

## The Deconstruction of the Traditional Macho Image in Allende

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Silvia Garzia Edwards  
with Julia Villaseñor  
Malone College  
Canton, Ohio

Since the publication of her first novel, *La casa de los espíritus*, in 1982, Isabel Allende has become one of the most prominent Latin American writers of our times. Much of the previously published literary criticism of her works, however, has focused on feminist interpretations of her texts and the development of her female characters. Allende herself has typically been labeled a feminist writer: "Allende agrega una dimensión feminista a la nueva narrativa...La perspectiva femenina de Allende altera y amplía los horizontes de la ficción latinoamericana contemporánea" (Mujica 598). Deconstructionist theory has aided in the feminist interpretation of text since: "...takes as its task the exposure and dismantling of the terms and the logic through which these claims have been made" (Green and Kahn 81). Ironically, the same Deconstructionism allows us to call into question this previously accepted hierarchy and the overlooked development of Allende's male figures, converting them into "el nuevo centro de enfoque" (Virgilio, Friedman and Valdivieso 293). We would also argue that the male characters in Allende's novels diverge far from the stereotypical image of the traditional male *macho* within a feminist/macho dichotomy. Allende's own definition of *macho* points to the restrictions inherent within the dichotomy:

Machismo hasn't made men happy either, and though we women are the main victims, the man's role is also very hard...living disassociated from their own nature, from their emotions, estranged from tenderness, relating to the world and to women

through power, possessiveness, domination. (qtd. in García Pinto 40)

In fact, we would concur with Jung<sup>1</sup> that “every man carries a woman within himself” (qtd. in Payne and Fitz 124). The integration of these opposite discourses, or dichotomies, results in male figures worthy of our consideration and study precisely because they are fully articulated human and spiritual beings.

There is a gradual evolutionary process taking place, if only on a smaller scale, among men in Allende’s work. In *Paula* (1994), men are not only women’s *enablers*—collaborators—in their emancipation process, they also seem to be experiencing a liberation all their own. It is with the presence of Ernesto, Allende’s son-in-law and Paula’s husband, that we begin to recognize some of the same characteristics attributed earlier only to women, bestowed now on men. They are not immune to change, not even Tata—perhaps the most traditional member of the Old Guard and its ways—always the protector of women and society’s norms yet, by Allende’s own account, not totally inflexible:

He was authoritarian by nature, but not inflexible. When I began to work as a journalist and had finally articulated a language for expressing my frustration as a woman in that macho culture, my grandfather did not want to hear my arguments, which to his ears were pure poppycock, an attack upon the foundations of family and society, but when he became aware of the silence that had settled over our afternoon tea and rolls, he began to question me in an offhand way...and in time he came to accept female liberation as a point of elemental justice. (Trans. Peden 135)

This is the same grandfather that Allende describes to Celia Correas Zapata, in “Isabel Allende: vida y espíritu,” as having: <la fe del carbonero...practicaba la religión sin hacer preguntas...Pero también acomodaba la religión según sus necesidades...creía en milagros, pero se burlaba de los santos...Sin embargo, los dos libros que lo acompañaron en los últimos años de su larga vejez fueron la Biblia y la Enciclopedia Británica> (173). This is hardly the portrayal of a convincing <macho> figure.

If Tata's compliance is a bit passive and slow, Allende's first husband, Michael, will take the role of an active, if sometimes reluctant, advocate and that of accomplice in her feminism—even during some of their most troubled times. Still, a character devoid of extreme emotional expression, to whom she refers affectionately as her <híbrido inglés> (“bland Englishman”):

Michael had commendable patience with me. He was not disturbed by the gossip or criticism I provoked, he never interfered in my projects, no matter how outlandish, and he defended me loyally even in my mistakes; our paths, nonetheless, were growing farther and farther apart. (166)

Allende not only describes him as an accomplice in all her ventures but also recognizes, in Correa Zapata's interview, that it was his understanding and support that made her the woman she is today: <Miguel nunca fue machista...Me dio espacio, se mantuvo a prudente distancia y me dejó explorar, experimentar, cambiar...Miguel me dio un cariño largo, fiel y paciente que me sirvió, entre muchas cosas, para adquirir confianza en mí como mujer> (98).

Although Allende says that Michael was <perfecto> (Correas Zapata 98), she admits that their relationship was slowly deteriorating. It is not until the arrival of Ernesto, her daughter's perfect companion, that the male figure is transformed in such a way as to share in some of the more identifiable feminine qualities, those of compassion and empathy.

Ernesto is so totally “in tune” with his wife, Paula—after one year of married life and several of courtship—that he is able to predict her needs, even while she lies motionless and speechless, unable to convey her most basic life requirements during her lengthy illness. Allende writes to her daughter, in *Paula*:

He feels your body in his own; he knows your state before the clinical diagnoses; he perceives signs invisible to other eyes and is the only one who seems to communicate with you...I am sure that you are breathing today because of his tender tenacity. (107)

Allende also confesses, to Correas Zapata, that Ernesto has deep moral and religious convictions which have enabled him to overcome the

most devastating loss, that of his wife (her daughter):

Ernesto tiene una gran sabiduría natural, él acepta lo que ha pasado y está tranquilo en el sufrimiento, nunca lo he visto rebelarse, por el contrario, me dice que no me angustie, que todo lo que pasa es para mejor y que me ponga en manos de ios. (qtd. in Correas Zapata 133)

It is this faith in God and the knowledge that everything happens for the best that enables Ernesto to accept Paula's death and makes Allende proclaim: <Hay seres como Ernesto>; at the same time that she feels inadequate in her faith and her lack of acceptance, she adds: <pero la gente pequeña, como yo, dudan de Dios y de sí mismos y necesitan recibir muchos palos para aprender las lecciones> (qtd. in Correas Zapata 133).

Thus, we are witnesses in the total conversion of the male fictional hero in the character of Ernesto. If we accept the description of Payne and Fitz, in "Ambiguity and Gender in the New Novel of Brazil and Spanish America," of the fictional hero as: "He (or she) {who} <discovers and assimilates his opposite (his own unsuspected self) either by swallowing it or by being swallowed—when the hero commits to a higher goal—or perhaps to another person—thus arriving at the knowledge that <he and his opposite are not of differing species, but one flesh" (119-120), as set forth by Campbell's<sup>2</sup> definition of "the heroic journey"; we must conclude that Ernesto has come full circle to this self-awareness, by ceasing to be merely Ernesto as he "feels" Paula's body "in his own". Furthermore, Payne and Fitz explain that the "hero's allegorical journey is a change of focus from the external to the internal...in which s/he reaches <what was missing in (her/his) consciousness in the world {s/he} formerly inhabited...The hero must look beyond societal definitions of reality because s/he <is the champion of things becoming, not of things become>...the hero achieves the goal of transcendence through descent to the unconscious, to what can be best understood as the **feminine** principle" (119-125).

To fully understand what Payne and Fitz are claiming to be the focus of this "journey," we must understand their meaning of the words **feminine** and **masculine**. Payne and Fitz make use of Jung's definition of these terms to mean very specific aspects of an individual, male or female, not tied to the traditional roles each plays in the real

world:

The masculine principle, *animus*, which according to Jung is embodied in the concept of Logos, integrates meaning, word, power, and deed and is primarily concerned with the activities of consciousness...The feminine principle, *anima*, which Jung presents as naturalness, union, and relationship, is related to the unconscious. (184)

Therefore, we must conclude that a person does not need to be a man to possess *animus* and, conversely, does not need to be a woman to possess *anima*. In fact, it is the integration of both aspects that constitutes a hero, regardless of whether the fictional hero should be a man or a woman: "whether this takes the form of sexual union, androgyny, transvestism...or the metafictionally [sic] self-conscious voices" (Payne and Fitz 184); to this Campbell adds that: "civilizations and cultures teach that the path to transcendence, or true knowledge, incorporates a fusion of opposites, and that the ultimate understanding achieved by the hero (whether biologically male or female) is always that division," (qtd. in Payne and Fitz 184) where the state of the *unconscious* (*anima*, feminine), what could be best described as the internal world of emotions and feelings, is the desired goal and the state of the *consciousness* (*animus*, masculine), the world that surrounds us (reality), is at times the most "illusory" and the state which the hero must transcend.

It is with Ernesto that both forces, the *animus* and the *anima* are joined. He has the singular role of the fictional hero: while he is a man, moving in the consciousness, or real world, of the male character (with all that it presupposes) he has also delved into the world of the unconscious, the inner sanctum, and bridged the two. This complete communion of souls with Paula has enabled him to acquire some of those most distinctive feminine characteristics; in Allende's own words, he has become one with his opposite, in this case his wife. Allende challenges our understanding of the traditional feminist/macho dichotomy in the presentation of a male character that embodies both states at the same time.

These words would seem to resonate even louder when we read of Allende's intent in the process of writing, beyond the individual character. In "Writing as an Act of Hope" (1994), she claims that the

new writers “are questioning everything, starting with our own image as human beings...(they) are shaking the literary world nowadays because they propose a completely new set of values. They don’t accept the old rules anymore. They are willing to examine everything—to invent all over again...Our sisters are using the cutting edge of words to change the rules we have always had to obey” (Allende 188-89). Payne and Fitz further explain that, according to Campbell, in order to accept the journey: “the key...lies in our understanding life as a process of growth springing from the harmonious merger of the intuitive and the rational; the psyche, organized around both, permits a free flow of energy between them” (120). The notion of “life as a process of growth” would seem applicable in Allende, both to her writing as well as to her characters, whether male or female.

Perhaps the most difficult task we face as readers of Allende’s work is to determine to what degree her characters are fictional. Are they fictional just by the mere fact that they are gracing several pages in one of her books? There is no doubt, at least as pertains to the three male figures discussed thus far, that these are real persons in her own life experience. After all, in her preface to Correa Zapata’s book, she refers to *Paula* as: “la dolorosa *memoria* que escribí durante la larga enfermedad de mi hija” (10). In fact, she will later admit: “La dificultad en *Paula* no fue seleccionar los acontecimientos...sino en tratar de ser honesta sin traicionar demasiado a las personas que aparecen en el libro con sus nombres verdaderos” (214). Nonetheless, in good old fashioned Allende style, she states a few lines down: “Jamás permito que la verdad se interponga en el camino de una buena historia...somos la leyenda que cada uno de nosotros elabora con los propios recuerdos y experiencias” (10). She carries this dichotomy of fictional biography throughout her interview with Correa Zapata, prompting us to question how real, or fictitious, each and every character really is. Allende would have us believe, on the one hand, that writing for her is: “un intento desesperado de preservar la memoria...para que no me derrote el olvido y para nutrir mis raíces...La escritura da forma a la realidad, crea y recrea el mundo...es un mensaje lanzado en una botella al mar” (qtd. in Correa Zapata 15-6). On the other hand, Allende also claims that some of the historical characters in her books have been greatly fictionalized, while some of her fictional characters are more historical than they are fiction:

Esteban Trueba está basado en mi abuelo, pero cambié su biografía y exageré sus defectos...Pedro Tercero García es Víctor Jara, el cantante de protesta torturado...(el) Doctor Arturo Jirón, médico de Allende,...inspiró la escena de la tortura de Jaime en *La casa de los espíritus*...(el) oficial chileno de más alta graduación en exilio...Me sirvió de inspiración y modelo para el personaje de Gustavo Morante...Gregory Reeves fue muy fácil, porque el modelo era Willie. Como en el caso de Clara del Valle, en *La casa de los espíritus*, nada tuve que inventar, el personaje estaba allí, esperándome...(qtd. in Correas Zapata 72, 91, 113)

However, Allende fascinates us with more ambiguity by her contention that *La casa de los espíritus*: “Se basaba en la vida de mi familia y en la historia de Chile, pero era más ficción que realidad...Creo que todos mis libros, excepto *Eva Luna* y algunos cuentos, son mucho más realidad que ficción.” (qtd. in Correas Zapata 75, 113) Allende then carries the same ambiguity to include some of her most historical characters:

Me pregunto si Willie existe o si yo inventé a Gregory Reeves ...y revestí a Willie con sus ropajes. ¿Quién vive conmigo, el Willie real o el literario? ¿Y mi madre? De tanto hablar de ella, no habré inventado la madre que me gusta y que necesito?...A mi abuelo le inventé defectos...y se quedó con ellos para siempre, pobre hombre. (qtd. in Correas 113, 115)

Whether her characters, or stories, are presumed to be real or fiction we are assured to find a good measure of both. Allende asserts that: “Cuando escribo mis novelas normalmente busco modelos para los personajes” (qtd. in Correas Zapata 208). This is certainly true of *De amor y sombra* (1995), while it is a novel, she confesses to Correas Zapata: “No tuve que escoger el tema: en 1978 se descubrió un crimen político en Chile...A partir de ese momento empecé a llevar un registro de la represión...Lo descrito sobre Irene es casi idéntico al ambiente en que yo vivía” (90, 92). To García Pinto she will insist (referring to said book): “And it happened just as my book describes it. Although segments of the story have been fictionalized, it really happened in just that way” (qtd. in García Pinto 32). Although there are no real models associated with Francisco Leal, his path (or journey)

closely reciprocates that of Ernesto. Most recently, Donald Shaw (in *The Post -Boom in Spanish American Fiction*) traces a similar “evolution” of fictional male characters, starting with Esteban Trueba and arriving at Francisco, the most polished example of fictional male figures:

Esteban Trueba...stands for the old oligarchic class blindly resisting socio-economic and political change...Reemphasizing it is the presentation of two other male characters, Pedro Segundo García <leal y silencioso> and Jaime {generoso, cándido y tenía una gran capacidad de ternura}...They are the forerunners of Francisco Leal in *De amor y sombra*. Characterized by loyalty, sensitivity, and supportiveness, these slightly idealized male characters in Allende’s early novels are in their way as important historically as the strong females...we can perceive here an evolution in the fictional presentation of masculinity. (59-60)

In fact, Shaw claims that it is this emphasis on the “sensitivity and supportiveness” of fictional male figures which gives Allende’s work new direction and strength—something not found in earlier works—and the mere fact that these men are now viewed from a totally new vantage point, that of a woman. Shaw states: “Supportive understanding, especially of women by men, has rarely been incorporated into fictional relationships. It is unquestionably one of Allende’s major contributions...Francisco Leal ..is a novel Spanish American fictional hero because of his combination of gentleness and strength...Kind, intelligent, humorous, supportive, virile without machismo, and sexy but at the same time tender and self-sacrificing” (62). This is how the male character has evolved, not just in the understanding of women and women-related issues, but in a generalized compassion unparalleled in typical fictional male characters. Fact that prompts Shaw to conclude that even in “his (Francisco’s) understanding of Mario’s homosexuality” (62) there is evidence of a complete shift of emphasis—from the animus to the anima—which forces Shaw to acquiesce that in Allende’s work we find “the emphasis on emotion rather than on action” (63).

In *El plan infinito* (1991), Allende’s first male as central character appears, signaling a significant departure from her previous works. The character in question, Gregory Reeves, is obviously based



on the life of her current husband (Willie). His significance lies, however, not only in his role as central character but also in his development as a character because said development becomes a central theme of the latter part of the book and “illustrates at length the reaction against the traditional macho hero already visible in Francisco Leal,” according to Shaw (69). In comparing these two figures, Shaw goes on to claim that, although Francisco is “mature, tender, and supportive” throughout the text, it is only at the end of *El plan infinito* that Greg Reeves comes to terms with himself.

Shaw’s assertion may clearly be appropriate, yet it would seem that Allende deliberately plants the seeds for Gregory’s transformation early on in the novel...As a young child, Gregory interrupts his mother during read-aloud time to express concern over the pending death of a fictional character. The close relationship with his childhood pet-Oliver, the mutt-his fear of the neighborhood gangs back in LA and his decision to run an after-school daycare program to earn extra money while attending college do not necessarily fit the image of a macho male either. We eventually learn, in fact, that Gregory’s sensitive and sentimental nature caused many problems for him, both in the neighborhood and at school:

Pero las peores burlas se centraban en su temperamento sentimental. El resto de los muchachos había interiorizado las lecciones machistas de su medio:.....Las dos reglas básicas, aprendidas por los niños en la cuna, son que los hombres no confían jamás en nadie y no lloran por ningún motivo. Pero Gregory escuchaba a la maestra hablar de las focas de Canadá exterminadas a palos por los cazadores de pieles o al Padre referirse a los leprosos de Calcutta y, con los ojos aguados, decidía de inmediato irse al norte a defender a las probes bestias o al Lejano Oriente de misionero. (“El plan” 56)

It is true, however, that Gregory only comes to terms with himself, and subsequently, comes to understand why his relationships with women in the past failed, toward the end of this novel. It is not until there are barely forty pages left that we learn that Reeves finally allowed himself to begin “el lento y doloroso viaje hacia el interior de sí mismo”-to the internal world...to the anima (*El plan* 321). After years of broken relationships and uncountable casual encounters with

women, during which time he admits “la sexualidad equivalía a la violencia de la guerra” (321), behavior that we typically associate with the traditional macho, a more mature, introspective Reeves emerges with the realization that “no pude establecer una relación sana porque no sabía rendirme ni aceptar la entrega completa de una compañera de verdad, nada sospechaba de la comunión en el amor” (327). Shaw reinforces the notion of “journey” by stating that Gregory’s “...redemption at the end is part of a much wider pattern of harmony that the text postulates. It operates a several levels [sic]. Thus Greg evolves positively not only at the emotional level but also at the spiritual one” (69).

In Allende’s latest novel, *Hija de la fortuna* (1999), we discover a return to a female protagonist in the character of Eliza Sommers. Eliza’s male companion, however, is an even greater departure from the traditional macho male figure and provides us with another wonderful example of the integration of the animus with the anima. Born the fourth child of a poor family on mainland China, Tao Chi’en is given up for adoption to a passing caravan that later leaves him with an aging medical doctor and expert in the art of acupuncture. Tao becomes an apprentice to this zhong yi who teaches him not only his trade, but also that “de poco sirve el conocimiento sin sabiduría, no hay sabiduría sin espiritualidad y la verdadera espiritualidad incluye siempre el servicio a los demás...También insistía en desarrollar en Tao Chi’en la sensibilidad artística que, según él, caracterizaba al ser superior” (*Hija* 175).

After the death of his mentor, Tao leaves the mainland for Hong Kong where he establishes himself as a successful zhong yi in his own right. He finally saves enough to buy himself a wife, according to the customs of that time, and discovers in her a love that he never imagined:

Jamás había oído manifestar tal clase de amor,....creía que en el mundo real las mujeres eran sólo criaturas de trabajo y reproducción, como las campesinas entre las cuales se había criado, o bien objetos caros de decoración. Lin no correspondía a ninguna de esas categorías....En presencia de Lin todo parecía iluminarse con un fulgor irresistible. El prodigioso descubrimiento de la intimidad con otro ser humano fue la experiencia más profunda de su vida. (*Hija* 199-200)

Tragically, Lin dies prematurely from tuberculosis. But it is in his relationship to Eliza, later in the novel, where Tao's role is very reminiscent of Allende's first husband Miguel. Tao becomes Eliza's friend, collaborator, mentor and, as the novel draws to a close, potential partner in life. Though he initially just facilitates her escape from the stifling Chilean society that surrounds her, this momentous act of intervention eventually leads to a compassionate and caring relationship that allows Eliza the freedom to embark on her own personal journey.

Perhaps the greatest cultural fallacy is for readers to view such "new male fictional heroes," as Shaw seems to imply, as *soft* males. By concluding that the "problem" with *De amor y sombra* is the lack of a viable "counterforce" to the characters of Irene and Francisco (ie., the absence of "the traditional male") which Shaw further equates to the "military regime" and leads him to suggest a love affair with a "golpista", instead of Francisco, as a more interesting plot—Shaw, ironically, shows us the same "traditional bias" we have been warned against. Payne and Fitz indicate that not even Jung and Campbell themselves were immune to this blurring—between the consciousness and the unconscious—or: "the confusion of the literal and the figurative" (121) as they put it, referring to Campbell's seemingly confusion of the "feminine with women" (121). Of Jung they tell us that Wehr<sup>3</sup> finds similar contradictions: "In his [Jung's] own discussions of anima [he] confusingly intermingle{s} anima and the psychology of women...He often states specifically that he is going to discuss the anima—an aspect of male psychology—and then launches into a discussion of the psychology of women" (qtd. in Payne and Fitz 124). In the same manner, inversely, Shaw falls victim to the pervasively held notion of "action," "physical strength" and "power" as synonymous with character strength, especially as applies to men. Myriam Miedzian, in "Real Men, Wimps, and National Security," identifies the following characteristics as being essential to a revered leader: "These traits include being <hard, tough, unemotional, ruthless, and competitive...The masculine mystique teaches men to be tough, repress empathy, and to not let moral concerns weigh too heavily when the goal is winning...Being compassionate and concerned about human life can cause a man to lose his job" (20-22). Miedzian further states that those men historically characterized as **wimps**:

“have been aware of the need to understand and empathize with the other side in order to arrive at a realistic long-range solution. They shun the kind of macho posturing and concern with ego that characterize hard positional bargaining” (20). Miedzian’s “real men”, in other words, have reached the unconscious level discussed earlier.

Miedzian, as Allende has done earlier, seems to be defining machismo (or “masculine mystique”) by the use of similar images—that inability to travel into the unconscious, away from societal prescriptions, where connections with the “inner” self and the “other” can occur. Shaw fails to recognize this distinction when he suggests that a *golpista*, or even Gustavo Morante, would have represented a stronger male character in *Of Love and Shadows*. It would have certainly contributed an unusual twist to the story, perhaps even a dramatic one. However, the notion that a macho male figure (such as a *golpista*) would have been able to journey out of his world of consciousness and into the unconscious, lies well beyond Allende’s intent. The character would have to be able to renounce his most strongly held beliefs—that which makes him a strong character in the first place (at the consciousness level)—and empathize with the other side (as we have already seen), in this case, the tormented.

Allende concedes that there are catalysts that allow us to transcend our own experiences and connect to other experiences or beings: “El amor—y a veces el dolor—nos permite traspasar el velo que separa lo aparentemente real de lo espiritual y conectarnos con otras dimensiones” (qtd. in Correas Zapata 171) but, at the same time, denies a macho the ability to fulfill the conversion; she confesses to Correas Zapata: “No te olvides que mi abuelo y mi padrastro, los dos pilares masculinos de mi infancia, eran de un machismo aterrador. Con ellos aprendí que los machos no cambian, hay que esperar a que se mueran no más” (97). And die they must. Even the character of Gustavo Morante, by all accounts a mild form of military presence, dies unable to shed the heavy burden of his beliefs. Gustavo loves Irene yet, it is only after she is shot down in the street—by the same forces to which he swears allegiance—that he is confronted with the unbearable truth: “Por primera vez se encontraba junto a las víctimas del régimen, no entre quienes ejercían el poder absoluto, y le tocaba sufrirlo donde más lo hería, en esa muchacha adorada” (“De amor” 236). He is shaken and, for the first time, he is forced to re-evaluate the military ideals that are the pillar of his existence: “Tal vez ya es

hora de volver a los cuarteles y restituir la democracia...No era necesario recibir una ráfaga de balas para abrirme los ojos”(“De amor” 137) Gustavo says quietly to Irene, as she lies unconscious in her hospital bed. However, his attempts at restoration are limited to the armed forces, and only through the armed forces:

Estaba convencido de que había otros como él, deseosos de lavar la imagen de las Fuerzas Armadas y sacarlas del hoyo donde estaban metidas...pero Morante tenía tanta urgencia por obedecer los impulsos de su corazón, que cometió el error de subestimar al Servicio de Inteligencia, cuyos tentáculos conocía de sobra. (*De amor* 255)

Although Gustavo is described as having great physical strength—as we are told he endured 72 hours of torture at the hands of the Forces in power—it is his inability to transcend the immediate reality that renders him a *weak* male character. Payne and Fitz remind us that, according to Jung:

The individual must plunge into his or her own depths to achieve authenticity...the importance of the correct formation of the individual (a formation that goes beyond the external world to embrace an understanding of what the person truly is, not merely what her or his role is). Individuals who cannot reach self-knowledge are, by extension, eternally trapped in their immediate circumstances and lack a vision that could move them toward another way of being. (127-128)

Francisco, on the other hand, an individual who experimented in his youth with notions of revolution and guns, is not bound by such ideals and is able to find in Irene his *inner* self:

Francisco sonrió en completa dicha, porque había encontrado a la mujer perseguida en sus fantasías desde la adolescencia ...la amiga, la hermana, la amante, la compañera... Hacía varios días (durante su convalecencia) con sus noches que Francisco Leal la vigilaba (a Irene) y se había habituado a descifrar los más leves signos de mejoría, llevaba la cuenta de sus suspiros, medía sus sueños, observaba sus gestos fugaces...Francisco llegó a conocer

a Irene tanto como a sí mismo...Hicieron entrega de todos sus secretos, se abandonaron más allá de los límites físicos, entregándose también en espíritu. ("De amor" 183, 234, 238)

Allende would seem to be very deliberate here, as she re-defines our concept of maleness; Allende presents the strong male character as one who possesses strong moral convictions and who is able to assimilate his opposite in his journey into the unconscious, in other words, the antithesis of a macho. The macho limitations, however, are not only attributed to Latin America, or the United States for that matter. Rather, machismo is a widely held notion throughout history, across cultures and around the world. Birgit Brock-Utne, in "Listen to Women, for a Change," argues this point when she attempts to define the difference between men and women in the face of conflict: "Military leaders argued that women should keep quiet about important questions of war and peace. They labeled men who did not want to go to war 'men in petticoats'...Women (on the other hand) find power in the everyday activities of the powerless...the three feminist principles (are those) of nonviolence, life as the ultimate value, and transnationalism (sic)" (206-209). Once again, characteristics of empathy and compassion are identified as closely associated with women and those least desirable in men.

Unquestionably, Allende's male characters are a new breed of strong men—not one that conforms to the old definitions but a new "liberated" form, emerging from a woman's perspective. Allende is, in this fashion, political in her writing; not by aligning herself with a particular ideology, but in daring to propose a "better" human being. Allende would seem to be, therefore, biblical in her writing as well. Although Allende herself would resist any direct connection with any established religious order, it is a fact that she has had a catholic upbringing and that she describes her childhood as a very religious one. Allende admits to Correa Zapata, however, that she finds most religious denominations intolerant and, by and large, "machistas." (173) Nonetheless, Christian values are a common thread throughout her work, as well as in most of her characters, including male figures. We need only to listen to her own words in describing her work:

I hope readers will find out that they are not political for ideological reasons only, but for other, more subtle considerations.

They are political precisely because Alba Trueba, in *The House of the Spirits*, who has been raped, tortured and mutilated, is able to reconcile herself with life; because Irene and Francisco, in *Of Love and Shadows*, make love in spite of terror; because in my third novel, *Eva Luna*, Eva defeats the odds of her fate with generosity and candor; because these characters search for truth and have the courage to risk their lives. (“Writing as an act” 188)

That we are talking about literature with a social conscience (*literatura comprometida*) is quite obvious by now, not only in Allende’s presentation of sometimes painful social events, but in the development of her characters as well. The fact that we witness a systematic “chipping away” at the traditional *macho* image is not by accident; Allende herself will testify to this: “It’s not a question of changing male chauvinism for militant feminism, but of giving both women and men a chance to become better people and to share the heavy burden of this planet” (“Writing as an act” 189). That most of the change each character experiences happens in the face of love, it is also very deliberate since Allende admits to being optimistic and believing in solidarity as our best hope for the future: “I believe in certain principles and values: love, generosity, justice” (“Writing as an act” 187). These values give Allende’s new male figures a Christian edge, a more biblical purpose. Even when they do not express their faith openly, as in the case of Francisco, their “spirituality” directs them to do God’s work. These men are moved by solidarity and justice, as in the case of Francisco, who does volunteer work three times a week in José’s congregation (Francisco’s priest brother) in order to correct the injustices of the regime. José is a catholic priest bent on helping the poorest among the poor and, to this end, enlists Francisco’s help on many occasions; furthermore, José works alongside Francisco to solve the crime committed against the Ranquileo family.

We should not wonder, therefore, that Allende’s best defined characters are those who transcend their immediate circumstances—as in the case of the male figure, moving away from the *macho-animus* straight jacket where he has been confined thus far—it would seem, on the contrary, a very intentional result of her work:

A literature that searches the spiritual dimension of reality, that accepts the unknown and the unexplainable, confusion and terror; a literature that has no answers, only questions; a literature that doesn't invent history or try to explain the world solely with reason, but also seeks knowledge through feelings and imagination. ("Writing as an act" 190)

Correas Zapata says of her friend: "Isabel desafía al machismo imperante en las sociedades latinoamericanas y las prácticas sociales que no se discuten, pero se aceptan tácitamente" (qtd. in Correas Zapata 66). At the same time, when she is approached by a man attending one of Allende's conferences, and she is asked *why* does the author attack men in that fashion, Correas Zapata replies: "Porque los quiere mucho" (67).

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jung, C. G. "Approaching the Unconscious." In *Man and His Symbols*, ed. Carl G. Jung, 1-94. New York: Dell, 1975. Payne and Fitz.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973. Payne and Fitz.

<sup>3</sup> Wehr, Demaris S. *Jung and Feminism: Liberating Archetypes*. Boston: Beacon, 1987. Payne and Fitz.

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