but in general the Indians are incorporated into the system of production and the consumer market, even if indirectly. (p.61.)

In her novel *Eva Luna*, which was written in exile in Venezuela, Allende creates the fictional town of Agua Santa which she places on the Venezuelan frontier. Agua Santa marks the present limit of capitalism in its ceaseless encroachment on the last 'redoubts of barbarism'. The jungle frontier becomes, then, a topos in which Allende locates the debate between paralogy

and universal history. The short story "Ester Lucero" from *The Tales of Eva Luna* is an allegory about the meeting of Western and indigenous modes of knowledge. In the story, the eponymous Ester (a child resident of Agua Santa) falls from a mango tree and is impaled on a stake. In the hot and humid climate infection quickly sets in and she develops a fever. She is sent to the local doctor Angel Sánchez who tries everything in his power to help her. Ester's condition worsens and in spite of his best efforts she lies close to death. Beyond the reach of conventional medicine, Dr Sánchez submits to the knowledge of an indigenous *curandero* - an Indian 'witch doctor' with renowned healing powers. The witch doctor leads him through the forest gathering plants and herbs from which he makes a poultice. This Sánchez administers to the injured girl with full ceremony. Allende's description of this ceremony marks the difference between the modes of knowledge represented by Western medicine and the witchcraft of the *curandero* very succinctly.

The doctor ran back to the hospital as if pursued, beneath a sun so hot it melted the asphalt. He ran up the stairs two at a time, and burst into Ester Lucero's room, dripping with sweat. The grandmother and the nurse on duty saw him race by, and followed as far as the door to peer in. They watched as he removed his white coat, cotton shirt, dark trousers, the black-market socks and gum-soled shoes he always wore. Horrified, they then saw him remove his undershorts to stand stark naked as a recruit. (p.99.)

El médico regresó al hospital corriendo como un preseguido, bajo el calor de plomo que derretía el asfalto. Subió las escaleras a saltos e irrumpió en la habitación de Ester Lucero empapado de sudor. La abuela y la enfermera de turno lo vieron pasar a la carrera y se aproximaron al mirilla de la puerta. Observaron cómo se quitaba la bata blanca, la camisa de algodón, los pantalones oscuros, los calcetines comprados de contrabando y los zapatos con suela de goma que siempre calzaba. Horrorizadas, lo vieron despojarse también de los calzoncillos y quedar en cueros, como un recluta. (p.114.)

Sánchez does not try to extract the rational kernel from the wild prescriptions of the *curandero* but submits entirely to the difference of this

other form of knowledge. He abandons the precepts of his medical training and the rational project that underlies it for the paralogical difference of this practice, even to the extent of stripping off his clothes, the vestments, as it were, of medical reason. Allende goes on to describe the spectacle of the ensuing ceremony, rendered all the more strange for its enactment within a hospital, a building which enshrines the scientific understanding of disease and its treatments.

Through the little window in the door they could just see the doctor as he moved the bed to the centre of the room, placed both hands for a second on Ester Lucero's head, and then began a frenetic dance around the sick girl. He lifted his knees so high they touched his chest, he swooped low, he waved his arms and made grotesque faces, without for an instant losing the internal beat that set wings to his feet. For half an hour he danced like a madman, never pausing, dodging oxygen tanks and intravenous solutions. Then he extracted a few dried leaves from the pocket of his white coat, placed them in a tin basin, crushed them with his fist until they were a coarse powder, spat upon them repeatedly, stirred everything together to form a kind of paste, and walked towards the dying girl. The two women watched as he removed the bandages and then, as the nurse noted dutifully in her report, he smeared the revolting mixture on the wound, unmindful of the first laws of asepsis, as well as the facts that his private parts were shamefully exposed to the girl. (p.100.)

A través del ventanuco de la puerta pudieron vislumbrar al doctor cuando movía la cama hasta el centro de la habitación y, después de posar ambas manos sobre la cabeza de Ester Lucero durante algunas segundos, iniciaba un frenético baile alrededor de la enferma. Levantaba las rodillas hasta tocarse el pecho, efectaba profundas inclinaciones, agitaba los brazos y hacía grotescas moriquetas, sin perder ni por un instante el ritmo interior que ponía alas en sus pies. Y durante media hora no paró de danzar como un insensato, esquivando las bombonas de oxígeno y los frascos de suero. Luego extrajo unas hojas secas del bolsillo de su bata, las colocó en una palangana, las aplastó con el puño hasta reducirlas a un polvo grueso, escupió encima con abundancia, mezcló todo para formar una pasta y se aproximó a la moribunda. Las mujeres lo vieron retirar los vendajes y, tal como notificó la enfermera su informe, untar la herida con aquella asquerosa mixtura, sin la menor consideración por las leyes de la asepsia ni por el hecho de que exhibía sus vergüenzas al desnudo. (pp.114-5.)

In this passage, Allende cleverly counterpoises the elements of these different systems of knowledge. Where we would anticipate the measured pace of the ward round we have the strange dance of the *curandero*; against the white coat we have the scandalously naked body of the physician; where we would expect asepsis we have saliva and a revolting mixture crushed by hand. Dr Sánchez's abandonment of the rationalist precepts of Western medicine, for a form of treatment that is completely beyond its mode of comprehension, marks the type of ethics of difference that Jean Francois Lyotard invokes in *The Postmodern Condition*. Where Lyotard argues that postmodern knowledge 'refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable' (p.75.), Dr Sánchez enacts it to the letter.

Allende's fictional treatment of the Indians of Agua Santa acts as a sustained meditation on the postmodern critique of knowledge. In this critique, Allende runs up against the limits of the theory's utility. If one accepts paralogy, the logic of theory maintains, one also abdicates from explanatory and emancipatory theories of the contemporary such as Marxism. Marxism's stridency and explanatory pretension places it with other Enlightenment discourses which are charged by Lyotard to examine the ethnocentric provenance of their universalist prescriptions. It is this kind of syllogistic development within postmodern thought that Allende resists. What is it, she asks, that threatens the Indian and the identity of the *curandero*? Is it a system of knowledge first and foremost? Is the menace from the anthropologist (as a synecdoche for the project of Western knowledge), or does the threat lie elsewhere?

Allende addresses this question in her short story "Walimai", also from *The Tales of Eva Luna*. Walimai is an Indian whose tribe have lived in the remote reaches of the jungle since time immemorial. They have survived through hunting and subsistence cultivation up until the recent arrival of the rubber tappers. Having hitherto enjoyed the fruits of his own labour, Walimai finds himself working in terrible conditions for wages. He cannot

understand the attitude to the land that private property, estranged labour and capital accumulation assume. 'We explained,' he states, 'that the jungle is not something that can be tossed over your shoulder and transported like a dead bird, but they did not want to hear our arguments.' (p.88.) ['Les explicamos que la selva no se puede cargar a la espalda y transportar como un pájaro muerto, pero no quisieron escuchar razones.' (p.103.))] In this story, Allende shows that the Indian's sense of the jungle and its uses is not menaced by a strident Western theory of knowledge but by the brutal fact of capitalist relations of production. The Indians, snatched from their subsistence lifestyle and inveigled into the wage relation, are transformed into commodities in the form of labour power. Not only that, their environment is also relentlessly commodified, uprooted, exported and realised as an exchange value on the international market. This violence, then, is primarily economic and only cultural in a secondary sense. The Indians are fugitives from modernity, not conceived in idealist terms as 'knowledge' but as commodification.

Allende responds to postmodernism's challenge to universal history by carefully exploring the question of knowledge and cultural difference within the broader material context of the global economy. Her response is that the concept of paralogy is an important ethical ideal. However, it remains an ideal rather than an effective cultural politics, since the threat to cultural difference comes not from metanarratives as such, but the globalization of capitalism. In that sense, a strategic deployment of Marxist critique sets out to understand and oppose a universalizing process in order to enable the carnival of knowledges that postmodernism hopes to announce.

In her critique of hegemonic modes of historical understanding, Allende goes on to consider the claims made for the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a just and equitable form of the state. Francis Fukuyama's work *The End of History and the Last Man* provides a useful conspectus of the philosophical arguments that underpin assumptions about liberal democracy. I shall take some of the positions presented by Fukuyama to concretize the latent

assumptions to which the inflection of Marxism present to Allende's writing seeks to respond.

Fukuyama's thought is a form of historical idealism that derives in large part from Hegel. It describes a dialectical historical evolution towards the realization of what Hegel has called the 'absolute Idea'.⁵ Where Fukuyama and Hegel differ is in what they take to be the absolute idea that moves history towards its final form.⁶ What we might call Fukuyama's Big Idea comes to his argument from his reading of the Master-Slave dialectic of the *Phenomenology*.⁷ This reading, fused with Alexander Kojève's selective interpretation, takes the central problem of History in Hegel's thought to be that of man's need for recognition.⁸ If recognition is essential to human happiness, Hegel argues, a system based on slavery would never be satisfactory. The slave could not freely return his master's desire for recognition since his capitulation to the will of his master on fear of death excluded the possibility of any mutual regard. The need for recognition, which Fukuyama calls the 'thymotic urge' is the basis for his historical argument. Fukuyama's excitable tone captures his belief that he has cracked the central enigma of historiography:

What man had been seeking throughout the course of history - what had driven the prior "stages of history" - was recognition. In the modern world, he finally found it, and was "completely satisfied." [...] It is possible to understand THE problem of politics over the millennia of human history as the effort to solve the problem of recognition. (p.xxi.)

The desire for recognition, according to Fukuyama, was the idea realised by the dialectical conflict between the absolutist French state and the bourgeoisie in the French revolution. Fukuyama has updated this with the more recent examples of the historical dialectic between Western liberal democracy and fascism in Franco's Spain, and most recently of all, between liberal democracy and communism in Russia and the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. Man's need for recognition was dialectically realised in the contemporary synthesis of the two antithetical forms of social organization.

As Fukuyama states:

Liberal democracy replaces the irrational desire to be recognized as greater than others with rational desire to be recognized as equal. A world made up of liberal democracies, then, should have much less incentive for war, since all nations would reciprocally recognize one another's legitimacy. (p.xx.)

Fukuyama locates the dialectical antagonism that realises the idea of thymos as one between historical communism and capitalism. The collapse of communism leaves capitalism as the historical victor in which 'the spirit of history' is realized, with all significant dialectical conflict resolved. The problem with this is that it builds its argument on what some commentator's have identified as a category mistake. To locate dialectical conflict between systems is to finesse dialectical contradictions that are to be found within them. As Gregory Elliott argues, for Hegel and Marx dialectical contradictions were not held to be exogenous to systems, that is to say inter-systemic, but were conceived as intra-systemic, lying within them.⁹ The collapse of historical communism, therefore, does not eradicate the contradictions internal to capitalism. What Althusser has called the 'beautiful contradiction', between capital and labour remains unresolved.

Much liberal history - while not ostensibly engaged with historiographical debate - is in fact informed by a tacit understanding that history has moved steadily towards an enlightened present in which there is widespread liberal democracy founded upon the capitalist mode of production.¹⁰ As Joseph McCarney notes, the dialectical opposition within capitalism, that of class, is profoundly un-thymotic. McCarney states that a strong community life in which all may enjoy mutual 'thymotic' regard is threatened within liberal democracy, since 'all forms of community figure merely as contractual devices to minister to the self-interest of individuals. The principles of liberty and equality fundamental to such societies are themselves conceived in individualistic terms that undermine the possibility of "meaningful community."' (p.37.)¹¹

This important insight perhaps needs further development in Marx's critique of the 'democratic' state in the essay "On the Jewish Question".¹² The state, which in the form of constitutions and bills of rights constitutes the communal life of the nation, is troubled by a performative contradiction. It is predicated upon an Hobbesian *bellum omnium contra omnes*, in which competitive individualism within civil society stands in opposition to the concept of community that is acknowledged by the political sphere. The credibility of liberal democracy as the form of the state that ensures recognition is troubled by the dichotomization of civil society and the political state. The communal is negated in the former and displaced to the latter, where it takes on a tautological circularity.

[N]ot one of the so-called rights of man goes beyond egoistic man, man as a member of civil society, namely an individual withdrawn into himself, his private interest and his private desires and separated from the community. [...] [M]an as *bourgeois*, i.e. as a member of civil society, and not man as citizen who is taken as the *real* and *authentic* man. (pp.230-231.)

The implications are very important for historical understanding and go beyond thymos to the heart of Western historical writing. As Marx noted in the "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of State", 'the content of the state lies beyond these constitutions.' (p.89.)¹³ In safeguarding the rights of egoistic man, the state underwrites a mode of social interaction that it does not control. The universal right to property in fact guarantees the *de facto* inequality of the several members of the political community, and regulates their interaction. The private ownership of the means of production, the wage relation that follows from this and the concomitant accumulation of capital all lie beyond the political realm and make up the palpable experience of the everyday world. The political realm of rights has nothing to say about the capitalist and the worker whose material lives (the only lives that they have) are so completely unequal. For Marx the quotidian is the realm that needs theorizing, not that of the political that bears a relation to it 'as heaven does to earth'.

Isabel Allende is particularly acute in her analysis of the state and civil society along Marxist lines. In her second novel, *Of Love and Shadows*, the events take place in a state under a military dictatorship. One of the characters of the novel, Professor Leal, is an elderly refugee from Spain under General Franco. Having fought on the deeply factional Republican side, he is alive to the nuances of Marxist thought. In the course of a family conversation he announces that '[g]overnments are intrinsically corrupt and must be eliminated. They guarantee the freedom of the rich, based on property, and they enslave the rest in misery.' (p.101.) ['Los gobiernos son intrínsecamente corruptos y deben suprimirse. Garantizan la libertad de los ricos basada en la propiedad y esclavizan a los demás en la miseria.' (p.95.)] The point that Leal draws about the corruption of government is more astute than the conventional grumble about the venality of politicians. He recognizes the formalistic freedoms extended by the state with the promise of a purely political liberty to all. This promise in reality only amounts to the freedom of the rich since it enshrines the *de facto* accumulation of capital in a few hands and the mass subordination of the majority through the wage relation.

Allende considers this question of political liberty and the whole question of rights once more in *The House of the Spirits*. Allende broaches this through Clara's reminiscences of her mother's involvement in the early days of Latin American feminism. The women members of the Del Valle family had been connected with the New World suffragette movement in the early years of the century. Allende pieces together the activities and demands of the early feminists, which with time appear somehow quaintly patrician.

[N]ivea went out at night to hang suffragette posters on walls across the city and that she was capable of walking through the heart of the city in the plain light of day with a broom in her hand and a tricornered hat on her head, calling for women to have equal rights with men, to be allowed to vote and attend the university, and for all children, even bastards, to be granted the full protection of the law. (p.85.)

Nívea salía en la noche a pega pancartas sufragistas en los muros de

la ciudad y era capaz de pasear por el centro a plena luz de mediodía de un domingo, con una escoba en la mano y un birrete en la cabeza, pidiendo que las mujeres tuvieran los derechos de los hombres, que pudieran votar y entrar a la universidad, pidiendo también todos que los niños gozaran de la protección de la ley, aunque fueran bastardos. (p.65.)

The agenda is a liberal-feminist charter that seeks to achieve equality for women within extant social relations. The formidable Del Valle feminists want to achieve for women the right to vote in elections and the right of access to education. This agenda amounts to a reformist platform that seeks to ameliorate the position of women within society, without challenging its broader organizational precepts. A little later in the novel, the interpolated narrative of Clara comments on this as a political practice, beginning to suggest its strictly limited purview, if not its insufficiency as a form of emancipatory politics.

At times Clara would accompany her mother and two or three of her suffragette friends on their visits to factories, where they would stand on soap boxes and make speeches to the women who worked there while the foremen and bosses, snickering and hostile, observed them from a prudent distance. Despite her tender age and complete ignorance of matters of this world, Clara grasped the absurdity of the situation and wrote in her notebook about the contrast of her mother and her friends, in their fur coats and suede boots, speaking of oppression, equality and rights to a sad, resigned group of women in denim aprons, their hands red with chilblains. (p.101.)

A veces Clara acompañaba a su madre y a dos o tres de sus amigas sufragistas a visitar fábricas, donde se subían en unos cajones para arengar a las obreras, mientras desde una prudente distancia, los capataces y los patronos las observaban burlones y agresivos. A pesar de su corta edad y su completa ignorancia de las cosas del mundo, Clara podía percibir el absurdo de la situación y describía en sus cuadernos el contraste entre su madre y sus amigas, con abrigos de piel y botas de gamuza, hablando de opresión, de la igualdad y de derechos, a un grupo triste y resignado de trabajadoras, con sus toscos delantales de dril y las manos rojas por los sabañones. (p.77.)

Liberal feminism fails as the sort of rights and freedoms that it calls for are sophisticated in nature since they do not challenge the divisions predicated upon the rights of egoistic man in civil society. While private property and the wage relation continue, liberties at the level of the political state remain formalistic in nature. They amount to offering a displaced form of liberty in the "political" sphere while maintaining the same relations of inequality in every-day life. It recalls Marx's essay "On the Jewish Question", his germinal critique of reformist movements that do not seek to challenge the foundations of capitalist relations, but to consolidate their rights as groups in political society. Women, as just such a political constituency may win the vote but they are resigned to their chilblains and denim aprons. In what, then, consists their freedom? Is it not, Allende implies, purely sophisticated?

Allende continues this meditation on the concept of freedom and political rights in her third novel, *Eva Luna*. The young Eva, with neither a family nor means of support, has to become a domestic servant. While she and her employers are equal as citizens in the eyes of the state, they have profoundly unequal quantities of wealth and leisure. Eva spends her days doing house work, while her employers slip into a kind of glazed domestic stupor. She cleans around them while they sit in comfortable armchairs, their cosseted and imperturbable inactivity a constant reminder of the spurious equality shared by master and servant in the eyes of the state. Later in the novel, Eva goes to work for a wealthy and idle cabinet minister. One of her demeaning household duties is to wait on the minister while he is at stool on his luxurious felt-upholstered commode.¹⁴ This demeaning act of servitude forces Eva to confront the irony of political equality that he embodies.

I entered the luxurious room that stank like a stable, knelt down behind the chair, and removed the basin. With absolute aplomb, as if it were something I did every day, I lifted the receptacle high and emptied it over the head of the Minister of state - with a single motion of the wrist liberating myself from humiliation. For an eternal second the minister sat motionless, eyes bulging. (p.101.)

Entré a ese cuarto lujoso impregnando de olor a establo, me incliné por detrás del asiento y retiré la bacinilla. De la manera más tranquila, como si fuera un gesto de todos los días, levanté el recipiente y le di vuelta sobre el ministro de Estado, desprendiéndome de la humillación con un solo movimiento de la muñeca. Por un largo momento él se mantuvo inmóvil, los ojos desorbitados. (p.114.)

Liberation from humiliation is not *through* the political process represented by the seated politician, but *from* the political process. In a sense, the stool of the politician can be read as a metaphor for the rights devolved to the citizen from the state. Pure rubbish (the faeces of the body politic) that should not be received with thanks but disposed of with ingratitude. Allende has answered the question she posed herself with the suffragettes of *The House of the Spirits*. What is the value of purely political emancipation? It is not worth shit.

The political scientist David Beetham considers the function of the political state within class society.¹⁵ The political state, Beetham argues, is popularly held to be the source of the citizen's fiscal problems, and, the place to which the citizen may look for these problems to be resolved. If, for example, the standard of living is low, it is because the state has mismanaged the level of taxes; if there is homelessness, it is because the state has a poorly considered housing policy. The sort of problems that in fact obtain to class society are thereby refigured as problems of government policy.

This contradiction [between the classes] is not *resolved* by state intervention, but is simply *displaced* onto the state itself, where it manifests itself as incompatible steering objectives, fiscal crisis and legitimacy deficit. [...] The problem of the state's performance, in other words, is not simply a lack of capacity, but a systematically generated incoherence of its goals. The basic contradiction of the capitalist system is reproduced as incompatible [...] objectives at the level of the state itself. (p.166.)

It is perhaps in this way that the value of liberal democracy appears as axiomatic to the apologists of capitalism since it displaces the conflict

between classes into a more ideologically enunciable form as the inept policies of government. A truly oppositional politics within liberal democracy is hindered by the misapprehension that what must be swept away is a particular government, not existing relations of production. This critique of liberal democracy, as a mystificatory alibi for capitalism's structurally inegalitarian nature, affords insights into other forms of the state in Latin America.

Latin American history has been dominated by the figure of the *caudillo*, the military strongman who rules by diktat, supported by armed force. What relation does the military state bear to civil society? The answer is quite simple. The more naked the unequal relations of production become between capitalists and those with nothing but their labour, the less the blandishments of the state soothe the citizen, equal in nothing but the 'political' realm. In this set of circumstances, the state enforces the rights to private ownership by force, since the chimerical nature of purely political liberty becomes apparent and loses its pacific spell. The violence of the state in Latin America is in direct proportion to the naked violence of economic relations in civil society. This extremely radical insight is shared by Isabel Allende in her novels. In *The House of the Spirits* the conservative patriarch Esteban Trueba has a very acute understanding of the way in which the state in Latin America is at times hard pressed to finesse the conflict between classes. Speaking of his own country, he sees its successful political regulation of class conflict without the need for military coercion as an index of the state's accomplishment.

This country's a genuine republic. We have civic pride. Here the Conservative Party wins cleanly and openly, and we don't need a general to keep things orderly and calm, not like the neighbouring dictatorships where they kill each other off while the gringos walk away with their raw materials. (p.89.)

Este es un país diferente, una verdadera república, tenemos orgullo cívico, aquí el Partido Conservador gana limpiamente y no se necesita a un general para que haya orden y tranquilidad, no es como esas dictaduras regionales donde se matan unos a otros, mientras los

gringos se llevan todas las materias primas. (p.68.)

Other countries that have not succeeded in hiding the conflict between classes by displacing it on to the state are forced to resort to force. The burden of legitimation passes on to the active task of repression. It marks the passing of the baton in the relay of oppression from one form of state to another. The failure of what Althusser has called the 'ideological state apparatuses', or the state apparatus itself as an ideological displacement, announces the arrival of the 'repressive state apparatuses', the armed forces, secret police and the dreaded *esquadrões de la muerte* or death squads that have been such a terrifying feature of Latin American life.

Liberal democracy, then, is perhaps no more than a compelling mystification of class society that survives intact just so long as the actual content of the state is not interfered with. Isabel Allende makes this point herself in her essay "Writing as an Act of Hope".

Our fragile democracies exist as long as they do not interfere with imperialist interests. Most of our republics are dependent on submissiveness. Our institutions and laws are inefficient. Our armed forces often act as mercenaries for a privileged social group that pays tribute to transnational enterprises. We are living in the worst economic and political crisis since the conquest of America by the Spaniards. (pp.47-8.)

Allende considers this further in *The House of the Spirits*. She explores the problems that the socialist government experiences in its attempt at fundamental reform of the relations of production. Her analysis is quite accurately based on the experience of President Salvador Allende's attempts at reform in Chile in the early 1970's. Since this reform is not 'political', but structural, it encounters opposition from the covert forces of the United States, as it challenges the interests of North American business in the region. In the novel, the CIA plots to destabilize the government reforms by subverting the democratic process.

'We are not interested in a military coup, General,' the head of embassy intelligence replied in studied Spanish. 'We want Marxism to be a colossal failure and for it to fall alone, so we can erase it from the people's minds throughout the continent. You understand? We're going to solve this problem with money. We can still buy a few members of Congress so they won't confirm him as President. It's in your constitution.'(p.391.)

- No nos interesa un cuartelazo, general - replicó en su correcto castellano el agente de inteligencia de la embajada - Queremos que el marxismo fracase estrepitosamente y caiga solo, para quitar esa idea de la cabeza a otros países del continente. ¿Comprende? Este asunto lo vamos a arreglar con dinero. Todavía podemos comprar a algunos parlamentarios para que no lo confirmen como presidente. Está en su Constitución. (p.304.)

They hope to subvert the state rather than overthrow it, so as to make the experiment of socialism appear a failure in its own terms. This external intervention calls into question the notion of the sovereign state. While an apparently discrete and independent entity, it is in fact unable to carry out reforms that challenge the rights to private property (often exercised by foreign-owned businesses). The sovereign post-colonial state, then, has a chimerical quality within Allende's work: it is a myth that hides the harsh truth of a continuing economic imperialism. This understanding becomes a kind of background knowledge that Allende's characters wearily accept. In *Eva Luna*, Eva's *madrina* casually remarks on the state's economic dependence as fact of life.

"Everything in this country is crooked, little bird. Too many yellow-haired gringos, I say. One of these days they'll carry the whole country off with them, and we'll find ourselves plunk in the middle of the ocean - that's what I say." (p.67.)

- Corrompido está todo en este país, pajarito. Mucho gringo de pelo amarillo. digo yo, cualquier día nos llevan la tierra para otra parte y nos encontramos sentados en el mar, eso digo. (p.77.)

Elvira recognizes that in spite of the country's independence, the gringos own the rights to all the significant natural resources and raw materials. In

suggesting that the gringos might carry the sea off one day she in fact calls into question both the absurdity of foreign ownership and the limits to private property.¹⁶

In her exploration of the ersatz sovereignty of the post-colonial state, Allende is in fact advancing one of the key tenets of dependency theory. Lenin's account of imperialism written more than 60 years earlier also notes the sophisticated formalistic nature of independence within an extended network of finance capital.¹⁷

Not only are the two main groups of countries, those owning colonies, and the colonies themselves, but also the diverse forms of dependent countries which, politically, are formally independent but in fact, are enmeshed in the net of financial and diplomatic dependence, are typical of this epoch. (p.230.)

While these countries are recognized as politically sovereign, this sovereignty has a spectral quality since the nation in question is subject to the domination of finance capital - in terms of loans - and whose raw materials are snapped up by powerful, monopolistic cartels. Capitalist growth in Europe and the United States has, Lenin argued, impoverished the countries of Latin America. Not only that, the continued economic growth of these states in turn generates further poverty. Underdevelopment is created as a product of a continuing process, and is as such a structural feature of capitalism. It is not a condition of backwardness or of failing to catch up. As Lenin continues, this process is implicit in capitalism.

It goes without saying that if capitalism could develop agriculture, which today is everywhere lagging terribly behind industry, if it could raise the living standards of the masses, who in spite of the amazing technical progress are everywhere still half starved and poverty-stricken [...] it would not be capitalism; for both uneven development and a semi-starvation level of existence of the masses are fundamental and inevitable conditions and constitute premises of this mode of production. As long as capitalism remains what it is, surplus capital will be utilised not for the purpose of raising the standard of living of the masses in a given country [...] but for the purpose of increasing profits. (p.212.)¹⁸

Within dependency theory, the riches of the capitalist nations are dialectically bound to the poverty of the other nations, invariably those of the former colonies. As Eduardo Galeano states in his account of this relationship.

[T]he existence of wealthy capitalist centres in our own time [cannot] be explained without the existence of poor and subjected outskirts; the one and the other make up the same system. (p.41.)

This enables Galeano to reach the conclusion that the concept of development is in fact a rhetorical flourish that characterizes the necessary poverty of Latin America in optimistic terms. Galeano, after Lenin and the long lessons of Marx on the state, concludes that this periodization and diagnosis of Latin American ills is unequivocally wrong:

In these lands we are not experiencing the primitive infancy of capitalism but its vicious senility. *Underdevelopment isn't a stage of development, but its consequence.* Latin America's underdevelopment arises from external development, and continues to feed it. (p.308.)

By way of conclusion, I would like to suggest that this insight is also implicit in Allende's work. A dark pessimism informs her novels, and their grasp of the historical process. In *The House of the Spirits*, the *campesinas* reject the call for universal suffrage since they recognize the equality that it heralds is a sham. The socialist government, in attempting to address the fundamental causes of poverty, fails through the interference of agents representing the interests of international capital. Through her fiction, then, Allende moves towards a grim recognition of the historical process stripped of the blandishments of liberal interpretation. Allende acknowledges the nature of the historical process in "Writing as an Act of Hope", suggesting that is a harsh truth lying behind a farrago of lies.

We inhabit a land of terrible contrasts and we have to survive in times of great violence. [...] The first and most naked form of violence is the extreme poverty of the majority, in contrast with the extreme

wealth of the few. In my continent two opposite realities coexist. One is a legal face, more or less comprehensible and with a certain pretension to dignity and civilization. The other is a dark and tragic face, which we do not like to show but which is always threatening us. There is an apparent world and a real world [...] There is a world of fiction created by the official discourse, and another world of blood and pain and love, where we have struggled for centuries. (pp.46-47.)

In her work Allende seeks to initiate the reader into a real world beyond the fiction created by official historical discourse. In this world, liberal democracy appears as nothing so much as a formalism that does little to resolve the inevitable contradictions at the level of civil society. Histories of the state, of the legislature, and of the functionaries of the state, all appear as inadequate attempts that engage with events at the epiphenomenal level. The history of the majority of the population must be made visible by reading the interstices of Western history, by making the exploitative nature of civil society apparent through the nominal equality that is enshrined in the political state. To write a history not of the formalist, or juristic state, but of the political content of the quotidian life of civil society that has long been abjured.

NOTES

1. Allende dismisses the assumption that history should be an account of the lives, actions and decisions of great men and women along Marxist lines. In "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" *Karl Marx: Surveys from Exile*, (London: Allen Lane, 1973.) Marx criticizes the historiographical assumptions that Victor Hugo made in his study of Louis Napoleon. 'Victor Hugo confines himself,' Marx observes, 'to bitter and witty invective against the responsible author of the coup d'état. [...] Thus he falls into the error of so-called *objective* historians. I show how, on the contrary, the *class struggle* in France created circumstances and conditions which allowed a mediocre and grotesque individual to play the hero's role.' (p.144.) Similarly, the Latin American writer Eduardo Galeano attacks the facile psychologistic school of historical writing in *The Open Veins of Latin America*, (New York: Monthly

Review Press, 1973.) 'The clinical or folkloric roots of this or that dictator, which provide seasoning for history, are not history. Who would dare maintain today that the First World War broke out because of the complexes of Kaiser Wilhelm, who had one arm shorter than the other?' (p.296.) The assumption that history should be understood as the conscious play of the subject's intention (or, within psychoanalytical history, the subject's inattention as subconscious drive) is prey to an elementary category mistake. The historical subject is not monadic, but the predicate of his or her historical circumstances. Pinochet may well be a person with an interior life from Goya, but the terror that he wielded in Chile was woven not ex-nihilo but out of the material fabric of the times. *The House of the Spirits* has a decidedly impersonal tone when dealing with the figures at the centre of historical events. The leader of the socialist government is referred to simply as 'the President', while the instigator of the military coup is described in the sparest denotative style as the 'the General.' Allende is interested, then, in the fabric of the times.

2. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992.)

3. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984.)

4. Eduardo Galeano, "Lust for Gold, Lust for Silver," *Open Veins of Latin America*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973.)

5. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, J. Sibree (trans). (London: George Bell, 1881.)

6. Fukuyama's argument is heavily teleological. He argues that capitalism and liberal democracy are, together, the fulfilment of historical destiny. He captures this in a summary of his 1989 essay "The End of History?." 'In it, I argued that a remarkable consensus concerning the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of government had emerged throughout the world in the last few years, as it conquered rival ideologies like hereditary monarchy, fascism, and most recently communism. More than that, however, I argued that liberal democracy may constitute the "endpoint of mankind's ideological evolution" and the "final form of human government", and as such constituted the "end of history.'" Ibid., (p.xi.) Isabel Allende is herself interested in refuting the notion of capitalism as history's telos, in concert with her critique of liberal democracy. Her arguments are drawn from Alejo Carpentier's reading of Oswald Spengler that appears in *The Lost Steps (Los pasos perdidos)* Harriet De On'is (trans). (London: Minerva, 1991.) In his work *The Decline of the West*, C. Francis Atkinson (trans)., (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956.), Spengler argued that the Western obsession with world history was ethnocentric. 'We select a single bit of ground as the natural centre of the historical system,' he wrote, 'and make it the central sun. From it all the events of history receive their real light, from it their importance is

judged in perspective. How from a morphological point of view should our eighteenth century be more important than any of the sixty centuries that preceded it? (p.38.) Carpentier's novel described a trip to a remote Amazonian community that live outside the rectilinear historical time that Spengler critiques. In his work, the Indian's perspective provides a point from which to unravel the teleological thread of Western history. Allende develops a similar argument at several points throughout her work. In *Eva Luna* she describes the co-presence of anterior forms of history, within the present moment of capitalist hegemony, as a form of affront to historical teleology. 'All ages of history co-exist in this immoderate geography. While in the capital entrepreneurs conduct business affairs with associates in other cities on the globe, there are regions in the Andes where standards of human behaviour are those introduced five centuries earlier by the Spanish conquistadors, and in some jungle villages men roam naked through the jungle like their ancestors in the Stone Age.' (p.158.) ['En esta desmesurada geografía existen en el mismo instante todas las épocas de la historia. Mientras en la capital los magnates se comunicaban por teléfono para discutir de negocios con sus socios en otras ciudades del globo, hay regiones de los Andes donde las normas del comportamiento humano son las que trajeron cinco siglos antes los conquistadores españoles y en algunas aldeas de la selva los hombres deambulaban desnudos bajo los árboles, como sus antepasados de la Edad de Piedra.'] (pp.177-8.)

7. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, A.V. Miller (trans). (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.) See also John O'Neill (ed). *Hegel's Dialectic of Desire and Recognition*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1996.)

8. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, James H. Nichols (trans). (New York: Basic Books, 1969.)

9. Gregory Elliott, "The Cards of Confusion: Reflections on Historical Communism and the 'End of History'", *Radical Philosophy* #64, Summer 1993, (p.6.)

10. This assumption provides the conceptual grounds for the enunciability of such important and influential works as Edwin Williamson's *Penguin History of Latin America* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), published in response to the quincentenary of Columbus' voyage. This history sketches in the pre-Columbian era as a benighted epoch that lacked both the wheel and complex mathematics, requiring the supplement of the European encounter to bring it into history. Once within the ambit of history proper, events could move towards their telos. Chapters entitled "Nationalism and Development", "Brazil: Order and Progress", serve as an illustration of that historical movement that Fukuyama describes.

11. Joseph McCarney, "Endgame", *Radical Philosophy* #62, Autumn 1992.

12. Karl Marx "On the Jewish Question", *Early Writings*, (London: Penguin, 1992.)
13. Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of State," *Early Writings*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992.)
14. It seems to recall Marx's remark that 'political understanding is something spiritual, that is given to him that hath, to the man who is already sitting on velvet.'(p.417.) Karl Marx, "Critical Notes on 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform'", *Early Writings*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991.)
15. David Beetham, *The legitimation of Power*, (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991.)
16. This exploration of the boundless avarice of North American companies is taken to its absurd conclusion in a remarkably similar account in Gabriel García Márquez's novel *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, Gregory Rabassa (trans.) (London: Picador, 1978.), '[T]hey took away the Caribbean in April,' the narrator states, 'Ambassador Ewing's nautical engineers carried it off in numbered pieces to plant it far from the hurricanes in the blood-red dawns of Arizona [...]' (p.188.)
17. See V. I. Lenin's "Imperialism" in *Selected Works*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977.)
18. V.I. Lenin, "Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism," *Selected Works*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977.)

Chapter 5
Labour Power:
The Lost Politics of Subjectivity

In Chapter One I considered the border as figure for the text that draws on the critical traditions of two cultures. In this chapter, I should like to return to the border, not as a metaphor, but as an economic zone, so as to throw into sharp profile Isabel Allende's grasp of the concept of 'labour power.' The border - where the comparatively rich dollar economy of 'el Norte' meets the hyper-inflationary, low-wage economy of Mexico - is a region in which the processes of capitalism appear in astonishingly pure terms. I want to consider the conditions of life in the *maquilas* or 'assembly plants' that lie along the border of the United States and Mexico. In 1992 there were 2,129 of them sprawled the length of the Mexican border between the Pacific coast to the west and the Atlantic coast to the east.¹ Parts are imported into Mexico from the United States to be assembled by Mexican labour before being immediately re-exported.² The unintegrated presence of the *maquilas* in the border zones is eloquent, therefore, of their function: to extract maximum surplus value from a cheap labour force. The economist Harry Browne, in a study of the economy of the border, highlights the grotesque ironies of this process.³

Hundreds of workers in Nogales produce automatic garage door openers for Sears at a massive warehouse-style factory, and many live in hovels of their own making just outside the high barbed-wire fence surrounding the plant. Like many other *maquila* workers, their homes are worth less than the products they assemble every day. (p.38.)

'Can economic growth' he concludes 'be the product of such misery?' In Marx's definition of wage-labour, the worker becomes a slave to the commodity, toiling away to earn enough to exist as a physical being. 'It is true,' Marx writes, 'that labour produces marvels for the rich, but it provides privation for the worker. It produces palaces, but hovels for the worker.' (p.325.)⁴ The example of the *maquila* worker, producing automatic garage doors for the wealthy, while living in a hovel, captures the exploitative nature of the wage relation in very similar terms to those first used by Marx. Marx also suggested a general relation between productivity and wage levels

which is also born out in the *maquilas*. The wage-levels in the *maquilas* have been pushed as low as they can go. Browne records an interview with the manager of one of these *maquilas* who accounts for the high turnover of workers. 'Workers quit' he notes, 'because the pay is poor, the work is heavy, and the company always asks for more.' (p.35.)

These wages [...] are not nearly enough to provide for a family, and they keep many maquila workers living in makeshift homes in squatter colonies that often lack water and sewerage. Even as the maquiladoras incorporate sophisticated technology and higher value-added activities into their assembly systems, wages remain extremely low: about \$60 a forty-five-hour working week on average, including benefits. In fact if wages and benefits had kept pace with advancing productivity through the 1980's, average Mexican compensation would have been almost 80 percent higher[.] (pp.33-34.)

This observation of falling wage levels in the *maquilas* in relation to productivity, illustrates Marx's own prognosis for the relative value of labour as a commodity. Marx takes as a corollary of the wage relation and the commodification of the worker, the worker's necessary impoverishment. The value of his labour as a commodity falls in relation to the price of that commodity elsewhere.

[T]he worker sinks to the level of a commodity, and moreover the most wretched commodity of all; that the misery of the worker is in inverse proportion to the power and volume of his production [...] The worker becomes an even cheaper commodity the more commodities he produces. [...] Labour not only produces commodities, it produces itself and the workers as a commodity. (pp.322-4.)

Marx in his seminal musings on the nature of the wage relation could have been speaking about the situation of the *maquilas* in the 1990s. The human misery of the *maquilas* begins to make clear the material foundation of the subject that Marx argues. The wage relation is primary, and underpins his wretched physical existence. As Marx writes, 'the worker becomes a slave of

his object; firstly [...] in that he receives work, and secondly that he receives means of subsistence. Firstly, then, so that he can exist as a worker, and secondly as a physical subject. The culmination of this slavery is that *it is only as a worker that he can maintain himself as a physical subject.*' (p.325.) [Italics my own.] The Latin American historian Eduardo Galeano takes up this conception of the subject, analysing the effect of fluctuations in the price of raw materials on the international market, and the effect that this has in turn for Latin American labour.⁵ 'The workers', he writes 'have to compensate for the fall in value of their labour power, which is the product they sell in the market. They must make up in quantity - quantity of hours - what they lose in purchasing power of their wages. *The laws of the international market are thus reproduced in the micro-world of every Latin American worker's life.*' (p.303.) [Italics my own.] The worker, then, is defined quite unambiguously as a physical subject through his or her own value as the commodity which Marx calls 'labour-power'.

As Marx noted, if the worker 'relates to his own activity as unfree activity, then he relates to it as activity in the service, under the rule, coercion and yoke of another man.' (pp.330-331.) I would argue that while the experience of the workers in the *maquilas* is quite striking, it is not singular. Latin American labour, I contend, holds fewer illusions about the nature of the wage relation, and of themselves as the commodity of labour-power, than workers in the 'classless societies' of the developed world. From this insight, it is but a small step to seeing the body itself as a commodity, traversed by the dehumanizing forces of supply and demand.⁶

I would like to argue that Isabel Allende has an extraordinarily acute understanding of the processes by which capitalism produces the subject as a commodity. In *The House of the Spirits*, Blanca's husband, Jean de Satigny, develops an unprecedented interest in archaeology. He employs his indigenous servants to excavate ruins for Inca remains, remains which he describes as having a certain 'historical value.' (p.293.) ['valor histórico' (p.226.)]. It is telling to note that de Satigny, ever the venture capitalist looking for a profitable angle, chooses to realize this as an exchange value.

He goes on to sell the Inca remains on the international market.

Inside its jar, shrunken into a fetal position, wrapped in tatters, and accompanied by its wretched necklaces of teeth and a handful of rag dolls, the mummy looked like the pit of some exotic fruit. They were far more highly prized than any other objects that were brought out of the tombs, because private collectors and a few foreign museums paid very handsomely for them [...] [D]isplayed in a glass urn, they were even more valuable to European millionaires than works of art. (p.295.)

En el interior de la vasija aparecía la momia, como el hueso de un fruto extraño, encogida en posición fetal, envuelta en sus harapos, acompañada por sus miserables tesoros de collares de dientes y muñecos de trapo. Eran mucho más apreciadas que los demás objetos que sacaban de las tumbas, porque los coleccionistas privados y algunos museos extranjeros las pagaban muy bien. [...] [A]comodadas en un urna de cristal, podían ser más valiosas que cualquier obra de arte para un millonario europeo. (p.228.)

The traffic in human remains can be read as a metaphor for the way in which capitalism produces the worker as a commodity in the form of labour-power. Like the Inca mummies, labour is a commodity bought and sold by cartels of millionaires, without the least regard for the vestiges of humanity that inhere in it. In a certain sense, however, the traffic in the dead is perhaps too weak a metaphor to account for a process which creates such manifest and palpable misery among the living. There are, nonetheless, other examples from both Latin American life and Allende's work, that capture the commodification of the human subject in more vivid terms. Eduardo Galeano cites an occurrence during the build up to the Nicaraguan revolution of 1979 which emphasizes the way in which the living body quite literally becomes a commodity within capitalism. This example also importantly captures the knowing rage that Latin Americans feel toward this process.

Various businesses were put to the torch by the angry people. One of them, Plasmaferesis by name, specialized in vampirism. This concern which went up in smoke at the beginning of 1978 was the property of Cuban exiles, and its business was selling Nicaraguan blood to the United States. In the blood business,

as in all others, what the producer's receive is barely a tip. The Hemo Caribbean outfit, for example, pays Haitians \$3 per litre of blood, which it resells for \$25 in the US market. (p.292.)

This astonishing example literalizes one of Marx's seemingly extravagant metaphors about the creation of capital. 'Capital is', he writes 'dead labour, that vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.'(p.228.) Vampirism is a suggestive metaphor for capitalism. It both names the literal process by which the body and its products are produced as commodities, and it gives figurative expression to the commodification of labour, and the appropriation of the transmuted life-blood of surplus value.

In Latin America there are many popular stories of allied forms of vampirism which, in the light of widespread worker exploitation and the existence of businesses such as Plasmaferesis, are difficult to simply dismiss as contemporary urban myths. One such commonly held story concerns a supposed trade in human organs for the transplant market. It is popularly feared that this trade is supplied by North American kidnappers, who either steal children or offer false promises to parents of a better life in the North.⁷ Allende explores this myth in *The Tales of Eva Luna*. In "The Road North" ("Un camino hacia el norte"), a humanitarian mission organised by a mysterious *señora* Dermoth arranges to take the most neglected and afflicted children of an unnamed Latin American state to the United States. The children that are the subjects of this humanitarian mission are offered the chance to become fully-fledged American citizens with almost limitless opportunities to achieve material success as doctors or lawyers in the United States. The parents are shown persuasive 'colour brochures containing photographs of dark-skinned children with blond parents, in luxurious surroundings of blazing fireplaces, huge, woolly dogs, pine trees decorated with silvery frost and Christmas ornaments.' (p.139.) ['Unos folletos impresos a color donde se veían fotografías de niños morenos junto a padres rubios, en lujosos ambientes con chimeneas encendidas, grandes perros lanudos, pinos decorados con escarcha plateada y bolas de Navidad.' (p.156.)] The

Latin American family at the centre of this story is divided about what they should do for their small, deaf son. The grandfather, who is bringing him up for his absent mother, wants him to remain at home where he is loved, so as to teach him to carve nativity figures to sell in the casual economy. The mother on the other hand, wanting the best for her son in material terms, decides to sell him to the mission for \$250. Soon after, the secretary of Welfare and Health discloses the details of a criminal organization headed by a '*señora Dermoth*' selling Indian children. According to his information, the organization kept the children for a while to fatten them up, and when they were in better shape took them to a secret clinic where they performed operations on them. 'Dozens of innocents had been sacrificed like living organ banks, their eyes, kidneys, liver, and other body parts removed and sent to be used in transplants in the north.' (p.142.) ['Docenas de inocentes fueron sacrificados como bancos de órganos, para que les sacaran los ojos, los riñones, el hígado y otras partes del cuerpo que eran enviadas para transplantes en el Norte.' (p.159.)] I would argue that the story of the child's sequestration as a somatic commodity is suggestive; it acts as a mythic retelling of the abstract process by which labour is produced as a commodity within the global economy.⁸

Aside from vampirism, another metaphor that Marx uses to describe the process of labour in capitalist relations of production is that of prostitution. It amounts, Marx states, to the 'prostitution of the non-owning class in all its forms.'⁹ The metaphor of prostitution describes the process of alienated labour very well. Within an unalienated sexual 'economy' the objectification of that labour would be children. In an economy based on exchange, sexual labour produces surplus value. Moreover, the prostitute generally does not even receive the surplus value that she has produced since it is taken by her pimp. Eduardo Galeano takes Marx's metaphor to its logical conclusion, referring to capitalists within the international setting of dependency theory, as 'the pimps of misery.'¹⁰ Prostitution occurs several times in Allende's work as an eloquent metaphor for capitalist relations of production. Interestingly, Allende also uses prostitution to explore possible

responses to the inequitable wage-relation under capitalism. The problem with prostitutes, in Allende's analysis, is that they do not act on what they know, but tolerate the injustice of their situation through a sentimental acquiescence to the subject position of victim. As Transito Soto states in *The House of the Spirits*:

Whores are the worst, patron, believe me. They throw their lives away working for some pimp, smile when he beats them, feel proud when he's well dressed, with his gold teeth and rings on his fingers, and when he goes off and takes up with a woman half their age they forgive him everything because "he's a man". (p.140.)

Las putas son las peores, patrón, créamelo. Dejan la vida trabajando para un cafiche, se alegran cuando él les pega, se sienten orgullosas de verlo bien vestido, con dientes de oro, con anillos y cuando las deja y se va con otra más joven, se lo perdonan porque "es hombre." (p.108.)

When taken as a metaphor, the passive deference of the prostitute to the injustice of her situation, begins to suggest the passivity of the worker who accepts the unfair relations of production under capitalism. The worker - like the prostitute who forgives the pimp since he is a man - corresponds to the worker who sees capitalism as a *natural* and inevitable set of social relations. Allende, however, is not content to shrug off this injustice as a natural and hence unavoidable consequence. She creates a set piece in *The House of the Spirits* in which the prostitute Transito Soto confronts Esteban Trueba, the rich *patrón* of a *hacienda* with many families in peonage.

The thing to do is form a co-operative and tell the madam to go to hell. Haven't you ever heard of that? You'd better be careful. If your tenants set up a co-operative, you'd really be finished. What I want is a whores co-operative. [...] What do we need a *patrón* for? (p.142.)

Lo que hay que hacer es una cooperativa y mandar a la madame al carajo. ¿No ha oído hablar de eso? Váyase con cuidado, mire que si sus inquilinos le forman una cooperativa en el campo, usted se jodió. Lo que yo quiero es un cooperativa de putas. [...] ¿Para qué queremos

un patrón? (p.109.)

Transito Soto comments disparagingly on the possibility of reforming capitalism, concluding that the question of whether the capitalist himself is good or bad is neither here nor there. The point is to transform the relations of production.

In *Eva Luna* and the *Tales of Eva Luna*, Allende follows her critique of capitalist relations, with an analysis of value. She is, I will argue, interested in the problematic conception of value as it appeared to Marx. In this schema, value is conceived first of all in terms of use. Spivak's swift definition of the former I find particularly helpful in reading Allende's work. 'Use value,' she writes is in play 'when a human being produces and uses up [a] product (or uses up the unproduced) immediately.' (p.155.)¹¹ At one point in her autobiographical work *Paula*, Allende recalls a trip she made with her stepfather, Tio Ramon, to visit the patients of a lunatic asylum near Santiago de Chile. The visit was conceived as a treat for the Allende children, who were allowed to run through the grounds picking and eating the fruit from the heavily laden trees, with the lunatics themselves acting as willing accomplices. In this recollection, Allende describes the way in which Tio Ramon turned to her with a twinkle in his eye, saying with a sonorous largesse that they were 'immensely rich' ['somos inmensamente ricos.']. His definition of riches invokes a conception of wealth within an understanding of value as use. They are filthy rich in this instance because they have more fruit - that of the unproduced as it were - than they can immediately use up. By way of contrast, superfluity does not exist in terms of exchange. Capital, the corollary and condition of exchange, can accumulate endlessly. You can never have too much, and, can never really be certain that you have enough, since quantity and sufficiency no longer stand in direct relation. This redefinition of riches outwith exchange marks a perspective from which Allende returns to critique exchange value.

Allende returns to the 'unproduced' in *Eva Luna* to tease out this meditation on value. The eponymous narrator lives for a while in a small

tropical town on the edge of the jungle. The town of Agua Santa lies in the hinterland between capitalist relations of production and the subsistence lifestyle of the Indians of the tropical forest. In this sense, then, Agua Santa is a liminal zone in which the coherence of exchange value is pushed to its limit. One of the gifts of the climate is its fertility and its year-round production of fruit. This is of interest because it makes Agua Santa, like the orchard of Tio Ramon's lunatics, rich in the unproduced. It lies partially outside capital relations in the domain of use value. This Edenic community is disrupted when a city type comes to live in the town, bringing with him a different attitude to the fruit that grows on the trees. The mango trees of the community are growing on his land. Therefore, to his understanding they are his, and represent at least potentially an exchange value and the prospect of capital accumulation (a different order of riches altogether). One day, he sees the son of the school teacher Inés stealing one of his mangoes. Acting on an impulse springing from the premise of private property and exchange value, he sees the boy's use of the un-produced as theft and shoots him dead. The response of the townspeople is an interesting immanent critique of accumulation.

Straight from the cemetery, each of them went to pick mangoes; they filled sacks, baskets, bags, and wheelbarrows, and then converged upon the property of the murderer [...] The crowd advanced in silence, surrounded the house, broke the windows and doors, and emptied their load inside. They went back for more. All day they hauled mangoes, until there were none left on the trees and the house was filled to the roof top. The juicy fruit burst open, soaking the walls and running across the floor like sweet blood. [...] In the days that followed, the sun beat down on the house, converting it into an enormous saucepan in which the mangoes slowly simmered; the building took on an ochre colour; it grew soggy and weak, and burst open and rotted, impregnating the town for years with the odour of marmalade. (pp.128-9.)

Del camposanto partieron todos a recoger mangos, llenaron sacos, cestas, bolsas, carretillas y así marcharon hacia la propiedad del asesino [...] La muchedumbre avanzó en silencio, rodeó la casa, rompió las ventanas y las puertas y vació su carga en las habitaciones.

Luego fueron por más. Todo el día estuvieron acarreado mangos hasta que ya no quedaron en los árboles y la casa estuvo repleta hasta el techo. El jugo de la fruta reventada impregnaba las paredes y escurría por el piso como sangre dulce. [...] En los días siguientes el sol calentó la casa, convirtiéndole en una enorme marmita donde se cocinaron los mangos a fuego suave, la construcción se tiñó de ocre, se ablandó deformándose, se partió y se pudrió, impregnando el pueblo durante años de olor a mermalada. (p.144.)

This episode eloquently satirizes the absurdity and immorality of capital accumulation from the alternative perspective of use value.¹² For years after the event, the town of Agua Santa is redolent with the sweet scent of this recognition. This theme is one that Allende returns to for a third time in "The Schoolteacher's Guest", ["El huésped de la maestra"] one of *The Tales of Eva Luna*. In this short story she retells the episode of the mangoes from a few years in the future. Allende's retelling of the event captures accumulation in grimmer terms than before.

After a few weeks, the sun had fermented the fruit, which burst open spilling a viscous juice and impregnating the walls with a golden blood, a sweetish pus, that transformed the dwelling into [...] an enormous beast in process of putrefaction, tormented by the infinite diligence of the larvae and mosquitoes of decomposition. (p.145.)

En pocas semanas el sol fermentó la fruta, que reventó en un jugo espeso, impregnando las paredes de una sangre dorada, de un pus dulzón, que transformó la vivienda en [...] una enorme bestia en proceso de podredumbre, atormentada por la infinita diligencia de las larvas y los mosquitos de la descomposición. (p.162.)

Accumulation, in Allende's characterization, is somehow equivalent to decay and death. It recalls Marx's definition of capital as dead labour, subjecting that metaphor to the organic process that it calls into play. If things cannot be used, the natural law is one of decay and putrefaction. The story is didactic. It exhibits an exemplary attitude to capitalism, its absurdities and its injustices, suggesting that they should not be patiently tolerated. The schoolteacher Inés kills the capitalist in an act of revenge, severing his head with deliberation. The community helps her dispose of the body. 'The next

day,' we learn, 'the inhabitants of Agua Santa returned to their usual chores exalted by a magnificent complicity, by a secret kept by good neighbours, one they would guard with absolute zeal and pass down for many years as a legend of justice.' (p.150.) ['Al día siguiente los habitantes de Agua Santa volvieron a sus quehaceres de siempre engrandecidos por una complicitad magnífica, por un secreto de buenos vecinos, que habrían de guardar con el mayor celo, pasándose uno a otros por muchos años como un leyenda de justicia.' (p.167.)

Allende, with an astonishing, almost zealously Marxist rigour pursues the critique of use and exchange values into the problematic concept of money. The inhabitants of Agua Santa have problems with money, which, as Marx makes clear in a long disquisition in the *Grundrisse*, is a difficult concept even for one who has devoted months of his life to the subject in the hush of the British Library.¹³ Allende uses the community's collective incompetence in dealing with the slippery principle of exchange embodied in money as an almost Brechtian estrangement of exchange value.

They were, in fact, suspicious of paper money that today was worth something and tomorrow might be withdrawn from circulation, according to the whim of the current leader, printed paper that could vanish if you turned your back - as had happened with the collection for Aid to Lepers, devoured by a goat that ambled into the treasurer's office. They preferred coins, which at least weighed in the pocket, rang on the counter, and shone as real money should. (p.127.)

Aun desconfiaban de los billetes, esos papeles impresos que hoy valían algo y mañana podían ser retirados de circulación, de acuerdo a los caprichos del gobernante de turno, o que en un descuido desaparecerían, como ocurrió con la colecta de Ayuda al Leproso, devorada en su totalidad por un chivo que se introdujo en la oficina del tesorero. Preferían las monedas, que al menos pesaban en los bolsillos, sonaban sobre el mostrador y brillaban, como dinero de verdad. (p.142.)

In an interesting touch the town goat, unmindful of the abstract order of exchange that money instantiates, tries to literalize its value as a form of

food. Very poor food it makes too, only conceivably of any sustaining value to a waste-land quadruped such as a goat. Allende's burlesquing of the habituated assumptions of exchange embodied in money is sustained in the bemused preference of the towns-folk for coinage. It recalls "The Chapter on Money" in the *Grundrisse* in which Marx speaks of early communities' fascination with gold, the shiny brilliance of which gave it value as an ornament. Coins, like gold, at least seem to embody a notion of value; they are shiny and heavy and could conceivably be put to some use, whereas bank notes tail off into the most alarming metaphoricity of value.

In this chapter, I have sought to show the way in which Allende foregrounds the materialist predication of the subject in the concept of labour power. Thus far, I have only succeeded in deriving the being of the worker from the wage relation. What about that of the capitalist, or the capitalist in its most incipient form as the bourgeois subject? Allende's second novel, *Of Love And Shadows*, is an interesting case in point. It tellingly figures the bourgeois as a subject who can be defined in relation to capital. In the novel, Allende creates the figure of Beatriz Beltrán. Beatriz runs an old people's home and lives a secluded life in the *barrio alta*. Allende's description of Beatriz inscribes her as a subject whose identity is - like that of the worker - derived from her material relations.

She was from a middle-class family, and from the time she was a little girl her one ambition had been to ascend the social ladder. Her capital consisted of her beauty, the artifice of her manners, and a few English and French phrases misused with such assurance that she gave the impression of being fluent in those languages. (p.50.)

Ella pertenecía a una familia de clase media y desde niña su única ambición fue ascender en la escala social. Su capital consistía en la bellaza de sus rasgos, el artificio de sus maneras y algunas frases chapuceadas en inglés y francés con tanto desarpajo que parecía dominar esas lenguas. (p.48.)

The idea of alienation and commodification creeps into this description.

Beatriz Beltrán bears an alienated relation to her own being. She regards her appearance as her capital and the 'artifice of her manners' as her collateral. The sense of the bourgeois suffering an alienated relation to her body is again considered in Allende's most recent novel, *The Infinite Plan*. This novel is set in North America and treats the American obsession with the body. The body does not have a materially innocent ontology, but is relentlessly traversed by alienating material and social demands, demands which reproduce it as an asset with a kind of social exchange value. Maria - the hispanic girl from the barrio made good (that is to say bourgeois) - has reached a stage in her life when she feels she needs a husband, as the sort of crowning acquisition of a life in business. She stands before a mirror and begins what she herself describes as an 'inventory' of her corporeal assets.

She appraised herself with a pitiless eye in the full-length bathroom mirror, counted her wrinkles, and regretted the years of not exercising and of cheating on her diet. She pinched her arms and legs, confirming her worst suspicions about muscle tone, tried to suck in her stomach but was foiled by a rebellious fold [...] She did not have the figure she had had when she met Leo Galupi, but she decided that, overall, the inventory wasn't too bad. (p.366.)

Se observó con despiadada atención en el espejo grande del baño, contó las arrugas y alcanzó a arrepentirse de no haber hecho más ejercicio y de los atracones de leche condensada con que burló la dieta a lo largo de los años. Se pellizcó brazos y piernas y comprobó que ya no eran firmes, trató de hundir la barriga, pero allí había un pliegue rebelde [...] No tenía el mismo cuerpo de la época en que Leo Galupi la conoció, pero decidió que el inventario de sus encantos no estaba mal. (p.334.)

The bourgeois body, then, becomes a form of commodity that is traversed by various social demands. The imperative is to keep it fit, banish excess fat and resist the ageing process, so as to maintain the body's exchangeability. It marks both the alienation of (or from) the body, and, the creation of the subject as consumer. The commodification of the body also inaugurates a carnival for the consumption of commodities that are designed to regulate

and otherwise beautify this asset. It is interesting to note that Allende characterizes Samantha, the first wife of the novel's central character Gregory Reeves, as a kind of machine that responds to the imperatives of consumption. She buys slimming products, joins the tennis club and installs a thermal hot-tub. In the course of the novel this does nothing but increase her alienation from her own body, to the point at which its natural functions, such as parturition appear as alien and uncanny.

When Samantha discovered she was pregnant, she was totally demoralized. She felt that her tanned body, which had never known a gram of excess fat, had become a loathsome receptacle housing a rapidly growing, gluttonous tadpole that she could not imagine had any connection with her. (p.158.)

Cuando Samantha descubrió que estaba embarazada se desmoralizó por completo. Sintió que su cuerpo bronceado y sin un gramo de grasa, se había convertido en un asqueroso recipiente donde crecía un ávido guarisapo imposible de reconocer como algo suyo. (p.150.)

Samantha's body has become reified in the sense that Lukács uses the term.¹⁴ It has been transformed 'into a property of man-produced things which have become independent (and which are imagined as originally independent) of man and govern his [or her] life.'¹⁵ She lives in a world which demands that she experiences her body in alienated terms. The baby that she carries is a disruption of that alienated order, and comes perversely to seem unnatural.¹⁶

The two sides of this conception of material subjectivity at parturition are explored in Allende's work, from different perspectives. To oppose to Samantha's refusal of the natural processes of the body in *The Infinite Plan*, Allende presents the attitude of Clara in *The House of the Spirits* to her newborn daughter. Unlike Samantha, Clara steadfastly resists the call of commodification that society insists upon, struggling against social demands for a relationship to her child that is not alienated or mediated by exchange.

She went everywhere with her little girl clutched to her breast,

nursing her constantly without a set schedule and without regard for manners or modesty, like an Indian. She did not want to swaddle her, cut her hair, pierce her ears, or hire a nursemaid to take care of her, and least of all to use milk manufactured in some laboratory, as all the ladies did who could afford such luxuries. (p.124.)

[A]ndaba con ella prendida al pecho, dándole de mamar en todo momento, sin horario fijo y sin contemplaciones con las buenas maneras o el pudor, como una indígena. No quiso fajarla, cortarle el pelo, abrirle hoyos en las orejas o contratarle un aya para que la criara y mucho menos recurrir a la leche de algún laboratorio, como hacían todas las señoras que podían pagar ese lujo. (p.94.)

Allende interestingly describes Clara as being like an Indian. What does she mean by this? Elsewhere in her work she accounts for the marginal existence of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, those of the Andes at the bottom of the social ladder and those of the Venezuelan jungle hovering on the edges of history. That is to say the Indian in her work acts as a figure on the fringes of the social contract, impoverished by capitalism but on the threshold of a different kind of freedom. A freedom of subsistence living in which the axiomatic polarities of exchange and use values are reversed.

In Allende's work there is evidence of a sustained and persuasive critique of the way in which subject relations are understood. Within dominant culture, the subject is not invited to understand the social field from the material circumstances of his or her own history, as for instance through an understanding of the inequities of the wage relation, but through mystificatory bourgeois ideology. Allende is interested in the process by which the subject is produced within hegemonic discourse. The remainder of this chapter is concerned with her critique of the bourgeois interpellation of the subject.

In Latin America, the hegemonic subject encounters the social field through the gendered hierarchies of *machista* culture. At the head of the family is the father, at the head of the corporation the *patrón*, and at the head

of the state the *caudillo* - or military strong-man. The entire social field of *machista* society is derived from a series of homologies that posit masculine authority as the natural given order and the salient determinant of interaction. While the hegemony of *machista* culture has obvious implications with respect to the position of women within society, it also serves as a mystification of class relations. The *patrón* and the *caudillo* are grasped as a natural *de jure* manifestation of masculine authority, not as the *de facto* beneficiaries of society structured by social class. Inequitable relations between social classes are excused as a function of an immutable masculine order, held in place in the name of the father. It is in this way that the subject in *machista* culture is interpellated as a kind of compliant child, to be led to the work place and to the ballot box by a series of authoritarian fathers. It is the effort of this chapter to explore the way in which that social field is created in Allende's novels, and the way that she subtly works away at its assertions, opening up a more dialectical understanding of the subject's position.

The conception of the subject as essentially familial, responding to the commands of various fathers, has vast and conservative effects when it comes to conceiving of the more broadly social terrain. It falls neatly over the contours of capitalist society characterizing not only the subject as familial, but all subject positions within the social field as familial too. As a form of understanding it cathects social critique, displacing a structural critique of social relations advanced by Marxism on to a sovereign model drawn from the family. This ideological displacement is one that Deleuze and Guattari address in their critique of psychoanalysis.¹⁷ Here the subject, or 'neurotic' as they term him, is trapped within the dominant conceptual schemas that they call 'territorialities'.

The neurotic is trapped within the residual or artificial territorialities of our society, and reduces all of them to Oedipus as the ultimate territoriality - as reconstructed in the analyst's office and projected upon the full body of the psychoanalyst (yes, my boss is my father, and so is the Chief of State, and so are you, Doctor). (p.35.)

The subject positions that this offers are very limiting in terms of their critical analysis. The subject positions within society are not historically determined but as invariable as the Oedipal drama itself. There will always be fathers, and they will always carry the onerous burden of their often ungrateful children. Within the familial model, capitalism is produced as a natural formation. The effect of this curtailment of what might properly be termed social critique is as pervasive as it is conservative. Capitalist relations of production, when conceived in these terms, anticipate and contains certain strategies of critique. The bad capitalist, it is implied, is not the inevitable product of a system but the consequence of individual moral failings. If the capitalist is unjust, it is not the system that is to blame but the particular 'father' himself. The corollary of this is that a kind of egalitarian society will necessarily flow from a familial capitalism headed by a good and just father.

This displacement is captured in (and reproduced by) mass cultural forms such as the *telenovela* or soap-opera. In a fairly typical *telenovela* such as the Colombian programme *Manuela*, questions of social conflict are couched very much in terms of familial relations. The class tensions that arise between peasant and landlord are displaced from a potentially incendiary analysis of social class onto that of the personal qualities of the particular member of the ruling class. Ariel Bibliovicz writes 'the "notables" who have "bad intentions" are cruel to the peasants while the mayor who is from the same social class as the "notables" has good "intentions" and wants to help them. The *telenovela* offers a simplistic analysis of the problems which are posited on the character of certain individuals and not the socio-economic reality of the country which is the real issue.'¹⁸

Deleuze and Guattari have called the fashioning of issues of class in terms of such familial relations the 'oedipalization' of society. That is not to say that the social subject is conceived as harbouring a frustrated desire to sleep with his mother, but is *required* to believe that this thwarted drive lies at the heart of each and every frustration. In the Oedipalized community, all social tension is adduced to this antisocial desire. It is in the sense of the ideological displacement enacted by psychoanalysis that Deleuze and

Guattari refer to Freud as the 'Luther and Adam Smith of psychiatry.' As Deleuze and Guattari state, the Oedipal subject is rehearsed in such a way as to answer Daddy-and-Mommy to all points etiological, whether they arise in the family itself, the work place or at the level of the political state.¹⁹

Allende considers the way the subject introjects the desire for his or her own repression in much the same way as Deleuze and Guattari have argued in her essay "Writing as an Act of Hope."

Until now, humankind has organized itself according to certain principles that are considered part of nature: we are all born (it has been said) with some original sin; we are basically evil, and without the strict control of religion and laws we would devour each other like cannibals; authority, repression and punishment are necessary to keep us in line. According to these theories, the best proof of our perverse nature is that the world is what it is - a round rock lost in the cosmic nightmare, where abuse, war, inequality and hatred prevail. (p.52.)

Allende is very astute in her handling of the ideology of *machista* society and the homologies it extends to the patronal system. In *The House of the Spirits*, Esteban Trueba's country estate, Tres Marias, acts as a model for capitalist relations grasped in familial terms.²⁰ The *patrón* has an enduring contempt for the competence of his estate workers to manage both the land and the complex world of politics. 'As I've always said,' he opines 'they're like children.'(p.83.) [...siempre lo he dicho; son como niños (p.64.)] Trueba, then, comes to represent a powerful strand of capitalist ideology that characterizes the exploitation of one social class by another as the paternalistic interest of one social group seeking to manage the interests of another incompetent, perpetually childlike social group. For Trueba this view is an ingrained habit of mind that refuses all contestation from a materialist perspective:

No one's going to convince me that I wasn't a good *patrón*. Anyone who saw Tres Marias in decline and who could see it now, when it is a model estate would have to agree with me. That's why I can't go along with my granddaughter's story about class struggle. (p.68.)

Nadie me va a quitar de la cabeza la idea de que he sido un buen patrón. Cualquiera que hubiera visto Las Tres Marias en los tiempos del abandono y la viera ahora, que es un fundo modelo, tendría que estar de acuerdo conmigo. Por eso no puedo aceptar que mi nieta me venga con el cuento de la lucha de clases. (p.53.)

Allende's modelling of subject relations, however, pays deference to their complexity. It is not simply that the *campesinos* have been the cruel dupes of the landowning classes. It is not sufficient to account for them as a wilfully misled group who, on learning the true character of their situation as a class, will refashion their self-understanding accordingly. Allende suggests that the weave that creates the totality of the social field, also creates an interior mechanism for repression. If the peons of Tres Marias are unable to grasp themselves as a class it is because they have internalized the subject position assigned them by the ideology of paternalism. The strong prohibition against disrespecting one's parents that is present to Latin American culture also presents an implied interdiction against an opposition to the *patrón*. While a simmering resentment exists among the *campesinos* in the novel, they are held back from action by internalized imperatives of a complex and quasi familial nature:

Pedro Segundo hated [the *patrón*], even though he had not given a name to the tortured feeling that gripped his soul and filled him with confusion. [...] His intuition told him that he would never have the courage to confront him because he was the *patrón*. (p.79.)

Por su parte, Pedro Segundo odiaba [al patrón], aunque jamás había puesto nombre a ese sentimiento tormentoso que le abrasaba el alma y lo llenaba de confusión. [...] Presentía nunca se atrevería a hacerle frente, porque era el patrón. (p.61.)

Allende returns to the *campesinos'* relationship to the *patrón* in *Paula*. In the years of the progressive presidency of Salvador Allende, the *campesinos* had been given land through the formation of rural cooperatives. The cooperatives, however, enjoyed mixed fortunes. Allende argues - with what degree of accuracy we cannot be sure - that this unfortunate failure owed to

the enduring habits of mind formed under the patronal system, rather than to any logistical problems of cooperative organization:

The *campesinos*, who had lived for centuries obeying orders, joined together in cooperatives, but they lacked initiative, knowledge and credit. They did not know how to use their freedom, and many secretly longed for the return of the *patrón*, that authoritative and frequently despised father figure who at least gave clear orders [...] (p.184.)

Los campesinos, que habían vivido por generaciones obedeciendo órdenes, se reunieron en asentamientos para trabajar, pero les faltaban iniciativa, conocimiento y crédito. No sabían usar su libertad y muchos añoraban secretamente el regreso del patrón, ese padre autoritario y a menudo odiado, pero que al menos daba órdenes claras [...] (p.205.)

Allende's analysis - which attributes the failure of the cooperatives to the *campesinos'* hidden desire for the return of the *patrón* - deploys a sophisticated model of power, in which the internalization of oppression is one of the most ingrained and insidious of its operations. It is an insight that is shared by Deleuze and Guattari, who seek to lay bare the psychological mechanism that institutes an almost willed oppression within subject himself. In order to define a politics of emancipation adequately, it is essential to understand oppression as process with an internal, psychological component. As they observe:

Even the most repressive and the most deadly forms of social reproduction are produced by desire [...] the masses were not innocent dupes; at a certain point, under a certain set of conditions, they wanted *fascism*, and it is this perversion of the desire of the masses that needs to be accounted for. (p.29.)

If *The House of the Spirits* is something of an Oedipal novel, in which workers and family members accede to (or are even complicit in) demands made in the name of the patriarch, then *Eva Luna* is its antithesis, a novel concerned with what Deleuze and Guattari have called 'deterritorialization'. In *Eva*

Luna, Allende, like Deleuze and Guattari, attempts to rid subjectivity of all the cluttered associations of the family and the homologies that are derived from it. Whereas the Truebas institute and live by an Oedipal order that regulates the lives of family members and estate workers alike, Eva Luna escapes such an order since she is an orphan. To understand the importance of this requires the semantic amplification that Deleuze and Guattari lend the term. In attempting to conceive of subjectivity as a kind of philosophical *tabula rasa* outwith Oedipal discourse, Deleuze and Guattari arrive at the term 'orphan'.²¹ Eva Luna is an orphan, both literally and in the figurative sense that Deleuze and Guattari imply: she is a subject unmarked by the traces of Oedipal discourse. It is interesting to note the way that Allende handles the situation of Eva's orphanhood. Since being an orphan is primarily a discursive, rather than an emotive requirement, the details of her abandonment are peremptory if not comical. Her father, an Indian of the forest, once he has impregnated her mother returns forthwith whence he came. Subsequently, Eva's mother dies from a poorly ingested piece of chicken. Her mother's somewhat summary departure leaves Eva all alone in the world to grow up under the guidance of a few benevolent adults, while she earns her keep as a domestic servant. In this context, Eva grows up outside of the demands of the family with an immediate sense of the wage relation as the most salient determinant of her subjective experience. This 'an-oedipal' state, Deleuze and Guattari argue, is somehow more faithful to the actual development of the subject outwith Oedipal ideology. '[T]he individual in the family, however young,' they write, 'directly invests a social, historical, economic, and political field that is not reducible to any mental structure or affective constellation.' (p.168.) As Deleuze and Guattari note, those who grow up outside the family and its demands are perhaps less available to the further homologies developed from its structures. The an-oedipal subject represents a threat to an Oedipalized social order. He or she will not answer Daddy-and-Mommy when it is demanded of them. '[T]hose who do not bow to the imperialism of Oedipus', write Deleuze and Guattari, 'are dangerous deviants, leftists who ought to be handed over to

social and police repression; they talk too much and are lacking in anality.' (p.108.) Whereas in *The House of the Spirits* Pedro Segundo is suffered to hate the *patrón* in silence since he cannot raise a finger against the father he represents, Eva is not so hindered. As an 'orphan' she has no father, no mother and no introjected homology that forbids her recognize the exploitative nature of the social field for what it is. The imperious, petulant and unreasonable demands of her *patrona* are not something that the young Eva feels impelled to respond to with a 'natural' deference. On finding Eva idly absorbed in her own thoughts when she should have been working, the *patrona* picks up a vase and empties its contents over the floor. It is a moment in which Eva is defied by her *patrona* to recognize her authority:

A monumental "No" swelled up inside me, choking me; I heard it burst forth in a scream that came from my toes and watched it explode against the *patrona's* face. When she slapped me I felt no pain, because long before she touched me I felt only rage, an urge to leap upon her, drag her to the floor, claw her face, grab her hair, and pull with all my might. (p.55.)

Un no monumental me creció por dentro, ahogándome, lo sentí brotar en un grito profundo y lo vi estrellarse contra el rostro empolvado de la *patrona*. No me dolió so bofetón en la mejilla, porque mucho antes la rabia me había ocupado por completo y ya llevaba el impulso de saltarle encima, lanzarla al suelo, arañarle la cara, agarrarla del cabello y tirar con todas mi fuerzas. (p.64.)

This episode lends weight to Deleuze and Guattari's supposition. The resolutely un-oedipalized Eva Luna appears to be a deviant proto-leftist who resolutely refuses to learn lessons in social authority, whosoever would suffer her to learn them. In the course of the novel I would argue that Eva develops as an exemplary model for the subject's development outwith the codifying and oppressive demands of society.

The process by which the subject internalizes social demands is more readily apparent in hispanic cultures, particularly in respect to women. *Vergüenza* is a peculiarly Latin concept that literally means 'shame'. In this context, shame must be understood not as a negative attribute, but as a

positive quality. To have *vergüenza* is to have successfully introjected the demands, expectations and values of society to become a fully socialized member of the community. These rules of conduct are invariable. As the anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers notes, once lost, *vergüenza* is not generally speaking recoverable.²² This acquiescence to social expectations is often achieved at some cost. Ferula in *The House of the Spirits* shows requisite *vergüenza* in acceding to the expectation that she look after her mother, albeit at the expense of her own happiness and fulfilment. Similarly, Blanca's loveless marriage to Jean de Satigny acknowledges her accession to shame. *Vergüenza* has, however, a double-edged quality with respect to subjectivity. If *vergüenza* marks the bounds of the socially permissible, it also designates a beyond of unacceptable behaviour. The *sin-vergüenza* is the subject who refuses all the solicitudes, imprecations and coercions of *gente decente* - decent people - to bend to hegemonic will, taking up an alternative subject position outside society. As Pitt-Rivers states '[A] *sin vergüenza* is a person who either does not accept or who abuses those rules.' (p.113.) Perhaps the best term to describe the young Eva Luna's state of continued and intransigent defiance is that of being *sin-vergüenza*. Eva Luna actively chooses not to comply with the demands of social codification. Having grown up outside the purview of their regulatory control, she feels neither that she is beholden to them, nor that her subjective integrity is contingent upon their affirmation. This realization is both a valuable lesson for all women complicit in their own repression within *machista* culture, and for a broader critique of social relations. I should like to conclude this chapter with an exploration of Eva Luna as an exemplary *sin-vergüenza*, who reclaims aberrant subjective experience from hegemonic social codification.

Deleuze and Guattari at times refer to the subject as the 'socius.' 'The prime function incumbent upon the socius,' they state, 'has always been to codify the flows of desire, to inscribe them, to record them, to see to it that no flow exists that is not properly dammed up, channelled, regulated.' (p.33.) Throughout Allende's work, there are characters - some real and some fictive - who stifle pleasure that society deems illicit. Pleasure in Allende's work is

often associated with orality in a strangely Freudian conjuncture. The refusal of pleasure - in a propitiatory gesture to the forces of *vergüenza* - is marked by the individuals covering their mouths with either their hand or with a handkerchief. In her autobiographical work *Paula*, Allende records that her mother-in-law, who drank illicitly, would cover her mouth to hide her shame. Likewise, her grandfather would stifle laughter by covering his mouth with his hand. (p.122.) Allende also records that as a child she had an early sexual encounter. She records that she hid the shame of her newly arrived front teeth from the man who took advantage of her. (p.104.) The mouth becomes a site at which pleasure is both recognized and the site at which that pleasure must be regulated; rendered social within the libidinal economy of *vergüenza*.

This somewhat outré theory can account for the otherwise anomalous deformity of one of the characters in *Eva Luna*, the Turk Riad Halabi. The Turk has what Allende calls a *labio de lievre* - a hare-lip. Thus afflicted he is visibly marked by a grotesque and indecent orality that signifies the always indecent possibility of pleasure. His hare-lip brings to crisis all the subtle power-play around the question of orality and pleasure. Throughout the novel he hides his mouth when he talks, eats or makes love, in deference to the shameful response that such pleasure requires. When Eva Luna seduces the Turk he prepares to cover his mouth, a gesture that she quite deliberately refuses:

[He] took out the handkerchief he used in moments of intimacy and covered his mouth. No, not with the handkerchief, I said. I grabbed it and threw it to the ground; then I walked around the chair and sat on his lap, putting my arms around his neck, very close, and stared at him unblinking. [...] I took Riad Halabi's face in my hands and slowly drew him toward me until I was kissing his lips, a long kiss, learning the strange form of his mouth as fire rippled through my bones and sent shivers through my belly and thighs. Perhaps for an instant he struggled against his own desires, but immediately surrendered [...] 'No one has ever kissed me on the mouth' he whispered. (p.178.)

[El] sacó el pañuelo de su pudor y se tapó la boca. No, eso no, le dije,

se lo quité y lo tiré al suelo, luego rodée la silla y me senté sobre sus rodillas, echándole los brazos al cuello, muy cercana, mirándolo sin pestañear. [...] Tomé su cara, me aproximé con lentitud y lo besé en los labios largamente, aprendiendo la forma extra164a de su boca, mientras un calor brutal me encendía los huesos, me estremecía el vientre. Tal vez por un instante él luchó contra sus propios deseos, pero de inmediato se abandonó [...] - Nadie me había besado en la boca - murmuró él. (pp.199-200.)

Kissing the Turk boldly on the mouth is the action of a *sin-vergüenza*. In so doing Eva reclaims pleasure from the demand that it be placed within a socially-regulated economy. This action announces the symbolic rejection of the coercive forces of *vergüenza* that have been cumulatively questioned and refused throughout the course of the novel.

What is the importance of being shameless in Allende's work? While in a certain sense it is merely a gesture of defiance, it also represents a movement towards a position of critique. A deterritorialized space from which the subject can begin to re-theorize his or her interactions with society. Eva Luna, outside the charmed circle of *gente decente*, acquires a new circle of friends and acquaintances whose experiences beyond the hegemonic share an oppositional character. The runaway Eva ends up sheltered by prostitutes in the Calle Republica, where she befriends Mimi, a transexual. Mimi is attracted to men. She rejects *machista* society and flees to the anonymity of the city and begins to transform himself into a woman. In stripping away the traces of his masculinity he begins to step outside the oppressive discourses that seek to trammel his identity. Mimi's transexuality acts as a metaphor for the possibility of refusing hegemonic interpellation. In support of this argument, it is perhaps important to note another felicitous coincidence with the nomenclature of Deleuze and Guattari. They term the subject who removes him or herself from the oppressive operations of discourse 'the body without organs.'²³

In her work, Allende suggests that homosexuals' and transexuals' failure to cathect society's construction of the libido, somehow makes them sympathetic to broader social critique. The Communist, like the transexual, has stepped outside the hegemonic to a deterritorialized understanding.

Allende envisages, therefore, strategic alliance between these groups. This alliance is realized in *Eva Luna*. The whores and transsexuals of the Calle Republica continually shelter the guerilla leader Huberto Naranjo. They also lead a civil insurrection of their own - 'the whores' revolt' - against the government's repressive policies. Allende also treats this theme in *Of Love and Shadows*. She describes the friendship between Francisco, a leftist journalist, and Mario, a homosexual make-up artist.

Francisco also talked about himself and, without overtly saying so, communicated to Mario the possibility of sharing a solid and deep friendship, but never love. [...] In a burst of confidence forbidden by the most elementary caution, Mario spoke of his revulsion for the dictatorship and his desire to oppose it. His new friend, able to read the truth in his eyes, offered his secret in return. When they said goodbye, shortly before the hour of curfew, they exchanged a firm handshake, sealing a pact of solidarity. (p.95.)

The possibility of such an alliance is also suggested in Manuel Puig's *The Kiss of the Spiderwoman (El beso de la mujer araña)*.²⁴ In Puig's novel, Molina and Valentín are, respectively, a homosexual and a communist, who have been placed in the same prison cell. Their enforced dialogue explores the grounds between the two for a shared understanding of social oppression. The novel implies that these grounds, while overdetermined, are nevertheless there. In her essay "Writing as an Act of Hope", Allende makes explicit the hope that she has for such a cause shared among oppositional subjects:

Probably the strongest literature being written nowadays is by those who stand unsheltered by the system: blacks, Indians, homosexuals, exiles and, especially women - the crazy people of the world, who dare to believe in their own force. [...] That is why we write - as an act of human solidarity and commitment to the future. We want to change the rules, even if we don't live long enough to see the results. (pp.55-6.)

In final summation, Allende has an acute sense of the issues that surround subjectivity. She suggests that the aberrant experiences of marginal groups,

such as women and homosexuals, enables them to step outside hegemonic discourse. Once outside, she suggests, they are able to understand the social field through the less deceived critique of Marxism.

NOTES

1. INEGI data, cited in *SourceMex* (Latin American Data Base, Albuquerque, NM, August 23rd, 1993.)
2. An example that captures the bizarrely fetishistic quality of this process would be of the North American firm which imports chicken thighs into Mexico in refrigerated trucks. The Mexican workers remove the bones, and the thighs are immediately re-exported to the United States.
3. Harry Browne, *For Richer for Poorer: Shaping US-Mexican Integration*, (London: Latin American Bureau, 1994.)
4. Karl Marx, from "Estranged Labour" in the "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", *Early Writing*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992.)
5. Eduardo Galeano, *The Open Veins of Latin America*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973.)
6. The sense in which the life of the physical body is popularly derived from its capacity as labour power is captured in a recent example of protest in Mexico. In response to the sacking of 10,000 workers employed in public transport in the nation's capital, one worker opted for his own crucifixion on Good Friday. The former worker Ventura Galvan stated that: "The government's behaviour leaves us no other course than to sacrifice parts of our bodies." Philip Gunson, "Final bus strike gesture proves a cross too far", *The Guardian*, Saturday April 6th, 1996.
7. In 1994 the North American State Department issued a warning to Americans travelling in Guatemala not to touch children in outlying villages. A terror of gringo kidnappers had spread through rural areas. So intensely felt was this fear, that local indigenous people had responded with violence, attacking two unaccompanied North American women.
8. The title in Spanish - "Un camino hacia el norte" - picks up on the complex resonance that the term 'el norte' has in Mexico and the countries of Central America. The term 'el norte' is used to designate North America as a place and to indicate collateral issues of North American geo-political influence,

economic domination and the remote possibility of riches for a migrant work force. In a sense, Allende's tale broaches the myth of 'el norte' as a land of opportunity. It reminds the reader that for most 'the road north' is a journey that ends with a high fence and the ever present *maquilas* that will turn the migrant into a commodity as surely as *señora* Dermoth.

9. C.Pecquer, *Theorie nouvelle d'economie sociale et politique, ou etudes sur l'organisation des societes*, Paris, 1842, (p.409.) Cited in Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, (p.292.)

10. 'There are 60 million *campesinos* whose fortune amounts to \$0.25 a day. At the other extreme, the pimps of misery accumulate \$5 billion in their private Swiss or U.S. bank accounts.' (p.13.) Eduardo Galeano, *The Open Veins of Latin America*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973.)

11. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value", *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1988.)

12. That which is of particular interest in Allende's critique of exchange value is the way in which she brings its internal contradictions to crisis. It is the same method of immanent critique that Marx used against Smith and Ricardo's work on political economy, fashioning a critique from capitalism's internal contradictions.

13. Marx's treatment of money runs to over 100 densely argued pages. "The Chapter on Money," *Grundrisse*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993.)

14. Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat", *History and Class Consciousness*, (London: Merlin Press, 1971.)

15. Entry on "Reification" by Gajo Petrovic in Tom Bottomore (ed)., *Dictionary of Marxist Thought, Second Edition*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991.)

16. See also Mahasweta Devi, "Breast Giver", in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1988.) Spivak's reading of Mahasweta Devi's short story "Breast-Giver" again calls forth this analysis of parturition and the processes of the maternal body within a materialist analysis of the subject. In "Breast-Giver", the wet nurse sells the milk she produces to feed the child of her mistress. The natural secretions of the woman's body is drawn into a different system of exchange values, bringing to question the body within differing notions of value.

17. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen R. Lane. (trans). (London: Athlone Press, 1984.)

18. Analyzed in Azriel Bibliowicz, "Be Happy Because Your Father Isn't Your Father: An Analysis of Columbian *Telenovelas*," *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol.14, No.3., Winter 1980., pp.176-85, cited in William Rowe and Vivian Schelling, *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America*, (London: Verso, 1993), (pp.107-8.)

19. In the terms of Deleuze and Guattari, the psychoanalyst no longer says to the patient: "Tell me a little about your desiring machines, won't you?" Instead he screams: "Answer daddy-and-mommy when I speak to you!" *Ibid.*, (p.45.)

20. Albeit that the estate, with its peons, resembles in many respects the pre-capitalist, feudal mode of production.

21. Deleuze and Guattari's particular use of the term 'orphan' is taken from the work of Antonin Artaud. Artaud states: 'I don't believe in father/ in mother/ got no/ papamummy,' *Ibid.*, (p.14.). Artaud's enigmatic remarks gesture towards a strategic understanding of orphanhood as a state outwith Oedipal discourse. Deleuze and Guattari go on to make explicit use of this metaphor throughout the text, for example: '[W]e must say the unconscious has always been an orphan.' *Ibid.*, (p.108.)

22. Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The People of the Sierra*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1954.)

23. The term 'the body without organs' is also taken from the work of Antonin Artaud. The text of Artaud's verse reads: "Le corps est le corps/il est seul/et n'a pas besoin d'organe/le corps n'est jamais un organisme/les organismes sont les ennemis du corps."] (in 84, nos. 5-6 (1948). Deleuze and Guattari define the figure as follows: 'The body without organs presents its smooth, slippery, opaque, taut surfaces as a barrier. In order to resist linked, connected, and interrupted flows, it sets up a counterflow of amorphous undifferentiated fluid.' (p.9.)

24. Manuel Puig, *The Kiss of the Spiderwoman*, Thomas Colchie (trans). (London: vintage, 1991.)

Chapter 6
The Triumph of the Banal

The argument that I have sustained over the course of my thesis has sought to stress the progressive political insights that run through Allende's work. To this end, I have focused on Allende's use of a technique of alienation similar to that of Brecht; on her adept interrogation of the claims made by liberal historiography, and on her exploration of the politics of subjectivity. I would like to suggest, however, that Allende's oeuvre is not entirely seamless. There is strong evidence of a more conservative intelligence at work in her most recent novel, *The Infinite Plan*. The novel, set in North America, shares many of the assumptions about history and subjectivity that I have characterized as 'hegemonic'. It is, in my opinion, a work of quite arresting banality. It signals a break with the trenchant Marxist critique of Allende's earlier work and a closer accommodation with the values of a North American readership. I do not believe, however, that it is adequate to regard this one novel as a kind of singular anomaly in an otherwise uniformly radical oeuvre. The undeniable conservatism of *The Infinite Plan* has emboldened me to look once again at the rest of Allende's work, to address the disquietingly conservative ellipses that at times trouble her earlier fiction. In this last chapter I want to question the conception that I have fostered of Allende as a committed radical. I mean to suggest instead that she is a writer who has held an acute, yet ultimately ambivalent, understanding of Left thought.

Marxism, it should be remembered, proposes as a fundamental tenet that revolutionary agency be located in the popular classes. The role of any kind of theoretically informed cultural intervention is, therefore, to enable the ordinary working person to understand their situation free from the distortions of ideology. The assumption that the bestseller has a radical political function is predicated upon its ability to reach and persuade a genuinely popular readership in whom revolutionary agency can be located. In the second chapter I explored the connections between Allende's work and popular Latin American forms such as the *folletín*, the *telenovela*, *testimonio* and the *nueva canción* in support of just such an argument for Allende's range. I had suggested that Allende had recognized the demotic

potential of the best-selling novel and had somehow courted it to further disseminate a radical political understanding. I supported this argument with reference to other Latin American writers who demonstrated a popular commitment both in the course of their work and in the insightful understanding of the form in which it was published.

Should the international bestseller really be equated with the *folletín* and the *nueva canción* in this way? Ought it to be assumed that the domains of mass and 'popular' culture are, in fact, simply continuous? To assess the significance of Allende's fiction as a political project requires that these somewhat anecdotal claims to affiliation be examined. Allende, it should be recalled, is a novelist. Her reputation as a political writer must be linked to an understanding of the readership of these novels. The Ecuadorian writer José de la Cuadra raises the question of the readership of the novel in a way that has implications for the political project of Allende's work.¹ De la Cuadra writes about the *montuvios*, the oppressed peoples of mixed negro and indigenous blood of Ecuador's coastal plain, in a politically committed way. He suggests, however, that the emancipatory insights that his work seeks to extend are compromised by the stark facts of the novel's readership:

From the truthful and sometimes even photographic representation of *montuvio* reality there arises a literature of protest and denunciation which is frankly tendentious and which through adjectives orientates [the reader] towards the demands of the peasants. The novel even fights for them as far as it can do in a country in which those who read are usually those who do not literally need to know, that is, through literature, what they already know by more obvious means. And besides, there is the fact that the most interested person, the *montuvio*, cannot read. (p.232.)

The political project of the novel is invalidated by the fact that the social group that it addresses, the *montuvios*, cannot read. The readers of De la Cuadra's works are not the class that he seeks to champion, but the middle classes who, besides, have access to other more direct sources of critique than the novel. De la Cuadra is not alone in his sense of frustration at the project of the radical novel. Allende tentatively ventures her own

understanding of the difficulties that circumscribe the radical prospects of her fiction in her essay "Writing as an Act of Hope."

In Latin America today, 50 percent of the population is illiterate. Among those who can read and write, only very few can buy books, and among those who can buy books, very few have the habit of reading. What, then, is the importance of a book in Latin America? None, would be the reasonable answer. (p.58.)

Not only does illiteracy act as a bar to a genuinely popular readership, Allende acknowledges that the price of books places the novel beyond the reach of all but the moneyed few. Furthermore, even among the privileged the habit of reading is by no means widespread. This combination of circumstances severely qualifies the hopes that may be held for the novel as a political form. Allende returns once more to the theme. She draws an almost comical profile of an elite literary readership, so narrow that it is popularly ascribed the highest academic honours as a necessary prerequisite for its recondite interests:

In Latin America a book is almost a luxury. My hairdresser calls me Dr Allende because I usually carry a book, and she usually thinks that a doctorate is the minimum prerequisite for such an extravagance. In Chile a novel of 300 pages can cost the equivalent of a labourer's monthly wages. In some other countries - like Haiti for example - 85 percent of the population is illiterate. Elsewhere in Latin America, nothing is published in the Indian languages of the majority. Many publishers have been ruined by the economic crisis, and the price of books imported from Spain is very high. (p.61.)

This portrait seems, however, to set free a torrent of hopelessness in her. Allende's doubts about the efficacy of her writing come tumbling out in the ensuing argument. To the exclusion of a popular readership through poverty and illiteracy, she also adds a lament for the weak publishing infrastructure in Latin America and for the lack of interest in publishing works in indigenous languages. It is a fairly bleak set of insights, substantiated by some dismal statistics. It would seem that the radical novelist has good cause

to feel dismayed. Allende appears to feel, however, constrained by the title of her essay - "Writing as an Act of Hope" - to draw some kind of optimistic conclusion for the novel from all this.

However, we should not despair. There is some hope for the spirit. Literature has survived even in the worst conditions. Political prisoners have written stories on cigarette paper. In the wars of Central America, little soldiers, fourteen years old, write poetry in their school notebooks. The Pieroa Indians, those who haven't yet been exterminated by the genocide being carried out against the aborigines of the Amazon, have published some legends in their own language. (p.61.)

Allende's 'hopes' are not as persuasive as her misgivings. The modest, anecdotal victories for literature, as a humanizing force in the gaols and armies of Latin America, do not amount to any new course for a radical literature. They raise once more the benevolent spectre of Matthew Arnold, suggesting as they do a therapeutic role for literature.² Allende herself perhaps unwittingly ironizes this position in her second novel, *Of Love and Shadows*. In this novel Francisco Leal is a trained therapeutic practitioner who no longer practices since he is unable to work with the people who most need his skills:

It was not that suddenly all human wants had been resolved and the country peopled with happy citizens but, rather, that the rich did not suffer from problems of basic existence and the others, even though they might need him desperately, could not pay for the luxury of psychological therapy. They gritted their teeth and endured in silence. (p.53.)

Y no era que de pronto se hubiesen resuelto las penurias humanas y el país estuviera poblado de gente feliz, sino que los ricos no sufrían problemas existenciales y los demás, aunque lo necesitaran con desesperación, no podían pagar el lujo de un tratamiento psicológico. Apretaban los dientes y aguantaban callados. (p.50.)

Therapy, whether literary or psychological, is a luxury that the poor cannot afford. It would seem that Allende's understanding of the value of literature

as a truly demotic force is circumscribed by an understanding of it as a materially produced practice. It is subject to a double demotion, from incendiary polemic to therapy, a therapy that is then discounted as solely of consolation to the bourgeois few. There is a certain sense, then, in which it could be argued that Allende has known all along that her practice of writing is far from the popular classes and causes with whom she seeks to be identified. This suspicion of the failure of the radical project of her work is amplified in her fiction. In moments of metalepsis in her novels, Allende discloses both an awareness of her readership, and of the function of her novels for that readership.

Such an instance of metalepsis is apparent in her treatment of the singer Pedro Tercero in *The House of the Spirits*. The critic Patricia Hart suggests that Pedro Tercero García corresponds to the Chilean protest singer Victor Jara.³ Like Victor Jara, Pedro Tercero's songs become anthems of the Marxist president's reforms. To reinforce this claim, Hart draws attention to the way in which Victor Jara's hands were mutilated during his confinement in the national stadium after the coup, gesturing to the similar injuries shared by Pedro Tercero at the hands of Esteban Trueba in Isabel Allende's novel. Here the similarities end. Hart draws short of accounting for the widely divergent fates of Victor Jara and his fictional counterpart. Whereas Jara was killed by the state for his convictions, Pedro Tercero flees the country to a new life in exile with Blanca, his lover. Pedro Tercero's decision to abandon the cause in his native country for a life of safety in exile, is marked by a crisis of conscience:

He began to be obsessed by the idea that he was a coward and a traitor for not having shared the fate of so many others, and felt that it would be more honourable to surrender and meet his fate. Blanca tried to dissuade him with the best of arguments, but he seemed not to hear her. (pp.445-6.)

Empezó a obsesionarle la idea de que era traidor y cobarde, por no haber compartido la suerte de tantos otros y que lo más honroso sería entregarse y enfrentar su destino. Blanca procuraba disuadirlo con sus mejores argumentos, pero él parecía no escucharla. (pp.344-5.)

Like her fictional creation Pedro Tercero, Allende herself survived the terror following the Chilean coup by fleeing into exile. It is interesting to note that Allende writes of a remarkably similar crisis of conscience that she faced as a writer, leaving her Chilean roots for a life in exile: 'I, like thousands of other Chileans,' she states in *Paula*, 'have often asked myself whether I did the right thing in leaving my country during the dictatorship...' (p.213.) ['A menudo me ha preguntado, como miles de otros chilenos, si hice bien en escapar de mi país durante la dictadura...' (p.235.)] I should like to suggest that while Pedro Tercero in certain respects is modelled upon Victor Jara, he also acts as a cypher for the radically inclined novelist herself. If indeed the fortunes of Pedro Tercero can be linked to that of the author, his subsequent career in exile casts an interesting light on Allende's attitude to her own success since fleeing her native Chile. Later in the novel, Allende ironizes Tercero's exile in 'that frozen country of the North' as a kind of exile from his political values.

Pedro Tercero composed revolutionary songs for workers, students, and, above all, the upper middle class, which made his music, successfully translated into French and English, their own despite the fact that chickens and foxes are underdeveloped creatures that lack the zoological splendour of the eagles and wolves of that frozen country of the North. (p.455.)

Él escribía canciones revolucionarias para los trabajadores, los estudiantes y, sobre todo, la alta burguesía, que las había adoptado como moda, traducidas al inglés y al francés con gran éxito, a pesar de que las gallinas y los zorros son criaturas subdesarrolladas que no poseen el esplendor zoológico de las águilas y los lobos de ese helado país del Norte. (p.351.)

Pedro Tercero's songs, written as a gesture of solidarity with the students and workers in the revolutionary movement, are being enjoyed by the upper-middle class of his North American exile. The act of translation annuls the songs' original radical intent, since they pass into a vernacular which is deaf to the nuances of class politics. Whereas the gregarious fauna of the

original modelled an exemplary politics of collectivity, the bourgeois audience of exile remains unmoved. The eagle and the wolf - the lone raptors of bourgeois individualism - are the zoological signifiers that stir the emotions of the more politically conservative audiences. Through the analogy of Pedro Tercero's experience of exile, I would argue that Allende is knowingly alluding to her own predicament as a writer. Her popular inclinations are somehow neither here nor there in an exile where her readership is comprised of the upper-middle classes, a group who would dismiss the political as a curious kind of idiom that unnecessarily complicates the folkloric.

The uncomfortable difference between the context of production and reception is sustained. Allende goes on to describe the way in which Blanca (Pedro's lover) makes a successful business from her interest in indigenous folk art. Just as Pedro Tercero's songs negotiate a cultural boundary, so Blanca's art crosses a fine line between a conception of value as 'use' and 'exchange'. Formerly valued for its cultural function, Blanca's folk-art is now valued as a commodity.

Meanwhile, placid and happy, Blanca was in splendid health for the first time in her life. She set up an enormous kiln in her house to fire her creches of monsters, which sold extremely well as examples of indigenous folk art, just as Jean de Satigny had predicted twenty-five years earlier, when he had wanted to export them. [These businesses] [...] gave them more than enough to live on. (p.455.)

Blanca, entretanto, plácida y feliz, gozaba por primera vez en su existencia de una salud de fierro. Instaló un gran horno de en su casa para cocinar sus Nacimientos de monstruos que se vendían muy bien, por tratarse de artesanía indígena, tal como lo pronosticara Jean de Satigny veinticinco años atrás, cuando quiso exportarlos. Con estos negocios [...] tenían suficiente [...] (pp.351-52.)

It is interesting to note that Allende describes the satisfaction of Blanca's labour in slightly absent terms. She is described as placidly happy, a quality that connotes a certain idiot tranquillity. Perhaps to fabricate in an economy of exchange rather than in one predicated upon utility requires a kind of

willed stupidity for the satisfaction to remain as bright. On the strength of this kind of evidence, I would suggest that Allende well knows the difference between writing politically inflammatory texts for the popular classes and writing novels of a folkloric charm in exile for the bourgeoisie. She also knows the difference between the text as a cultural tool known for its utility, and the text of exile that has much more the appearance of a commodity.

It is significant to note that Allende does not appear to have the heart to acknowledge these misgivings when speaking openly of her work. An understanding of her work's political shortcomings is marked with a kind of obliquely held sense of misgiving, a kind of wistful knowledge of radical failure held at one remove, rather than a profound sense of disillusion. Allende's refusal to question her work's efficacy marks a process by which her own doubts become displaced into the fiction itself, to be explored through a series of hidden allusions and analogies. I would like to suggest that Allende's reluctance to question her work amounts to a somewhat ready conciliation with the seductive realities of international success. It suggests that her radicalism, while acute in its insights, is perhaps somewhat lightly held. Marxist critique remains a preoccupation in her work, while not its ostensible function.

I should like to conclude with an almost subterranean genealogy of Allende's conservatism, producing it as a perhaps ever-present feature of her work that has moved, from the periphery of her earlier fiction, to the foreground in recent years. In Chapter Three, that considered the political character of Allende's magical realist technique, I touched upon a reactionary strand of thought present even to her earliest work, *The House of the Spirits*. I argued - with reference to both her novels and non-fictional work - that Allende was experientially remote from the indigenous cultures and religions that inform, for example, García Márquez's magical narratives. I suggested that she shows an innate suspicion - if not hostility - toward indigenous peoples, referring to them in her work as *indios* rather using the more culturally

sensitive term *indigena*. For a bourgeois Chilean to be suspicious of the indigenous races of the continent also carries shades of social condescension for the class beneath one's own. Allende addresses the specific characteristics of social class in Chilean society in *Paula*.

In Chile, the upper class tends to have a European appearance; as you descend the social and economic scale, indigenous features become more pronounced, class consciousness is so pronounced that I never saw one person violate the defining boundaries. (p.43.)

En Chile, la clase alta tiene por lo general un aspecto europeo, pero al descender en la escala social y económica se acentúan los rasgos indígenas. La conciencia de clase es tan fuerte que nunca vi a nadie traspasar las fronteras de su puesto. (p.53.)

The Latin American proletariat appears to Allende - and comes to be recorded in her work - as a kind of racial, and hence social, other, forever held the other side of a largely impenetrable divide. Allende's subtle hostility towards the darker skinned popular classes marks a delicate but disquieting fracture in the radical project of her work. It is as a kind of bourgeois hostility to an indigenous proletariat that Allende's conservatism can best be understood.

In *The House of the Spirits*, Allende writes with comic condescension of the ineptitude of the 'Inca' servants of Blanca and her husband Jean de Satory, during their wedded exile in the northern tip of Chile. It is important to note that this narration is not filtered through the eyes of Esteban Trueba, the source of all conservative opinions and values in the novel, but comes through the third person collation of Alba, the narrator who most corresponds to Allende herself. While the scene is comic and perhaps should not be taken in an entirely po-faced and humourless manner it is nevertheless revealing of Allende's lack of either care for, or interest in, the indigenous servants. The servants, when not referred to as incas are pejoratively termed *indios*, and upbraided for their lack of finesse in the important task of waiting at table:

They were always attended by the same impassive, silent Indian, who constantly sucked a green ball of coca leaves that was his chief sustenance. [...] Waiting on table certainly was not his forte; he had still to master platters and serving implements, and would fling the food down however he could. One time, Blanca had to remind him please not to grab the potatoes with his hand and put them on her plate. (pp.289-90.)

Los servía siempre el mismo indio impasible y silencioso, que mantenía en la boca rodando en permenacia la verde bola de hojas de coca con que se sustentaba. [...] Tampoco era su fuerte servir la mesa, ya que no dominaba ni fuentes ni cubiertos y terminaba por tirarles la comida de cualquier modo. Blanca tuvo que indicarle en alguna ocasión que por favor no agarrara las papas con la mano para ponérselas en el plato. (p.224.)

The Indian is sullen and uncouth, unable to wait at table, unable even to conceive of anything less coarse than a handful of bitter leaves as food. Chewing coca is presented as the sign of a cultural gulf, an incommensurability that marks the profound difference of the servant - as a representative of his kind - from those seated around the table. He lurks with a sombre sort of solitude on the far side of a divide that Allende would have us believe is more cultural - ontological even - than one of social class. However, Allende's account of this difference, amusingly anecdotal as it is, fails to read the traces of history that mark this encounter. The passage is dense with assumptions that demonstrate an inadequate contextualization of the servant and his customs. The Indians of the Andes do not simply chew coca as 'sustenance' as Allende suggests, but to stave off an all too real hunger. This hunger has its origins in the Indians' exploitation as a labour force, both in the mines, and under the *encomienda* system of Spanish colonial rule. This vast historical disadvantage is carried through into the present day, in which the Indians remain the most economically disadvantaged group in the Andean countries of Latin America. They continue to get by through a variety of means, yet predominantly in the casual economy. It is this historical difference of experience that places the Indian at the table chewing coca as he looks on. It also accounts for his inability to serve the food to the diner's satisfaction, since waiting requires some kind of an

education in the ways of the bourgeois table, a requirement too far of a group often denied even a rudimentary education or sufficient to eat. Indians are not born inept and chomping coca, history has made them so. This episode in *The House of the Spirits* is bleaker than Allende would wish it to appear. It is revealing of her attitude to class, and the shortcomings of her understanding of class difference.⁴

The account of Inca waiting at table is not the only evidence of an innate suspicion of the popular classes within Allende's *The House of the Spirits*. Having made his fortune in the mines of the North, Esteban Trueba turns to the neglected family estates at Tres Marias. The way in which Allende characterizes this neglect is telling:

In a courtyard, moored to a post, [Esteban] saw a teenaged idiot with a rope around his neck, drooling and babbling incoherently as he stood there naked, with a mule-sized penis that he beat incessantly against the ground. For the first time in his life, he realized that the worst abandonment at Tres Marias was not of the land and animals but of the people [...] (p.76.)

En un patio conoció a un adolescente idiota, babeando, con una soga al cuello, atado a un poste, hablando cosas de otros mundos, desnudo y como un sexo de mulo que refragaba incansablemente contra el suelo. Se dio cuenta, por primera vez, que el peor abandono no era el de las tierras y los animales, sino de los habitantes de Las Tres Marias [...] (pp.58-59.)

The idiot boy on a leash, beating his penis on the ground, can be read as a metaphor for his class' relation to the land: unproductive, stupid and ultimately in need of the firm hand of the *patrón*. Arguably, the suspicion of the *campesinos* is not simply that of Esteban Trueba, but that of Allende herself, a *soi-disant* radical who does not feel confident of a society without the firm hand of the *caudillo* to guide it. The image of the idiot campesino is not speculatively framed by Trueba's partial narrative, but laid before the reader as an expressive truth of his class, and carries an axiological charge indicative of a deeper level of conservatism that underlies Allende's narrative practice. While this might seem uncorroborated and speculative in nature,

there are other examples within *The House of the Spirits* that go to support it. The 'house on the corner,' the residence in the capital of the Trueba family, is maintained by the vigilant presence of the brusquely practical matriarch, *la Nana*. (Nana, it may be recalled, is the rather forbidding figure who attempted to rid Clara of her muteness by dressing up as a ghost to frighten her into speech; a no-nonsense sort of quality that, no doubt, helps in managing a busy household.) When Nana dies, the orderly life of the house goes to pieces as the servants revert to type:

The death of Nana, who despite her age was in charge of the big house on the corner when the owners were away, sent the remaining servants into disarray. Without her vigilance, they neglected their duties and began to spend their time in an orgy of siestas and gossip, while the plants went dry for lack of watering and spiders filled the dusty corners of the house. (p.197.)

La muerte de la Nana, que a pesar de sus años era la responsable de la gran casa de la esquina en ausencia de los patrones, produjo el desbande de los sirvientes. Sin vigilancia, abandonaron sus tareas y pasaban el día en una orgía de siesta y chismes, mientras se secaban las plantas por falta de riego y se paseaban las arañas por los rincones. (pp.150-151.)

In this example we learn that the popular classes are not simply profoundly inept, but that they are also indolent. There is an almost protestant rejection of their idleness as a vice. Siestas are a kind of moral abhorrence, an 'orgy' of idleness that will reign without the watchful and vigilant eye of the tough-minded *patrona*. Without her firm hand the house will go to a rather trivial sounding ruin. Again in this instance, Allende is not using this anecdote to ironize the conservatism of Esteban Trueba. It is left to stand on its own as a kind of testament to the truth of servants who, like the human resources of Tres Marias, will revert to a chaotic and indulgent state when left to their own devices. While this can yet be construed as amusing and anecdotal, a kind of delightfully silly prejudice that is left to roll on through the narrative, it becomes much more serious later on in the novel.

After the election of the socialist president in *The House of the Spirits* -

a figure modelled on the former Chilean President, Salvador Allende - the government's attempts at economic and social reform are seen to founder. In the countryside, the reforms sought to redistribute the land by returning title to the *campesinos* who had worked the fields. While the failure of Salvador Allende's government has been widely attributed to an international blockade, and to economic sabotage carried out by the covert operatives of the United States, Isabel Allende gives a different set of reasons for this in *The House of the Spirits*.⁵ Much as the servants of the house on the corner let the house go to ruin, so the *campesinos* of the sequestered estate of Tres Marias squander its resources. The revolutionary policies of the socialist government are jeopardized by the disappointing stupidity of the class in whose name they have been set in motion:

With his departure Tres Marias was left adrift for quite a while. There was no one to give orders and no one to obey them; the peasants for the first time in their lives, were savouring the taste of freedom and the experience of being their own *patrón* [...] [T]hey celebrated [...] by opening the sacred wine cellar of their former patron, sacking his aged wines, and slaughtering his breeding bulls in order to eat their testicles with onion and basil [...] they also ate the imported cows and all the brood hens. (p.405.)

Con su partida, Las Tres Marias quedó por un tiempo a la deriva. No había quien diera las órdenes y ni quien estuviera dispuesto a cumplirlas, pues los campesinos saboreaban por primera vez en sus vidas el gustillo de la libertad y de ser sus propios amos [...] [Les] celebraron [...] abriendo las sagradas bodegas del antiguo patrón, saqueando sus vinos añejos y sacrificando los toros reproductores para comer las criadillas con cebolla y cilantro [...] se comieron también las vacas importadas y las gallinas ponedoras. (pp.314-5.)

Allende lards this collective and wayward stupidity with tellingly symbolic accounts of their wasteful behaviour. In addition to imprudently drinking the wines laid down to age, the *campesinos* eat the estate's only bull. Not only that, they take a kind of grotesque gustatory pleasure in its testicles, squandering the future of the estate's herds for the sake of a moment's pleasure. Their collective imprudence extends to eating the imported cows

and the brood hens that would have provided food and revenue into the future but for the *campesinos'* short-sightedness. The point is forcefully and emphatically made with a combination of examples of the untrustworthy nature of the popular classes. In spite of the finest hopes vested in them, and the long awaited opportunities handed to them, they squander them all. It is this final gesture of bad faith that most seriously undermines the radical project of Allende's work. It calls into question her commitment to an emancipatory project carried out in the name of the popular classes. When pushed to the point of change, Allende declares a lack of confidence. While I have argued in previous chapters that Allende is an acute observer of both history and subjectivity from a Left perspective, she also has a deeply reactionary streak that somehow qualifies her radical insights. The injustice of capitalist relations of production is somehow offset by what she senses is - in philosophical and ethical terms - its *necessity*. Without the leadership of a *patrón*, Allende apparently fears that social order will break down entirely, into a needless and destructive state of anarchy. She is, after all, more of an anti-gringo nationalist of the old Right, than a committed leftist.⁶

The question of Allende's incipient conservatism takes a formal turn in her subsequent novel *Of Love and Shadows*. I have commented in Chapter Two on Allende's movement from the complex narrative structure of *The House of the Spirits*, to the rectilinear narrative *Of Love and Shadows*. Furthermore, I noted a movement from a theoretically intricate left poetics, to a use of the poetics and tropes of the bestselling novel. I have argued, in a way that is sympathetic to Allende's own account, that this was a strategic attempt to win the broadest possible readership for what is ostensibly a work of testimony. The problematic devices of the bestseller receive, therefore, special pleading as a kind of pragmatic real-politik inextricably linked to the work's polemical function. There is, however, something unsatisfactory about Allende's execution of her polemical aims. On reading *Of Love and Shadows*, one begins to doubt Allende's grasp of the textual politics she espouses, suspecting instead that she might possibly be a muddle-headed writer ultimately in thrall to pastiche.

Allende's somewhat ambivalent use of the bestseller form becomes more apparent in contrast to the work of Manuel Puig, in many respects a more accomplished bricoleur of popular form. While Manuel Puig has a fascination for popular forms (from the *bolero* and the *folletín* to the camp excesses of North American cinema), he uses them adeptly. His technique is to place his characters' lives in amongst a collage of the myriad popular forms through which they come to self-knowledge. In so doing, Puig becomes scribe to a dialectic between mass culture and the historical subject, recording the subject's fond path to an ultimately erroneous self-understanding. That is to say that while Puig's characters are beguiled by the blandishments of popular form, his commentary is not so deceived. While not disdainful he retains a distance throughout, which ironizes the promises of mass culture. One cannot feel as a reader of Allende's work that one is in such capable hands. While Puig remains analytically aloof from these discourses, Allende seems to be enthralled by their roseate promises and increasingly beholden to the values that they advance. The most controversial episode in *Of Love and Shadows* describes Irene and Francisco making love outside the abandoned mine workings in which they have just discovered the mutilated corpses of a political massacre. Allende's description of their love-making does not reflect a change in register between the two narrated events.

Slowly, without haste, in the peace of the night, he dwelled in her, pausing at the threshold of each sensation, greeting pleasure, possessing at the same time he surrendered himself. Then, when he felt her body vibrate like a delicate instrument, and a deep sigh issued from her lips to give breath to his own, a formidable dam burst in his groin, and the force of that shuddering torrent swept over Irene, washing her into gentle seas. They lay closely and tranquilly embraced, letting the fullness of love flow over them, breathing and throbbing in unison until that intimacy renewed desire. She felt him grow within her, and sought his lips. (p.201.)

Largamente, sin apuro, en la paz de la noche habitó en ella deteniéndose en el umbral de cada sensación, saludando al placer, tomando posesión al tiempo que se entregaba. Mucho después, cuando sintió vibrar el cuerpo de ella como un delicado instrumento

y un hondo suspiro salió de su boca para alimentar la suya, una formidable represa estalló en su vientre y la fuerza de ese torrente lo sacudió, inundando a Irene de aguas felices. Permanecieron estrechamente unidos en tranquilo reposo, descubriendo el amor en plenitud, respirando y palpitando al unísono hasta que la intimidad renovó su deseo. Ella lo sintió crecer de nuevo en su interior y buscó sus labios en interminable beso. (p.184.)

The allusive sexual metaphors draw upon the imagistic resources of bestseller poetics. The sex described, as a torrential encounter that sweeps the enamoured into warm seas, has something of the compensations of the Caribbean holiday. It sweeps the lovers out of the intractable historical world in which they have become so shockingly entangled, and in to a soothing realm of the sensory. In the description of the lovers' truce there is not the slightest trace of the gravity of what has gone before. Following so hard upon the harrowing testimonial element of the narrative, it has the unfortunate effect of suggesting that the wrongs of the Chilean terror can be rectified by the soothing balm of bestseller sex. This shift in narrative form is an ill-advised attempt to re-centre the novel through the crass and soothing values of the best-selling romance. Allende attempts to achieve a kind of balance, unwisely trying to harmonize the gravity of testimony with the lightness of best-selling romance. The novel appears to be teetering out of true on its axis, unable to centre two incommensurable forms. A better writer than Allende - Manuel Puig perhaps - might have used the incongruity of the two forms of discourse to bring the rhetorical strategies of the best-seller to crisis, ironizing the form's slightness in the face of an event incommensurable with its banal precepts. An encounter in which historical reality would confront the compensations of ideology, demanding that it finally deliver or be silent. Allende, however, calls into question her own ability as a writer. *Of Love and Shadows*, I argue, marks Allende's accession to the spell of mass culture, not her début as its artful bricoleur.

In *The Infinite Plan*, Allende appears to have given herself over to the best-selling form in a much more whole-hearted and unambiguous way than in her second novel. *The Infinite Plan* carries no trace of its antecedent's

testimonial function. There is no longer a sense of the bestseller as a form in the service of a more serious narrative enterprise. It is, quite simply, a good read without any edifying purpose. Taking the example of sex once more, there is a new boldness to Allende's narrative. The lovemaking of her middle-aged heroine Tamar is replete with the tropes and values of airport-fiction.⁷ It is a kind of kitsch erotic marathon that lacks any trace of irony, in its use of cliché, or any sense of ulterior purpose:

She heard the music of strings from somewhere far away, carrying the millenary sensuality of India to that room in Rome bathed in moonlight and the light fragrance of jasmine from the garden. [...] She felt his hands removing her blouse, her full skirt, her sandals [...] With exploring kisses and knowing hands, Leo Galupi began to familiarize himself with her body; his tongue moistened her still firm nipples, the shell of her ears, her inner thighs, where her skin shivered at the touch; she felt the air growing dense and panted from the effort of breathing; a glowing urgency flowed through her loins, and she ground her hips and moaned as she escaped him, until she could not wait any longer, turned him onto his back, and swung astride him like an inspired Amazon, clasping him between her knees amid a storm of pillows. Impatience or fatigue made her clumsy; she twisted and slithered like a snake, seeking, reaching, but she was wet with pleasure [...] Leo Galupi took the lead, without haste, steady, pausing at each station on the way to wait for her and lead her to the farthest garden, where he left her to explore alone until she felt herself slipping into a shadowy void, and a joyous explosion shook her body. Then it was his turn, as she caressed him, grateful for that absolute and effortless orgasm... (pp.370-1.)

Una música de cuerdas le llegaba de muy lejos, trayendo la milenaria sensualidad de la India a esa habitación romana, bañada por la luna y la vaga fragancia de los jazmines del jardín. [...] Sintió sus manos despojándola de la blusa, la amplia falda, las sandalias [...] Leo Galupi la recorrió con besos exploratorios y manos sabias, lamió los pezones todavía firmes, el caracol de sus orejas y el interior de los muslos donde la piel palpitaba al contacto, mientras a ella el aire se le iba tornando más denso y jadeaba en el esfuerzo por respirar, una caliente urgencia se apoderaba de su vientre y ondulaba sus caderas y se le escapaba en gemidos, hasta que no pudo esperar más, lo volteó y se le subió encima como una entusiasta amazona para clavarse en él, inmovilizándolo entre sus piernas en el desorden de los almohadones. La impaciencia o la fatiga la hacían torpe, culebreaba buscándolo pero resbalaba en la humedad del placer [...] Leo Galupi se abrió paso sin prisa, firmemente, deteniéndose en cada estación del

camino para esperarla y conducirla hacia los últimos jardines, donde la dejó explorar a solas hasta que ella sintió que se iba por un abismo de sombras y una explosión feliz la sacudía todo el cuerpo. Después fue el turno de él, mientras ella lo acariciaba agradecida de ese orgasmo absoluto y sin esfuerzo... (pp.338-9.)

On first reading one pauses in anticipation of bathos, a hoped for and sardonic lance to puncture the encroaching banality of the narrative. The instrumental prelude heralds a carnival of clichés which one expects to be disrupted at any moment, yet this moment never comes. That which is an ostensibly imitative discourse is actually in earnest, an effect used without any parodic function whatsoever. It can no longer be convincingly argued that she has borrowed eclectically from the poetics of the best-seller to some more noble political end, but rather that their use is a kind of flat pastiche indicative of a changed set of social and political values. From passages such as this it begins to appear as if Allende is not adeptly juggling the poetics of mass culture to critical ends but has somehow taken them to heart.⁸

I should like to consider the subtle shift in values in Allende's work through an analysis of romantic love as a trope. This can be traced through readings of sexuality and attraction in her first novel, *The House of the Spirits* and her most recent, *The Infinite Plan*. In the former, the lives of the Truebas is heavily socially prescribed. Esteban, having made his fortune, courts Clara del Valle, a young woman from a more patrician family. Clara does not marry for love, but, for the material security that the match brings. Sexual attraction does not, however, obey the circumscribed position accorded it within the rigorous class structure of the novel. It functions as a haplessly demotic impulse working against the relentless codification and hierarchization of the social world. The *campesino* Pedro Tercero's attraction for Blanca, the *patrón's* daughter, eventually proves to be stronger than social differences that separate them. As such, sexual attraction and romantic love acts as a trope to figure the erstwhile conventionality - inhumanity even - of oppressive class relations. In *The Infinite Plan* however, something much more conservative is afoot. Whereas before romance sought, perhaps

idealistically, to abolish the edifice of class, here it begins to be regulated once more by its prescriptions.

Having founded her own business empire, Tamar (the former *chicana* from the *barrio* turned entrepreneur) decides to look for a husband. It is not enough that she marry for love, since compatibility is once more governed by class criteria. Allende's description of Leo Galupi, Tamar's prospective match, begins to sketch the bourgeois and venal grounds of his eligibility.

His years of trading in Asia had refined his taste, he knew a lot about art and had good contacts, and so had launched the venture of his dreams. He opened a gallery specializing in Oriental objets d'art, and it was so successful that after ten years he had a second gallery in New York and one in Rome, where he lived much of the year. (p.365.)

Sus años de tráficos en Asia le refinaron el gusto, sabía mucho de arte y tenía buenos contactos, así dio forma a la empresa de sus sueños. Abruna galería con objetos orientales y tanto fue su éxito que a la vuelta de diez años tenía una sucursal en Nueva York y otra en Roma, donde vivía buena parte del año. (p.333.)

The romance is given authorial benediction since Galupi has essential qualities. He is both a man of taste and a man of the world. More than that, he is an internationally successful businessman who has opened a string of *recherché* little boutiques in the cultural capitals of the world, in which of course he spends a good part of the year.⁹ The abolished hierarchies of *The House of the Spirits* make, therefore, a forcible return, in which marriage becomes once more a contract governed by questions of status. It is interesting to note the way in which Allende develops the theme of the lovers' compatibility. Possessed of a material equality as rich entrepreneurs, they are free to explore a descending chain of lesser compatibilities that lend ancillary support to their union. After their absurd lovemaking, they spend time establishing interests in common.

Finally they slept, curled in a tangle of legs and arms. In the days to come they discovered they had fun together, that both slept on the same side, that neither smoked, that they liked the same books, films

and food and voted for the same party, that sports bored them, and that they regularly travelled to exotic places. (pp.371-2.)

Finalmente se durmieron ovillados en un enredo de piernas y brazos. En los días siguientes descubrieron que se divertían juntos, ambos dormían para el mismo lado, ninguno fumaba, les gustaban los mismos libros, películas y comidas, votaban por el mismo partido, se aburrían con los deportes y viajaban a lugares exóticos. (p.339.)

Tucked in among the other details of the lovers' life-styles is the question of politics (at the formalistic level), here demoted to the level of sports, smoking, taste in books and so on. It is an unobtrusive part of one's lifestyle choices, not something that informs every action or every understanding. The manner in which the axiology of bourgeois romantic exchange relegates politics to the background as a discrete element of one's 'lifestyle' points toward a need to reappraise Allende's conception of the political in her oeuvre. What was once a vital and informing part of everyday life seems to have suffered a conceptual relegation. I want to consider evidence of Allende's most recent position on the conception of the political.

In her essay "Writing as an Act of Hope" Allende notes the importance of resisting what she somewhat clumsily calls 'the mermaid's voice of celebrity.'¹⁰ (p.49.) This is a warning that she does not appear to have heeded. Rather than stopping her ears to the blandishments of success in the international market, she seems to have embraced the ideological values of its bestselling fiction. Perhaps the most cogent example of a change in political outlook would be that of Allende's abandonment of the Marxist theory of labour, a form of radical understanding that she is at pains to advance in her earlier novels and short stories. It is this powerful and unflinching critique that lies at the heart of what I have called Allende's 'counter-hegemonic poetics.' If the Marxist theory of labour is anathema to bourgeois hegemony, then the ideology of the benevolent employer, the gentle redress of trickle-down economics and the blandishments of ethical trading are its apotheosis. *The Infinite Plan* is saturated with these bourgeois

values and marks the movement in Allende's work from thesis to antithesis in an astonishing volte-face.

This change can be eloquently charted through the figure of Carmen Morales, the *chicana* from the *barrio* who realizes the American dream (incidentally changing her name to 'Tamar' in the process.) Allende, like the perpetrators of the American dream, is suddenly short on any critical analysis of the material relations required for the creation of wealth. To make a fortune almost invariably requires the production, or transformation, of commodities for sale on the market. This production requires that the value added to the commodity by the worker's labour is realized not by the worker, but appropriated as a surplus value by the bourgeois entrepreneur. While Allende had, in earlier novels, used the metaphor of prostitution and the figure of the pimp to account for the exploitative nature of the wage relation, in *The Infinite Plan* she characterizes this social contract in the most absurdly benevolent terms. Whereas before the body was understood in shockingly alienated terms as nothing more than a commodity within capitalism, here the labouring body is seen as the site of the greatest and most benevolent of care extended by capitalism.

For [Tamar], there was no conflict between a good eye for business and compassion; from the beginning she made it a point to offer employment at optimum conditions to those lowest on the social scale, and later, as her operation expanded, she hired so many poor Latins, Asian and Central American refugees, and physically disabled, as well as two mentally handicapped men she put in charge of plants and gardens, that Gregory called his friend's business "Tamar's hospice". [...] Her spontaneous charity turned out to be a visionary managerial strategy [...] because her personnel responded with astounding loyalty and efficiency. (p.313.)

Para [Tamar] no existía conflicto entre el buen ojo para el comercio y la compasión, desde el comienzo se las arregló para dar trabajo en las mejores condiciones posibles a los más pisoteados de la escala social, y después, cuando su fábrica creció contrataba tantos Latinos pobres, refugiados asiáticos y centroamericanos, inválidos y hasta un par de retardados mentales que puso a cargo de las plantas y los jardines, que Gregory llamaba al negocio de su amiga el hospicio de Tamar. [...] Su espontánea caridad resultó una visionaria medida empresarial

[...] porque el personal respondía con fidelidad y eficiencia asombrosas. (pp.287-88.)

The reader who has stayed with Allende for the radicalism of her earlier work is left feeling somehow incredulous. In *The Infinite Plan*, the resolute arguments for the irremediability of capitalism are not simply finessed, but replaced with what can only be called a benign form of neo-liberalism. There is perhaps even the suspicion that the happy, pluralistic vision of the workplace Allende now advances, requires the sort of workers that Tamar so proudly flourishes. Poor Latins, Asian and Central American refugees and the physically disabled comprise a fragmented workforce, possibly too crushed by their experiences to achieve any meaningful solidarity. The translation of *retardos mentales* as 'mentally handicapped men' masks a harshness that obtains in the original Spanish. Allende implies, perhaps with a vestigial irony, that Tamar's workplace is an idiots' utopia. Whatever, one wonders, has become of the worker's co-operatives of *The House of the Spirits* that sought to prevent the appropriation of surplus value generated by the workers themselves? Whatever happened to the analysis that brilliantly characterized the bourgeois entrepreneur as a pimp? Whatever happened to the call for 'justice not charity' as the analytically, and ethically, correct response to the question of poverty? The reader begins to suspect that Allende has heard the 'mermaid's voice' of literary celebrity and abandoned progressive class politics on the rocks of bourgeois paternalism. It is not so much that the best-seller form has weakened the radical message - through a process in which sex, jet-set lifestyles, and widespread venality act as sugar to the bitter medicine of Marxism - but that Allende's radicalism has been replaced by an ameliorative social vision, a vision in which capitalism can be harmonized to accommodate even the most vulnerable of workers.

The politics of labour comes to the fore once more in Allende's handling of the relationship between the rich Timothy Duane and his black maid, Bel. The master to servant relationship is characterized as an unproblematic one, the wheels of which are oiled by flirtation and a kind of

condescending bonhomie. This too, in spite of the fact that Bel's grandfather was a Mississippi slave, a historical fact that suggests a history of exploitation and subordination stronger than the palliative introduction of wages.

Bel had worked for Timothy's parents so many years that it was difficult to imagine the house without her. When she was hired, she was already a woman of legend, one of those narrow-waisted black women who move as if they are swimming underwater.

"Marry me," Timothy would say in the kitchen when she treated him to pancakes, her one skill in cooking. "You're so beautiful you should be a movie star instead of my mother's maid."

"The only blacks in the movies are whites in blackface," she would say, laughing. (p.291.)

Trabajó como mucama de los padres de Timothy durante tantos años que costaba recordar esa mansión sin ella. Cuando la contrataron era todavía un mujerón legendario, una de esas negras quebradas en la cintura que se muevan como si nadaran bajo el agua.

-Casaté conmigo - le decía Timothy en la cocina cuando ella lo festejaba con panqueques, su única proeza culinaria - Eres tan linda que deberías ser estrella de cine en vez de sirvienta de mi madre.

-Los únicos negros del cine son blancos pintados de negro -se reía ella. (p.268.)

This can be contrasted with Eva Luna's attitude to service. Eva it should be remembered, attacked her *patrona*, clawed at her face and pulled her hair for the insult of servitude. As if to emphasize the ethical importance of this gesture, in her next domestic appointment she poured the contents of her new *patrón's* chamber pot over his head. In *The Infinite Plan*, however, Bel's happy acquisition to the given order provides a much different example of the politics of service. The extract implies that if black people were allowed the possibility of social advancement - such as the prospect of becoming movie stars - all would be different. That is to say the sophisticated possibility of a notional equality would adequately compensate for the continuing structural inequalities of class society. It is sad to say that the austere politics of Marx and Lenin that were once a feature of Allende's work, have been replaced by the dazzlingly vapid politics of the Oprah Winfrey show.

Allende allows herself to be beguiled by the aniseed trail of race which has so successfully mystified issues of class in the United States for decades.

The steady denigration of the political message of Allende's earlier novels is also attested by the status accorded political debate in *The Infinite Plan*. Whereas in earlier novels Left politics penetrated every aspect of the characters' interactions, dissolving as it did the dichotomization of the political state and the quotidian, it is altogether a much more hushed affair in *The Infinite Plan*. When Allende finally broaches the question of the status and function of Left thought in the novel, she does so through the perceived norms of an hegemonic North American perception. That is to say that Left critique does not exist as a body of thought of any substantiality, but as a kind of signifier of a generalized sedition, the nature of which is never actually engaged. The central character Gregory Reeves reaches his teens before political critique even becomes an enunciable concept. When it does, its somewhat disreputable status is implied in the furtive manner of its discovery: 'I had first heard the word "politics" whispered in a library elevator [...]' (p.130.) ['Escuché por primera vez la palabra *politica* en susurros en el ascensor de la biblioteca [...]' (p.126.)] Marxism's unique exponent in the novel is Cyrus, the wizened and desiccated operator of an elevator who hints at a political radicalism during his endless journeys that quite literally take him nowhere. That Marxism as a historical method should be confined to the muted understanding of a lift attendant has an almost metaphoric resonance as an insight into the status of left critique in North America. The theorist Michael Ryan suggests that right and left wing modes of thought can be aligned with Jakobson's bi-polar model of metaphor and metonymy.¹¹ While right-wing thought favours metaphor and symbol, making paradigmatic substitutions on the vertical axis (an "eagle " for "freedom" say), left wing thought operates through metonymy making serial and contigual connections on the horizontal axis (between, for example, the creation of surplus value and world poverty). In the right-wing American imaginary Marxism becomes, somewhat ironically, a *symbol* for a despotic tyranny of the worker. As such, it is suffered to make bounded journeys on a vertical

axis as a figure for tyranny rather than to operate contiguously on the horizontal axis. This is, quite literally, what becomes of Marxist critique in *The Infinite Plan*. Cyrus, its sole proponent is an aged lift operator whose critique is nothing more than a seditious whisper between floors.

Allende's ambivalence toward Marxism is apparent in the way she handles Cyrus as the exemplar of left thought in the novel. Cyrus's communism amounts to little more than a guilty secret. The furtiveness with which he holds his belief, albeit in the time of the McCarthy era, is somehow consonant with contemporary American experience in which left radicalism is routinely anathematized. When Cyrus finally comes to trust his protégé Gregory Reeves enough to tell him of it, it is as if he is admitting to a hidden and unspeakable proclivity:

After they knew each other better, Cyrus made an appointment to meet Gregory in the park, using the pretext of discussing philosophy and sharing a picnic lunch. [...] After making Gregory swear he would never betray him, he solemnly confessed that he was a member of the Communist Party. The boy did not entirely understand the significance of such a confidence, even though the country was at the height of a witch hunt unleashed against liberalism, but he imagined Cyrus' proclivity as something as contagious and disreputable as a venereal disease. (p.96.)

Tiempo después Cyrus lo citó en un parque con el pretexto de discutir filosofía y compartir una merienda. [...] Después de hacerlo jurar que jamás lo tracionaría, le confesó solemne su afiliación al Partido Comunista. El muchacho no tenía claro el significado de tal confidencia, a pesar de que estaban en plena época de la caza de brujas desencadenada contra las ideas liberales, pero imaginó que debía ser algo contagioso y de tan mala reputación como la enfermedades venéreas. (p.95.)

While Allende's portrait of Cyrus is in some respects insightful in the way that it seeks to place left thought within the North American imaginary (as a proclivity as morally reprehensible as child molestation), it shows no will to grasp the complexity of Marxist argument. It is interesting to note the way in which Allende fails to engage with Gregory Reeves dismissal of Cyrus' brand of Marxism.

Gregory found his theories unarguable from the point of view of justice and logic, but intuitively he knew they had no chance of succeeding, at least in his half of the planet. Besides, he found the idea of making a fortune more seductive than owning an equal share of poverty [...] (p.109.)

A Reeves esas teorías le resultaban incuestionables desde el punto de vista de la justicia y la lógica, pero intuía que no tenían la menor posibilidad de triunfar, por lo menos en su mitad del planeta. Por otra parte, la idea de hacer fortuna le parecía más seductora que la de compartir la pobreza por igual [...] (pp.106-7.)

It is sad to say that Allende delivers Marxism as an emasculated knowledge consonant with the archive of received ideas. Left critique is not rejected through rational interrogation of its substantive claims, but through an intuited knowledge of its inappropriateness. Allende, much like Francis Fukuyama, has taken to burlesquing a pantomimic and denigrated version of Marxism, rather than engaging with the particularities of its critique.

Marxism, then, has a much altered status in *The Infinite Plan*. The sense that Marxism is bounded by its prescribed North American designation, as an insane blue-print for a churlish worker's dictatorship, is emphasised elsewhere in the novel. One of Gregory Reeves' acquaintances is a refugee from communism. Balcescu the Romanian gardener has only two words, 'money' [dinero] and 'freedom' [libertad] when he comes to the United States. A comic figure, he babbles the two words endlessly, repeating the idiot's litany of economic individualism almost *ad nauseam*. While it seems that Allende is ironizing the promises of bourgeois liberty, it is not sustained in concert with any more significant critique of bourgeois values. On the contrary, in the light of Allende's accession to the values of the bestseller it lacks any real force. Balcescu is ultimately just a small, maverick comic turn with no exemplary significance. His bizarre lexical fixation could be just as much a conservative insight into the pathological monotony of the communist state he has fled, as a critique of bourgeois society.

In Allende's earlier work, her acute grasp of Left thought was perhaps always shadowed by a patrician suspicion of the popular classes. This

conservatism was, however, somehow latent rather than explicit. Her latest novel, *The Infinite Plan*, is interesting in that it precipitates these refractory themes to enable a more balanced assessment of her work.

NOTES

1. "El Montuvio ecuatoriano", In Jean Franco's *An Introduction to Latin American Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.)
2. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, (London: Macmillan, 1938.)
3. Patricia Hart, *Narrative Magic in the Work of Isabel Allende*, (London: Associated University Press, 1989.)
4. In addition to Eduardo Galeano's much referenced *The Open Veins of Latin America*, Ronald Wright's *Stolen Continents: The Indians' Story* (London: Pimlico, 1992.) provides an excellent guide to the historical plight of Latin America's indigenous Andean communities.
5. My reading of Chilean history has been largely derived from the excellent and scholarly synopsis offered by James Petrus in *How Allende Fell: A Study in US-Chilean Relations*, (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1974.)
6. Allende's belief in the ineptitude of the popular classes marks the break down of her dialectical grasp of the historical process. The childlike indolence that she ascribes the proletariat is more ontological than historical, since it seems to articulate a truth about their *nature* hidden beneath the surface of their apparent historical condition. The sensed ethical questionability of capitalist relations of production is placed, therefore, in the parentheses of lived historical experience: it is the best option for a flawed world.
7. I use the terms 'airport fiction' and 'bestseller' almost interchangeably. I have taken works such as those of Jackie Collins and Danielle Steel as paradigms of this form, against which to read Allende's work.
8. It is interesting to notice how close Allende has come to the poetics of the airport fiction. The following passage is taken almost at random from Jackie Collins' *Hollywood Husbands* (London: William Heinemann, 1986.) 'Tantalizingly he started to kiss her neck, moving down at a leisurely pace, relishing the piquant taste of everything about her. She enclosed his hardness with her hands and teased his unquenchable desire, until the slow, erotic

pace of things turned once again into fervent, reckless lovemaking. And after the second time they fell asleep, wrapped in each other's arms, peaceful and voluptuously content.' (p.365.)

9. The man-of-the-world trope is common in airport fiction. In, for instance, Danielle Steel's *Fine Things* (London: Little Brown and Company, 1987), the leading male character, Bernard, is a movie executive who lives in New York's Upper East Side. He travels all over the world (always accompanied by his Louis Vuitton luggage), making conquests. 'He was a hardened case. There were models and secretaries and executives. He met women in Rome, there was a very pretty stewardess in Milan, an artist, a socialite [...]' (p.27.). The list goes on.

10. Allende delivered this lecture in English and presumably was herself responsible for any confusion in translation. In Spanish, the word *sirena* means both 'siren' and 'mermaid'. She clearly requires the classical emphasis of the former.

11. Michael Ryan. *Politics and Culture: Working Hypotheses for a Post-Revolutionary Society*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989.)

Conclusion

A final appraisal of Isabel Allende's work is almost certainly premature. At 54, Allende is still a comparatively young author with a number of novels yet to write. The conclusion that I draw here is, therefore, only provisional. I have argued in Chapters One and Two that comparative criticism should not dismiss Allende - one of Latin America's most widely read authors - out of hand, but should attempt to situate her work in a cognitive hinterland. That is to say as a body of work stranded between the hegemonic conception of a readership in translation, and, a counter-hegemonic tradition of Latin American writing. To this end I have examined Allende's reconception of popular aesthetics, and, her polemical interest in mass cultural forms as diverse as the *telenovela*, popular radio and the best-seller. I have hoped to establish, therefore, that Allende's use of the best-seller form calls into question the axiomatic distinction between 'autonomous art', as the erstwhile domain of literary merit, and mass-cultural forms as the irremediable beyond of the bourgeois imaginary. Perhaps, she suggests, of the two forms, the best-seller is the more important.

I set out to consolidate this argument in subsequent chapters by establishing the progressive political insights that I argue Allende seeks to advance in her work. In Chapter Three I outlined the dialectical interplay in Allende's work between a Latin American practice of magical realist writing and the Brechtian technique of alienation. In Chapter Four, I suggested that Allende pursues a project of Left critique into a conception of history, arguing that she shows a sophisticated and critical understanding of the issues that surround 'universal history' and recent conceptions of 'paralogy'. Furthermore, that she uses a form of Marxist critique to dispute the modish claims of a resurgent form of neo-Hegelianism. In Chapter Five, I traced Allende's strikingly acute appraisal of Left thought into questions of subjectivity, arguing that she adeptly explores both the Marxist theory of labour, and, analogous questions of 'use' and 'exchange' value. I have argued, with respect to this, that there are also remarkably felicitous similarities between Allende's critique of subjectivity and that of Deleuze and Guattari. To both, the 'orphan' and 'the body without organs' become figures

for the subject outwith oppressive bourgeois discourse.

In reading both a wealth of Left theory and a great deal of Latin American fiction (including works from the more orthodox critical canon), I have yet to encounter a single creative writer who has better expressed the fundamental tenets of Left thought than Isabel Allende. Her fiction is unequalled in the way that it captures highly radical ideas in gnostic vignettes for the benefit of a popular readership. While Allende has recently shown a disquieting tendency to adopt more conservative attitudes, I believe that these attitudes have been unfairly fastened upon by academic criticism. In choosing to focus on these recent shortcomings, critics have been able to rehearse an almost Pavlovian hostility to popular form while continuing to ignore Allende's deft handling of abstruse theoretical concepts, and, her unflinching critique of hegemonic shibboleths. While Allende's work is uneven, I believe that it is high-time it received more serious, and appropriate, critical attention. She is a far more interesting writer than her critics allow. Only time will tell, however, whether her early interest in Left poetics will emerge as juvenilia or a more substantial commitment.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Correspondence with Carmen Balcells, Isabel Allende's Literary Agent

Oxford, 23 Mayo 1996

Sra. Dña. Carmen Balcells,
Plaza y Janes,
Avda. Diagonal 580,2º,2ª,
08021 Barcelona,
España

Muy Sra. Mia,

Soy un estudiante de investigación de la Facultad de Humanidades de la Universidad de Oxford Brookes. Actualmente me encuentro realizando mi Tesis Doctoral sobre el trabajo de su cliente, Isabel Allende, cuyas obras vengo disfrutando durante los últimos años. Mi trabajo, bajo el quizás algo pretencioso título de "Counter-hegemonic Poetics in the Work of Isabel Allende," busca seguir las huellas del pensamiento izquierdista en la obra de Isabel Allende desde su primera novela "La casa de los espíritus" hasta su más reciente, "El plano infinito."

Como lector de las obras de Sra. Allende en inglés, estoy especialmente interesado en la acogida internacional de su trabajo. Tengo la teoría que escribe para un público en el extranjero, y por eso, su trabajo es como un diálogo intercontinental. Le estaría enormemente agradecido por toda aquella información que pudiera proporcionarme acerca de las publicaciones y ventas de las novelas de su cliente. En concreto, estaría interesado en obtener la siguiente información:

1. En cuantos idiomas se ha traducido la obra de Isabel Allende, y cuales son estos idiomas.
2. En que países o territorios están sus obras disponibles.
3. Cuantas copias de cada libro se han vendido en cada país o territorio.
4. Cuantas veces se han reeditado sus obras en cada territorio.
5. Disfruta la Sra. Allende de mayor éxito editorial en otras lenguas que en la suya propia.
6. Disfruta Latinoamérica de suficiente infraestructura para el éxito literario o es necesario recurrir a las publicaciones en el exterior.

Si usted tiene alguna copia de criticas literarias a la obra de Isabel Allende aparecidas en prensa nacional o extranjera, podria enviarme copias de ellas. Me consta que usted ha de recibir numerosas solicitudes de información acerca de los trabajos de su cliente. En cualquier caso le estaria muy agradecido si pudiera ayudarme con la citada información de modo que pueda realizar mi trabajo con el adecuado rigor.

En espera de recibir noticias tuyas, le saluda atentamente,

Reply from Carmen Balcells

Barcelona, 14 de junio de 1996

Sr.D. Tim Gaynor
Postgraduate Programme
School of Humanities
Oxford Brookes University
OX3 OBP, Inglaterra

Estimado señor Gaynor:

Muchas gracias por su carta del 23 mayo, interesándose por obtener algunos datos sobre las obras de Isabel Allende para su tesis doctoral sobre esta autora.

En respuesta a su pregunta sobre los idiomas a que han sido traducidas las obras de Isabel Allende, me complace adjuntarle una copia de su nota biobibliográfica, donde figuran los idiomas y las editoriales que han publicado sus libros.

Por lo que se refiere al número de copias impresas o reeditadas, me temo que no puedo proporcionarle esta información, que tiene carácter confidencial. Asimismo debo indicarle que no es posible enviarle copia de las reseñas aparecidas en la prensa internacional sobre los libros de Isabel Allende porque ésta sería una tarea ingente, que emplearía a una persona durante todo un año.

Finalmente, me complace informarle de que Isabel Allende ha alcanzado un gran éxito tanto en España, como en América Latina, Estados Unidos y Alemania,... por lo que es difícil precisar si sus libros han tenido una mayor difusión en la lengua española o en otras lenguas.

Espero que esta información le sea de utilidad y le saludo cordialmente.

Appendix 2

Publishing History of Isabel Allende's Works in Spanish and in Translation

Allende's works are listed chronologically. The different languages in which each work appears is on the left, while the publishers are listed on the right.

La casa de los espíritus: (The House of the Spirits, novel, 1982)

<i>Spanish</i>	Diana, Oveja Negra, Plaza & Janés, Sudamericana, Círculo de Lectores, Cirexa, RBA, Harper Collins (USA)
<i>Bulgarian</i>	Narodna Kultura
<i>Chinese</i>	China Times
<i>Croat</i>	Prosveta
<i>Czech</i>	Svoboda
<i>Danish</i>	Gyldendal
<i>Dutch</i>	Wereldbibliotheek
<i>English</i>	Knopf, Jonathan Cape, Text Plus, Hall, Bantam
<i>Finnish</i>	Otava
<i>French</i>	Fayard, France Loisirs, Livre de Poche
<i>German</i>	Aufbau, Suhrkamp
<i>Greek</i>	Oceanida
<i>Hebrew</i>	Schoken
<i>Hungarian</i>	Europa
<i>Icelandic</i>	Mal og Menning
<i>Italian</i>	Feltrinelli
<i>Japanese</i>	Kokusho Kanko Kai
<i>Norwegian</i>	Gyldendal Norsk
<i>Polish</i>	Czytelnik, Muza
<i>Portuguese</i>	Difel, Circulo do Livro, Circulo de Leitores
<i>Russian</i>	Geesti Raamat
<i>Serb</i>	Prosveta
<i>Slovak</i>	Taran
<i>Slovene</i>	Pomurska Zalozba
<i>Swedish</i>	Norstedts
<i>Turkish</i>	Can Yayinlari

La Gorda de Porcelana (The Porcelain Doll, children's story, 1983)

<i>Spanish</i>	Alfaguara
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De amor y de sombra (Of Love and Shadows, novel, 1984)

<i>Spanish</i>	Diana, Círculo de Lectores, Oveja Negra, Plaza & Janés, RBA, Harper Collins (USA)
<i>Bulgarian</i>	Christo G. Danov
<i>Danish</i>	Gyldendal
<i>Dutch</i>	Wereldbibliotheek
<i>English</i>	Knopf, Jonathan Cape
<i>Finnish</i>	Otava
<i>French</i>	Fayard
<i>Greek</i>	Oceanida
<i>German</i>	Aufbau, Suhrkamp
<i>Hebrew</i>	Schocken
<i>Hungarian</i>	Fabula
<i>Icelandic</i>	Mal og Menning
<i>Italian</i>	Feltrinelli
<i>Norwegian</i>	Gyldendal Norsk
<i>Polish</i>	Oficyzna Literacka
<i>Portuguese</i>	Circulo do Livro, Difel, Circulo de Leitores
<i>Russian</i>	Inostrannaia Lit.
<i>Serb</i>	Narodna Knjiga
<i>Slovak</i>	Slovensky Spisovatel
<i>Slovene</i>	Pomurska Zalozba
<i>Swedish</i>	Norstedts
<i>Turkish</i>	Can Yayinlari

Eva Luna (novel, 1987)

<i>Spanish</i>	Diana, Círculo de Lectores, Oveja Negra, Plaza & Janés, RBA, Harper Collins (USA)
<i>Bulgarian</i>	Narodna Kultura
<i>Croat</i>	Znanje
<i>Danish</i>	Gyldendal
<i>Dutch</i>	Wereldbibliotheek
<i>English</i>	Knopf
<i>Finnish</i>	Otava, Great Finnish Bookclub
<i>French</i>	Fayard, Librairie General Française, France Loisirs
<i>Greek</i>	Oceanida

<i>German</i>	Aufbau, Suhrkamp
<i>Hebrew</i>	Schocken
<i>Icelandic</i>	Mal og Menning
<i>Italian</i>	Feltrinelli
<i>Japanese</i>	Kokusho Kanko Kai
<i>Norwegian</i>	Gyldendal Norsk
<i>Polish</i>	Oficyna Literacka
<i>Portuguese</i>	Circulo do Livro, Difel, Circulo de Leitores
<i>Russian</i>	Inostrannaia Lit.
<i>Slovak</i>	Lita
<i>Swedish</i>	Norstedts, Book of the Month Club
<i>Turkish</i>	Can Yayinlari

Cuentos de Eva Luna (Tales of Eva Luna, collection of short stories, 1990)

<i>Spanish</i>	Diana, Plaza & Janés, Sudamericana, RBA, Harper Collins (USA)
<i>Bulgarian</i>	Narodna Kultura
<i>Chinese</i>	China Times Publishing Co.
<i>Danish</i>	Gyldendal
<i>Dutch</i>	Wereldbibliotheek
<i>English</i>	Atheneum, Hamish Hamilton, Lester & Orpen Denys, Book of the Month Club, Bantam Books
<i>Finnish</i>	Otava
<i>French</i>	Fayard
<i>German</i>	Suhrkamp
<i>Greek</i>	Oceanida
<i>Hebrew</i>	Schocken
<i>Icelandic</i>	Mal og Menning
<i>Italian</i>	Feltrinelli, Mondadori
<i>Japanese</i>	Kokusho Kanko Kai
<i>Norwegian</i>	Gyldendal Norsk
<i>Portuguese</i>	Difel, Bertrand
<i>Slovak</i>	Praca
<i>Swedish</i>	Norstedts
<i>Turkish</i>	Can Yayinlari

El plan infinito (The Infinite Plan, novel, 1991)

<i>Spanish</i>	Diana, Plaza & Janés, Norma, Sudamericana, Círculo de Lectores, Harper Collins (USA)
<i>Danish</i>	Gyldendal

<i>Dutch</i>	Wereldbibliotheek
<i>English</i>	Harper Collins (UK and USA)
<i>Finnish</i>	Otava
<i>French</i>	Arthème Fayard, Grand Livre du Mois, Librairie General Française
<i>German</i>	Suhrkamp, Bertelsmann (club)
<i>Greek</i>	Oceanida
<i>Hebrew</i>	Schocken
<i>Icelandic</i>	Mal og Menning
<i>Italian</i>	Feltrinelli, Club Degli Editori
<i>Norwegian</i>	Gyldendal Norsk
<i>Portuguese</i>	Portugal: Difel, Circulo de Leitores, Brazil: Bertrand
<i>Swedish</i>	Norstedts & Soners
<i>Turkish</i>	Can Yayinlari

Paula (non-fiction/autobiography, 1994)

<i>Spanish</i>	Diana, Plaza & Janés, Círculo de Lectores, Harper Collins (USA)
<i>Danish</i>	Gyldendal
<i>Dutch</i>	Wereldbibliotheek
<i>English</i>	Harper Collins (UK and USA)
<i>Finnish</i>	Otava
<i>French</i>	Arthème Fayard, Grand Livre du Mois
<i>German</i>	Suhrkamp, Bertelsmann (club)
<i>Greek</i>	Oceanida
<i>Hebrew</i>	Schocken
<i>Icelandic</i>	Mal og Menning
<i>Italian</i>	Feltrinelli
<i>Norwegian</i>	Gyldendal Norsk
<i>Portuguese</i>	Portugal: Difel, Brazil: Bertrand
<i>Swedish</i>	Norstedts
<i>Turkish</i>	Can Yayinlari

Appendix 3.

International Prizes and Honours Received by Isabel Allende.

- *Mejor Novela del año*, (Best Novel of the Year) awarded by Panorama Literario, Chile 1983
- *Author of the Year*, Germany 1984
- *Book of the Year*, Germany 1984
- *Grand Prix d'Evasion*, France 1984
- *Grand Prix de la Radio Television Belge*, Belgium 1985
- *Mejor Novela*, (Best Novel) Mexico 1985
- *Premio Literario Colima*, (Colima Literary Prize) Mexico 1985
- *Quality Paperback Book Club New Voice*, - nomination - United States 1986
- *Author of the Year*, Germany 1986
- *XV Premio Internazionale I Migliori Dell'Anno*, Italy 1987
- *Mulheres Prize for Best Foreign Novel*, Portugal 1987
- *Los Angeles Times Book Prize*, - nomination - United States 1987
- *Library Journal's Best Book*, United States 1988
- *Before Columbus Foundation Award*, United States 1988
- *Miembro de la academia de la Lengua*, Chile 1989
- *Freedom to Write Pen Club*, United States 1991
- *Profesor de Literatura Honoris Causa por la Universidad de Chile*, (Honorary Doctorate University of Chile), 1991
- *Doctor of Letters at New York State University*, United States 1991
- *XLI Bancarella* (Literary Prize), Italy 1993
- *Independent Newspaper Foreign Fiction Award*, United Kingdom 1993
- *Brandeis University Major Book Collection Award*, United States 1993
- *Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*, France 1994
- *Condecoración Gabriela Mistral*, (Gabriela Mistral Medal), Chile 1994
- *Marin Women's Hall of Fame*, United States 1994

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