

Proposal
Pew Summer Research Program
Dr. Karen Martin

Challenging Borders: The Demarcation of Space and Place in Isabel Allende's
House of the Spirits Trilogy

I. Project Description and Major Goals

Chilean author Isabel Allende is Latin America's most celebrated contemporary woman writer. In fact, her first novel, 1982's *The House of the Spirits*, has been credited with having revitalized the Latin American novel. The University of Virginia's Donald Shaw, for example, classifies its publication as "without question the major literary event in Spanish America during the early eighties," a time when Latin America found itself lacking for an international successor to the Boom-era fame of such male authors as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Carlos Fuentes. Allende's matrilineal history of a thinly veiled Chile was quickly translated into twenty-seven languages and became an international best-seller. During the nearly quarter-century following her debut, Allende has published three memoirs, various short stories which have been anthologized in key college literature texts, and six additional novels. She ranks among the most widely-read contemporary authors on the international literary scene. Notwithstanding her commercial success, Allende is also among the most frequently criticized authors of what might be considered the contemporary "canon" (a problematic term in itself, but tied to a debate beyond the scope of this project) due to the accessibility of her work; charges of banality and superficiality are frequently leveled against her works, particularly among the literary elite of postmodern South American literature.

My readings of Allende, informed by an interdisciplinary theoretical base linked to the emerging fields of cultural and literary geography, seek to demonstrate that the author's

seemingly traditional themes and literary forms in fact derive their narrative energy from a revolutionary destabilization of the center, anchored in spaces of alterity. To that end, I study three of Allende's novels, *The House of the Spirits*, *Daughter of Fortune* (1999), and *Portrait in Sepia* (2000), as a trilogy. These works, written over a span of nearly twenty years, demonstrate Allende's mastery of narrative architecture, as she successfully constructs a unified saga of six families, three continents, and 130 years of Latin American and United States political and cultural history. Informed by French theorist Michel Foucault's premise that the history of space is essentially the history of power, my in-progress monograph explores Allende's fiction in terms of the delineation of socio-political and socio-ethnic space, key indicators of hierarchical or contested relationships. Susan Stanford Friedman's cultural geographies of encounter and Gloria Anzaldúa's study of borderlands support my theory that Allende's seemingly traditional romance form actually camouflages a sophisticated subversion of traditional Latin American political and ethnic norms. The author consistently rejects binary conceptions of space and power, both within public and private spheres. Rather, she arranges textual spaces in terms of contact zones and borderlands, or spaces in which two cultures, genders, races, or ideologies are forced to mingle, and consequently to negotiate or contest societal norms delineating access to or dominion over various types of space. In terms of socio-ethnicity, for example, Allende's narrative universe is characterized by the fluidity of boundaries; she rejects Chile's view of itself as a European, "white" nation by placing the nation's indigenous and Asian roots at the center of the narrative action; her at times utopic universe demands that hegemonic groups recognize and admit minorities within their protected spaces. Her representations of socio-political space, likewise, present both American continents as having failed in their binary, partisan systems;

rather, she exposes the invisibility of women and ethnic minorities in the public sphere while simultaneously placing these marginalized groups at the center of her literary geography.

My proposed Pew research uses the dissertation that I defended in Summer 2006 as a starting point; as such, I have 200 closely edited, scholar-reviewed pages prepared to date. My defense at Middlebury College, one of the nation's most respected institutions for the study of languages and literatures, was very well received, and my committee strongly encouraged me to seek publication of my work in book form. In keeping with the immersion nature of my program, I wrote and defended my dissertation entirely in Spanish, but the realities of the market demand that I re-write my research in English. Allende is, as discussed below, widely studied in a variety of countries and languages, and English seems to be a more viable *lingua franca* among the various scholarly perspectives interested in the author. Due to the differences in register and discourse between Spanish and English, my initial revisions are far more involved than the term "translation" might suggest to the reader outside the language and literature disciplines. In fact, the movement between the two languages will require a complete reorganization of the work that I estimate will require a minimum of eighty hours, assuming an ambitious rate of two to three pages per hour. I have already begun this re-writing process and expect to complete it during the 2006-07 academic year.

As I explain below in an overview of the field, my research centers on an emerging field which to date includes several respected journal articles or book chapters but no book-length analyses connecting literary geography to Latin American literature. As a result, the writing is thought to be very publishable at present, according to my dissertation committee, but will be greatly enhanced and make a stronger, more marketable contribution to the field if I expand it by approximately seventy pages; this will allow me to thoroughly review the various disciplinary

approaches to space as well as apply these additional ways of reading to Allende's novels. Latin American literature scholars are currently forced to apply a very piecemeal approach to readings based in literary geography, and as such the resulting scholarship is at times critiqued as overly compartmentalized or incomplete. For these reasons, my prospects for publication, both of portions of the research in article form, as well as of the study itself as a monograph, appear to be quite encouraging. Several dissertations related to this topic are currently in progress, and many scholars are racing to produce a cohesive, book-length study connecting space and Spanish literatures, so I am writing under a certain amount of time pressure and will write extensively during Summer 2007 in order to seize publishing opportunities while they are at their peak.

My anticipated final framework for the monograph is as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction to Space- and Place-Centered Reading (broad theoretical framework)
- Chapter 2: Further Theoretical Orientation: Literary Geography, The Body, and the Voice
- Chapter 3: The Space and Place of the Trilogy (initial application of literary geography to Allende and the trilogy structure)
- Chapter 4: The Delineation of Socio-Political Space
- Chapter 5: Body/Space and Social Stratifications
- Chapter 6: Socio-Ethnic Contact Zones and Contested Spaces
- Chapter 7: Conclusions: Allende's Imagined Universe

II. Review of Relevant Scholarly Literature

The theoretical model of literary geography discussed above is a highly contemporary approach rooted in the crossing of traditional disciplinary boundaries. The most noted theoretical texts in the field, as it applies to the study of marginalized populations, undergird my research; these include the works of geographer Susan Stanford Friedman, philosopher and

literary critic Michel Foucault, Chicana activist Gloria Anzaldua, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, and literary geographer Shirley Ardener. These critics informed the initial 200 pages of my writing and continue to be the most widely read in the broad definition of literary geography. They are the founders who framed the discussion of space not as a neutral factor, but as a vital element in shaping structures of power and defining the people within a particular delimited area, be it the nation or the classroom. These critics allowed me to build a cohesive theoretical framework centered on Allende's work as a destabilization of the center; additionally, they offer an alternative narrative kinesthetic that views setting not as static, but as a key factor that provides text with its narrative energy.

Because I am writing in a very new field, my post-dissertation work differs from the norm. Rather than being asked to sharply reduce or eliminate my theoretical chapters, I have been advised by all four members of my dissertation committee to significantly expand my theoretical framework to increase my publication prospects. The consensus is that to date no book-length study has centered on the synthesis of spatial theories within a Latin American context; thus, offering two lengthy chapters of introduction to the field should significantly increase the study's marketability. Based on my expert readers' advice, I have chosen to add Gaston Bachelard's psychoanalytic approach to space; French polyphonic, or multi-voiced, discursive space; and Elizabeth Grosz's concept of the body as a space to my theoretical framework. This will require significant additional reading in the fields, as well as a restructuring of the book and the writing of approximately 60-70 new pages: 25-35 pages focused on these additional approaches to narrative space and place, and another 25-35 pages, distributed among the body of the text, of textual analysis informed by these approaches.

To date several article-length studies of space as it relates to Latin American literature have been published, and this is a key topic at literary conferences; a sampling of these articles as well as of the key works by the above critics is provided in the attached bibliography. For example, the primary organization in Latin American women's literature and culture studies (Asociacion Internacional de Literatura y Cultura Femenina) is devoting its 2006 convention entirely to the theme of space and boundaries. Space and place appear on the program of every major literary conference and are growing fields. However, in part due to the lengthy publication cycles typical of the humanities, to date no book-length studies applying literary geography to Latin American literature have been published. Dr. Susan Carvalho's case-study approach, *Taking Her Place: Space and Power in Latin American Novels by Women*, will be published in 2007 by Tamesis Books of England and appears to be the first book-length study of its type in the field. My research on Allende, so far as I have been able to determine, will be the first monographic study of the author's narrative architecture; it will also be the first monograph to analyze the novels in question as a cohesive trilogy. In terms of market, I am fortunate that Allende is broadly read in English and Spanish courses, so that my study should be of interest to diverse populations of scholars. The marketability of my work, both as articles and as a book-length study, is also enhanced by the limited amount of published literary analysis of the final two works of the trilogy. Due to the recent publication dates of these novels, at present the Modern Language Association's database includes only eight articles addressing these two novels, and only one article regarding the trilogy as such.

III. Time Frame for Completion and Dissemination of Research

October 4-8, 2006: I will participate in the 2006 Conference of the Asociación Internacional de Literatura y Cultura Femenina Hispánica (International Hispanic Women's Literature and

Culture Association). This is one of the key annual gatherings of scholars and publishers in Latin American literature(s) and related women's studies issues and appears to be one of the most likely sources of publishing opportunities in my field. I will present "Mapping Ethnicity in Isabel Allende's *Daughter of Fortune* and *Portrait in Sepia*," a portion of the fourth chapter of the book being proposed for this Pew project. This presentation will allow me to begin disseminating my research before an audience that is perhaps uniquely qualified to evaluate it, as well as offering me the opportunity to meet personally with acquisitions editors from the key publishers interested in my field.

January 2007: I will substantially revise my chapter on socio-ethnic space in the trilogy for submission to the annual Feministas Unidas essay competition for outstanding research by a junior scholar, an award which two of my graduate school colleagues have won in recent years. This award offers publication in *Letras Femeninas (Women's Letters)*, the international, peer-reviewed journal of the AILCFH. This will serve the additional purpose of allowing me to have a polished sample chapter ready to submit to publishers, along with the proposal and abstract I will write that month.

Spring 2007: I will continue rewriting the existing chapters of the book in English. I will also seek publication of the socio-ethnic space chapter in an international, peer-reviewed journal such as *Letras Femeninas*. This journal actively seeks new submissions, has previously published one of my book reviews, and appears to be the most logical outlet for this research.

Summer 2007: Having devoted the preceding months to active revision and dissemination of the existing material, I will concentrate on the following aspects of the book publication process during the summer months:

(a) I will submit a proposal and sample chapter(s) to a publisher focused on Latin American literature and women's issues no later than May. Tamesis Books in England will be my likely first choice, as they are actively seeking manuscripts in the field and are currently publishing a related monograph by my dissertation director without requiring a subvention; Tamesis is also the largest publisher in my field, outside Spain. Manuscript evaluation tends to be approximately a two-month process. If Tamesis does not accept the book, by August I will pursue opportunities with Juan de la Cuesta monographs in Spain, a press whose expert readers include a member of the faculty of my doctoral program and a noted Allende scholar, two strong supporters of this type of research.

(b) I will expand the theoretical framework of the text by approximately 25-35 pages, adding the additional approaches that have been suggested by two expert readers. This will require substantially reconfiguring my first two existing chapters, as well as a close reading and analysis of approximately fifteen critical texts.

(c) I will add an additional 25-35 pages of textual analysis within the body of the work as an application of the expanded theoretical framework described above.

(d) I will substantially revise the authorial introduction, currently located in my first chapter, to form a stand-alone chapter. This will involve a reduction of biographical information as well as an addition of approximately 8-10 pages of critical assessment of Allende in light of the contemporary, elitist publishing community in Latin America.

Fall 2007: I plan to revise the summer's writing and, depending on the status of my contact with the above-mentioned presses, attend either the 2007 South Atlantic Modern Language Association Convention or the 2007 AILCFH Congress to aggressively pursue publishing

options. I will also propose a paper based on the book to present at one of the above conferences.

IV. Budget

As various MLA discussions and bulletins have confirmed, publication of monographs within the humanities has become an increasingly challenging and costly proposition. My research deals with an author who is widely known in both English- and Spanish-speaking contexts, thereby offering me a broader market than that available to scholars working with more obscure writers; however, it is very likely that I will be required to provide, or at minimum given more favorable consideration in exchange for, a “subvention” for publishing. Larger, more research-based institutions often fund subventions, or subsidies, on behalf of humanities scholars; this funding opportunity consequently leaves humanities faculty at more teaching-focused institutions at a distinct competitive disadvantage when proposing book publications. In fact, of the four publishers I have extensively researched as possible presses for my book, three inquire as to the availability of subsidies on the proposal form itself, stating that this will influence the manuscript selection process. Subventions in my field tend to range from \$1,500 to \$3,000, depending on how marketable the project is perceived to be. Given these market realities, I would offer the required portion of my Pew funding as a subvention to allow me to compete on an equal playing field with other scholars in my discipline. The remaining funds would primarily compensate me for the time required for completion of my writing and research, work that I would estimate as requiring approximately 80-100 hours for translation and rewriting of the original work, in addition to another 80-100 hours of research and writing to create the new sections required to make my research appropriate for publication in book form.

V. Integration of Faith and Research

Peninsular Spanish and Latin American literatures trace their origins to the Christian faith; in fact, an understanding of all but the most recent writings in Spanish is nearly unattainable without a thorough knowledge of biblical and Catholic traditions. The earliest known text written in Spanish, the twelfth-century *Poema de Mio Cid*, establishes the archetypal Spanish model: the citizen rooted in service to God and nation, a noble figure distinguished by his temperance and virtue. A foundational text of Latin American literature, the *Brief Story of the Destruction of the Indies*, authored by Dominican priest Bartolome de las Casas in the sixteenth-century, recontextualizes this Spanish Christian tradition, adding to it the call for social justice. Using Scripture as well as the best of civil law, Judaic tradition, and Spanish history to cement his arguments, Las Casas establishes a Christian standard for interpreting the treatment of the marginalized or disenfranchised within the Americas, a new paradigm centered on respect for all beings as God's creation. Although Isabel Allende and other contemporary Latin American authors may not identify themselves as Christian, any voice that cries out for the protection of the abused, the tortured, the enslaved, or the wrongly imprisoned necessarily advocates principles of equality and justice that are central to the traditions of Hispanic Christianity. In essence, many of the beliefs shared by sensitive people of various belief systems are reflections of divine truth; if we believe that all truth is God's truth, then surely advocacy on behalf of the voiceless is a passion that derives from a loving, just Creator and insists upon the inherent worth of every individual as an image-bearer of God.

Isabel Allende, of course, was niece of assassinated Chilean President Salvador Allende, and personally lived the worst of late-twentieth-century history: the emergence of brutal military dictatorships through coup d'etat, followed by the torture and "disappearance" of up to 30,000

citizens of the Southern Cone of South America within fifteen years. Her trilogy is rooted in historical research as well as lived experience and represents a cohesive, consistent attempt to draw attention to those who have been silenced both in the United States and in Latin America: child sex slaves in Chinatown; countless peasant women raped by hacienda owners as a demonstration of “patronal rights”; thousands who were tortured or “disappeared” by dictatorships who to date have refused to accept responsibility for their crimes; indigenous populations decimated by colonizers who condemned them to diaspora. In this advocacy for the “invisible,” Allende’s writings echo the concerns of the minor prophets. She also provides valuable documentation of Christ-inspired acts of self-sacrifice and tremendous courage in the service of others. For example, her novels and my research point out that the church was the only public voice defending the accused “subversives” during the military dictatorship, despite the tragic reality that several priests and nuns were killed for offering asylum to so-called enemies of the state. Likewise, this research highlights the valor of a California Quaker community that set up an “underground railroad” to allow prostitutes and sex slaves the opportunity to escape their oppressors and begin new lives. These images are both inspirational to those within the church and illuminating to those without it, offering evidence of divinely-inspired character. These emphases clearly coincide with Union University’s core values of being a Christ-centered and people-focused institution, one committed to “reconciliation . . . in a hurting and broken world” as well as “the visible demonstration of valuing one another.”

Beyond these specific interstices of faith and literary studies, I view my interest and abilities in language, literature and culture as God-given.. Language study offers a challenging opportunity to develop human creative capacities designed by God, as well as to enter into relationships with other image-bearers of God in unique ways. As it is impossible to fully

master all nuances and lexical features of any language, even one's native tongue, my chosen field offers lifelong challenges and opportunities to continue sharpening the abilities God chose to gift me with, as well as to grow in relationship to other children of God.

VI. Curriculum Vitae

See attached.

VII. Letters of Reference

Forthcoming from Dr. Susan Carvalho Chumney, University of Kentucky and Middlebury College, and Dr. Cynthia Powell Jayne, Union University.

VIII. Selected Bibliography

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