Where the Violence of the System Meets the Violence of the Revolution: A Look at the Battle between *Machismo* and Feminism in Allende's *La casa de los espíritus*

by
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Abstract

This thesis analyzes Isabel Allende's *La casa de los espíritus* as a work of intersectional feminist literature that emphasizes female characters' confrontation with *machismo*. Through an in-depth exploration of four main characters, the thesis illustrates how *machismo* and feminism are brought to life in the novel and how they counter each other. Esteban Trueba serves as the embodiment of the authoritative and patriarchal values that characterize *machismo*. On the other hand, Clara del Valle Trueba, Blanca Trueba, and Alba Trueba serve as examples of feminism and each defy the *patrón* in their own individual ways. Based on social issues and historical events that still plague Latin America at present, Allende's tale of female activism, voice, and spirit is still as relevant in the fight against misogyny today as it was forty years ago.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

Throughout the course of history, many civilizations around the world have established sets of ideals for the roles that men and women should play in society. Although there are sure to be variances in these rules, gender roles typically find their roots in age-old ideologies about the "perfect" family structure. This structure would typically include a strong patriarch, whose role is to provide for the family, and a nurturing matriarch, whose role is to maintain the home and bear children. While these gender roles are ancient, this perpetuation of the "perfect" man or woman has become embedded in some world cultures even to this day.

One course of action that Latin American women have utilized to fight back against these destructive social structures is creating poetry and prose. For approximately the past century, feminist authors and poets have been shattering the oppressive bonds of the patriarchy by changing the narrative and creating new representations of the "ideal" woman. Chilean author and feminist powerhouse Isabel Allende tells such a narrative through her work *La casa de los espíritus*, or *The House of the Spirits*. This novel is a complex piece of intersectional feminist literature that constructs a story line spanning multiple generations of a Latin American family. Within only fourteen chapters, Allende creates a thought-provoking discussion on patriarchal values and their role in society and politics in Latin America. We follow the del Valle-Trueba family across generations and witness the constant battle between the *machismo* and feminism.

Machismo refers to the set of attitudes and values passed down from generation to generation in Latin American society that define the ideal man. In a positive light,

machismo is characterized by bravery, pride, honor, courage, and the ability to provide for one's family (Sequeira 9). However, it is more commonly associated with the negative byproducts of these ideals. A *machista,* or a man who displays intense pride in being manly, is characterized by the objectification of women, aggressiveness, authoritarianism, hypersexuality, infidelity, and the need to feel dominant over other men (8). The corresponding term for women is *marianismo,* which is the set of attitudes and values that define the ideal woman. Aspiring to be like the Virgin Mary (*la Virgen María),* a *marianista* should remain chaste until marriage as her purity is directly equated to her value as a potential wife. Once married, the woman is expected to be completely and selflessly devoted to her husband, children, and all domestic responsibilities (30). Therefore, a woman who embodies *marianismo* is one who lives her entire life as dictated by men—with no power over her own narrative. This inherent superiority of men in turn makes the objectification of women both commonplace and easy, which can be seen in traditions such as arranged marriage. In being handed over by her father to a husband who will thenceforth practically own her, a *marianista* lives her life in complete docility, submissiveness, dependence, and subordination (30). Although instances like arranged marriage are not as pervasive nowadays, these idealized gender roles have played a major role in Latin America's history, and their effects are still evident today. Allende gives a glimpse of how deeply embedded *machismo* and *marianismo* are in Chilean culture through the responses of the peasant women of *Tres Marías*[1] when Clara tries to lecture them on feminist ideas.

[1] "Three Marias;" the name of Esteban Trueba's estate

> ‘Since when has a man not beaten his wife? If he doesn’t beat her, it’s either because he doesn’t love her or because he isn’t a real man. Since when is a man’s paycheck or the fruit of the earth or what the chickens lay shared between them, when everybody knows he is the one in charge? Since when has a woman ever done the same things as a man?’ (Allende 118)

This response is the perfect example of women who have been raised in a society where *machismo* and *marianismo* are the norm. Throughout the novel, the reader sees how *machismo* is sustained by men who are wealthy and in positions of power. Esteban Trueba, the patriarch of the story, is a prime example of this ideal; his beliefs and behaviors perpetuate the objectification of and violence against women. On the other hand, Esteban’s wife, daughter, and granddaughter all counteract his authoritarianism in their own significant way. Clara del Valle Trueba, Esteban’s wife, exhibits feminism by exacting control over her narrative. She does not allow men, especially Esteban, to overpower her voice. She asserts her narrative through daily writings in her journal and periods of selective muteness. Blanca Trueba, Clara and Esteban’s daughter, rejects the *marianismo* ideal of remaining chaste until marriage and the social requirement to marry within the same class. She falls in love with a peasant boy on her father’s *hacienda*[2], and she becomes pregnant with daughter Alba. Alba Trueba serves as the antithesis of *marianismo* and is the strongest foil to her grandfather Esteban. All of the feminist traits exhibited in the women before her are combined and magnified in Alba.

[2] Estate; ranch

While the setting and time frame are never stated outright in the novel, Allende gives the reader a few clues throughout the text. She begins the story with a poem by famous Chilean poet Pablo Neruda and ends the story with the assassination of the unnamed socialist President and the resulting military dictatorship. From these and other context clues, the reader can ascertain that the novel takes place from 1910s-1970s in Chile. Salvador Allende, the real-life Chilean socialist President, who was murdered during the coup d'état of 1973, was Isabel Allende's father's first cousin. She admits that he did not influence her life until after he died, but then she realized his impact on Chilean history and how many people viewed him as a hero (Allende).

La casa de los espíritus's unique combination of a grim reality with a romanticized spirit world has become an exemplar of magical realism. Magical realism is very commonly associated with Latin American literature, and it combines reality and truth with myth and fantasy.

> According to Isabel Allende, magical realism is a way of seeing life, including the emotional and spiritual aspects, and is particularly apparent in the literature of underdeveloped countries, due to the daily contact with violence and misery which sends the writer into the world of the supernatural searching for explanations and hope. (Rave 31)

By giving the del Valle-Trueba women supernatural abilities, Allende gives them an otherworldly essence of power that is invaluable in their fight against their oppressors. In

this battle against *machismo* and political persecution, these women find hope not only in each other but also in a home with a life of its own: the House of the Spirits.

In analyzing the characters Esteban Trueba, Clara del Valle Trueba, Blanca Trueba, and Alba Trueba, one notices the battle between *machismo* and feminism in the text. This thesis examines these four characters each with their own chapter. Keeping with the novel's theme of magical realism, each chapter is named after a card in the traditional tarot deck. "The High Priestess" serves as the title of Clara's chapter and takes reference from the card that symbolizes spirituality, inner knowledge, and intuition. Blanca's chapter, titled "The Lovers," highlights her character's desire to love freely. "The Hanged Woman," taken from the tarot's "The Hanged Man," symbolizes a sacrifice necessary to progress—a fitting name for Alba's chapter. Finally, "The Emperor," a card symbolizing masculine principle, authority, fatherliness, and organization, serves as the title of Esteban's chapter. Esteban embodies the oppressive ideals of *machismo* in direct contrast to Clara, Blanca, and Alba, who not only break the ideals laid out by *machismo* and *marianismo,* but also take charge of the historical narrative typically controlled by men. The conflicts between the patriarch and the female characters are struggles that still plague the feminist movement in Latin America today.

Chapter Two: The High Priestess

Clara del Valle is the life force of the House of the Spirits—when she dies, it dies with her. From a young age, Clara is set apart from her brothers and sisters due to her supernatural talents. She has the power of premonition and can foresee natural disasters and deaths. "Clara the clairvoyant," as she is often called, can also see spirits and the auras of the living. In her free time, she learns to practice divination through the tarot and to sharpen her telekinetic abilities in order to play the piano without touching a single key. Clara becomes ostracized in society by peoples' whispers of her supernatural nature, but she does not further ostracize herself by directly combatting the ideals of *machismo* like her daughter and granddaughter would come to do. Instead, she asserts her dignity by dictating her own narrative in spite of her tyrannical husband.

An analysis of Clara as a character is impossible to complete without looking at her mother Nívea del Valle. Nívea, "who was considered the first feminist in the country" (Allende 135), brings to life the beginnings of the women's suffrage movement in Latin America. Unlike her husband, who was deterred from a life in politics after a foiled assassination attempt resulting in the death of their daughter Rosa, Nívea dedicated the majority of her life to her own political campaign. Nívea "would chain herself with other ladies to the gates of Congress and the Supreme Court" and "went out at night to hang suffragette posters on walls across the city" (75). Upon reflecting on Nívea del Valle and her political campaign calling for women's right to vote and to attend university, Esteban Trueba would become irate.

> ‘That woman is sick in the head!’ Trueba would proclaim. ‘It would go against nature. If women don’t know that two and two are four, how are they going to be able to handle a scalpel? Their duty is motherhood and the home. At the rate they’re going, the next thing you know they’ll be asking to be deputies, judges – even President of the Republic!’ (75)

Nívea, who embodies the rise in political activism for equal rights, perturbed characters like Esteban because she avoided submitting to socially acceptable roles for twentieth century women.

The Catholic church played a tremendous part in enforcing and sustaining the image of the docile and submissive housewife. Catholicism did not pervade Latin America until the conquistadors forced the religion upon the indigenous people. The Spaniards fought violently in their conquest, starting in Mexico with the arrival of Hernán Cortés in 1519 (Schwaller 52). Although they sought to establish these areas of the New World as a colony under the rule of Spain, “the imposition of Christianity was an essential part of the establishment of Spanish political hegemony” and “there was no real thought given to peaceful conversion” (57). With the establishment of the Catholic church came the establishment of *marianismo*. Although *La casa de los espíritus* takes place several hundred years after the conquest of Latin America, Catholicism still acts as the cornerstone of the suffocating gender roles that the female characters fight to break.

In Clara’s early years, when her father still desired to be a politician, the del Valle family regularly attended church in the parish of San Sebastían. Although Severo del Valle was an atheist, he dragged his wife Nívea and their eleven children to church to

give voters the impression he was a god-fearing family man. With the novel's timeline beginning sometime in the 1910's, the del Valle family is introduced around the time that the church broke its silence on feminism. In 1906, Pope Pius X (1903-1914) argued, "there is much to admire in the feminist desire to elevate women intellectually and socially, but the Lord protect us from political feminism!" (Camp 512). The twentieth century proved to be a time of tumultuous opinion on women's rights according to the church. In contrast to Pope Pius X's statement, Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) argued against the right for women to earn the same education as men.

> The Creator has disposed and ordained perfect association of the sexes only in the unity of matrimony, and, with varying degrees of contact, in the family and society. Besides, there is not in nature itself…anything to suggest that there can be or ought to be promiscuity and much less equality, in the training of the two sexes. (514)

With both of these statements, one can see that Nívea del Valle's feminist activism—particularly her advocacy for women's suffrage and equal opportunity for education—contrasted directly with the position of the Catholic church. By not succumbing to the pressures of society and religion, Nívea instills in Clara a certain resiliency that she would then pass down to her own daughter and granddaughter.

The combination of her upbringing and supernatural talents resulted in a precocious young Clara. One of the first instances in which she uses her powers is when she predicts the accidental murder of her sister Rosa. The family is shocked when little

Clara's prediction comes true, and Clara believes that by speaking her premonition aloud, she had manifested her sister's death. In her grief and guilt, Clara enters her first period of selective muteness. The use, or disuse, of her voice became one of Clara's most powerful weapons in establishing command over her narrative. The ten-year-old girl did not speak again for nine years until she predicted her marriage to Esteban Trueba, Rosa's former fiancé. Clara would not weaponize her voice again until many years later in response to abuse by her husband.

The most significant way that Clara maintains control over her life's story is through her journaling. The first sentence of the novel begins: "*Barrabás came to us by sea*, the child Clara wrote in her delicate calligraphy" (Allende 1). From that moment onward, Clara would write down the events of her everyday life for the next fifty years. She utilized writing to indirectly combat the often incomplete history told by the patriarchy. In preserving her thoughts in this way, she creates an intricate history of her life experiences that could be passed down to future generations without being lost in time, overshadowed, or erased by the narrative of her husband or any other man.

Her gift of premonition along with her writings and periods of selective muteness give the reader the sense that, even though Esteban believes himself to be the *patrón*[3], Clara is really the one in charge. Even when she is in the process of dying, the reader is under the impression that she is completely in control of what is happening. After her physician son examines her, he says, "I think she's decided to die, and science has no cure for that" (322). Clara is simply bringing her narrative in the physical world to a close.

[3] Boss; employer; master

Death is not the end for Clara, of course. She visits and continues to inspire her family from the spirit realm. Perhaps the most important instance of this is when she visits her granddaughter Alba during her time as a political prisoner.

> Clara also brought the saving idea of writing in her mind, without paper or pencil, to keep her thoughts occupied and to escape from the doghouse and live. She suggested that she write a testimony that might one day call attention to the terrible secret she was living through, so that the world would know about this horror that was taking place parallel to the peaceful existence of those who did not want to know, who could afford the illusion of a normal life, and of those who could deny that they were on a raft adrift in a sea of sorrow, ignoring, despite all the evidence, that only blocks away from their happy world there were others, these others who live or die on the dark side. (460)

Clara's visit produces a cascade of effects. The first, and most important, is that her advice inspires Alba to "write" her testimony in her mind and to survive so that someday she could share that testimony. When Alba does survive, she continues to write just as her grandmother told her to do, and the reader later discovers that Alba has been writing *La casa de los espíritus* all along. Her story is brought to life with the help of her grandmother's journals, her mother's letters, and the interjecting first-person narrative of her grandfather who helps Alba write.

In summary, Clara's eccentric way of life completely rejects the expectations for a stereotypical *marianista.* Though she is not what society would call the "ideal" woman,

she is an inspiring and compassionate mother and grandmother who fosters a family environment of love and acceptance in direct contradiction to her husband. She is able to combat his oppressive ideologies in a roundabout way by disrupting their power dynamic through use and disuse of her voice. Without the intelligent and ethereal Clara, there would be no story to write. She serves as a major stepping stone in the Trueba women's fight for freedom and respect.

Chapter Three: The Lovers

From the moment she was born, Blanca Trueba was a free spirit. Although she was brought into the world by a mother in a loveless marriage, Blanca represents the incarnation of love. She is more defiant than her mother Clara, though most of her rebellious acts take place in secret. Blanca combats *machismo* and *marianismo* by defying men's ownership of women's bodies. She does this in a number of ways, but most significantly, she falls in love with a man outside of her social class, practices sexual autonomy, and leaves an unhappy arranged marriage.

During Blanca's childhood, she would spend her summers with her family at the *hacienda* in the country. There she met Pedro Tercero García, the son of Esteban's foreman. Upon meeting each other, Pedro and Blanca connected immediately and created a bond that would last for the rest of their lives. However, Esteban's expectations for her did not include somebody of Pedro's social class. He desired for her to marry a man of notability and take her place as a proper lady in society, but Blanca had different aspirations. Her affinity for the peasant boy from *Tres Marías* only grew stronger as time passed, and she knew when she was just a child that Pedro was the love of her life. However, even in their youth, Pedro knew that they could never be together.

> 'When I grow up, I'm going to marry you and we're going to live here in Tres Marías,' she whispered. Pedro stared at her with his sad old man's look and shook his head. He was still much more of a child than she, but he already knew his place in the world. (Allende 163)

Class was only one of the obstacles in Blanca and Pedro's path, however. As Pedro began to mature into a young man, he began to read, research, and talk to Communist and Socialist revolutionaries. He soon began to share his knowledge with the workers on *Tres Marías*, but he was quickly met with Esteban's snakeskin whip. From that moment on, Esteban flagged Pedro as a threat to his authority. This tension would only lead to even more outrage from Esteban when he discovered his daughter's secret relationship.

During the summers of their teenage years, Blanca and Pedro began to meet in secret every night down by the river. Blanca makes the decision to partake in sexual relations with Pedro, and by doing so, defies one of the major rules of *marianismo*: remaining chaste until marriage. They continue this relationship for several years until Pedro is fired by Esteban for spreading Communist ideas among the tenants. Esteban, still clueless to Blanca's relationship, becomes furious at even the mention of Pedro's name at the dinner table. He rants about Pedro's "Bolshevik" ideas and says,

> '…the only reason I didn't shoot him through the eyes is because I respect his father and because you could say I owe my life to his grandfather, but I warned him that if I caught him prowling around here I'd blow his brains out.' (190)

Though Blanca is terrified of her father's rage, she lets nothing get in the way of her relationship with Pedro. She even pretends to have contracted tuberculosis so that her school would send her home to *Tres Marías*. She continues to feign her illness so that she

is never sent back to school. Pedro and Blanca continue to meet in secret due to her father's animosity and Pedro's increasing involvement with the Socialist party.

Count Jean de Satigny, who in Esteban's eyes was the only valid contender for Blanca's hand, discovers that Blanca has been sneaking out to sleep with Pedro and betrays her to Esteban. However, by this time it is too late. Blanca has already become pregnant with Pedro's child—a daughter she would name Alba. Esteban is furious, but in an attempt to salvage Blanca's image, he arranges for her to marry Count Jean de Satigny. Blanca refuses her father's attempt to hand her over to the Count, but is eventually broken down when Esteban tells her that he has killed Pedro Tercero. Thinking that the love of her life is dead, Blanca agrees to the arranged marriage.

Blanca does not learn that her father had lied to her until after her marriage. She does attempt to have a civil partnership with the Count, but she remains unhappy. However, when Blanca learns that her husband has been partaking in sexually promiscuous behavior with the house servants, she abandons her role as his wife. In leaving him, she proves that she has built upon the bravery of her mother, who did not marry a man she loved and never confronted her husband about his infidelity.

By the end of the story, Blanca finds her way back to Pedro. However, one must note that she does not immediately agree to marry him despite his persistence. By waiting to advance the relationship until she felt comfortable with doing so, Blanca further establishes that she does not belong to any man. Ultimately, Blanca's role in the battle against *machismo* is to assert her bodily autonomy and her ability to determine her own future. She breaks conventions set by society and religion in order to be with the person whom she loves.

Chapter Four: The Hanged Woman

As a child born from true love, Alba Trueba herself is filled with compassion. Though she is just as strong-willed as her grandfather Esteban, she quickly becomes the apple of his eye. She spends her entire life directly opposing not only Esteban's ideologies, but also the actions of his government. Alba combines different aspects of the women who came before her in the battle against *machismo*. She inherits a passion for politics and human rights activism from her great-grandmother Nívea, a need to command her own story from her grandmother Clara, and an understanding that the power of love transcends the constricts of class and religion from her mother Blanca.

Alba embodies her great-grandmother's passion for advocacy and her grandmother's charitable kindness, but she is bolder than the women who came before her. She devotes herself to the Socialist cause, though initially she does this out of love for her partner Miguel and not for any ideological principle. Her participation in her first protest and occupation is notable because she directly defies her grandfather's orders. At her university, students seized a building to protest for the rights of workers. When Alba does not come home that night, her grandfather calls her.

> 'You have no business being there with all those Communists!' Esteban Trueba roared. But he immediately softened his voice and begged her to leave before the police came in, because he was in a position to know that the government was not going to let them stay indefinitely. 'If you don't come out voluntarily, they're

> going to send the mobile unit in and drive you out with clubs,' the senator concluded. (Allende 356)

Alba disobeys her grandfather and stays with her comrades at the university until she becomes physically unwell and must leave. This event is the beginning of many actions that Alba would take to defy Esteban.

With the election of a Socialist President for the first time in the nation's history, the outrage of the right wing Conservative party, which Esteban Trueba led, was channeled through their efforts to disrupt and devastate the economy in an attempt to make the new President look inept. The Conservative party's actions to destabilize the economy affected all classes, but disproportionally affected the lower working class. With the extreme shortage of food, Alba's mother began to work with the black market to have copious amounts of food delivered to the house. Seeing that there was far too much food than what her family could possibly need, Alba devised a plan to steal some of it.

> Alba made a hole in the wall, through which she removed part of what Blanca stored. She learned to do it carefully, stealing cupfuls of sugar, rice, and flour, breaking off pieces of cheese and spilling open sacks of dried fruit to make it look like the work of mice, that it took Blanca more than four months to suspect her…The product of Alba's thefts would up in the hands of Miguel, who distributed it in poor neighborhoods and in factories…. (390)

As time passes and as she witnesses firsthand the suffering that the Right has caused, Alba finds a sense of purpose in aiding the Socialist cause. She would only continue to become more passionate, and as a result, partake in more risky acts of service.

When Alba learns that her grandfather has been conspiring with other Conservative extremists to accumulate weapons and to overthrow the government, she believes that Esteban is funneling these weapons into their home. With the help of her Uncle Jaime, they infiltrate the locked room, discover the boxes of fire arms, and devise a plan to steal them.

> In the days that followed, they stole everything they could, leaving the empty boxes under the other ones after filling them with stones so they could go unnoticed if anybody tried to lift them. Between them they pulled out pistols, submachine guns, rifles, and hand grenades, which they hid in Jaime's room until Alba could take them in her cello case to a safer place. Senator Trueba saw his granddaughter walk by pulling the heavy case, never suspecting that the bullets he had worked so hard to bring across the border and into his house were rolling about in the velvet lining. (391)

Ultimately, they decide against handing over the weapons to Miguel and opt to bury them in a secret location in case they were needed at a later time. However, even with the absence of Esteban's weapons, the Conservative party, in cooperation with the military, is successful in completing the coup d'état.

After the military has taken control of the government, Alba does not kowtow to the demands of her grandfather or her brothers and continues to risk her life for the Socialist forces. She harbors political fugitives right under Esteban's nose in his own home. These activities and her relationship with Miguel are the leading causes for her arrest and torture as a political prisoner of the state.

Just like her mother Blanca fell for Pedro, Alba falls for Miguel, a Socialist extremist and law student, despite the disapproval of Esteban. Following directly in Blanca's footsteps, after the political unrest begins to worsen, Alba and Miguel rendezvous in secret, and she explores her sexuality with him. At the end of the novel, the reader learns that Alba has become pregnant out of wedlock, though she does not know if her daughter is the product of her trysts with Miguel or of her repeated rapes during her time in prison.

And finally, having inherited some of her grandmother's intuition, Alba is able to communicate with Clara while she is being tortured in the "doghouse" at the prison. After receiving Clara's advice to begin writing her testimony in her mind, Alba does as she is told and develops an overpowering resiliency.

> The guards opened the hatch of the doghouse and lifted her effortlessly, because she was very light. They took her back to Colonel García, whose hatred had returned during these days, but she did not recognize him. She was beyond his power. (461)

She would take her grandmother's message with her even after she was released, as she came to realize the power in writing her own narrative.

Alba, whose name literally means "dawn," serves as a medium for a new beginning. All of the strengths of Nívea, Clara, and Blanca have culminated in her and will further be magnified in her own unborn daughter. Through her, there is hope for the future generations of women in the continued battle against the oppressive ideals of *machismo* and *marianismo*.

Chapter Five: The Emperor

Esteban Trueba is the quintessence of *machismo* in its most extreme ways. Trueba was raised in extreme poverty following the death of his father. His mother was ill and unable to work his entire life, which left Esteban and his older sister Férula to provide for themselves. Férula did not earn enough money to make ends meet, so Esteban began work at a young age to provide for his family. His home environment was full of hostility—Esteban resented his mother for being ill; Férula resented Esteban for having the freedoms of being a man; Esteban resented Férula for making him feel guilty for his freedom. His upbringing left him cold, heartless, and with an intense desire to become successful. In the novel, we witness the strategic business decisions that allow him to reach unfathomable wealth and social status. From *el patrón* of a destroyed *hacienda* to Senator of the Republic, Trueba obsesses over power and wealth until the day he dies. He will do anything necessary to assert his manliness to society even if his actions mean hurting the ones he loves the most. Esteban Trueba epitomizes *machismo*, but especially in the following five facets: objectification of women, hypersexuality, physical and sexual violence toward women, infidelity, and desire to feel dominant over another man.

Trueba's upbringing and journey to financial success cultivated an intense desire to dominate not only women, but also every person he deems to be lesser than himself. That is to say, he dehumanizes nearly every character he interacts with on the basis of his sexist, classist, and racist beliefs. While the idea of *machismo* relates more so to the objectification of women, one must note his behavior toward all people he deems to be lesser than himself, regardless of gender. Trueba's self-importance stems from his

identity as a man, but his social stature and wealth surely represent contributing factors as well. There are three significant instances in the text when his dialogue or actions confirm his feelings of superiority. Two of these directly result in his objectification of women.

The first instance occurs when the workers on *Tres Marías* begin to talk of wanting a decent salary and more respect and dignity from their *patrón*. When Trueba catches wind of this dissent, he strikes their ideas down without a second thought. Of his tenants he says:

> 'As I've always said, they're like children. There's not one of them can do what he's supposed to without me there behind him driving him on. And then they start in on me with the story that we are all equal! It's enough to make you die laughing!' (Allende 73)

In one fell swoop, Trueba invalidates the experiences of those workers whose hard labor is the main driving factor of his success with the *hacienda* while also asserting that they do not deserve to be treated as adults.

The second instance occurs later in the text and is in regard to Clara, his wife. Clara, who frequently goes through phases where she is distant or inaccessible to her husband due to her involvement with the spirits, does not satisfy Esteban's emotional needs. The behavior that he desires from his wife is revealed to the reader in the following lines:

> He wanted Clara to think of nothing but him, and he could not bear for her to have a life outside that did not include him. He wanted her to tell him everything and to own nothing he had not given her with his own two hands. He wanted her to be completely dependent. (142)

These desires do not bear in mind Clara's emotional needs, which would more than likely include the need to have a "life outside that did not include him" to do her spiritual workings and interact with friends of a like mindset. In this case, one can see that Trueba does not view his wife as a human being with her own desires, but rather an object with the sole purpose of satisfying his needs. There is not a single instance throughout the entire novel that Trueba bothers to ask his wife want she wants. When his needs are not being met, he always attempts to capture his wife's attention by showering her with expensive jewelry and other lavish gifts. However, this method never works because Clara places more value on the happenings in the spiritual realm. One of the main faults in Esteban's relationship with Clara is his assumption that she is a simple-minded woman whose affections can be bought.

The final, and perhaps the most jarring, instance in which Trueba blatantly objectifies someone takes place after Clara's death. Trueba decides to have a luxurious mausoleum built in the cemetery so that when he dies, he can be laid to rest between the two loves of his life—Clara and Rosa. Although decades had passed since Rosa's death, Trueba reaches out to the del Valle family for permission to move her casket to the mausoleum. When the del Valle family denies his request, Trueba takes matters into his own hands. With the help of his son, he breaks into the cemetery at night, exhumes

Rosa's casket, and transfers her to the mausoleum. In his absence of respect for Rosa's helpless body, he decides that he must lay eyes on her one last time. After breaking open her coffin and finding her body completely intact, he kisses the glass covering her face. Simultaneously, an opportune breeze enters the crypt and disintegrates Rosa's body into "a fine gray powder" (339). As he raises his head, Trueba comes face to face with the consequences of his actions. However, in his reflection on what occurred, he fails to find fault in himself. Instead, he dwells on how pitiful his life is: "Férula was right, I thought; I've been left all alone and my body and my soul are shriveling up. All that's left for me is to die like a dog" (339).

One of Trueba's most defining features as a *machista* is his hypersexuality. The reader first witnesses this side of his character soon after Rosa's death. His thoughts while spending the night at Rosa's grave set the tone for his intrusive lustful thoughts for the rest of the novel. In his first-hand account of that night, he discusses the uncontrollable anger spreading through him "like a malignant tumor" (41). He then describes his feelings in the following passage:

> But beyond confusion and rage, the strongest feeling I remember having that night was frustrated desire, because I would never be able to satisfy my need to run my hands over Rosa's body, to penetrate her secrets, to release the green fountain of her hair and plunge into its deepest waters. (41)

Although he does not act on these feelings that night, Trueba's lust gets the better of him many times later in his life.

Trueba's hypersexuality and violent nature come to fruition for the first time when he kidnaps and rapes Pancha García, one of the tenants on his *hacienda*. Pancha, who was only fifteen years old and a virgin at the time, became a regular for Trueba. He abused her on a daily basis until she became pregnant with his child. Upon finding out about the pregnancy, the narrator states that Trueba "…felt repulsed by her. He began to see her as an enormous container that held a formless, gelatinous mass that he was unable to view as her own child" (70). Trueba promptly has Pancha removed from her position within his house and placed back in her parents' hut. He never speaks to her again. These actions confirm that Trueba views women—especially women of lower social class—as objects to be used for his pleasure and nothing more.

Trubea continues to rape the young girls on his own *hacienda*, and eventually branches out to assault the young girls on the neighboring *haciendas*. The narrator describes him as "…a rake, sowing the entire region with his bastard offspring…" (71). Trueba is not ashamed of his behavior and is never truly held accountable for it. This is best described in the following passage:

> He did not bother to hide, because he was afraid of no one. On a few occasions, a brother, father, husband, or employer showed up at *Tres Marías* to call him to account, but faced with his uncontrolled violence, these visits in the name of justice or revenge became less frequent. (71)

His behavior hardly harmed his reputation. In fact, it provoked "…jealous admiration among the men of his class" (71). His political career never suffered for it, and he never

faced punishment at the hands of the legal system. However, many years later Alba would suffer at the hand of his illegitimate grandson in a plot for revenge. Treuba's only true comeuppance for his sexual violence was at the expense of his innocent granddaughter.

Trueba's hypersexuality continues to be an issue throughout the novel and leads him to partake in another feature of *machismo*: infidelity. Throughout their marriage, when Trueba feels that Clara is not meeting his sexual needs, he would cheat on her in one of two ways. When he first began to seek out other women, he frequented a brothel and slept with numerous prostitutes. However, the narrator claims that he also "…reverted to his former sins, rolling with some robust peasant woman in the tall rushes of the riverbank while Clara stayed behind with the children in the city…" (144). His casual infidelity is common of *machistas* because seducing women is seen as manly and because there is less societal backlash against men who are not loyal to their partners in Latin America.

Trueba's violent nature exposes itself time and time again throughout the novel. However, one of the worst instances of his violence was the physical assault of his wife and daughter. After learning that Blanca had been sleeping with Pedro Tercero García, Trueba hunts down his daughter. The narrator describes his actions in the following lines:

> When he saw his daughter, Esteban Trueba was unable to restrain his evil character and he charged her with his horse, whip in the air, beating her mercilessly, lash upon lash, until the girl fell flat and rigid to the ground. (222)

After bringing Blanca home and sending her to bed, Trueba turns his rage toward his wife. Clara points out that he was not unlike Pedro Tercero himself because he had also slept

with unmarried women outside of his social class. Trueba responds by striking his wife in the face hard enough to knock out several of her teeth. He fulfills his role as a *machista* in this sequence of events by tearing down the women who dare to defy his authority.

With having ruined his relationship with his wife and daughter after the events of that night, Trueba does not find fault in himself but rather blames Pedro Tercero García. He becomes fixated on his need to assert his dominance over García as he believes harming García will quell his rage and resolve his depression. When he is finally able to track him down, Trueba attempts to murder García. Having failed in what he set out to do, Trueba is more angry than ever. While he ends up being glad that he did not kill García, Trueba resents himself because he feels that he has lost his place as the patriarch of his family.

Ultimately, Esteban Trueba's insecurities continue to fill him with more and more rage. He continues to exemplify *machismo* until very late in life. With the return of his granddaughter, his demeanor slowly begins to soften. In his final days, Clara appears to him. "At first she was just a mysterious glow, but as my grandfather slowly lost the rage that had tormented him throughout his life, she appeared as she had been at her best, laughing with all her teeth and stirring up the other spirits as she sailed through the house" (479). Even with all of the hatred and violence perpetrated by Trueba during his lifetime, he is given an opportunity to start again as he dies with a smile on his face murmuring, "Clara, clearest, clairvoyant" (479). However, his cruelty is not to be forgotten but rather to be learned from in hopes to break the cycle being passed "down through the centuries in an unending tale of sorrow, blood, and love," as Alba describes it (480).

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The battle between *machismo* and feminism in this story is a battle between Esteban and Clara, Blanca, and Alba. While the book spans Esteban's entire life, each of these women plays a pivotal role in checking the patriarchal ideologies that he embodies until he finally loses the anger held so deeply in his heart. While each woman bears similarities to her mother before her, they change Esteban's heart in completely different ways.

Clara defies her husband's oppression by taking ownership of her own narrative. Through her journals that bear witness to fifty years of her life, she cements her voice in her family's history while also helping her descendants, like Alba, reclaim the past. However, the greatest instance in which Clara faces her husband's *machismo* does not involve her voice, but rather her silence. After Esteban hits her and knocks her teeth out in his fit of rage, "Clara never spoke to her husband again. She stopped using her married name and removed the fine gold wedding ring that he had placed on her finger twenty years before…" (Allende 224). Clara was the victim in this situation, but she very quickly takes control and sets her husband in his place. By returning to her maiden name and removing her wedding band, she rebukes her husband's ownership of her, reclaims her self-authority, and asserts her place as the author of her story. Her silence is not a choice made in defeat, but a choice made in order to reclaim power. In remaining silent, she weakens Esteban's authoritative hold and reminds him that she is the lifeblood of the Trueba family.

Clara's daughter inherited this same determined spirit, but her role is to push the envelope of societal expectations for love, sex, and marriage. Blanca defies her father nearly her entire life in these expectations that he had laid out for her. Esteban wanted his daughter to be the embodiment of *marianismo*: a well behaved young woman who married a man of her class, had his children, and played the role of housewife. Even after Blanca falls pregnant out of wedlock, Esteban fights to salvage her reputation as a proper young lady and arranges her marriage to Count Jean de Santigny. Although she goes along with her arranged marriage, Blanca does not hesitate to continue resisting her father's authoritative grip on her love life. She makes it known that she does not care what society has to say about her when she returns home briefly during her honeymoon. She encounters a disapproving Esteban who chastises her saying, "Don't you realize that if anybody sees you they're going to say that your husband sent you home in the middle of your honeymoon? They'll think you weren't virgin!" to which Blanca simply replies, "But I wasn't, Papa" (276).

Alba combines the strong will, intuition, compassion, and love passed down from her great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother to become the ultimate foil to Esteban. She defies her grandfather's authority through her writing, her political activism, and her relationship with Miguel. She has the combined bravery of the women who came before her which can be seen in many instances throughout the story. For example, following the assassination of the Socialist President, Esteban begins celebrating in front of a distressed Alba, who is trying to call those who might be in danger.

> ‘Now they’re going to pay for everything!’ Senator Trueba exclaimed, raising his glass. Alba snatched it from his hand and hurled it against the wall, shattering it to bits. Blanca, who had never had the courage to oppose her father, did not attempt to hide her smile. ‘We’re not going to celebrate the death of the President or anybody else!’ Alba said. (413)

Unlike her grandmother or mother who might have opposed Esteban with their words or actions behind his back, Alba confronts him head on and is not afraid to put him in his place.

The dynamic between Alba and Esteban is especially interesting as they both serve as the narrators of the book. Esteban’s patriarchal perspective serves to justify his decisions in the past, and he often leaves out key details. His account neglects to include his wrongdoings such as his raping of the peasant women of *Tres Marías* and other *haciendas*, and these choices create gaps when retelling these women’s lives. His narrative could be considered a symbol of the patriarchal gatekeeping of history. Alba’s all-encompassing narrative directly combats Esteban’s linear and sparse narrative and places the stories of women in the spotlight. In this way, Alba’s compilation of her grandmother’s, mother’s, and her own stories serves as a symbol of women taking back their narrative voice and rewriting patriarchal history. Although at the end of the story the *machistas* have won, Alba serves as a beacon of hope for the future. Upon being transferred to a female concentration camp and then released in a poverty-stricken section of the city, Alba bears witness to the resiliency of the women around her. “It was then I

understood that the days of Colonel García and all those like him are numbered, because they have not been able to destroy the spirit of these women" (477).

Although this story ends sometime in the 1970s, the fight for the feminist cause is alive and well in Chile and the rest of Latin America today. *Machsimo* remains engrained in modern Latin American culture and can range anywhere from microaggressions to femicides[4]. In the book *No son micro: Machismos cotidianos*, which was recently published in 2020, Claudia de la Garza and Eréndira Derbez outline nearly one hundred ways that *machismo* affects the lives of women on a daily basis. The authors bring up issues such as the objectification of women, the treatment of women in the workplace, the sacrifices made by women to become mothers, the #MeToo movement, and harmful rhetoric such as "Feminazi" or "Not all men." All of these are contributing factors to the survival of *machismo* and the continued violence against women.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened the inequality between women and men, as well as violence against women in Latin America and the Caribbean. "In spite of women's wider presence on the front lines of the crisis (they account for 72.8% of persons employed in the health-care sector), their income in this sector is 25% lower than their male counterparts" (United Nations 14). Domestic violence and femicide rates are also on the rise. In Chile, there have been nineteen femicides and seventy-eight attempted femicides so far in 2021 (Ministerio de la Mujer y la Equidad de Género).

[4] The gender-based murder of a woman or girl by a man (Merriam-Webster)

The feminist movement in Chile has also been at the forefront of the nation's recovery since the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. During social uprisings in 2019,

> Feminist groups were among the loudest shouting for change. During the months of mass protests, the phrase *'The revolution will be feminist—or it won't be a revolution,'* was etched onto city walls, projected onto buildings, and chanted by thousands of women. (McGowan)

After politicians ceded to the outcry and offered a referendum for a new constitution, feminists took to the streets again in December, petitioning for gender parity in the constitutional assembly (McGowan). After the referendum was passed with an addendum of guaranteed equal gender representation, the constitutional assembly of one hundred and fifty-five Chileans was elected in May of 2021 (Ríos Tobar) . The assembly represents a diverse Chile with seventy-seven female members, seventy-eight male members, seventeen reserved seats for indigenous people, and six members who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community (Ríos Tobar). The constitutional convention will begin in July 2021.

In conclusion, *La casa de los espíritus* may be a story of the past, but *machismo* and the feminist movement still take center stage in modern-day Chile. Allende's breathtaking story telling transports the reader back in time, but her characters are contemporary and relatable. In this way, the reality of the story feels intertwined with our own reality. Clara's narrative is our narrative; Blanca's passion is our passion; Alba's

fight is our fight. The road to progress may be long and winding, but just the same, we will continue to plant seeds in a garden we might never get to see.

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