

International Curriculum Module Development
Module: Contemporary Latin American Women Writers: Isabel Allende

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region's belief in the supernatural.

This module would be introduced into the course(s) at the point when the instructor begins to discuss significant living contemporary writers; the influence these writers (writings) have on contemporary literature; and/or the effect international writers have on defining culture. In addition, the instructor may wish to introduce this module when s/he begins discussion regarding the intersection of politics, language, and culture.

The module might apply to the other courses, such as:

ENH 110 Introduction to Literature
ENH 200 Critical Reading and Writing About Literature
ENH 204 Literature of Today ENG 210 Creative Writing
ENH 285 Contemporary Women Writers

2) CONTENT

a) *Outline*

Introduction:

Isabel Allende was born August 2, 1942 in Lima, Peru. Her uncle and godfather is Salvador Allende, who was Chile's president (1970- 1973). Besides being a novelist, she has also been a journalist, dramatist and writer of children's stories.

Her best known novel, thus far, is *House of Spirits*. According to *Contemporary Literary criticism* (vol. 57), the novel began as a letter written to her dying grandfather in Chile.

Aware of his belief that a person dies only if they are forgotten by the living, Allende recorded her remembrances of her grandfather to reassure him that he would survive her memory. The correspondence, never sent, evolved into *The House of Spirits*. ...Several reviewers considered *The House of Spirits* to be closely imitative of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, citing such similarities as its family chronicle structure, magic realist narration, and parallel characters [However other critics have seen the novel] as an original and important work. (15-16)

Distinguishing Features:

- *Magical Realism*

apparent dismay of the main characters.

Sara Maitlan writes in her article, "Courage and Convictions," published in *The New Statesman*:

I enormously admired Isabel Allende's first novel, *The House of Spirits*, which seemed to me to take South American "magic realism" a step further in the direction that I always felt it could go -- to a fictional technique which can carry universal meaning within its own specific location of character and place. This would solve...a problem in contemporary fiction about how one can address enormous and fairly abstract themes around culture and politics without abandoning the emotional and imaginative territory which is the novel's home base. (27)

Allende, herself, addressed the issue of magical realism in an interview with *Contemporary Authors*.

I think that not only in Latin America but everywhere in the world there are things that are invisible that we systematically deny: emotions, passions, dreams, superstition, myths, legend. They are everywhere all the time, and they affect our lives. It's the same in Germany or in the United States as it is in Latin American and Africa and India. But it seems that in what you call the Third World we are willing to accept those realities too. We cannot control everything in our reality. We know that there is a dimension of uncertainty in which we move constantly, and that is literature has been translated as magic realism (7).

- *Masculine and historical; Feminine and Magical*

According to critic Robert Antoni ("Parody or Piracy: The Relationship of 'The House of Spirits' to 'One Hundred Years of Solitude'" in *Latin American Literary Review*), Allende's novel appears to deliberately clash traditional "female writing" with traditional "male writing voice." Like magical realism, the collision of opposites seems to give literary works an energized focus.

...Allende narrates from a third-person omniscient point - of-view ...Allende's language is the language of magical realism: synochronic, hyperbolic, crowded with metaphor, oxymoron, synthesis, personification. This narrative voice is the "feminine" voice in the text (17- 18) Allende alternate her third-person-omniscient magical realist narrations with the shorter, first-person testimony [this] is the "masculine" voice (19-22). [However] not only does a "feminine"

The metaphorical house, the themes of time and power, the *machista* violence and the unstoppable merry-go-round of history: all these are reworded and then examined from the other side -- the woman's side. (5)

And Harriet Waugh of the *Spectator* states:

[The] magic gradually dies away as a terrible political reality engulfs the people of the country. Ghosts, the gift of foretelling the future and the ability to make the pepper and salt cellars move around the dining-room table cannot survive terror, mass-murder and torture. (5).

b) *Selected Principle Works* (written here in English) *Eva Luna* (1987)

House of Spirits (1985)

Of Love and Shadows (1987)

Paula (1994)

The stories of Eva Luna (1991)

c) *Notes*

The instructor may want to address issues of gender, class and ethnicity. For example, the video "The Woman's Voice in Latin-American Literature" (PQ8098. 1.154174 1994 -- available in the PVCC library] might be a useful tool in generating discussion on this topic.

3) METHODOLOGY

a) *Instructor's role*

The instructor might begin class by reading an excerpt from Allende's work. The instructor might then lecture to the class about the distinguishing features found in the work.

b) *Student's role, activities, and assignments*

Students might break into small groups to answer the following discussion questions.

- Allende has states that "there are things that are invisible that we systmatically deny: emotions, passions, dreams, superstition, myths, legend." Do you agree or

- In your view, is there a *significant* difference between this Latin American writer and American writers? Mexican-American writers? Mexican-American women writers?

4) EVALUATION

- Students might write a 2-3 page paper which discusses the features of Allende's magical realism.
- Students might write a 2-3 page paper which compares and contrasts a feature of Allende's work with a feature of an American writer. (Allende and Faulkner; Allende and Anaya; Allende and Morrison)
- Students might explore in a paper the various aspects gender, race and class have on the shaping of particular literary works.