5 THE FICTIONAL DIMENSION

5.1 Self-conscious fiction: telling *stories* and *telling* stories

Apart from denoting social criticism, the picaresque also addresses the difference between reality and fiction through the conscious reconstruction of experience. By expressing her experience in writing, a woman attempts to attain self-definition and ultimately to determine her place in society. In a similar fashion to Scheherazade, both Bessie Head and Isabel Allende[1] have realized the potential of stories as metaphors or allegories of experience - either to facilitate interpretation or to project a utopian/dystopian vision of the future. In many instances, writing by women becomes a metaphor for survival, as illustrated in testimonial writing and as Alba exemplifies in the *The house of the spirits* (Gordon 1987:531).

In contrast with the traditional perspective on history and fiction as two separate types of literature, one as the official or objective rendition of events and the other as the personal or subjective interpretation thereof, contemporary postmodernism questions this assumption by pointing to the presence of ideology in both. Consequently, their difference would rather reside in the degree of referentiality they embrace than in the objectivity or subjectivity of their versions of society and politics. Marta Morello-Frosch (1986:207) expresses it as follows:

> Pues si bien el discurso narrativo no está pegado a un referente explícito, la relación referencial tiene lugar en otros espacios, a distancia, pues hay un pacto de lectura, como dijimos, de relaciones socio-culturales en estas citas de otros discursos reales o posibles.[2]

Women authors and feminist movements exploit this dialectic between history and fiction in their writing, by postulating the significance of different versions of "reality". By implementing such a strategy,

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1 *The collector of treasures* by Bessie Head and *The stories of Eva Luna* by Isabel Allende exemplify this analogy.

2 Translation: Then even if narrative discourse is not related to an explicit referent, the referential relationship occurs in other spaces, at a distance, because there is a reading pact, as we say, of socio-cultural relationships in these citations of other discourses, whether real or possible.

women subvert the validity usually attributed to official documentation and history and suggest, in fact, a reassessment of historically accepted facts because they are vulnerable to the ideological influences which underpin any form of discourse. In this way, women attempt to reinscribe themselves in history. Coddou (1986:13) explains the affinity/interaction between fiction and history as a progression from private to public:

> Es cuando, en la novela, la historia se hace Historia: lo que eran acontecimientos de dominio particular, privado, pasa a evocar, como criterio de significación, un orbe general, público. Insisto: ambos están en el referente y en el texto, en la "literatura" y en la "realidad".[3]

In discussing the close relationship between history and fiction in Latin America, Morello-Frosch (1986:201), in similar vein to Alter (1975:xv) seems to regard literature as a mediator for experience. She defines history as a way of explaining the past and maintains that the act of narration serves to reassess the past from the present stance, thus creating a new discourse which will have the function to "actualizar el pasado, reconstituirlo en su nueva significación, y naturalizarlo para un nuevo grupo" (Morello-Frosch, 1986:201).[4] Consequently, she (Morello-Frosch 1986:207) suggests that re-reading history would render a new perspective from another vantage point in time and have a new meaning for the future or, in Balderston's (1986:11) terms: "The recreation of a past time serves as an inducement to meditate on the shape of things to come". The future is then constructed on the past but because of a different perspective and the advantage of hindsight, the new interpretation could contradict the official documentation and expose its neutrality or bias (Morello-Frosch 1986:202) which implies a process of subversion.

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3 Translation: It is when, in the novel, the story becomes History: the events that belong to the particular, personal sphere, evoke, as criterion of signification, a general, public sphere. I insist: both are in the referent and in the text, in "literature" and in reality.

4 Translation: to make the past present, reconstitute it within its new meaning and adapt it to a new context.

Such an interpretation is, however, only possible when the fragmentation of society is represented by multiple narrators (Morello-Frosch 1986:203) so that the reader can gain perspective, construe his/her own interpretation of events and does not need to rely on reported documentation which has already been ordered and selected.

According to Morello-Frosch (1986:202), the worst result of official documentation is its denial of the personal suffering and conflict which constitutes the fabric of society; it does not reflect the "pasos perdidos" [lost footprints], the silenced minorities.[5] She (Morello-Frosch 1986:207) then perceives the same organic processes at work in history as in literature: noting the use of intertextuality and allusion to different discourses in both disciplines, she suggests that history, like literature, should attempt to represent the dynamics of society, its fragmented and multicultural constitution and not a mere neutralized reportage of events. It should constitute a complementary and composite picture of society.

The best illustration of the complex interaction of history and fiction is still perhaps the explanation given by the Personal Narratives Group (1989:261) about their composite work of personal narratives, which encapsulates the spirit of history/fiction, to the effect that

> when talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they *are* revealing truths. These truths don't reveal the past 'as it actually was [sic], aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences.

This remark is of seminal importance in the approach to truth/reality observed in this thesis because it admits to personal or ideological influences in the interpretational process which deny a final stance on truth *per se*. Feminist theory, aware of this fact and remaining "skeptical of the claim of objectivity" (Personal Narratives Group

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5 An effort has been made to rectify this situation in recent years as can be seen in publications such as *Nunca más* in Argentina and *Síntesis de la Comisión Verdad y Reconciliación* in Chile.

1989:263), therefore relies on context as a pertinent factor in literary judgement.

In Latin America, the fictional dimension is also present in the concept of magic realism which represents the creation and acknowledgement of another view of reality coinciding and correlating with the conscious creation of fiction. As Gloria Bautista (1989:299) avers, Allende uses magic realism to express the inexpressible. Consequently, magic realism provides a powerful vehicle for expressing the multiple dimensions of reality which are represented in the duality/multiplicity of narrators in women's fiction, especially in Latin America. Magic realism is then not necessarily a component in the fact/fiction dialectic but serves as an additional technique of exploring the depth of meaning and the expansion of perspective. Such a perspective accommodates both fact and fiction as part of a complex reality because it perceives magic in the everyday existence (Bautista 1989:303).

Earle (1987:544) comments on the rich texture of Latin American history and its relationship to literature, suggesting that "It invites storytelling and sharpens historical awareness, for history is something that needs constantly to be deciphered through literature - probably its best instrument". A constant dialectic then exists between telling *stories* and *telling* stories - recounting and reconstructing - as I have suggested in the heading of this subtitle.

5.2 Allende in context: Oppression and marginalization

In a discussion of the picaresque element in *Eva Luna*, Pilar Rotella (1991:125) summarizes Allende's creative approach under three key concepts: "magical realism, historical imagination and feminism". However, as Rotella (1991:125) is careful to qualify, Allende's feminist point of view aspires to self-realization and social equality,[6] as is evident in "the prevalence of androgynous traits in many of Allende's characters". These terms are then also indicative of her specific perspective and concomitant literary strategy. Consequently, the main

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6 Coddou (1986:36) is also careful to underline the fact that Allende's characters denounce *machismo* in order to opt for social equality.

focus of attention will be on her rendition of female resistance to patriarchal/traditional domination and marginalization, the interaction between text and context and personal and political reality, as well as on the modes and strategies she exploits to illustrate her preoccupation.

As a journalist, Allende has an aptitude for detail and sensationalism (Allende 1986a:51) which stand her in good stead in her literary career. She feels herself part of history and feels responsible for her part in it. She regards writing as a means of committing to memory the atrocities committed by authoritarian regimes and as such, her writing assumes a testimonial quality.[7] She (Allende 1986a:43) asserts: "En algún momento esos horrendos acontecimientos saldrían a la luz y cuando eso sucediera, las historias recopiladas por mí no se habrían perdido, servirían como testimonio histórico".[8]

Allende has an obsession with the past/history because, as a result of her eventful life, she maintains that she is inclined to forget things (Allende 1987:56):

> y todo lo que olvido es como si no lo hubiera vivido. Me producía angustia la pérdida del pasado. A nivel histórico, a nivel de un país, es grave olvidar el pasado. Hay que recuperar la memoria para sacar experiencia para el futuro. Por eso es importante para mí mantener vivo el recuerdo.[9]

Consequently, Allende (1987:56) insists that memory must be kept alive because society has become consumer-oriented and in such a world

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7 The close relationship between history and literature is especially noticeable in Allende's work. In fact her first novel, *The house of the spirits*, emerged from letters originally written to her grandfather (Allende 1988d:5). This feature contributes to the identification of her work with testimonial literature and historiography (Muñoz 1991:61).

8 Translation: At some moment in time these horrible events will come to light and when that happens my collected stories will not have been lost but will serve as historical testimonies.

9 Translation: and everything I forget is as though I might not have lived it. The loss of the past created an anxiety in me. On a historical level, and for a country it is grave to forget the past. One has to recover memory in order to extract experience for the future. That is why it is important for me to keep memory alive.

"donde casi todo es desechable, yo tengo ansias de recuperar las cosas eternas, los materiales nobles, la piedra, la madera, el amor, la libertad".[10] Memory plays an important part in her conception of time which she (Allende 1987:57) experiences as a confluence of past, present and future dimensions:

> la niña que fui es parte del adulto que soy hoy y de la vieja que seré mañana. Todos los tiempos vividos y posiblemente otros que viví antes de nacer y viviré después de morir, son parte de mí.[11]

Allende conforms to her grandfather's idea of immortality. He believed that "death didn't really exist. Oblivion is what exists, and if one can remember those who die - remember them well - they'll always be with him and in some way will live on, at least in spirit" (Earle 1987:543). This concept is then explored in *The house of the spirits* via various forms of writing documenting personal history or memory and historical events. Earle (1987:543) describes Allende's attempt as

> a diary in retrospect, a family chronicle, an autobiography, a political testimony, a group portrait and contemporary history, a series of experiments with magic. In other words, a novel.

Her first two novels, *The house of the spirits* and *Of love and shadows* were both written with specific historical events[12] in mind and as an attempt to come to terms with them. Yet, as Camacho-Gingerich (1992:13) shrewdly observes, Allende does not attempt a faithful reproduction of Chilean history, but a transformation of historical reality into textual reality, so that "El significante, discurso narrativa o realidad textual imaginada, llega a réemplezar la realidad

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10 Translation: where almost everything is discardible I am anxious to retain eternal things, precious materials, stone, wood, love and liberty.

11 Translation: the girl that I was is part of the adult that I am today and of the old woman that I shall be tomorrow. All the lived time and possibly that which I lived before birth and shall live after death are a part of me.

12 Although not explicitly identified, the novels refer to the regimes of the Marxist Salvador Allende (1970-1973) and the military dictator Augusto Pinochet in Chile (1973-1990).

extratextual".[13] Allende (1986a:46) attempts to explain violence as another dimension of our being and says that when we cross the frontier to that side we can only attempt to survive - similar to Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of darkness* - by clinging to the familiar.

Part of her obsession with memory can be attributed to the effects of her self-enforced exile after the coup of 1973. However, like Joubert (1984:58), she (1988a:78) also admits that her exile has given her a new perspective on the situation in Chile, as "me han quitado un poco lo parroquial y me han dado un sentimiento de América Latina como tierra, como continente, como proyecto".[14] In an interwiew with Foster (1988c:44) she describes vividly how her absence had broadened her previously-restricted vision: "I lived immersed in that little reality and I couldn't see through those immense mountains". Consequently, her preoccupation with memory and the past is closely associated with her identity because she avers that "when you have to leave everything behind, the past becomes central because you have to put your roots in the past and not in a landscape or in a place" (Allende 1988c:44).

Censorship, oppressive regimes and fear create cowardice and blunt initiative, with the result that few people take positive action to correct injustices. Most of all, Allende appeals to the reader's conscience when she states (1986a:47) how "Tenían todas las pruebas ante los ojos, pero se negaban a verlas".[15] She (1986a:43) is very aware of the guilt carried by society and believes that the paradoxical emotions and experiences of violence and love are ever present in our lives. This perception of reality-transmuted-into-writing, is described by Allende in a paper given at Montclair State College (Thomson Shields 1990:79) as "ink, blood and kisses"; a description which aptly encapsulates the contrasting elements present in her writing and underlines the predominant themes of fiction, history and human compassion.

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13 Translation: The significant, narrative discourse or imagined textual reality, comes to replace extra textual reality.

14 Translation: I discarded the parochial and attained a feeling for Latin America as country, as continent as project.

15 Translation: They had all the proof in front of them but they refused to see it.

It is a very significant feature of contemporary women's writing - and the contemporary picaresque as well - that contrasting points of view are represented to illustrate their difference but also their complementary or reconciliatory potential. For instance, Thomson Shields (1990:84) points out that the cyclical structure of *The house of the spirits* is intended to focus on its re-readability: "The writing of this book never stops, never finds a point of completion because in each return to rewrite the story, readers approach the work with new knowledge". Such a reading then acts as a complementary dimension of interpretation. Thus the emphasis seems not to be so much on unity as on understanding the differences and exploiting their potential.

As a privileged member of society, Allende (1986a:50) feels it to be her duty to contribute towards a just and free society when she asserts: "No puedo recluírme detrás de una pared para olvidar la responsabilidad que me cabe en los procesos de cambio. Al contrario. El ser privilegiada me obliga más que al resto".[16] Consequently, women and their struggle for equality constitute an important aspect of Allende's work. She (Allende 1987:53) comments on the scant success of women writers in Latin America claiming that

> Las escritoras han tenido que luchar y siguen luchando contra los prejuicios de los editores que consideran que la literatura masculina es de mejor calidad o vende mejor, y de los críticos que guardan un silencio estratégico respeto al trabajo de la mujer.[17]

Allende's experience of her mother's humiliation as a "víctima primero de un hombre que la abandonó y luego de una sociedad represiva" (Allende 1987:55)[18] has made her a firm supporter of women's rights.

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16 Translation: I cannot enclose myself behind a wall in order to forget the responsibility which I have in the process of change. On the contrary. The fact that I am privileged obliges me more than the rest.

17 Translation: Women writers have had to fight and continue fighting against the prejudice of publishers who consider that literature written by men is of a better quality or sells better, and against those critics who maintain a strategic silence with regard to women's work.

She realized early in life that to succeed as a woman she had to work doubly hard. Although she has an advantage as a writer, she is intensely aware of the many discriminations still suffered by women today. Allende (1987:55) is motivated by her conviction that liberty is the right of every individual.

Her second novel, *Of love and shadows*, can also be directly related to a historical event which took place in Chile in the vicinity of Lonquén (Allende 1986a:43).[19] Like Poniatowska in *La noche de Tlatelolco*, Allende uses the question of the "desaparecidos" as a theme but she constructs a novel around it. In an interview with Moody, Allende also points out the significance of the novel (1986a:43) as a first attempt to expose the crimes of Chile's authoritarian government in which censorship has also played a role in the perpetuation of oppressive regimes - like in South African literature with black and white authors. Muñoz (1991:62) notes how Allende subverts the official account of a specific historic event in Chile in the text of *Of love and shadows* by describing a personal interpretation of the event which puts the historical account's "veracity and objectivity" into question. Allende's text is then not a document as such but an attempt to prick the collective conscience and to show "the other side" of history by recreating the experience for the reader in fiction. Weaver (1991:79) claims: "La lectura *De amor y de sombra* nos proporciona mediante la ficcionalización del testimonio una imagen dramática de los seres humanos que, buenos y malos, palpitan detrás de la historia oficial".[20]

Allende confesses that she is primarily a "teller of stories" and that she has difficulty in separating reality from fiction because "La frontera que

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18 Translation: firstly, as the victim of a man who abandoned her and then of a repressive society.

19 Allende (1986a:44) refers, in particular, to documentary evidence obtained from members of the military and witnesses. Marjorie Agosín (1988:7) reports that in 1978 a mass grave was discovered at Lonquén, an abandoned mine not far from Santiago. She (Agosín 1988:7) points out that in order to "call attention to this macabre finding, a human chain was formed consisting of 1500 people that reached all the way from Santiago to the entrance of the mine".

20 Translation: A reading of *De amor y sombra* as a fictionalized testimonial presents a dramatic image of the human beings, good and bad, who breathe behind the official history.

divide ambas cosas es un línea impalpable que al menor soplo se esfuma" (1987:51)[21] She then tells Moody (1987:52): "Escribo porque me gusta contar. Para mí es una fiesta diaria, es mi propia orgía perpétua".[22] Although she uses her experience as a woman in a politically unstable society as a basis, she maintains that her evolution as a writer is concomitant with a diminished reliance on contextual matters. She (Allende 1987:52) says that

> Supongo que cada vez hay menos elementos autobiográficos en la obra de un escritor... Aquello que es tan evidente en las primeras obras se hace menos evidente después cuando uno ya ha vaciado todo su pasado y empieza a robarle el pasado a los demás.[23]

This admission is very significant when we consider that for women, writing presents a form of self-knowlege and an exercise in coming to terms with their reality. For Allende, it indicates her dedication to an aesthetic commitment. Allende (1988a:77) openly states that each of her books has aided her in coming to terms with certain aspects of her life: *The house of the spirits* represents her youth while *Of love and shadows* helped to exorcise the rage and hatred[24] which festered inside her and was displaced by love and compassion. One might project that *Eva Luna* would then constitute an exercise in writing/constructing a future.

Like the work of several other authors in this study, her work clearly indicates this psychological progression. *Eva Luna*, as she (Allende 1987:52) implies to Moody, displays a more universal or objective stance of female awareness because she exploits literary conventions

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21 Translation: The boundary separating these two things is an impalpable line which fades with the least puff of wind.

22 Translation: I write because I like to tell stories. For me it is a fiesta, my own perpetual orgy.

23 Translation: I suppose that each time there are fewer autobiographical elements in a writer's work ... That which is quite evident in the first works becomes less evident afterwards when one has already emptied all of his/her past and started to steal the past from the rest.

24 Allende felt enraged because she had to live the life of an exile and therefore had to come to terms with the injustices of a repressive system and the loss of her family and friends.

such as the picaresque and fabulation to obtain the necessary distance. Allende (1987:52) claims that she takes refuge in another world which she juxtaposes with reality but also regards as reconcilable with it. On an earlier occasion she (Allende 1986a:52-53) tells Moody that

> Vivo en un continente donde no hace falta inventar mucho, porque la realidad siempre nos sobrepasa...Es imposible imaginar algo más ridículo y atroz que algunos de nuestros gobernantes...Estamos determinados por la fantasía y la violencia".[25]

It is this dimension which women in postcolonial countries have explored and are still exploring because of its endless subversive potential. Allende's protagonists experience magic realism as an everyday occurrence and it sometimes seems more acceptable than the irrational behaviour of authoritarian governments.

5.3 Reinscribing themselves in history: Allende's female protagonists

The main role of the female protagonists in three novels by Allende, is to deconstruct the traditional concept of women - to "intervene in history" (Amaya & Fernández 1989:192) - to assert female independence and to construct a new inclusive history by writing their own story/metatext (Cabrera 1991:37).

In *The house of the spirits*, Allende recounts the history of a family, a saga like *Cien años de soledad* [A hundred years of solitude] (Agosín 1986:87), against the backdrop of the history of Chile. However, at the same time, she is also tracing the individual life stories of four women and their fight against oppression which give the text a testimonial quality and emphasizes the interrelationship between personal and political experience. As Rojas (1985:209) remarks, Allende traces the

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25 Translation: We live in a continent where it is not necessary to invent much because reality always overwhelms us ... It is impossible to imagine anything more ridiculous and atrocious than some of our rulers ... We are shaped by fantasy and violence.

history of the four women Nívea, Clara, Blanca and Alba to indicate "el curso de viejas a nuevas formas de participación de la mujer en la lucha por sus derechos".[26] In the process, they also illustrate a literature of matrilineage which explores female bonding and mother-daughter relationships in contrast to the usual male-dominated text (Gómez Parham 1988:193).

The evolution of a female consciousness is also traced in the progressive stages of clarity symbolized in the names of the female protagonists in *The house of the spirits* and it is also evident in their respective attitudes (Coddou 1986:30). As several critics note (Cabrera 1991:41; Campos, 1986:23 and Handelsman, 1988:57-58), each of the women asserts her independence in a different way but they all undermine the conventional, stereotypical role ascribed to women by a male-oriented society. From Nívea, who advocates the vote for women and supports charity, to Rosa who seeks self-expression in embroidering enchanted animals,[27] to Clara who seeks her strength in the spiritual world, in recording the details of her life for posterity and in undermining her husband's authority through silence; to Blanca who escapes into an enchanted world of ceramic animals (*House*:203)[28] and Alba who refuses to marry and who takes her political responsibility seriously.

Handelsman (1988:59) notes that Nívea's participation in charity is merely superficial - it does not address the roots of the problem - and even Clara's withdrawal into a separate inviolate world, a "room of her own" - which both Alina Camacho Gingerich (1992:17) and Handelsman (1988:59) recognize as a state of personal autonomy within the patriarchal world of Esteban as well as the male society in general - hers is still a personal world which excludes society. Her withdrawal

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26 Translation: the trajectory from old to new forms of female participation in their struggle for rights.

27 Due to Rosa's death early in the novel, she is not considered an important female character, but as Marjorie Agosín (1986:99) remarks, her act of embroidery should also be perceived as a substitution for another form of feminist writing.

28 *House* refers to: Allende, Isabel. 1990a. *The house of the spirits*. (Magda Bogin, Trans.). London: Black Swan.

and silence constitute potent weapons against male domination because, ironically, men are powerless against such insubstantial and abstract measures. Yet, it will only be Alba's commitment to political responsibility that will make this private world public in the novel.

It is important to note that Clara consciously chooses to resist male traditions and forms of physical domination through silence. As silence also constitutes meaning or repressed meaning, Clara's silence must be seen as a positive act of self-affirmation, and a resort to unconventional means of communication (Meyer 1990:362). Just like she decides to talk again when she agrees to marry Esteban after nine years of silence, she also chooses to remain silent after her argument with Esteban - when he hit her. Her independence and freedom of choice are then significant indications of her deviation from the traditional role model of the married woman. Earle (1987:547) suggests that Clara and Esteban Trueba personify the opposing forces of oppressor and oppressed, male and female, violence and conciliation. He (Earle 1987:550) asserts that

> The dramatic nucleus of the book is the struggle between Trueba and the forces he generates, on the one hand, and the female members of his family, on the other. He is the blind force of history, its collective unconscious, its somatotonic (i.e., aggressive, vigorous, physical) manifestation. They embody historical awareness and intuitive understanding.

Esteban is described as the "epítome del orden patriarcal" and Campos (1986:22) indicates that he conforms to the history of domination in all his attributes as father, *patrón*, oligarch and senator of the Conservative Party. As a representative of the dominant sex, Esteban becomes responsible for perpetrating both personal/domestic violence and institutional violence (Huerta 1990:59) because as a *macho* male, he exercises all the rights of a patriarch and landowner - including the violation of his female subjects - and initiates the atrocities committed in the name of power (Huerta 1990:61).[29] He functions as the

29 Sandra Boschetto (1989:528) analyses his attitude still further and remarks that Esteban treats both women and language as objects related to money and the economy. This remark raises the issue of prostitution and the role it plays in *The house of the spirits* and *Eva Luna*.

countertext, attempting to imprint his authority in every way and viewing peasants and women as being in the same category of dependents (Campos 1986:27).

The spiral of violence caused by the imposition of male domination is further accentuated by Esteban's volatile and dominant nature. He becomes the anti-hero (Huerta 1990:60) and is rejected by the reader who becomes a witness to suffering and associates him/her self with the victimized hero.

Although Allende uses contrast effectively in her work,[30] Huerta's (1990:62) suggestion that the role of resistance is given to women who represent spiritual and emotional qualities in *The House of the spirits*, not only seems exclusive but also seems to revert to the stereotypical perceptions of women as the emotional and men as the rational and powerful sex. Such an interpretation would undermine the assumption that Allende is consciously applying feminist assertion as a positive characteristic of resistance to the traditional role imposed on woman. Consequently, I would regard such an interpretation as inadequate to explain the motif of violence which is introduced. In fact, I would suggest that the interrelationship between personal and political or institutional violence suggests the correlation between personal and political experience which Alba is attempting to coalesce in her text.

It is quite ironic that Gordon (1987:533) also falls into the same trap when he interprets Esteban and Clara's characters as "pure will" and "all sensibility" respectively. From this perspective he seems to reduce the text once more to binary oppositions which Allende is at pains to avoid. It is therefore no wonder that he does not perceive the text as worth recommending and claims that Allende "has left the novel genre about where she found it". Although Gordon then hastens to add that Allende has used the novel as a skillful weapon against tyranny, he does

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30 Earle (1988:994) points out that Allende's work is characterized by contrasting concepts of reality when he claims that "El arte de Isabel Allende is oximorónico: alternan la violencia y el amor, la opresión autoritaria y el impulso de la liberación femenina, la tortura y la risa". [Isabel Allende's art is oxymoronic; alternating between violence and love, authoritarian oppression and the impulse for feminine liberation, torture and laughter].

not appreciate the elements of feminist assertion and subversion which characterize the text. It is probably such a superficial reading which also induced the director of the film, *The House of the spirits*, which has recently been released, to ignore the element of magic realism[31] and the feminist angle in the text and so to produce a mediocre screen version of mainly male-interpreted historical and political events.

Allende constructs her novel on the assumption that women need to empower themselves to escape a traditional fate. One example of this strategy is illustrated by the character of the prostitute Tránsito Soto who gains power and economic independence within her profession. Her position serves as a telling example of the interrelationship between personal and political subversion and the possibility for women "escribir ellas mismas sus propias novelas, su propia historia"[32] (Camacho-Gingerich 1992:15). Tránsito feels obliged to help Esteban Trueba because he had done her a favour in the past and, consequently, arranges for Alba's release from jail. Although her presence in the text is a strong reminder of the sexual exploitation of women, it also illustrates female enterprise and male vulnerability.

Handelsman (1988:61) notes that whereas Clara asserts her personal space, Blanca asserts her sexual liberation. Her refusal to view marriage as the ultimate state contrasts ironically with her own forced marriage and the unhappy marriage of her parents which both conform to traditional norms of conduct. What Allende attempts to suggest is that a woman does not need marriage to define her identity or give her self esteem, neither does a relationship depend on social sanctions to succeed. Alba then constitutes/inherits a synthesis of these attributes which are necessary to create an independent lineage of women who take on equal responsibility with men - and the reader, as Huerta (1990:61) comments, she displays the political consciousness of Nívea,

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31 Gordon (1987:530-531), in fact, questions the existence of such a mode as magic realism in his following statement: "(if there is indeed such a thing and if it may be said to have an inventor)" and continues in a similar cynical trend to mention "the fashionable mode of domesticated magic" (Gordon 1987:534).

32 Translation: themselves to write their own stories, their own histories.

the independent will of Clara and the spontaneous and free passion of Blanca.

In this way, Allende illustrates how self-expression engenders political accountability in the testimonial and a subsequent impulse to re-write history because, as Camacho-Gingerich (1992:19) asserts, "La escritura también puede hacer la historia al influir en el desenlace de los acontecimientos".[33] Alba's task is to testify to events and to construct from them a new future, such as her name heralds. While Earle (1987:551) perceives Alba as the harbinger of a new era, Cabrera (1991:38) asserts, "Alba es la historiadora, es la voz que articula el texto"[34].

Alba's role is also important in that she promotes a new future, a future which has exorcised the past[35] which she admits when she says that

> That's why my Grandmother Clara wrote in her notebooks, in order to see things in their true dimension and to defy her own poor memory. And now I seek my hatred and cannot seem to find it. I feel its flame going out as I come to understand ... (*House*:490).

This admission is an expression of Allende's belief that hate is corrosive and should be replaced by love. Allende (1988a:74) confirms this note of optimism when she says that "Tal vez lo único que he aprendido en todo este tiempo es que nada es un callejón sin salida, hay una solución, y que con mucho trabajo, o con poco trabajo si uno tiene la inspiración o la suerte, sale... Hoy sé que hay siempre una salida".[36]

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33 Translation: writing could also forge history by influencing the resolution/ending of events.

34 Translation: Alba is the historicist, the voice that articulates the text.

35 Allende (1985:448) admits that she wrote *The house of the spirits* as a form of exorcism.

36 Translation: Perhaps the only thing that I have learnt in all this time is that nothing is a dead-end street, there is a solution, and with a lot of work, or with a little work if one has the inspiration or the luck, one will find an solution ... Today I know that there is always an exit.

The fact that Clara's diary is arranged according to the importance of events and not chronologically, suggests her creative ability and relates to the differences between plot and story which in turn, suggest the fictionalization of events (Muñoz 1988:443). Earle (1987:552) expresses it as follows:

> If observation of what occurs, changing the course of what occurs, and understanding what must occur are the three most important attributes of the narrative writer, then Clara fully and dynamically symbolizes the narrative writer.

As far as self-conscious fictionalization is concerned, Camacho-Gingerich (1992:18) also mentions that Blanca's personality differs from that of her mother Clara. Blanca is more pragmatic and consequently views matters differently and places emphases differently, which inadvertently promotes the creation of new versions of Clara's stories. Although Camacho-Gingerich (1992:18) attributes these omissions to Blanca's bad memory, I would be inclined to reason that Blanca simply remembers what appears to be important to her, thereby exposing the role of ideology in the construction of history and fiction. However, Clara's rebellion is private whereas Alba's act of writing implies public engagement (Meyer 1990:362). Thus, by adapting Clara's notes to her own situation, a different historical context, Alba introduces a dialogic interaction (Meyer 1990:362).

Cabrera (1991:43) points out that the ending seems apposite to the intention of the text, that it follows its own internal design and illustrates the regenerative/creative function of literature:

> Y el texto de la novela is el testigo y el historial de su proprio *construir* y *reconstruir* indefinidos, indefinidos porque la última línea de la novela es el comienzo de otra y de la misma historia.[37]

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37 Translation: and the text of the novel is the witness and review of its own indefinite *construction and reconstruction*, indefinite because the last line of the novel is the beginning of another and the same story.

The significance of repetition, noted by Sandra Boschetto (1989:530), is also present in the reading process which suggests a cyclical pattern. As the text is read and reread, each reading brings new insight and creates a new text. True to postmodernist fiction, as Cabrera (1991:44) notes, the text parodies itself and the concept of a definite author, thereby establishing a dialectic between fiction and reality.

Although Allende has often been accused of emulating *One hundred years of solitude*, the feminist intention evident in *The house of the spirits* makes it clear that the text should be read rather as a parody of a "master text" and an assertion of feminist innovation. Antoni (1988:16) explains that Allende is engaged in a rewriting exercise during which she acquires a distinctive discourse and discovers her own novel. Whereas García Márquez concentrates on male lineage in *One hundred years of solitude*, Allende focuses on the female line which complements (Cánovas 1988:123) the former and establishes an implicit dialogue between the sexes in the two novels. Allende also presents a novel interpretation of history from the left, or the other side of political reality, questioning its official "veracity" so that the reader becomes aware of another side of history which seems as valid and furthermore invokes the possibility of social change. In agreement with Antoni, Coddou (1987:12) proposes that criticism of her work could be attributed to a possible fear of subversion on the side of the dominant discourse.

Like in Gordimer's case,[38] Allende's critics also seem to ignore the appropriate reading strategy. Mora (1987:55) criticizes the supposed passive ending of the text and Allende's use of stereotypes. However, the conclusion of *The house of the spirits* must be seen as an attempt at reconciliation, represented by the unborn child and its uncertain parentage. Similar to *A sport of nature*, where Hillela acts as a hybrid of the disparate cultures, the child is an indication of a mixture of the past and the present. Its birth indicates/prognosticates a new kind of vision for the future in which the reader can participate. Mora (1987:53) also ignores Allende's intention to expose stereotypes and to indicate a gradual change in the perceptions of women and the ways in

38 Nadine Gordimer's novel, *A sport of nature*, had also received adverse criticism due to inappropriate reading strategies.

which individuals resist the imposition of traditional norms. For this purpose she needs to work within the patriarchally imposed framework, which in this case would be *One hundred years of solitude*.

Meyer (1990:360) succinctly encapsulates the gist of my argument against Mora's (1987:55) indictment of the ending of *The house of the spirits* when she states unequivocally that

> Allende creates a feminocentric novel that - in the tradition of the self-conscious text - represents through discourse two empowering and transforming female experiences associated with renewal: giving birth and being reborn. In other words, *La casa de los espíritus* focuses both on the physical experience of creating a text (within the text) and the psychological experience of creating a new self.

Women's role in the resolution of social and political problems and their participation in such a process are clearly illustrated in *The house of the spirits*. Allende intimates that the vicious cycle of violence must be stopped and Alba is predestined to fulfil this role. Her final words at the conclusion of the novel convey this message of reconciliation when she says that Clara's letters were written "so they would help me now to reclaim the past and overcome terrors of my own" (*House*:491). Her imprisonment and physical degradation have led to spiritual regeneration as Rojas (1985:210) observes.

Like *The house of the spirits*, *Of love and shadows* also depicts the limitations of traditional womanhood. The mother, Beatriz Beltrán, epitomizes traditional values while the daughter, Irene, is given the opportunity, through love, to resist conventional and official restrictions and depend on her own intelligence and resources for survival. True to the social mould into which she has been cast, Gordon (1987:536) notes that Beatriz clings to appearances and she refuses to consider that the government may be deceitful.

Irene Beltrán is also at first "partly imprisoned in her mother's world" (Gordon 1987:536), a situation which appears similar to the predicament of Rosa Burger in Gordimer's novel *Burger's daughter*.

However, in both cases the operative word would be "choice" as both these young women show resilience, courage and inventiveness by choosing to decide their own futures. The idea of survival features strongly in Allende's works, especially women as survivors, and Gordon (1987:535) makes the perceptive observation that

> *De amor y de sombra* instead seems to be saying that love can survive even in the shadow of Big Brother steadily watching, can survive physical agony and the threat of death, and perhaps also that love needs the shadow to become most fully love.

Reminiscent of *A sport of nature*, the question of memory acquires an interesting dimension through the concept of photography. Francisco Leal, Irene's friend and a photographer by profession, is at hand to photograph the the events he and Irene investigate. Yet, the concept of immobilizing history and memory in a photograph only presents one dimension of reality and therefore does not provide sufficient evidence of the multiple versions of reality. Barabara Harlow (1987:83) points out that photographs, "while they preserve the memories and genealogical existence of a culture and a heritage, nonetheless stop short of disclosing the context within which they are implicated".

Caught up in a middle-class environment and values, Irene Beltrán has her comfortable world rudely disturbed when she investigates the story of the disappearance of Evangelina Ranquileo, a young peasant girl who is supposed to be endowed with second vision. It is this event which initiates the subsequent investigation and evokes the political conscience of Irene.[39] In her attempt to come to terms with political reality, Irene delves into the mystery of Evangelina and unearths unpleasant "truths". Meyer (1988:156) describes Irene's political awareness as her "fall from innocence". Irene openly admits to her innocence with regard to oppression when she maintains that "Because until now I've been living in a dream, and I'm afraid to wake up" (*Love*:148)[40] and she learns that officialdom does not necessarily spell validity. Similar to the black

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39 Gordon (1987:537) observes that Evangelina can be regarded as symbolic of the oppressed forces in the Chilean society.

40 *Love* refers to Allende, Isabel. 1990b. *Of love and shadows*. (Margaret Sayers Peden, Trans.). London: Black Swan.

body which refuses to remain buried on Mehring's farm in Gordimer's novel ironically called *The conservationist*, Irene's search produces evidence which cannot be indefinitely kept secret and which contradicts official versions of history. Irene's personal life then becomes inevitably linked to political events and she comes to realize her responsibility as a woman and a citizen. Irene illustrates how a woman can transcend conventional and political barriers and trust in her instincts and sense of justice. René Campos (1989:197-198) points out how Irene and Francisco's personal relationship is juxtaposed with the lives of others to show how the personal is inextricably linked to the political and to create political conscientization. Irene's situation is echoed in many countries around the world where people refuse to become involved and to assume political accountability. This text could also be read within the tradition of testimonial writing because an awareness of a collective consciousness is introduced by the account of personal experience. When Irene investigates the story of Evangelina Ranquileo she begins to realize the deceptiveness of appearances and learns to read between the lines (Campos 1989:200).

Allende's heroines then offer new alternatives to the traditional mould imposed on women by society. In defiance of stereotypical roles, they assume various modes of independence and as Camacho-Gingerich (1992:22) correctly indicates, they advocate an androgynous approach to the social dilemma reflecting the opposing values of the two sexes. However, Sandra Boschetto (1989:531) regards this "equalization" of voices/perspectives as a kind of fusion, so that "Lo que queda no es no voz masculina ni femenina, sino más bien experiencia narrada, una sola voz que subyace a la premeditada confusión de identidades y a la repetición de ciertos hechos".[41] Even more significant is the fact that, as Coddou (1986b:31) observes, Allende's female protagonists turn themselves into the subjects of a discourse in which they have so far featured as objects. Consequently, writing becomes a means of confronting official silence which Coddou (1989:90) implicitly admits

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41 Translation: That which remains is neither masculine nor feminine voice, but rather narrated experience, a single voice which underlies the premeditated confusion of identities and the repetition of certain events.

when he refers to literature as "esta otra forma de conciencia que es la literatura".[42]

Eva Luna's story explicitly illustrates this fact. Although she moves in a picaresque world and meets with people from all levels of society, she does not conform to the traditional title of *pícara* because she literally and figuratively creates her own future by learning to write and better herself. Her improved status does, however, correlate with Lazarillo's elevated position but it also differs in that she gains legitimate control of her destiny, unlike Lazarillo who depends on appearances.

5.4 *Eva Luna*: Creating fiction and shaping lives

5.4.1 Eva and the education of experience

The circumstances of Eva Luna's birth correspond to a large extent with the anonymity associated with the picaresque tradition. She is the product of a chance union between a jungle foundling - named Consuelo by the missionaries - and a nameless silent Indian from a remote tribe whom she describes as :

> My father, an Indian with yellow eyes, came from the place where the hundred rivers meet; he smelled of lush growing things and he never looked directly at the sky, because he had grown up beneath a canopy of trees, and light seemed indecent to him (*Eva*:3).[43]

Although Eva's name, which means "life", was taken from a book of names consulted by her mother Consuelo (*Eva*:7), it also evokes her mother's mysterious appearance at the mission station in the jungle, in a paradisiacal ambience, as "a naked cub caked with mud and excrement, crawling across the footbridge from the dock like a tiny Jonah vomited up by some freshwater whale (*Eva*:4).

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42 Translation: this other form of conscience that is literature.

43 *Eva* refers to: Allende, Isabel. 1989. *Eva Luna*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Ester Gimbernat de González (1991:111) clearly associates the name with the biblical Eve and claims that it invokes the dynasty of Eve and her daughters. She (Gimbernat de González 1991:115) also connects Eva's conception with the Edenic image of the garden(er) and the snake and perceives the many faces of Eve to be represented in the female characters in the novel.

Eva's surname was derived from the name of her father's tribe, the Luna tribe (Children of the Moon), because her godmother insisted that "Only a dog can run around with one name" (*Eva*:20). Consuelo's education was neglected by the missionaries because she was a girl and consequently, she was allowed to roam around freely until she started to develop physically and the missionaries realized that she needed to be schooled in women's work and sent her off to a city convent. Here she was locked up in a cold and unsympathetic world of silence and monotony and instructed in servants' work. The austere atmosphere of this place is succinctly described in the next image: "a breeze of modernity lifted the women's skirts, but in the Convent of the Little Sisters of Charity none of this mattered" (*Eva*:8). She was then employed by a Professor Jones who spent his life in a twilight world surrounded by mummies which he had conserved by means of a miraculous fluid. Consuelo's only time of short-lived happiness in her life of drudgery occurred when Eva's father, who worked as Jones's gardener, was bitten by a poisonous snake and she nursed him back to health and in the process managed to conceive Eva.

From this improbable and romantic liaison Eva emerges to spend her first years among mummies. However, with the help of her mother's fertile imagination she learns to regard them as friends and friendly spirits (*Eva*:22-23). Eva's world is bound by the iron railings of the garden (*Eva*:23) and her toys are nonexistent except that she regards everything in the house as part of her games (*Eva*:22). In addition, her mother's gift for story-telling helps to transform her world. Gimbernat de González (1991:115) describes this inheritance as :"Con la palabra le entraga a Eva el mundo, en todas sus dimensiones y posibilidades".[44]

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44 Translation: With words, she handed Eva the world in all its dimensions and possibilities.

As the daughter of a servant girl, Eva realized quite soon that she did not have a wide choice of vocations. She recalls afterwards that it had perhaps been her unusual background that had provided her with her rebellious spirit - similar to Jesusa Plancares's- and prevented her from living a life of humiliation (*Eva*:20).

Due to her mother's untimely death - she choked on a chicken bone - and Professor Jones's death not much later, Eva is taken under the wing of her godmother who sells the child's services for money. Like Jesusa suffers under her stepmother, Eva suffers under her godmother. Although Eva insists that "In her way, my *madrina* was fond of me" (*Eva*:42). She embarks on a series of jobs where either her godmother's greed interferes or Eva's pride dictates her actions and she is dismissed or leaves out of her own free will.

Her various employers range from a retired and frustrated couple of siblings - spinster and bachelor - in a neglected household; to a woman with porcelain figures cluttering her house - with a room decorated like a pharaoh's tomb (*Eva*:97); to a Cabinet Minister, an aristocrat with vulgar habits; to a brothel Madam and finally to Riad Halabí who gives her an identity in the form of a birth certificate and educates her. The isolation she experiences in the house of her first employers is somewhat mitigated by her relationship with Elvira who acts as her grandmother and listens to her stories (*Eva*:52). Although her second employer is obsessed with her porcelain figures, she is not unkind. However, Eva's senses are outraged by the behaviour of her third employer, the Minister, when she is employed for the sole purpose of shining his shoes and emptying his chamber pot (*Eva*:101). After a few days she rebels and

> 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 (*Eva*:101).

Gimbernat de González (1991:117) remarks that this incident reaffirms the discourse which questions socially-determined hierarchical structures and illustrates Eva's independent spirit.

On her peregrinations among various levels of society - a literal panorama of Venezuelan or even Latin American society - Eva, contrary to picaresque tradition, makes a few good friends such as Elvira, Huberto Naranjo, Mimí and Riad Halabí. Thus, although she is exploited she is also treated kindly, but mostly by outsiders such as Riad Halabí. However, due to her experience of the transitory nature of relationships - typical of the isolation of the *pícara* (Rotella 1991:127) - Eva seems resigned to her fate when she exclaims: "I had the sensation of having lived through this desertion before" (*Eva*:102).

Allende then introduces love as one of her main themes, or in this case, the power of compassion. Halabí almost resembles the frog prince in the fairy tale except that he engenders the transformation of Eva into a person. Apart from the influence of Halabí, Huberto Naranjo also acts as a kind of protector to Eva. Ironically, she is taken under the wing of a brothel Madam but remains untouched by her trade due to the owner and the inmates' protective attitude and Naranjo's strict injunctions to that effect. Although La Señora shows a sense of humour when she claims that "Men are arrogant, always telling you what to do. It's better to say yes to everything and then do whatever you please" (*Eva*:106). Her empowerment as a person and a woman comes with education and she is therefore not dependent on power gained through sexual favours, like Hillela Capran.

The concept of woman as a sex object and marginal figure is replaced by the realization that men are also vulnerable and that women have access to considerable political power through their sexual liaisons.[45] Allende illustrates this in the person of Tránsito Soto in *The house of*

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45 Kavita Panjabi (1991:13) addresses this issue in her article on Tránsito Soto, the rich whore in *The house of the spirits* when she points out that because Tránsito is economically independent and peripheral, she is also not part of the "hierarchical property relations". The prostitute and her client have a relationship based on a "combination of dependence and power" (Panjabi 1991:14) because both are dependent on the other and yet both have authority in their respective spheres.

the spirits, and in the position of La Señora in *Eva Luna*. This empowerment is also evident in Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and Gordimer's Hillela Capran in *A sport of nature*.

Yet, Eva becomes aware of a double life at La Señora's and realizes that her trade might be immoral but that she trades on the corruption of others - blaming her would then be a case of the pot calling the kettle black. In fact, La Señora points out that her trade is flourishing because "there is enough corruption for everyone" (*Eva*:112). Eva later realizes that she was living in limbo and could not recognize reality when she says

> That was a good time in my life, in spite of having the sensation of floating on a cloud, surrounded by both lies and things left unspoken. Occasionally I thought I glimpsed the truth, but soon found myself once again lost in a forest of ambiguities. In that house day and night were reversed, you lived at night and slept during the day (*Eva*:113).

Rotella (1991:129) remarks that Eva lives in a contradictory world where "the whores and the thieves who populate the red-light district are more honest and better organized than the police force ... and in which social outcasts (such as Mimí, a gloriously beautiful and unusually generous tran-sexual) behave more decently than highly placed government officials".

This awareness extends to the political situation and the oppression of women. The satirical account of El Benefactor, a highly ironical name for a political tyrant, and his successor highlight the social problems outside the walls of Eva's domestic world. A world where women are either servants or sexual objects and men benefit the most from the situation as Eva's godmother points out (*Eva*:42). Her sentiments equal those of Jesusa on this topic. Eva's growth in social consciousness is commensurate with her intellectual development and education, but it is also encouraged by the subtle change in her journalistic enterprise. According to Eva, this change was engendered by the "Revolt of the Whores" which led to the dissolution of her comfortable world with La Señora and aroused her social consciousness. Ironically, the raid on

whore houses is at first applauded as a decisive move against vice but when the newspapers implicate important public figures in the debacle, public opinion is aroused to realize the extent of the corruption in government circles. It is significant that corruption is finally exposed in the newspapers in the form of caricatures of political figures:

> Two of the drawings were perilously like the General and the Man of the Gardenia, whose participation in trafficking of all kinds was well known, although until that moment no one had dared suggest it in print (*Eva*:119).

However, Allende not only implicates the government in her criticism but also makes subtle swipes at the church and the sanctimonious front it presents. The first intimations of the hypocritical ways of the church come with Consuelo's childhood among missionaries and the convent where compassion and Christian love seem to be distressingly low in the order of priorities. When Eva is taken to confession as a little girl, she is confused by the harsh words of the priest who tells her not to touch herself (*Eva*:45). This is an ironical example of the priest's obvious preoccupation with sex - a matter which Jesusa Palancares also addresses. Eva's final disillusionment with the church occurs when the pastor appropriates the inheritance left to her by Professor Jones (*Eva*:48). Innocent children and poor people become pawns in the game of power and greed and the institutions which are supposed to protect the people actually exploit them (Eva:68). This constitutes the main thrust of the picaresque novel and of Allende's critique of power abuse.

In order to realize the full potential of *Eva Luna*, it is necessary to recognize the various conventions and codes at work in the text and to "select, from a multiplicity of possibilities, one organizing class that works as a program of decodification" (Goodrich 1986:57). Reading *Eva Luna* as a picaresque novel, a mode which is overtly present in the text and is perceived as such by both Rotella (1991:132) and Gloria Gálvez-Carlisle (1991:172), the question of irony becomes pertinent. A very important indicator of the picaresque mentality is that "For his part, the picaro's revenge (and his **modus vivendi**) consists in out-maneuvering, out-smarting and disrupting the established order to this

[sic] own profit and advantage" (Rotella 1991:127-128). This feature should be considered seriously in an assessment of *Eva Luna* because it acts as a guideline for interpreting Eva's actions and her "story". As the narrator, Eva herself gives us a clue by emphasizing her imaginative skills - in other words, she warns us that her reliability as narrator might be affected by her penchant for fabrication - when she describes the malleability of the "universal matter": "*Porcelana* is a dangerous temptation, because once its secrets are known, nothing stands in the way of the artist's copying everything imaginable, constructing a world of lies, and getting lost in it" (*Eva*:98). Consequently, we have to weigh her story with the necessary care as Rotella (1991:132) also realizes when she comments on the "total precariousness of Eva's narrative".

The veracity of Eva's account is also questioned by Coddou (1991:145) who points out that due to Eva's inclination to embellish reality, whether factual or invented, the reader is aware of the fact that she might also have transformed the facts of her life. Consequently, as Coddou (1991:145) is careful to note, it is not merely a case of assimilation but "más bien, y por el contrario, frente a un proceso de inversión, subversión y transformación de lo recibido".[46]

Coddou (1991:143) also remarks on the ambivalence of the dual perspective of the narrator/protagonist in *Eva Luna* and mentions that this is a characteristic of parody, a discourse of two voices (Coddou 1991:144). The result of this ambivalence is that the reader is never certain about the interpretation of reality, whether it is factual or fictional, or as Coddou (1991:144) puts it

> El lector no puede nunca estar seguro de cuando la narradora se restringe a presentar **hechos** y cuando da **versiones** configuradas por ella y, así, hasta tergiversadas, de lo 'real' acontecido.[47]

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46 Translation: but even more, to the contrary, we are faced with a process of inversion, subversion and transformation of the received.

47 Translation: The reader is never sure when the narrator restricts herself to presenting deeds and when she gives versions transformed by her and thus, almost distortions of the 'real' account.

Like Jesusa, Eva learns an important lesson early in life: always to fight back (*Eva*:62) and secondly, like Jesusa resorts to reincarnation to explain the unbearable contingencies of existence, Eva learns that stories help to make life bearable, to transform reality. This is a matter which the whores in La Señora's house realize only too well when they confess to Eva: "Your stories are better than the movies, there's more suffering, they would sob, mouths filled with chocolate cake" (*Eva*:114). This observation is of course filled with irony, evoking the image of Marie Antoinette and her injunction to give the people cake instead of bread. It also juxtaposes the two worlds of reality and illusion very successfully.

Ester Gimbernat de González (1991:118) notes how Eva compares the power of words with the creative process involved in shaping objects of porcelain (*Eva*:173) and she explains that the main difference lies in the enlivening quality of literature which is "capaz de poner en movimiento lo que la porcelana fría deja inmóvil".[48] It is Eva's inventiveness which replaces the typical resourcefulness and instinct for survival so evident in the picaresque hero, that Rotella (1991:131) identifies as her best asset because her survival depends on her selling of stories/lives, on her wit and her intelligence.

Unlike the usual *pícara*, who is traditionally associated with sexual relationships as an object of lust, Eva has been quite fortunate in her relationships with men. She has never been sexually exploited by the men in her life but they have rather protected and accepted her.[49] As Rotella (1991:130) notes, "Eva's love affairs are presented as a sign of personal affirmation rather than of sinful behavior". It is interesting to note that in Eva's progression towards independence she gradually outgrows the father and protector figures represented by men like Halabí and Naranjo[50] - especially Naranjo who represents the

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48 Translation: it is capable of enlivening that which cold porcelain leaves lifeless.

49 Although Rotella (1991:130) also seems to have this perception of Eva's relationships, Gimbernat de González (1991:116) claims that Eva acts as a mother figure to Professor Jones, the old bachelor and Naranjo. Perhaps both these perceptions would be valid in different situations.

picaresque/adventurous element in her life - because she needs a partner who presents a challenge to her as a person and a woman. This is the role reserved for Rolf Carlé. Consequently, Rotella (1991:130) summarizes: "The overall, implied message of Eva's story, as of all picaresque stories, is a lesson on human error, vice and corruption, punctuated by rare examples of good will and tenderness". Eva learns to sell her imagination, to "barter words for goods" (*Eva*:63) although she never forgets life's ambiguity and seldom creates a "standard happy ending" (*Eva*:65) to her stories. Eva then serves as an example that writing, or education, could supplant "sexual barter" and create independence.

Both Hillela Capran in *A sport of nature* and Eva in *Eva Luna* then manage to transcend the traditional role of the *pícara* and assert their rights as women. Although Hillela is still involved in a relationship where sex plays a decisive role, she is regarded as a partner and equal by the general. However, the general's wife is left to raise the children and manage the family - even to produce more children after Hillela has taken up residence at the presidential palace. This situation indicates a dichotomy between courtesan and wife which still needs to be addressed and resolved by Gordimer if she wants her protagonist to attain full independence. However, Eva seems to represent the fulfilled woman who determines her own destiny, apart from and with men.

5.4.2 Creating her own history

Although Eva is the first-person narrator, she tells different stories which create the impression of different perspectives similar to *La casa de los espíritus*. Carvalho (1992:59) remarks that the stories, learnt from her mother, are moulded by her experience and shaped by her imagination so that fiction and fact become intermingled and part of her life.[51] Consequently, as Carvalho (1992:59) observes, we witness the transformation of stories into literature "which goes far beyond copying

50 Huberto Naranjo is an example of the traditional male who sees women ranged in two main categories: whores and wives. He has entrenched ideas *about* women and the macho image of men which Eva soon realizes will never be changed.

51 This seems reminiscent of Lazarillo, although his conscious construction or improvement on his adventures is more modest.

old notebooks" and make *Eva Luna* "a novel of artistic self-exploration, a kind of Bildungsroman" (Carvalho 1992:60). In fact, it recounts a double life story, first Eva's and alternately Rolf's in the form of an autobiography and biography.

A repetition of images and incidents illustrates that both Eva and Rolf have experienced traumatic and restricted childhoods. The similarity is captured in various ways: for instance, Eva describes her presence in the professor's home - where her mother worked as a servant - as a silent "prolongation" (*Eva*:22) of her mother's shadow while shortly afterwards, in the chapter on Rolf Carlé's childhood, Rolf and his siblings are described in similar terms:

> His children learned not to cry or laugh in his presence, to steal about like shadows and talk in whispers, and they developed such skill for passing unnoticed that sometimes their mother thought she could see through them, and was terrified that they might become transparent (*Eva*:27)

The structure of the text also indicates a parallel account which converges into one account towards the end. Karrer (1991:155) draws up a scheme by which he indicates the symmetrical evolution of their lives which finally merge in the last two chapters. The alternative account of Eva's and Rolf's stories and their suffering at the hands of a callous society creates a complementary picture of male/female experience.[52] Ironically, Eva's lack of a father figure, which might be seen as a negative blot on her development, is negated by Rolf's father who is a monster of torture and deserves to be dead. This juxtapositioning highlights the need for love and compassion in the development of a human being. Both Eva and Rolf hunger for love (*Eva*:82), a need which drives Eva to Halabí and Naranjo, and Rolf into his twin cousins' arms. Like Eva in her isolated domestic work, la Colonia also represents an isolated Garden of Eden where the real world seldom intrudes and then only for short intervals.

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52 Karrer (1991:151) comments on the similar themes of "salvation through love" which characterize both *Of love and shadows* and *Eva Luna*.

The technique of dual narration assumes an important function because in asserting her experience, Eva also has to acknowledge Rolf's experience. As Antoni (1988:21) suggests about Esteban Trueba in *The house of the spirits*, unless Rolf's version is considered, the exercise of rewriting history becomes meaningless and the female version of history would constitute a one-sided point of view. Like Alba's voice is perceived to be dominant in *The house of the spirits* (Meyer 1990:361), Eva's voice is dominant in the dual version of history. The significance of juxtaposing the two life stories is situated in the similarity between male and female suffering which emphasizes the complexity of difference and evokes a compassion for human life in general. We realize that there is no valid and irrefutable account of history but only a fragmented account of reality which we as the readers as well as Alba and Eva have to interpret. Through writing, Eva recreates the past which becomes an almost tangible presence and she intimates that this exercise also empowers her to shape her future when she says that "Little by little, the past was transformed into the present, and the future was also mine" (*Eva*:224).

Apart from the dual life stories, Eva is also reconstructing the past from a mature stance which allows the intrusion of irony and underlines the discrepancy in perspective. This disparity is evident in her account of the politics during her childhood and youth which she describes as follows:

> and a more progressive government was set in motion that promised to bring the nation into the twentieth century - not a far-fetched idea, considering that it was already three decades behind (*Eva*:16)

Boschetto (1990:54) compares Clara in *The house of the spirits* with Scheherazade and maintains that they are both "creatures of language, imagination, and invention: weavers of words, and creators of worlds within words" but this description seems even more appropriate to Eva in *Eva Luna*. In both these texts there seems to be a clear incentive for women like Alba and Eva - as well as other women - to construct their own future, whether by means of words or some form of artistic expression. Allende's texts then overtly emphasize the subversion of

gender norms and the traditional concept of a "living happily ever after ending" similar to the fairy tale, because that would imply a static, prescriptive state of existence.

Allende favours an open ending which stresses that life is what you choose to make of it: by consciously forgetting hatred, like Alba, or looking for another kind of love, like Eva.[53] Gimbernat de González (1991:120-121) points out that the open ending of *Eva Luna* impels a re-reading of the text so that "una vez que el libro se repite, su identificación consigo mismo se encuentra con una diferencia que nos permite discretamente escapar el 'final feliz' cerrado".[54] In accordance with the parodic intent identified in the text, Coddou (1991:145), also indicates the impossibility of a closed ending.

Eva realizes that one can create your own story and consequently your own ending but would that be reality? In turn, Rolf attempts to find reality in film but in the end he is also creating fiction, his own account. If Eva in her task as author wants to be true to herself, she cannot create a happy ending to her stories because life goes on and cannot be dictated to. This is the typical conclusion in any autobiographical account and in particular of the picaresque. Eva is left to devise her own conclusion and Gimbernat de González (1991:122) indicates how Eva's life is intertwined with her fictional characters who shape her life. There seems to be an interesting correlation here between the Afrikaans novel *Griet skryf 'n sprokie*"[55] by Marita van der Vyver and *Eva Luna* because both have significant conclusions. Griet's account of her life takes on a fairy tale "ending" while Eva implies that this could be her destiny as well but she allows for the unpredictability of life to interfere. She juxtaposes fiction with reality by comparing her novel, *Bolero*, with her life by writing that "He strode forward, and kissed me

53 In *Lazarillo de Tormes* the reader was left with the definite impression that he had been duped by the narrator and had also indirectly been implicated in the indictment of society. Consequently, he/she was left in judgement of the situation. This impression is prevalent in both *A sport of Nature* and *Eva Luna*.

54 Translation: once the book is repeated, there is a difference in its self-identification which allows us to discreetly avoid a final happy ending.

55 Literally translated this would read "Griet writes a fairy tale" but it has subsequently been translated into English under the title *Entertaining angels*.

exactly as it happens in romantic novels, exactly as I had been wanting him to do for a century, and exactly as I had been describing moments before in a scene between the protaginists of my *Bolero*" (*Eva*:270).

Life is more complex than a fairy tale and perhaps also more challenging. Eva (*Eva*:271) openly speculates on the outcome of life and fiction when she continues her account by saying that

> Later, for a judicious period of time, we loved each other more modestly until that love wore thin and nothing was left but shreds. Or maybe that isn't how it happened. Perhaps we had the good fortune to stumble into an exceptional love, a love I did not have to invent, only clothe in all its glory so it could endure in memory - in keeping with the principle that we can construct reality in the image of our desires.

This extract embodies the thematic and metafictional concerns of the text: the idea of a love turning sour is countered with an ideal love "a love I did not have to invent" which emphasizes fiction as a construct. Allende manipulates the dialectic between fact and fiction to illustrate their close relationship and like Cervantes's knight, Don Quixote, realized all those years ago, she intimates that fiction might be preferable to life.

As the protagonist/narrator in *Eva Luna*, Eva successfully asserts a female perspective by undermining the stereotypical concept of woman and *pícara*. Firstly, she creates Mimí the transvestite who is ironically described by Aravena the journalist, as the "absolute female" (*Eva*:227) but who has been "painfully created to satisfy the dreams of others" (*Eva*:227) and juxtaposed to this "fictional woman" (*Eva*:227), Allende creates Eva who is picaresque in spirit but also defies the stereotype of the *pícara* as an illiterate prostitute. This implied criticism of social stereotypes and conventions is further concretized and embodied in the conscious dialectic between fiction and reality. We are under no illusion that Eva is engaged in constructing a story like her own and we are left to draw our own conclusions as to the implications of this creative act.

The manipulative character of language and fiction which Allende illustrates in her novels is described by Walker (1990:43-44) as a conscious female strategy which

> can lie, as women themselves have been manipulated and lied to. Thus in the midst of telling their stories, women express their awareness that the truth they seek to tell of is illusory, and that a fantasy could be as 'real' as the observable facts of their lives. Indeed, the perception that language is arbitrary and mutable can be the first step toward liberation.

In conclusion, Allende supports her theme of subverting traditional conventions by manipulating various modes: the metafictional by writing a story within a story; the picaresque and romance by relating Eva's social and personal adaptation; the fairy tale by recounting Riad Halabf's strange romance; myth as intertwined with the account of her mother's miraculous appearance; as well as magic realism with regard to Professor Jones's magic preservative fluid and the evasive Palace of the Poor (*Eva*:123). These modes are all interwoven in the love story of Eva and Rolf to exemplify the levels of complexity in language and literature and emphasize the reader's role as an active participant.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 The picaresque and feminism

An analysis and contextualization of four postcolonial novels by women (*Eva Luna* by Isabel Allende, *A sport of nature* by Nadine Gordimer, *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* by Elsa Joubert and *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* by Elena Poniatowska) have revealed a pervasive presence of picaresque and testimonial qualities within these novels. As both these modes are ways to testify against personal and political oppression, they provide appropriate channels to address the invidious social and cultural inequality of women as identified and discussed in Chapter 1.

The most outstanding and coherent characteristic of these novels is their assertion of female autonomy through the subversion of culturally-imposed female stereotypes and their questioning of the validity of historical discourse. This strategy is operative in both the thematic and formal dimensions of the texts and is particularly effective due to the manipulation of *literary modes* such as the *testimonial*, the *picaresque* and *metafiction*. Although these modes all pertain to subjective or autobiographical writing, their basic tone of social critique and commitment to testify against unjust social practices bear the stamp of political engagement. The personal inevitably becomes political.

Ivonne Jehenson (1990:75) notes that recent Latin American literature has been strongly influenced by testimonial literature, which she defines as "ese sincretismo de historia documental y ficción narrativa que constituye el testimonio".[1] The title of her article, "El testimonio, crónica, autobiografía o género picaresco?" exemplifies the dilemma of categorizing the testimonial but also intimates its affinity with the other forms of autobiographical writing.
It would seem, though, that the picaresque tradition, with its origin in the sixteenth century in Spain, encapsulates both the qualities of testimonial and documentary or chronicle. In particular, it constitutes a watershed in the evolution of contemporary autobiographical writing by women because it effectively synthesizes subjective expression, in the

1 Translation: this syncretization of documentary history and narrative fiction which constitute the text.

form of autobiography or testimonial, and self-conscious experimentation and aesthetic innovation in the form of metafiction and fantasy. In this sense, the picaresque, [picara?] like Hillela in *A sport of nature*, is a hybrid [form?] which captures the experience of personal fragmentation characteristic of postmodernist fiction, exemplifies the inherent dialectic between individual and society - also pertinent to autobiographical writing - and effectively expresses the disparity between different perspectives. The awareness of such a disparity also infers a similar disparity in historical documentation which undermines its validity. The technique of dual or multiple narration therefore becomes more subtle and highly developed in contemporary women's fiction which attempts to promote a complementary, thus multifaceted perspective of experience.

A study of the picaresque mode has also revealed an interesting progression in women's writing within the autobiographical genre. Although the subjective aspect of writing remains constant, an inclination towards self-conscious fiction and fantasy is evident. As a result, the literary mode of expression and the manipulation of language attain equal status with the thematic or referential subject or, in some cases, supersede it.

In an attempt to grapple with and account to some extent for this manifestation, I have chosen four texts which respectively emphasize the aspects of *testimonial*, *irony and social critique* and *metafiction* and yet, could all be associated with the *picaresque* tradition.

The testimonial aspect of Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* is incontestable and it therefore tends to obscure the presence of picaresque features in the text. Its narrator (and protagonist) is an authentic historical person whose account testifies to social marginalization and political oppression. The question of referentiality constitutes one of the main distinctions between the testimonial and the picaresque and yet, as I argued in Chapters 2 and 3, the testimonial cannot deny its fictional component which is present in both Jesusa's account of her life and Poniatowska's reconstruction of the past.

Although Elsa Joubert's *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* can also be regarded as a testimonial[2] the picaresque element is more subdued and the absence of self-conscious irony and a callous attitude would actually defy classification as a picaresque. For this reason, it has mainly been used to serve as a counterpointing device, a foil, to Poniatowska's text.

Irony is then a vital aspect of the picaresque. In the testimonial, irony exists outside the narrator's account and it is only evident to the facilitator and the reader who perceive the disparity between Jesusa's personal account and the official accounts of history. It is Jesusa's naive rendition of events that creates irony but she is not aware of this fact. In contrast, the true *pícara* is fully aware of her situation and is as much a victim as a victimizer.

The combination of testimonial and picaresque in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*, however, underscores the dilemma of women as the doubly marginalized and underlines the discrepancy between women's history - or their absence as an authoritative voice in history - and the official version of history.

In *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*, the protagonist/focalizer evinces an ambivalence, a conflict between traditional and "feminist" perceptions of representation and assertion but the qualities of courage, independence and determination are promoted by Poniatowska, the facilitator, as necessary attributes for female independence. In her own way, Jesusa defends women's rights and by acting as her facilitator, Poniatowska establishes a significant link with less privileged women. Poniatowska and Joubert's positions - and perhaps even mine - as white intellectual women are defended by Jean Franco (1992:80) when she makes the observation that

> The woman intellectual cannot claim unproblematically to represent women and be their voice, but she can broaden the terms of political debate by redefining sovereignty and by using privilege to destroy privilege.

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2 I recently made this distinction in a comparative article on *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* and *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena*. (See Wenzel, Marita. 1994.)

The picaresque emphasizes the discrepancy between the personal and the political and the individual and society through the focalization of the *pícara*. The inclusion of an ironic retrospective stance allows the *pícara* to exonerate herself as a product of a corrupt society and to point the finger indirectly at the reader as a responsible member of that society. Apart from criticizing society like the testimonial, the ironic aspect then implicates the reader. In order to survive in such a society the outcast has to adapt and Hillela, the protagonist in *A sport of nature*, has to become a hybrid to survive in such a fragmented society. She crosses the barriers of convention and is therefore ironically termed "a freak of nature". She openly resists convention and allies herself with the opposition in the political struggle for South Africa - the outsiders and freedom fighters. The true *pícara*, Hillela, learns to play by the rules and how to adapt to society and camouflage her identity while the narrator of the testimonial is recounting historical realities and thereby condemning the abuse of political power. Hillela's personality is such, however, that the reader is left with doubts as to the moral validity of her success. Her final position as consort of the black general, and her total lack of family connections and loyalties, call to mind the conniving and unscrupulous attitude of the arch *pícaro*, Lazarillo. As the reader is aware that Hillela is an opportunist, he/she is then inclined to suspect that her true motives for infiltrating/joining the new South African community have not been so guileless after all. Let us not forget her ambitious spirit, iron will and sheer determination. This suspicion is confirmed by Kathrin Wagner (1994:95) who maintains that "There is a suggestion here, at a subtext level, that it is power which is the ultimate prize, for within a context in which powerlessness is the bitter corollary of oppression, liberation becomes synonymous with the access to power".

The self-consciously fictional aspect of the picaresque as exemplified in Isabel Allende's *Eva Luna*, includes the critical tone of the witness, the social irony of the true picaresque but emphasizes the catharsis enacted by writing. It emphasizes the recuperative forces latent in literature as well as its potential for self-construction - that is, creating a personal identity. Eva serves as an excellent example of such a process. Her picaresque background provides her with the determination to succeed,

but whereas the usual *pícara* is corrupted by society and exploits her sexuality economically, Eva Luna goes one step further in her quest for equality by taking the initiative and creating her own space and own history through fiction. While Hillela is empowered within the patriarchal system - that is, she exploits sexual weakness to her advantage and so becomes part of history - Eva resists the easy way out and is thus empowered and liberated to create her own story and, most important of all, to choose her own history.

Female identity then constitutes a predominant issue in the texts under discussion and one of women's main concerns remains their resistance to stereotypical images - especially the allocation to the binary positions of either wife and mother (essentially good) or witch and prostitute (essentially evil). The image of the prostitute features very prominently in these novels in order to highlight the abuse and exploitation of women. In *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*, Jesusa views prostitution as women's subjugation to male lust and power, while Tránsito Soto and Hillela Capran in *The house of the spirits* and *A sport of nature* respectively, indicate the financial benefits of the profession which bring empowerment. However, they are still dependent on men for this advantage and although they are asserting themselves through body politics and thereby demanding that their presence be acknowledged, it is Eva Luna who manages to re-**inscribe** herself in history as well as to choose her own fate, with or without a man (Rolf Carlé in this case). It should perhaps also be mentioned here that the subversion of female stereotypes also affects the role of the wife, and Lucía Guerra Cunningham (1989b:148) points out the ironical implications of marriage as a form of legal prostitution. Such a concept once again raises the question of choice, and I would suggest that self-determination constitutes one of the major issues contested by women. Joanne Frye (1986:69) emphasizes this aspect when she maintains that "Consciousness and choice in a social context thus center the idea of self as process" and Margaret Lenta (1986:35) also addresses the question of female rights when she entitles her article on Schreiner and Joubert: "Independence as the creative choice in two South African fictions."

This thematic exploration of female assertion and empowerment is concretized and reinforced by the manipulation of modal and structural devices in the above-mentioned novels.

The four novels then seem to exemplify an extended metaphor of the evolution in women's struggle for equality. Janeway (1979:376) perceives such an evolutionary process in women's writing and identifies "two major elements at work in women's literature as it moves beyond the phase in which it is simply in search of an identity": firstly, a scrutiny of women's ordinary lives as significant of attention and secondly, "an urge to create a new set of values that will suit the lives and purposes of women as seen by women". The latter becomes political because it questions social norms and values. Thus the feminist critic must focus attention on different ways of reading texts, or as Irvine (1986:13) formulates it, to recognize "alternate structures".

The final stage in women's writing as it is perceived for the purposes of this study, is defined by self-conscious fiction which also contains definite elements of fantasy. Foster (1986:148) also perceives this development as a general literary progression from documentary/personal to politically and universally-oriented narrative which espouses more abstract forms of fiction. In fact, he (Foster 1986:150) calls this process one of artistic transcendence and concludes his article by claiming that political oppression has resulted in

> un juego de expresiones de varios grados de apertura y de desenmascaramiento y una tendencia hacia una articulación expresionista que metamorfosea el imperativo documentalista y testimonialista en una escritura alegórica con visos marcadamente grotescos y antinaturalistas (Foster 1986:152).[3]

As I regard fantasy as a significant development in the contemporary women's novel and magic realism - as a mode of fantasy literature - features in both the Latin American texts in this thesis, I shall devote

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3 Translation: A play of various degrees of expressions of openness and unmasking and a tendency towards expressionist articulation which transforms the documentary and testimonial imperative into an allegorical literature with a decidedly grotesque and antinaturalist appearance.

some discussion to it and indicate its influence on the postcolonial literatures under discussion.

6.2 The fictional alternative: Fantasy and magic realism

Hume (1984:44) explains that authors resort to fantasy in various guises to cope with the uncertainties of contemporary life, to interpret reality and satisfy the quest for meaning which is expressed via mythical invention, metafiction and pluralism.

The main function of fantasy remains political - which implies that it has an inherent intention to question, undermine and change existing traditions and conceptions. It is therefore not to be wondered at that it is so easily appropriated by women's writing in the quest for meaning and identity and that it contributes another very significant dimension to the debate between history and fiction. In the search for self-definition, the fantastic explores alternate voices and worlds, enlarges the scope of meaning and as Hume (1984:196) asserts, it "helps us envision possibilities that transcend the purely material world which we accept as a quotidian reality".

Walker (1990:8) points out the significance of irony and fantasy as narrative devices in the contemporary feminist novel by claiming that

> like Austen, the contemporary woman novelist understands the power of language to both control and subvert the control of authority. Not only do irony and fantasy depend for their force upon a recognition of verbal constructions, but authors must maneuver around the language of dominant discourse in order to deconstruct cultural mythologies, including the myths that women construct about their own lives.

Fantasy should be viewed as a mode in interaction with historical context because its interpretation depends on its relationship with the "real" world.[4] As Hume (1984:xii) quite aptly observes, "Departure

4 In the identification of different realms in fiction, Katharine Galloway Young (1987:188) proposes that the realm of the "ordinary, the

from reality does not preclude comment upon it: indeed this is one of fantasy's primary functions". It is exactly because fantasy provides the necessary distance from "consensus reality", condenses emotion and depersonalizes relationships that the reader can recognize certain flaws and grasp certain truths about humanity and human experience. Fantasy is wide ranging and can either distort or omit evidence/facts.

With respect to fantasy literature, Chanady (1985:vii) distinguishes between the fantastic and the marvellous as two opposing poles. She (Chanady 1985:161) places magic realism under the fantastic and identifies three criteria for the existence of the fantastic and magical realism: "the presence of the natural and the supernatural, the emphasis on or resolution of antinomy in the fictitious world, and authorial reticence".

Chanady (1985:21) claims that magical realism provides an "amalgamation of a rational and an irrational world view" which she explains as "two conflicting, but autonomously coherent, perspectives, one based on an 'enlightened' and rational view of reality, and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality". However, it must be stressed that the supernatural must be recognizable as such for the fiction to be classified as magic realism as Chanady (1985:22) clearly indicates when she says that "the term 'magic' refers to the fact that the perspective presented by the text in an explicit manner is not accepted according to the implicit world view of the educated implied author". (Therefore *A thousand and one nights* would not belong to that category.) Thus, while the supernatural features in both the fantastic and magic realism, Chanady (1985:24) observes that the fundamental difference lies in the perception of the narrator in magic realism who accepts the occurrence without judgment. Furthermore, she (Chanady 1985:2) explains that the quality of the fictional world, or the level of reality, usually determines whether a text belongs to the fantastic or whether it is a fantasy. There is a great difference between the expected and accepted appearance of monsters and witches in a fairy tale which is based on "a fictitious world totally removed from our conventional view of reality", and of the encounter

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commonsense world of everyday life, is the one that is unreflectively called reality".

of "an apparently supernatural being" in a story about an everyday world. The fairy tale would consequently belong to the marvellous while the latter would rank with the fantastic.

The fantastic can also be distinguished from the uncanny - such as the Gothic - because the latter provides a rational explanation for apparently supernatural occurrences. In a similar fashion to the marvellous, science fiction functions within a readily defined world which, as an extrapolation of ours, conforms with "existing scientific discoveries and theories" so that "what would obviously be regarded as supernatural in a different context, is considered normal in the world of science fiction" (Chanady 1985:5). Chanady (1985:29) says that "the portrayal of hallucinations, dreams and superstitions does not make a story into an example of magical realism, unless the imagined events are presented as objectively real".

Within the Latin American context, several women writers use magic realism or combine it with other modes, like Allende in *Eva Luna*. Poniatowska uses magic realism in the form of reincarnation in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* and it serves the same purpose as Eva's story telling in *Eva Luna*: both these devices enable the protagonists to come to terms with their world. Poniatowska (1989:22) herself points out that Jesusa resorts to/invents the spiritual world to make life tolerable. In a similar manner, the *pícaro/a* re-invents/restructures his/her life to justify his/her position and Eva constructs her own future. Apart from its function as an escape mechanism, magic realism also emphasizes the alternate version of reality and projects a new way of looking at it. Consequently, it underscores the principle of dual or multiple perspective.

Apart from Poniatowska and Allende, several other contemporary Latin American women novelists express themselves through magic realism: Mireya Robles and Luisa Valenzuela are but two that I shall mention here. Mireya Robles illustrates the blatant discrimination against women by subverting the concept of hagiography and she entitles her novel *Hagiografía de Narcisa la bella* [*The hagiography of Narcisa the beautiful*]. In *Cola de lagartija* [*The lizard's tail*] Luisa Valenzuela

uses a dual narration to illustrate the discrepancy between official and personal renditions of history.

It is interesting to note that, with the exception of perhaps Bessie Head and more tenuously Doris Lessing, English South African fiction, and women's fiction in particular, has not yet adopted magic realism as a mode. However, the Afrikaans women writers' seem to have used it as a means of expressing African reality - or, by the same token, South African reality. Here I would mention Wilma Stockenström's *Die Kremetartekspedisie* [*Expedition to the baobab tree*], Fransi Philips's *Die wilde kind* [*The untamed child*] and Lettie Viljoen's *Karolina Ferreira*. Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a survivor* juxtaposes two alternative worlds: the future and mental worlds and from this conflict, the mental world finally triumphs over the historical one (Waugh 1984:109-110). *A question of power* by Bessie Head answers to Walker's (1990:11) claim that dreams and forms of madness can be regarded as the characters' attempt to "find or invent a past that will allow them to make sense of the present". Madness is symptomatic of a sick society - as J.M. Coetzee intimates in his novel entitled *Age of iron* - but in women's fiction it also represents a dual personality. Lorna Irvine (1986:58) remarks that in

> much fiction by women, the madwoman is the author's double rather than her foil; her own story rather than the culturally accepted story ... Forced to recognize her double, the female character often discovers in madness a cleansing that allows her to face the actual madness of her culture more openly.

Nancy Walker (1990:35) is careful to point out that "the line between dreams and fantasies, on the one hand, and madness on the other may be almost indistinguishable in the contemporary women's novel". She (Walker 1990:36) comments on the divided self as a narrative device to indicate change and claims that

> the need for social change and the recognition that social change begins with individual change - the personal is political, but the reverse is also true.

Magic realism and other forms of fantasy then provide women with numerous avenues to explore and revise the male canon, and re-inscribe themselves into the history which has marginalized them through so many ages.

6.3 Comparative literature and the future

The interpretation of difference in relational terms forms the premise of my thesis. It informs the plea for social equality in gender and race and constitutes the basis for the acknowledgement of complementary experience. Knowledge can only expand horizons and insistence on one kind of experience as normative is not only biased, but a denial of the basic human right to a separate existence and hence experience. Within this context, feminist experience attains validity.

As I intimated in the **Introduction**, comparative literature provides a crucial bridge to an understanding of cultures and this study is an attempt to keep the dialogue open. Masiello (1992:198) explains how women's literature can assist in this objective when she says that

> From a conflation of limits or a challenge to national boundaries, women entering the modern age rewrite the language of nationalism and seek out new forms of alliance. In this way, the schism between public and private spheres that has been the target of recent critical interest appears to be reconfigured in the interstices of formally constituted spaces of discourse.

The novels discussed in this study have all, then, manifested an awareness of the marginalization of women and have attempted to rewrite the official discourse to include women and men. In addition, women in postcolonial countries have had to combat the influence of colonialism as well. Alicia Partnoy (1989:12) expresses the hope that her experience of oppression will strengthen her resolve to:

> build cultural bridges, to destroy stereotypes about Latin American women, and to denounce political repression in our countries.

This statement could not only be seen as a manifesto for women's aspirations in general, but could also serve as a synopsis of this study in particular.

Although the three novelists who have used the picaresque mode have all been from European extraction and belong to the privileged classes, they have managed to convey and assert the plight of women and have convincingly shown that literature can rewrite "history" to include the personal dimension and thereby acknowledge a variety of perspectives.

Nadine Gordimer (1992:5) defines how the essence of experience is reflected in writing when she says that

> We spend our lives attempting to interpret through the word the readings we take in the societies, the world of which we are part. It is in this sense, this inextricable, ineffable participation, that writing is always and at once an exploration of self and of the world; of individual and collective being.

She (Gordimer 1984:33) believes that the tragedy of the South African fragmented culture lies in the "fossilization" of the European culture and the failure to "make the connection with an indigenous culture" and she expresses the hope that South Africans will be able to build a common cultural future. I believe that a combination or the co-existence of the indigenous and European cultures could produce a dynamic new literature in South Africa - similar to that in Latin America.

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NOTE

In recognition of the diversity of sources and languages used in this thesis, I have adhered to the Harvard method of documentation which reduces the capitalization of letters to the minimum so that most titles are written in the lower case. My main source of reference for this method was N. Visser's Handbook for writers of essays and theses.

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