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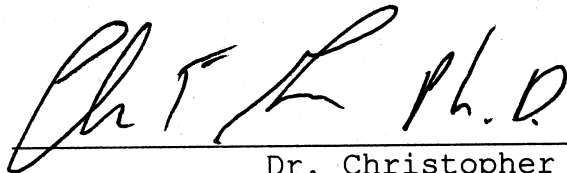

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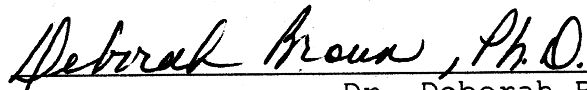

Dr. Deborah Brown

A False Feminism: The Objectification of Women in Isabel Allende's *The Stories of Eva Luna*

Abstract

By: Elizabeth Griggs

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Isabel Allende is often praised for creating heroines that liberate themselves from oppression, often through their freedom of sexuality. In her collection of short stories, *The Stories of Eva Luna*, the female protagonists are intelligent, sensual, creative and resourceful, but far from being liberated, they are entrapped by this freedom. This is illustrated in "Toad's Mouth," "The Judge's Wife," and "Simple Maria." An initial reading of these stories may support the idea that the protagonists in these three tales are liberated and living lives of their own choosing; however, a deeper analysis reveals that the women are not free but are, in fact, imprisoned.

Hermelinda is the only women for hundreds of miles around and is extremely free with her sexuality. She makes a living charging for sexual exploits with any man who comes into her home and pays to play her games. As she manipulates the games to her advantage, she imagines that

she has the power over her partners, home, her life and the men in her realm. Contrary to appearances, however, Hermalinda is disempowered by her sexual freedom.

In “The Judge’s Wife,” Casilda comes to the area as a mail order bride to bring prestige and power to the judge. Instead she appears to hold the power over him, and he changes so drastically that the entire town notices and is thankful to her for her influence over the judge. In the end, when the judge and his family are fleeing his rival, Nicolas Vidal, she uses her sexuality to save her family. Although it seems that sexual freedom is Casilda’s salvation, it is actually her condemnation.

In “Simple Maria,” Maria has an innocent mind as the result of a train accident when she was a young child. She is able to care for herself and her child, so she is self-sufficient but is treated by her family as if she is incompetent and sold off to an elderly, ailing man who dies shortly after their wedding. She finds that she loves sex and it is the only thing that brings her pleasure and spends all her time waiting for partners and in the sex act. She becomes a world renowned prostitute with men lining up to receive her services. She spends her entire life waiting without ever finding true love or happiness.

While Maria gives the illusion that she happy in her life of meaningless encounters, she is disillusioned by the lack of happiness she has found in her sexual freedoms.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Isabel Allende has been much praised by critics as a feminist writer. The goal in this essay is to demonstrate the absence of feministic values within her collection of short stories, *The Stories of Eva Luna.* Focusing on three stories in particular “Toad’s Mouth,” “The Judge’s Wife,” and “Simple Maria”, this essay will show that the methods Allende employs in her writing causes her stories not only to be lacking in aspects of feminism but, in fact, objectify and disempower her heroines. “Toad’s Mouth” centers around the aspect of prostitution; “The Judge’s

Wife" centers around the aspect of rape; "Simple Marìa" centers around the aspect of suicide.

When asked in an interview if she considered herself a feminist, Isabel Allende responded: "Because I am a woman and because I am intelligent, excuse my arrogance, I have to be a feminist. I am aware of my gender" (Iftekharuddin 10). Allende is proud to be a feminist and wishes people to be aware of her advocacy for women. It is her opinion that all intelligent women are, or should be, feminists and one of her aims in her writing is to convince all women that they need to become aware of their gender. Allende strives to support women's rights in her writing and is not ashamed that her feminist agenda is transparent in her works. Allende is endeavoring to give girls female role models that are free, empowered, and in control of their own lives and destinies. Allende employs many methods to empower her women: villainizing the men, solidifying her female characters, allowing her heroines a gift with words, condemning stereotypes, reversing the roles of the protagonist and antagonist, changing the understanding of the marginal (Allende defines the marginal as the prostitutes, homosexuals, guerillas, the poor, and the mentally handicapped), depicting a different type of

romantic relationship, and, most often, writing her characters with sexual freedom.

Allende uses the notion of machismo rampantly in her works to emphasize the plight of women in Latin America. The concept of machismo is also prevalent in the writing of other boom and post-boom writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortàzar, Carlos Fuentes, Josè Donoso, Gabriel Garcìa Màrquez and Vargas Llosa among others. Machismo is a strong or exaggerated sense of manliness; an assumptive attitude that virility, courage, strength, and entitlement to dominate belongs to men; or, put more succinctly, it is simply a strong or exaggerated sense of power or the right to dominate, especially over women. This idea is very favored in Latin American men, and women in Latin America are often treated as little more than possessions. While this attitude still exists today, it was much stronger in the period when Allende was growing up in Chile. Machismo does not simply give husbands the right to dominate their wives or fathers and brothers the right to dominate their female family members, it gives all men the right to dominate and control all women because women are subservient to men. In the name of machismo, many atrocities have been committed against women including,

harassment, rape, and imprisonment. Based on her writing and comments in interviews it appears Allende's view is that most Latin American men are villainous dictators who oppress all women they come across. One of Allende's goals in her writing is to fight the idea of machismo and all the stereotypes and oppression that go along with it.

Though Chilean, Allende spent little time in Chile. As a child, her father was an ambassador to Peru and her step-father an ambassador to Lebanon and Bolivia, so Allende spent much of her childhood in those countries. In her twenties, she spent time in Europe as part of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization not returning to Chile until 1966. Allende was a cousin of dictator Salvador Allende, whom she addressed as Tìo (uncle); he committed suicide after Pinochet's successful coup in 1973 removed him from power forcing Allende and her husband to flee to Caracas, Venezuela where she lived for several years before returning to Europe then settling in the United States. Allende has experienced much of Latin American life, but was also exposed to more Americanized and Europeanized feministic ideals of the roles and status of women from an early age and adopted these ideals rather than accepting the notion of machismo that so many Latin American women

accept as normal. As Allende has been one of the leading advocates for women's rights in Latin America, feminist doctrine in Latin American countries follows many of the same ideals and goals of the westernized feminist ideals. The main difference in feminism for Latin American countries is how much farther there is to go in reaching equality.

Allende, utilizing this notion of machismo, often depicts men as villains. She writes men as powerful, dictatorial monsters who take advantage of and abuse powerless women. "Allende never hesitates to represent men as selfish, controlling patriarchs. Once Allende places both sexes face to face she immediately becomes an advocate for the woman" (Karanxha 6). As men are the villains, women must be the victims. These victims can triumph over the tyrannical men in their lives by coming together. Female solidarity is an important feminist tool in Allende's writing.

Critics seize on the triumphs and victories of women to support Allende's feminist agenda. In her book, *Narrative Magic in the Work of Isabel Allende*, Patricia Hart forms a new genre under which to put Allende's works; she calls it "magical feminism." She defines this as

"magical realism employed in a femino-centric work, or one that is especially insightful to the status or condition of women in the context described in the work" (30). In the book, Hart argues that Allende's use of magic and realism combine to emphasize the plight of women and show them ways out; although sometimes escaping into the mind is the only way out. Sometimes the heroine is able to outwit the villain by turning the tables on him regulating him to her helpless position while she comes out superior in position, but sometimes the heroine is unable to change the status quo and is freed by retreating into silence and into her own space both literally and figuratively.

Hart is not alone in her praise of Allende's femino-centric writing. Linda Gould Levine sees in Allende's writing "a feminist connection and woman's right to appropriate words" (78) referring to Allende's penchant to empower her heroines through language and words. John Rodden states that Allende's writing "condemns sexist stereotypes and the hypocritical chauvinism" (113) praising Allende's practice of placing her female Latin American characters in the workplace, opposing the typical machismic ideals of Latin America, and of featuring marginals in her stories.

Isabel Dulfano lauds Allende's writing saying "These stories are not only tales of divertissement and amusement, but alternatively the inscription of a promised better and more egalitarian world that challenges pre-established patriarchal norms of linguistic and social relations" (225). Dulfano explains that Allende is not writing just to entertain, but that she is empowering women through one of two methods of turning the tables in a tale: in that what appears to be true at the beginning of a story is often proved false by the end or by reversing the roles of the heroine and villain by the end of the tale – so the villain becomes the victim.

These critics all praise Allende's obvious preference for her feminist characters. Allende herself admits that while she loves all her creations, she likes her female characters more than the male and likes the feminist characters best of all. Allende does not hate men, and there is often a hero in her novels and short stories that works with the heroine in her quest. Partnering heroines with a seemingly ideal man is one of the methods Allende uses to employ feminism in her writing showing what an equitable loving relationship would look like in a perfect and fair world. A strong, free woman who has a strong lover

to take care of, protect, and who allows her to maintain control of her own life and destiny is Allende's ideal heroine. The model for a perfect relationship is between a man and woman with equal power, or as more often depicted in her writing, an empowered woman with a disempowered lover. The one exception to this balance in the relationship is when the woman encounters danger, and then the man is allowed to be more powerful temporarily in order to save her. Then, once the woman is safe, the power redistributes itself so it sits equally between the couple or the woman returns to the position of higher power than her lover.

Allende's works are beautifully and vividly written. She uses vivid imagery to place the reader in the story. Such as in the opening of "Toad's Mouth:"

> Stone, sedge, and ice; endless plains that toward the Tierra del Fuego break up into a rosary of islands, peaks of a snowy cordillera closing off the distant horizon, and silence that dates from the birth of time, interrupted periodically by the subterranean sigh of glaciers slipping slowly the sea. (55)

In this passage the reader can sense the complete stillness and isolation of the land that is inhabited by the characters in this story. Allende considers all five senses when she writes so that the reader sees, hears, feels, and even tastes and smells what the protagonist does. However, she is not consistent in her ability to empower her women, and, in many cases, she not only fails to empower them, but, in fact, disempowers and objectifies them.

In Allende's first two works translated into English, *House of Spirits* (1982) and *Of Love of Shadows* (1985), she is mostly successful in portraying feminist heroines with few digressions from her pattern of empowered women. Perhaps this is because in these two novels the feminist agenda plays second to the political agenda. The primary goal of the heroines in these works is to defeat dictatorships, both in their private homes and in their country. However, in Allende's third novel translated into English, *Eva Luna* (1987), this political agenda disappears and pushing a feminist agenda becomes Allende's main goal. Unfortunately, she is not as successful in her portrayal of the predicament of women and, even worse, in her methods of saving her heroine here as in the first two novels. All of Eva's problems come to an end when she meets, falls for,

and becomes a lover to a European named Rolf Carlè. It is as if Eva needed a man to make herself complete. Eva is a storyteller and during the novel references are made to the stories she tells, although few of the stories are actually revealed to the reader. In response to questions about Eva's stories, Allende wrote a collection of twenty-three short stories titled *The Stories of Eva Luna* (1989). This collection is the fourth work by Allende to be translated into English.

When she was a child, Allende sneaked into her stepfather's office after he had left for work to read the forbidden *One Thousand and One Nights*. She states of the book "My awakening to eroticism and imagination was marked by that book. It left me with a love for storytelling and a love for the sensuous world it portrayed" (Rodden 195). Allende's adulation of *One Thousand and One Nights* leads her to frame her short stories with the tale, bookending the collection with quotations from the classic. The prologue, written by Rolf, describes an intimate scene between Eva and himself after which he demands of her: "Tell me a story" (Allende 5). Thus Eva proceeds to tell *The Stories of Eva Luna* creating Eva as a Latin Scheherazade. While Allende's love of *One Thousand and One*

Nights is understandable, it was not the best choice to embellish a feminist work because of its utter lack of anything feministic. Scheherazade succeeds in saving herself and other young maidens from execution, but she fails to do anything to improve women's standing in her culture. Scheherazade simply maintains the status quo. A feminist is not interested in maintaining the status quo but in improving the lives of women in the home and in society. When reading *One Thousand and One Nights*, Allende "searched for the sexy passages" (Gregory 82). Her reading of these stories fed into her budding sexual nature, so in channeling her ideal of Scheherazade, Allende takes her heroines from sexually free to sexually promiscuous. While this, in and of itself, does not demean women, Allende's portrayal of these empowered women includes pornography, voyeurism, forced prostitution, and justification of rape. These techniques do not empower women; they objectify and imprison them.

Allende claims that her inspiration for *The Stories of Eva Luna* came from "things that have really happened. Newspapers, television, radios" or from people she has met (Iftekharuddin 8). Allende takes very tragic and private moments of people's lives and writes them down for the

entire world to see. In her essay, "Vision and Division: Voyeurism in the works of Isabel Allende," Elizabeth Gough's definition of voyeurism includes watching sexual objects or acts, distant spying, and hidden gazing at someone else's sexual or non-sexual private, dramatic, and/or traumatic moments to obtain sexual gratification (93). Even when the purpose of watching someone's intimate moment is not sexual gratification but purely entertainment, the individuals whose lives Allende is marketing become mere possessions for her trade. Gough later informs the reader that Allende's use of voyeurism exceeds ninety instances in her works. This implies that not only does Allende enjoy passing on other people's painful moments for entertainment, but also revels in their pain. As it is always the female protagonist that is the victim, it is this protagonist's trauma that the reader witnesses and in this way that the protagonist becomes the object of entertainment for the reader. This inadvertent objectification of the female protagonists is one of the ways the protagonist is imprisoned rather than freed in Allende's works.

Allende told Farhat Iftekharuddin she "would really like to write erotic novels" and that she is "extremely

sensuous and sexual" (9). This is evident in the sexually and erotically explicit passages in her stories. Allende does not just imply the sexual acts or sexual organs in her tales, she describes explicitly what is seen and done. "When Isabel Allende moves in closely upon the act of love—and she seems to enjoy moving in very closely—she tends to lose her restraint and the prose becomes overcharged" (Gordon 54). Just as Allende delights in transforming the readers into voyeurs, she delights in transforming her stories into sexually erotic works. There are no circumstances in which explicit sexuality in the manner that Allende writes it in these stories empowers women. It is hard to consider these stories as feminist works since "pornography, to feminists, remains an annihilating death-force that operates through the depiction of sexual subjugation, abuse, and degradation with its roots in woman-hating. . .which dehumanizes females" (Shea 223). All of the factors mentioned occur in many of Allende's stories. The protagonists are placed into stereotypical roles relegating them to subservience to males. The women, no matter how seemingly free, are abused both by men and other women. Although Allende believes her female characters fully empowered women, they find no respect within the stories or from the readers who see them as

little more than prostitutes who have no respect for themselves, their bodies, or each other. These women "have repressed their selves which has led to a crippling, deadened life" (Shea 230). By giving into the classic stereotypical feminine protagonist, Allende oppresses her women. They have no chance at freedom. They have no chance at having any control over their own lives or destinies. These women are entrapped by Allende's erotic style of writing in these tales.

Many of the protagonists in *The Stories of Eva Luna* are forced into prostitution as we will see in "Toad's Mouth" and "Simple Maria." On the surface it seems that the characters make the choice to enter that profession, but it is clear to the reader that the characters have no other options. They sell themselves because it is the only chance they have at survival in a male dominated environment. In Allende's short stories rape victims often fall in love with their rapist as Casilda does in "The Judge's Wife," and not only fall in love with them, but in some cases it is the interaction with the rapist that saves the woman. It is the rape that frees the woman. This justifies rape. The text seems to imply that Casilda not only wants to be raped, but that she needs to be raped. Casilda and other

heroines like her are repressed sexually and emotionally and only when the powerful rapist forces himself onto the helpless, but secretly thankful, protagonist does she truly become free. This not only demeans and objectifies women, it empowers and entitles men. It shows that men have permission to violate women because women are nothing until they have had a sexual encounter with a real man reinforcing the old adage that for a woman “no means yes.”

Though evident in all the short stories in the collection to varying degrees, there are three stories in which the dehumanization and objectification are blatantly obvious. An apparently empowered and carefree hooker with a compassionate heart and giving nature is depicted in “Toad’s Mouth,” but Hermelinda’s perceived sexual freedom is in actuality her disempowerment. Some critics argue that Marìa is living life according to her own desires, but in “Simple Maria,” this seemingly happy prostitute’s disillusionment with the life that was forced upon her is revealed. What may appear to be a story about the sexual awakening of a repressed housewife in “The Judge’s Wife,” Casilda’s rape is far from justified. In the following chapters, it will be revealed how in all three of these stories, which Allende claims have basis in reality, the

readers impose themselves into the lives of these women, watching and participating in their most private moments, their humiliations, and their objectification. The readers bear witness to the fact that these women have no choices and no future release. They will forever be condemned to have their pain become entertainment. They have been dehumanized rather than empowered within these stories.

Chapter 2

A False Freedom: The Disempowerment of Hermelinda in Isabel Allende's "Toad's Mouth"

Allende uses her writing as a vehicle for empowering her female characters, often through perceived sexual freedom. She wishes to illustrate what a romantic relationship between a man and a woman would look like if the relationship were based on an equal partnership. It is

argued that Allende “acknowledges and celebrates women’s autonomous sexual desire” (Levine 89); however, in “Toad’s Mouth,” a tale in her collection of short stories, *The Stories of Eva Luna*, “women’s autonomous sexual desire” translates to forced prostitution and loss of power.

According to Chilean legend, there lived in the Pampas a lone native woman among the sheepherders employed by the reserved British family that governed the land. This woman offered release to the lonely drover (sheep herders) through a number of sexual games. Men would pay to play these games of chance in which the prize was a sexual encounter. This is the legend on which Allende based “Toad’s Mouth.”

In Allende’s version she names her heroine Hermelinda which means “shield of power.” Hermelinda’s apparent sexual freedom is meant to be a shield protecting her from the scorn of the British governors and allowing her dominion over the sexually starved drovers. From Hermelinda’s first appearance in the story, the name is meant to reveal that here is a woman who is in control of her own life and her own destiny. Here is a woman who has the power to choose. Here is a woman who is free. Here is a woman who holds her sexuality like a shield of power. Hermelinda’s freedom and

power comes from sex. But it is a false freedom. Hermelinda is, in actuality, disempowered.

The sheep ranch is located in an extremely isolated and remote area of the Pampas. There is no civilization around except for the members of the governor's family living in the big house; however, this civilization is cut off from the lives of the drovers by fences and gates. The British do not interact with the drovers with the assumed exception that the governor communicates with the foreman over the drovers. The only female member of the governor's household is his wife, but she is exceptionally cold-hearted and spares no time or thought to the drovers' happiness or well-being, let alone that of Hermelinda. There is no sexual gratification for the drovers to be derived from the governor's wife. Luckily, they have Hermelinda, the only other woman for hundreds of miles.

Hermelinda is not introduced right away. Allende sets up her story with the desperation of the sheepherders for any sort of sexual satisfaction in this secluded land free of women in the freezing southern reaches of the world. "The seals had large mammae, like a nursing mother's, and if they skinned the still living, warm, palpitating seal, a love-starved man could close his eyes and imagine he was

embracing a siren" (Allende 56). Skinned seals cannot equal the performances Hermelinda gives the men because a willing partner would seem to be more fun than violating an animal partner given the men's anxiousness for Friday nights. "On Fridays, riders galloped frantically from such far reaches that as they arrived their foaming mounts dropped beneath them" (Allende 57). Why travel so far and put their horses through such torture if a sheep was as satisfying as Hermelinda. Fortunately, Hermelinda is lovely to look at as well as an accommodating and exciting sexual partner.

Allende writes that Hermelinda is "in the business of solace out of pure and simple vocation" (Allende 56). However, as the only women not of a high class in this region, Hermelinda has little choice but to become a prostitute. With no education and no children in the area, teaching or acting as a governess is not an option. She is not of high enough station to work as a servant for the governor's household, because she has no breeding and is of the lowest class. As a woman, she cannot work in the field with the men. Hermelinda cannot leave to find a life elsewhere because she has no husband or family to protect her. She has nowhere to go. Linda Gould Levine argues in her essay, "*The Stories of Eva Luna*," that "Hermelinda is

simply presented as a feisty and independent woman with sharp business skills" but is not a prostitute (88); that Hermelinda is shrewd so sees the opportunity to make a fortune by servicing the lonely drovers and seizes it. It is true that Allende never uses the word prostitute in the tale, but it does not change that a prostitute is what Hermelinda is, no matter how it is dressed up. Glamourizing the life of a prostitute with games instead of the traditional payment followed by intercourse with no preamble does not empower Hermelinda, for in the end, she still has no choice other than to sell her body for use by men who do not love her and think of her as nothing more than a diversion from their longings. To survive, she has to find an occupation. Her only choice for survival is to become a prostitute.

In addition to cards and dice, there are three main games the men can pay to play at Hermelinda's: Blind Rooster, Swing, and Toad's Mouth. In Blind Rooster, men remove their trousers and underwear, leaving on all other clothing to fight off the cold, then they pay for their blindfolds. Once all the men are blindfolded, they chase Hermelinda around the room. The first man to catch her raises a "triumphant cock-a-doodle-doo" (Allende 58). In

Swing, Hermelinda sits on a long wooden swing and spreads her thighs so the men can see she is naked beneath her yellow petticoats. Men pay, line up, and each in turn attempts to catch her as she swings. Any man that succeeds gets to possess her right there on the swing before the next man in line takes his turn. In Toad's Mouth, the game from which the story takes its name, Hermelinda draws a chalk line on the ground then four paces away draws a chalk circle. She lies down in the center of the circle and raises her legs spread eagle-like in the air wearing nothing under her dress and petticoats. Again, men pay, line up and take their turn tossing coins at her vagina which is open as "a merry toad's mouth" (59). Any man who succeeds in landing his coin inside the folds of her vagina wins two hours alone with her as a prize.

Even the men who do not win the ultimate prize get a show and a sexual release. No one goes home from Hermelinda's without something. The air of competition and voyeurism is a stark contrast to the vision feminists have tried so hard to earn for themselves as having a choice in relationships and having equal partnerships with their lovers. Here is a woman that is an object for men to view and to obtain as a prize to be won.

In the games, Hermelinda appears to have all the power; however, despite this appearance that "Hermelinda still maintains control of the rules of the game at every minute and reigns among the men of the pampas," (Levine 89), Hermelinda is nearly powerless. It seems the men must remain in her good graces to be allowed to play the games, because she can choose who can or cannot participate. Hermelinda attempts to hedge the odds in her favor by serving drinks before the games begin in hopes of impairing the men's eyesight, steadiness of hand and body, and sharpness of mind. The effectiveness of this is questionable because she has no control over whether a man chooses to drink at all, how much he chooses to drink, or how well he holds his liquor. In the first game, it is true that the unblindfolded Hermelinda has a measure of control over which of the lucky drovers catches her; she can see and thus has the advantage over the blindfolded men and can make the game last for as long or short a period of time as she wishes. Possibly she could even watch from a place they cannot reach as they run about like roosters feeling around for her until she chooses her partner and allows him to catch her. However, she cannot watch all three-hundred and sixty degrees around herself at once, so she cannot prevent a man from approaching behind her from another position out

of her vision before she is ready. Also, the more crowded the room, the harder it would be for her to keep the men from laying hands on her before she is ready. Making control particularly difficult, the game was quite loud preventing her from hearing anyone approach from outside her line of vision. "they raised such a ruckus that their huffing and guffaws spread through the night beyond the roses to the ears of the impassive the English couple" (58). If they were so loud that their noise carried all the way to the house, the noise would have been nearly deafening for one in the same room leaving Hermelinda unable to use hearing as a defense against unwelcome winners. In Swing, she has even less choice of who catches hold of the swing. The men are not blindfolded, so there is little she can do to prevent a man from holding on to her without being accused of employing unfair evasive tactics. "The players, in an orderly line, had a single chance to possess her, and anyone who succeeded found himself clasped between the beauty's thighs, swept off his feet in a whirl of petticoats, rocked to his bone marrow, and lifted toward the sky" (Allende 58). All the men are watching eagerly and with attention because even if they cannot catch hold of her, they will still get a show. With so many eyes on her, Hermelinda has no chance to cheat in effort to control who

may manage to reach her on the swing. In Toad's Mouth, she has no control over whether or not the coin lands inside her, for without obvious movement she would not be able to prevent true aim from landing its mark, even if she believed she could use such subtle movement to deny a man his prize. "Some were expert marksmen, with a hand so steady they could stop a panicked animal running at full speed by slinging stone bolas between its legs" (58-9). There is little Hermelinda could do to keep such an exact throw from entering the "dark center of her body" (Allende 58) and winning the "sultan's treasure" (Allende 59). Even the slightest movement on her part would likely be discerned by the drovers who are so practiced at watching for movement and unrest in animals. Any man who can afford to play and practices to perfect his aim has a chance at winning the prize. These games do not truly offer Hermelinda any shield and her attempts at evasive tactics offer her very little power. Hermelinda does not truly have control during these games, but is simply lucky that all the drovers receive enough relief from the games that they never feel the need to take advantage of her isolation and vulnerability in their remote and lawless environment.

In her essay, "Magic Feminism in Isabel Allende's *The Stories of Eva Luna*," Patricia Hart argues that Allende shows the reader equality between the sexes in her tales, and she praises Allende's feministic renditions of prostitutes which are treated "with emotional reality" (107). However, there is no emotional anything in Hermelinda's character. Told by a third party narrator, we have no insight into Hermelinda's thoughts or emotions. The story contains no dialogue, which not only contributes to the inability to know Hermelinda's thoughts or feelings; it also takes away Hermelinda's voice. The narrator tells us what Pablo is thinking and feeling and exactly why he came to town, but gives us nothing of Hermelinda's voice, and the lack of dialogue removes her voice completely. She is given the stereotypical, sexist attitude of the "hooker with a heart of gold." Lovingly taking care of every emotional, physical, and sexual need of the drovers, she altruistically takes nothing and asks nothing for herself. There is nothing realistic or feministic about this depiction; although prostitutes can be kind-hearted, their lives are not usually happy or healthy and they seldom feel they have any other choice for survival than becoming prostitutes. Many feminist supporters argue that prostitution as an occupation always demeans women. Without

evidence of Hermelinda's emotions, the reader cannot simply assume that the life Hermelinda is living is life she chooses because she loves sex so much that she might as well profit off of her promiscuous behavior; the reader can only rely on widely held societal assumptions that prostitutes turn to prostitution as an occupation out of desperation, and judge that Hermelinda is not all that happy with her life since she jumps at her first opportunity to escape.

Nowhere in the story does Allende say that Hermelinda herself receives any benefit for herself from her work other than feeling good about the service she is providing. She enjoys helping the drovers, but she gets nothing in return other than money which she has no use for in the uncivilized area in which she lives. She gives literally all of herself to the drovers, but they give none of themselves to her. In their opinions, she is there to please them. That is her purpose and her job as the only woman in the land. Hermelinda should be getting some fulfillment in her own right, but she has no power to find a place and life that is fulfilling to her.

What little power she is afforded by her evasive tactics during the games is taken away completely upon the

appearance of an Asturian named Pablo who, on hearing tales of Hermelinda, rides thousands of miles with the intention of proving to her that she cannot live without him. He is the living proof that Hermelinda has no true power during her sexual games. He is a smuggler with no home, no money, and no family, nothing to make him marriageable. He is a "peevish banty rooster" (Allende 59) who is surly, pugnacious, and ready for a fight at the slightest provocation. He wants a woman, but has no desire to change his ways or become domesticated, so based on her reputation as a wild sexual animal, he chooses Hermelinda believing that he can possess her for his own gratification without sacrificing his own life and freedom. Liquor has no effect on him. He doesn't play in any of the lessor games, watching as Hermelinda and the other men play. When it comes time for Toad's Mouth, he is not tired out by the earlier activities so is steady of hand, and clear minded despite a night spent drinking Hermelinda's liquor. This is the game he is waiting for. He is certain that in two hours he can teach her how necessary he is to her. He confidently knows he can show her the truly great time she has been missing and she will discover that she cannot live without him. His aim is true. After not two but eighteen hours of sex, the two ride off together with Hermelinda's money.

Pablo takes away any of the power Hermelinda had, if she had any to begin with. Like all stereotypical fairytale heroines, Hermelinda rides off into the sunset with the Asturian Pablo. Allende illustrates Hermelinda's lack of choice in riding off with him in this passage: "Hermelinda had accumulated a small fortune, but the idea of retiring to a more conventional life had never occurred to her" (Allende 59).The interaction between Pablo and Hermelinda is minimal. It consists of his participation in this game and their eighteen hours of intercourse. Essentially, there is no interaction other than sexual between the two. Yet Pablo succeeds in his mission. Hermelinda gives up everything to him; her money, her life, and the limited power she has had to this point. His arrival completely disempowers her.

Life for the drovers in the Pampas is without any rule. The British in the big house spend little energy on the savage natives who work for them, allowing them to behave as they will and ignoring any unseemly activities.

> A carnivalized attitude permits illicit individual behavior, while culturally as well as legally held collective values are, for a time, suspended. . . . Ultimately, such attitude may be

> directed towards life itself, which may, along with such mores, attitudes, and values be itself devalued. (Danow 245-6)

The sheepherder's attitudes and behaviors are quite carnivalized. The carnival in the pampas has been going on so long that values are not suspended for only a short time but permanently causing life in the pampas to become all about winning Hermelinda. The men think all week about Friday's games. They do not value Hermelinda as a person, but, in her carnivalized treatment of prostitution, women's empowerment is suspended so women become the possessions of men. Hermelinda becomes an object of entertainment for the drovers. Hermelinda becomes sex to the drovers, nothing more. She may care about them, mending their clothes or tending to the sick, but her efforts go unnoticed by the men who see her only as "a female they could see and count on, one with a heady mixture of blood in her veins and a hearty taste for a good time" (Allende 56). To them, she is a way to release their passions.

Karin Rosemblatt tells us in "'What We Can Reclaim of the Old Values of the Past:' Sexual Morality and Politics in Twentieth Century Chile," "women have to place limit—and especially sexual limits—on men to assure that men

respected them" (152). Hermelinda places no limits on men so receives no respect from them except as a good time with a great body; a body better than that of a sheep or seal. If men can get whatever they want from a woman without having to work for it, they are not going to put any work in. Hermelinda places no limits on any man that has the money to pay for her services. Without limits it is easy for people to take advantage. It is not just sexually that Hermelinda lacks limits. She spends her days mending clothing and cooking for the drovers and attending the sick. Her lack of limits places her in the role of a wife for the drovers, and not even a wife of equal status but a subservient wife who gives all of herself and receives nothing in return except money; however, the money is not enough to buy her freedom. A woman who can be bought so easily has no respect, not from the men who purchase her, not from other women, and not for herself. Hermelinda's failure to place limits makes her an easy target for Pablo when he appears. He arrives at the ranch, takes advantage of her lack of limits and offers her what looks to her in her naiveté to be freedom. He is a possible way out of the imprisoned position of wife to hundreds of men who care nothing about her as a person and who view her only as a possession. Hermelinda cannot be considered a strong,

empowered female because she lacks the power to set limits and force others to adhere to them. She allows people to take advantage of her and her isolation in the Pampas.

Philip Swanson observes that Allende's "protagonists are naïve women who slowly wake up to reality" (59). Correct: Hermelinda is completely naïve if she believes she has any power, any control over her own life, or any choices, but she never wakes up to reality. She does not choose Pablo as a partner; he chooses her and makes sure he gets her. He travels to the pampas with the aim of leaving there with Hermelinda as his own, and she allows him to acquire her. She has allowed the sheepherders to purchase her for years because she has been caged by her remoteness from anyone who can protect her or teach her how to respect herself. She has accepted her prison and made the most of it, but she jumps at the chance to leave when the opportunity arrives. When she leaves she remains under the impression that Pablo will free her from her prison. She does not see that she is exchanging one prison for another. Pablo has no more care for Hermelinda as a person than the drovers did. He is driven by the need to win, and he sees winning Hermelinda as the ultimate prize. She is to him a possession the same as to the other drovers. She is too

naïve to see it. Where Allende fails to turn Hermelinda into a feminist and Swanson is wrong is at the end of the story when Hermelinda still believes that she will be freed. There is also the problem that Hermelinda expects a man to save her. She does not save herself in the manner of a good empowered feminist; she waits placidly until Pablo comes to take her away. An empowered woman would lose her naiveté and discover her own power to control her own destiny, without relying on a man, something Hermelinda never does.

Not only is this story based on a legendary woman, the game Toad's Mouth is based on an actual game. In Latin America men play a game of skill in which they toss coins, pebbles, or other small items into the mouth of a ceramic toad from at least four paces away. Allende is very literally objectifying her heroine by placing her in the role of the inanimate object of this game and of this story. It is argued by critics that Allende's use of the toad's mouth imagery, rather than objectifying, is meant to protect Hermelinda from being objectified and disempowered by men's fantasies and imaginations. Levine states that the metaphorical language used by Allende in the tale to describe Hermelinda's sexual organs such as "a merry toad's

mouth," "gate of heaven," "open fruit," "dark center," and "sultan's treasure" (Allende 59) brings a combination of the heavenly and the comical and this technique prevents men from using Allende's words for fanaticizing the female body (89), but the images are not comical, they are demeaning. The erotic images in this tale are all about male fantasies and female subjugation. Isabel Dulfano argues that "If in many of these stories women are perceived as commodities initially, by the end, the tables are turned and the woman is in control of the outcome" (229). When in the tale does Hermelinda stop being a commodity? She remains an object for sale from the beginning to the end; throughout the story, Hermelinda plays the role of sex toy, first to the drovers, then to Pablo to whom she will forever more be a toy.

Allende trounces the feminist ideals with the inadvertent suggestion that a woman's life is not full until she has had great sex with a great man implying that all a woman wants is sex and a man to take care of her. In his review of *The Stories of Eva Luna*, John Butt points out "her [Allende's] heroines' lives are usually legitimized by their being in love with or desired by some male" (12). In the beginning of the story, Hermelinda's life only has

meaning because of what she does, and in the end, she is taken away by Pablo, but this is what she wants and needs, a man to give her life meaning. Without a man, Hermelinda's life lacks meaning.

Rather than the female sexuality being celebrated in this tale, it is turned into mere male fantasy. Far from the feminist ideal that women can be self-fulfilled, "Toad's Mouth" advocates for women needing a man to be fulfilled. Hermelinda is defined through her usefulness to men. If the men were satisfied with the sheep and seals, Hermelinda's life would have no meaning. If Hermelinda is so happy with her job and life, why run off with Pablo after eighteen hours of sex? Is his sexual prowess so mind-blowing that she cannot live without having it constantly? Or maybe she was not so fulfilled by her life as the only prostitute in the land. Either way, Hermelinda's life was incomplete without a man and sex. David Buehrer says, "The male penis often and in a stereotypically pornographic manner conquers these women, as if intercourse with that special, machismo-laden, man is all they really needed" (104). Hermelinda is conquered by Pablo's penis. He takes all power away from her when he lands his coin in her vagina and, nearly violently, takes her. This is apparently

what she has wanted and needed all along to fulfill her: Pablo's sexual dominance. The reader loses all allusion of Hermelinda's power over her own life when she gives up all she has and all she is to Pablo. Allende wrote in Hermelinda a heroine who wanted to be dominated, controlled and disempowered.

This story is rife with erotic ideas and images. John Butt writes that "Isabel Allende's numerous erotic passages are actually quite well done. She might do better to write straight pornographic books without the apologetic romantic adornments" (12). It cannot be disregarded that Hermelinda is entirely exposed to the reader as well as the drovers or that the very vivid imagery of the metaphors puts pictures into the readers' heads. The readers become voyeurs, spying on the intimate details of Hermelinda's person and on her private moments. Hermelinda's lack of power is turned into a game for the amusement not only of the drovers, but for the readers, and all are let down when she packs up and heads off with Pablo because entertainment and sexual gratification at Hermelinda's expense has come to an end. Hermelinda rides off with Pablo with a "satisfied swish to her memorable rump" (Allende 61) as if all she needed was a real man. "Still more regrettable, the ugly sexist, even

pornographic, implication seems clear here: feminism be damned, since this is what women really want, and fanaticize over" (Buehrer 105). Allende's plot in the story is weak and unrealistic, although vividly written. It is enjoyable in a frivolous way, but cannot be counted as feminist literature.

The very vividness of Allende's descriptions takes away from any feminine aspects of this tale. Allende writes using colorful language that puts pictures into the readers' minds. When reading phrases like "firm horsewomen's legs and breasts without a trace of wear" (Allende 57) and "she would flex her legs so all could see she had nothing on beneath the yellow petticoats" (Allende 58), the words are no longer merely words on a page but images in the mind. This is something that only gifted writers achieve in their stories; however, the content of the story, of the images, removes any feministic qualities in the story. Due to these pictures that are placed into the readers' heads, Hermelinda begins to be seen, not for herself, but for her body. Allende's language creates a very light-hearted tone in this story. Her word choices create comedy, but not farce. A farce may have the ability to make a point—to take a stand, but a comedy is really

just appreciated for its entertainment value. A farce may inspire true thought, while a comedy does not. This story does not motivate the reader to walk away contemplating the plight of women; it does little more than give the reader an enjoyable interlude with a frivolous story. Allende describes Hermelinda's sexual events as "games of fantasy" (55). She describes the English superintendent's English wife as unable to "resign herself to life outside the heart of the British Empire" (56) and continuing "to dress for solitary dinners" (56). These are not cartoonish or unbelievable descriptions as would appear in a farce, but they do paint a somewhat comical description of the "English lady" (56). Allende's playful depictions of her characters add to the tone of levity in the tale which prevents it from carrying any more solemn feminist ideals. This is not a serious story about a woman forced into prostitution because of her lack of education and a lack of options for women in her country as critics that argue this is a feminist story claim; its light tone prevents that from being a possibility and turns it into no more than another story supporting the male fantasy about a women with an insatiable sexual appetite.

Patricia Hart, in her book review for *The Stories of Eva Luna*, calls "Toad's Mouth" "a playing off of the Cinderella myth, Allende is not out to prove that she can be as raunchy and insensitive as her male counterparts, but to expose fairy-tale brainwashing" (315). Hart argues that Allende is stripping away the euphemisms in *Cinderella* to show how ridiculous fairy tale thinking is.

> The "perfect fit" that in Cinderella is coyly expressed as shoe size here is rendered literally. In the fairy tale, the prince offers a palace, riches, and station; Cinderella her virtue and beauty. Here the equation is noted in vigorous shorthand—the woman offers sex and the man money. (107)

At first, Hart's analogy seems to fit: Hermelinda has no virtue to offer and Pablo has no home, money or social status to offer. She a prostitute and he a smuggler, the two are hardly a prince or maiden. In fact, it is Hermelinda who has the money. Hermelinda and Pablo are exaggerated caricatures of Cinderella and the unnamed Prince Charming. However, Hart misses some key elements in the story that ruin her analogy. Cinderella and Prince Charming's connection is not based on sex. Hermelinda and

Pablo have nothing but sex between them. The prince does not seek out Cinderella based solely on her reputation with the intent of possessing her as Pablo seeks out Hermelinda. The prince knows nothing of Cinderella's existence until they meet and spend time together at the ball talking and dancing, not having sex. When he seeks her it is with the intention of winning her heart, not her person. Pablo, on the other hand, wants nothing but sex and ownership of Hermelinda. Cinderella could have chosen not to bring out the remaining shoe when the first is broken. Hermelinda has no choice in having intercourse with Pablo. He won her fairly. Finally, Cinderella goes off with the prince to a palace, money, and a position that will afford her power in her own right as princess then queen. Hermelinda goes off with Pablo having nothing in her future but a life as his mistress. He takes her money and her body but gives her nothing in return. If this story is supposed to evoke a dark reworking of the Cinderella myth in this tale, it is being misunderstood because Hermelinda loses while Cinderella wins. Unlike Cinderella, Hermelinda has no control over her own destiny. Hermelinda passively follows Pablo for no apparent reason other than great sex. Hart ignores Allende's own assertion that she changed the ending of the legendary prostitute's story because she wanted

"Toad's Mouth" to have a happy ending. If Hermelinda riding off with Pablo is supposed to be a happy ending, Hart's entire argument falls apart because now we see that the story was not meant as mockery of stereotypical ideals but is simply written in the stereotypical pattern. Far from being feminist it is promoting the same old sexist ideas, and as Eleanor J. Bader states "wipe[s] out two full decades of important work feminists have done" (60).

Hermelinda follows Pablo into a blank future. They have her money from the drovers, but what happens when that runs out? There is no love between them. He lives as a nomad so there is no stable home at which Hermelinda can start over perhaps sewing or learning to read. She will have to move around with him. When the money runs out she will have to return to her old ways to support them, but now Pablo will have control over her clientele. In all likelihood, it will not be long until Pablo tires of Hermelinda and becomes bored with their relationship so abandons her and any children, after all who could say if they were his. Cinderella is victorious; she gets a happy ending. Hermelinda's victory is as false as her seeming empowerment. Rather than maintaining control, let alone gaining it, Hermelinda gives all her control to Pablo. She

has no future the minute she rides off with Pablo. Where is the “happy ending” in that? Allende does not show a sexually free woman in control of her own life, but she does show the disempowerment of Hermelinda.

Chapter 3

A False Salvation: The Condemnation of Casilda in “The Judge’s Wife”

In her early works translated into English, Isabel Allende shows great perspicaciousness in her portrayal of feminist heroines who defy the gender stereotypes of Latin

American machismo; however, as has been discussed in the prior chapters, in her collection of short stories *The Stories of Eva Luna*, her heroines often fall short of the mark of feminist and actually play into the stereotypical pattern of the helpless female in need of the strong man to save her. This is exemplified in the two female characters in "The Judge's Wife." There are no feminist aspects to this tale. Through the idea of the male savior for the weak female, the idea that sex is all that a woman needs to be complete, and the romanticizing of rape, it upholds male fantasy and the gender stereotypes Allende claims to be knocking down.

Before discussing the two female characters, it is necessary to discuss how the role reversal of the two major male figures in this story aids in the maintaining of gender stereotypes. Nicolàs Vidal is at the beginning presumed to be the villain. He epitomizes the concept of machismo. He is a merciless rapist, torturer and murderer. He cares nothing for anyone, especially women since at his birth it was prophesized that a woman would "cost him his life" (Allende 183). It quickly becomes evident that Nicolàs will become the hero by looking at the meaning of his name. Nicolàs means "victory of the people." Legend has

it that in the fourth century Saint Nicholas, a bishop from Anatolia, saved a poor man's daughters from lives of prostitution; the patron saint of children, Saint Nicolas is the basis for the legend of Santa Claus. Juana la Triste, Nicolàs' mother, was a poor prostitute, like those Saint Nicholas saved, until she became too old to be desirable and became housekeeper for the brothel. Nicolàs, true to his name, triumphs in the end: he is able to save Casilda, the judge's wife, from a life of boredom and repression in the control of her machismic spouse Judge Hidalgo; he wins the affection of Casilda, stealing her love away from her recently dead husband and Nicolàs' sworn enemy. Although he is taken away for execution because he chooses to remain with Casilda after he rapes her, Nicolàs triumphs as the hero because he dies a new man, one who knows what it feels like to know love, to him that is worth death, and he has become Casilda's savior.

Nicolàs' last name, Vidal, is also the name of many saints and martyrs and means "of vital life." Nicolàs is definitely a vital man. He never tires and prides himself for his bravery. His mother, Juana la Triste (Juana the sad), may have chosen this name randomly, but Allende did not pick this name randomly for her villain turned hero.

While Nicolàs' victims blame Juana's attempts at abortion for his foul character, in truth, it is likely the poverty in which he was raised, combined with shame over his mother's profession, the abandonment of his father, and the fear of women that causes him to turn to a life of violence. There is no excuse for Nicolàs' behavior as Allende would imply by giving a name of such meaning to a rapacious man, Allende is maintaining stereotypical gender roles by implying that he is of great character despite his mistreatment of all people.

It is not only Nicolàs' name that places him in the stereotypical role of the misunderstood bad boy. Allende sympathizes with his character by telling of how his mother knew "he had no business in this world" (Allende 185) and repeatedly attempts to terminate her pregnancy. Any child that is so unwanted generates sympathy from others. Patricia Hart argues in her essay "Magic Feminism in Isabel Allende's *The Stories of Eva Luna*" that Nicolàs is entitled to rape because he is the son of a prostitute stating "the degradation of women through prostitution transmits a rapist mentality to the children of sex for sale" (120). He had no choice but to become a rapist because his mother was a prostitute. It is not his fault. Allende wants us to

sympathize with Nicolàs despite the malicious criminal he grows up to be. This argument falls flat when one considers how many children of prostitutes do not grow up to be rapist or criminals of any sort. When Judge Hidalgo locks up Juana la Triste, Nicolàs cockily laughs it off because he is sure the judge is not as brave as himself, so there is no need to rescue her, despite the opinions of his men that it is a matter of honor, no matter how little Nicolàs cares about his mother. Then, when the judge relents and releases Juana, Nicolàs sees it as his own victory in a battle of wills against the judge. It would seem that Nicolàs is the better man because he is braver than Hidalgo and he does not give in to tyranny. In reality, however horrible the actions of the judge, Nicolàs is the bigger tyrant.

In Spanish, Hidalgo means “noble.” Noblemen in Latin America, much like those in Victorian England, were generally portrayed as hypocrites. They preached morals and virtue but rarely applied any of what they preached to themselves. There was one set of rules for the nobility and one for everyone else. Nobility was determined to maintain the status quo because any change in the social order would threaten their position. As a judge, Hidalgo holds a higher

position than anyone else in town, and so is, in effect, the nobility of this town. By all accounts, Judge Hidalgo is determined to carry out the law. This determination to uphold the law is painted as a negative, "In the exercise of his duties he ignored every rationale for humaneness, punishing with equal firmness the theft of a hen and premeditated murder" (184). Rather than lauding the judge for accepting the difficulty of this job and recognizing the need for a judge to be consistent, it seems that the judge is indeed the villain. He is a vain and pompous man who cares more for his high position in the town than in carrying out justice; however, an important part of justice is remaining true to the laws in the land. No one knew what the judge truly felt about those he tried and convicted because they only see him carry out the letter of the law. But to make Nicolàs the hero, the judge must become the villain. The judge softens some in the carrying out of his duties after his marriage; this new attitude does not extend to Nicolàs Vidal. Desperate to catch Nicolàs, Judge Hidalgo decides to "put aside scruples" (187) so that justice can be served and proceeds to lock Juana la Triste in a small cage in the Plaza de Armas with no food and limited water. Forgetting how villainous Nicolàs is, the judge assumes Nicolàs will come to rescue his mother, then

the judge and his soldiers will capture Nicolàs. This decision turns the judge from gentleman to villain. Allende does not distinguish the difference between a decent man driven to immoral acts out of desperation for justice and a wicked man with no true redeeming characteristics. There is no excuse for the judge’s torture of Juana, but he is still a better man than Nicolàs. The judge cannot go through with his torture of Juana. At the pleadings of his wife and cries of his children he relents and set Juana free. Nicolàs would never be so merciful. He would have allowed his mother to die without a second thought. The judge, despite what Allende means the reader to believe, is the better man.

There are no good men, no heroes in this story. Nicolàs Vidal and Judge Hidalgo, different as they are, fall into the Latin American machismo type. Both are men who believe that they are always in the right. Nicolàs believes that it is his right to take what he wants from whomever, whenever he likes. He feels that being the strongest and the bravest entitles him to everything he desires. He does not hesitate to kill any who stands in his way or to rape any woman that appeals to him. It is his right, as an alpha male, to behave this way. Judge Hidalgo,

while a milder version, also believes that he has the right to play God. He feels that as the highest ranking official in town, he can decide who is worthy of punishment and who is not; he can decide what is best for the people in his town; he can decide what constitutes the greater good. He believes he has the right to lock up and torture Juana la Triste because it is in the name of the greater good. Neither man has much, if any, respect for women. The judge's changes after his marriage show that under Casilda's influence he can become a better man. He might be able to defy the gender stereotypes and let go his machismo. When, at Casilda's request, the judge to gives into pressure and frees the innocent Juana, and Hidalgo relents, he is turned into a weak man and even more of a villain. He does not know how to love a woman, so despite having three children he cannot sexually please her—he is not a real man. Nicolàs is vital and brutal so he can please a woman. He sticks to his guns. He is captured only when he desires to be. Hidalgo succumbs to a heart attack when the pressure becomes too great. Never mind that Hidalgo is the man willing and able to change his character and become an equal to his wife, it is the brutal, unchanging Nicolàs who is the hero in this tale preserving

the anti-feministic idea that women truly want and need to be dominated.

The name Juana is a feminine form of the English name John which means “God is Gracious.” History’s most infamous Juana is the sixteenth century’s Juana, Queen of Castile. Due to her refusal to sit by quietly while her husband, Philip el Hermoso (the Handsome) conducted numerous affairs she was given the moniker Juana la Loca (the Mad or Crazy). Due in part to the fits of rage her jealousy would bring on and in part to her father, Ferdinand of Aragon, and her husband’s desires to have control over Castile, the presumably innocent Juana was kept locked up for nearly all of her adult life. Upon the deaths of Philip and much later Ferdinand, her son Charles inherited Spain and the Holy Roman Empire; he left his mother locked in her prison and never visited her after he became King. While Allende’s character of Juana la Triste is seen in both the infamous Queen of Castile and the literal meaning of the name in this tale. The play on the meaning of the name can be perceived in that despite all her abortion attempts, God graciously spared Juana’s baby. God showed graciousness once again in sparing her from death in the cage by sending Casilda to intercede on her behalf, leading to her freedom.

Like her predecessor Juana la Loca, Juana la Triste is doomed to a life of tragedy. She is either impregnated by a client or abandoned by Nicolàs' father, much like Juana la Loca is repeatedly abandoned by her unfaithful husband. Both are imprisoned unfairly as pawns in the game of someone more powerful than they. Both are abandoned to their fate of imprisonment by their son. The tie to Juana la Loca shows that Juana la Triste's situation is hopeless so that when she kills herself out of humiliation it is apparent that she has no other option. Neither of these women was able to overcome the men who oppressed and imprisoned them.

Juana la Triste is the closest in this tale to being an advocate for women's rights. In Juana the true horrors of prostitution are seen. Juana, unlike Hermelinda and Maria, who will be discussed in the next chapter, is not portrayed as happy with her vocation, her "eyes were always filled with unshed tears" (186). In Juana is seen the plight of women in Latin America: the lack of options beyond marriage, the lack of choices, and the inferior treatment. But Juana did not even try to change her situation, she simply accepted her place. She showed no desire to triumph over the men who so let her down and

mistreated her. As a woman, and a prostitute on top of that, she accepted that she had no place to protest the treatment of the man who abandoned her and their child, of the judge who wrongly imprisoned her, or of her son who left her to her fate. Juana's response to this life is to kill herself "because she could not bear the shame of having been abandoned by her son in that cage in the center of the Plaza de Armas" (190). Juana does not kill herself because she sees that as a way to take charge of her life, she kills herself because she cannot bear to live with the humiliation that a woman, not a man, came to her rescue. Unlike any truly feminist heroine, Juana does not become empowered, does not escape the mistreatment of the men in her life, she does not overcome. She gives in, confirming the male and female stereotypical roles.

The heroine of this tale is the judge's wife, Casilda. This name appropriately means "of the home." Allende writes Casilda as a homebody. In appearance she is nothing magnificent, slight, pale, and frail. In character she is as if invisible, colorless, silent, and rarely out of her home. "No one ever heard more than a timid hello from her, nor witnessed gestures more bold than a nod of the head or a fleeting smile . . .she gave the impression of not being

there" (184-5). There seems to be nothing in her to take note of, yet somehow she wins the love and respect of the judge to such an extent that she changes him from a stern and entitled man to a man open to a new form of justice, one that does not follow the letter of the law but allows for extenuating circumstances that may drive a man to crime, but she cannot change him enough to prevent him from the machismic act of caging the innocent Juana for his own political gain. It is problematic for a feminist work that "Casilda appears to exist exclusively for the love of her husband and children and to lack a creative type of life in which she might contribute to the improvement and enrichment of society" (Spanos 165). Casilda has nothing to offer anyone other than her children and husband. It is true that she is instrumental in the release of Juana, but it is only after the town leaders, presumably male, visit her and ask her to intervene on Juana's behalf. It is almost as if she is interfering not out of solidarity with Juana but out of a desire to help her husband redeem some respect from the town. They disapprove of Hidalgo's decision to use Juana against Nicolàs, so if she were to die, Hidalgo would be considered at fault and his standing in the community might be jeopardized. By not acting until it becomes clear that her husband's reputation was at

stake, Casilda shows that it is actually her husband that she is concerned with, rather than Juana. A true feminist would have intervened on Juana’s behalf long before the town leaders appealed to her because it would have been the ill treatment of a fellow woman that offended her into action, not worry for her husband. However, in freeing Juana at his wife’s bequest Judge Hidalgo does show an aptitude for changing. His bowing to her opinion shows that he truly does have respect for her and in their relationship there is the chance for becoming an equal partnership, which is what Allende claims she wishes to portray in her couples. If the story had ended here, with Hidalgo listening to his wife as a partner, then perhaps there could be an argument made for this as a feminist story; however Allende goes on and what could have been a tale about equality in relationships becomes a tale about male supremacy and a woman’s need for domination.

In the end, rather than hiding with her children, Casilda decides to allow Nicolàs to rape her. She waits for him in the street, and being the man he is, he does not even hesitate to take her. Barbara Mujica states that Casilda is a strong feminist protagonist because she chooses to be raped (60), but choosing to submit to save

one's life is not the same as consenting to the sexual act. Casilda, however, enjoys the rape and feels indebted to Nicolàs for his brutal attack, because whether or not there are any physical marks left on the body rape is always a brutal attack. She urges him to run before the soldiers arrive, out of her appreciation; she is not hurt, angry, or even offended by the rape; it turns out to be what Casilda needed all along. She finds herself in the rape and is beholden to her rapist. "She did not forget for one instant throughout the memorable afternoon that her objective was to gain time, but at some point she let herself go, marveling at her own sensuality, and somehow grateful to Vidal" (193). Casilda's husband was old and although able to give her three children, apparently the sex was never good, so Casilda could never find herself. She needed good sex, and according to Allende, the rape is what she needs. In his essay "From Magical Realism to Fairy Tale: Isabel Allende's The Stories of Eva Luna" David Buehrer asks

> Is it that woman can only have authentic experiences and/or discover their true selves through the service of heterosexual intercourse, no matter the circumstances or conditions . . . ? Am I missing something in all this, or do the

> rape-fantasies and other perverse, quasi-romantic clichés used throughout these tales connote a sordid, regressive sociohistoric mandate? (106)

Buehrer is not missing anything. Despite what this story illustrates, there is nothing romantic in rape. On the contrary, rape is a vicious violation. Whether the victim chooses to fight her attacker or not, it is still an assault and victims do not find themselves grateful for the assault any more than rapists find themselves in love with a woman they have just violated.

Like "Toad's Mouth," there is very little dialogue in this story. The spoken words are given to Nicolàs and his men, and even these are few. Casilda is given one line in which she gives instructions to her children before leaving them in the cave, showing only that she is a caring mother but nothing of her as a woman or an advocate for women. Juana and Casilda are given nearly no words of their own, so once again Allende's female characters are deprived of a voice. Again, there is a third person narrator, but in this story, unlike in "Toad's Mouth," the narrator in this story gives the reader more insight into the thoughts of Juana. The reader knows Juana commits suicide because she is humiliated, but very little is revealed about Casilda's

thoughts or feelings until the end when the narrator tells us that Casilda finds herself "somehow grateful to Vidal" (Allende 193) as he rapes her—a sentiment that is quite unbelievable and causes an astute reader to question the reliability of the narrator. There are two pivotal scenes for Casilda, scenes in which she might be seen as a woman first and a wife and mother second: when she goes to her husband on behalf of Juana and when she begs Nicolàs to run from the soldiers. However, Casilda is denied her voice in both of the scenes while a narrator simply relays the events to the readers. The limited dialogue adds to the oppression of Juana and Casilda.

This story is written with a sentimental tone towards Nicolàs that takes away from any feministic feelings that may have otherwise been felt by the suffering of Juana and the repression of Casilda. Much sympathy for Juana is erased when the narrator tells of her repeated attempts to rid herself of the unwanted and unborn Nicolàs. "He had no business in this world, and his sad mother knew it; that was why she had tried to tear him from her womb by means of herbs, candle stubs, lye douches, and other brutal methods, but the tiny creature had stubbornly hung on" (Allende 185). The reader wonders how a mother can feel so hostile towards her own baby. Even if the reader is pro-choice,

Allende's language in describing the attempts at abortion describe a cruel and painful process in which Juana is the "brutal" monster and Nicolàs the "tiny creature" that "stubbornly hung on." In this passage, Allende paints Nicolàs as a survivor. The readers feel sorry for the poor boy that was so unwanted but worked so hard to survive so forgive him his later transgressions. The language Allende employs in this tale lead the reader to want to see Nicolàs overcome his bad habits of theft, rape, and murder; they want him to gain all that he was denied due to his mother's lack of love.

Hart argues that perhaps Allende intended this as a female rape fantasy, "So what if Allende really wrote this story intending it to be erotica, her version of an exciting sexual fantasy" (126)? There are many key differences between this story and a female rape fantasy. In a woman's rape fantasy, she is safely removed from any actual danger and is giving consent to a known object of desire. Casilda knows nothing of Nicolàs other than that he is a dangerous man who has no scruples and will kill even women and children without remorse. There is no safety in this set up. In a female rape fantasy, "what is wished for in real life is surrender to a powerful and attractive selected male and a sense of danger, excitement, and

passion in real life relationships" (Binova and Critelli 67), it does not mean in any way that they wish to be raped; in a woman's fantasy, she is not at the mercy of her attacker but is the one calling all the shots. Whereas in an actual attack, or in a male rape fantasy, the woman has no say in what is going on. A woman's rape fantasy is all about her own power and pleasure, but in this tale, the rape is about the rapist's power and pleasure. Casilda does not go into it imagining that she will be pleasured, as is the case in a female rape fantasy. During a rape, a woman is not giving consent in any way, even if, as Casilda does, the victim decides not to fight the attacker but to comply with the rape so as to save her life. This is not permission or any implication that the rape is desired. It is all about survival, but for Casilda it becomes about salvation.

Samuel Amago argues in Isabel Allende and the Postmodern Literary Tradition: A Reconsideration of *Los Cuentos de Eva Luna* that "making her protagonists openly embrace the act of rape, the narrator actually subverts the negative connotations of sexual violence, making rape a redemptive act for both man and woman" (44) and he is correct. Allende, in making Casilda enjoy and discover her true self in her rape, makes rape into a positive thing, a

notion any feminist would abhor. Both Casilda and Nicolàs benefit from his raping her. She finds herself and is freed from her repressed sexuality so that she can now be whole. He discovers for the first time the closest he will ever come to love and an equal relationship. This idea of redemption in the rape act is a way to justify rape, but there is no justification for rape and there is no equality in a rape. In a rape, the rapist has all the power and the victim has none.

Wendy Hesford tells us in her essay "Reading Rape Stories: Material Rhetoric and the Trauma of Representation" that "representations may reproduce the spectacle of violence by casting viewers into the role of voyeurs" (194). Allende is once again utilizing the mechanism of voyeurism in this story. By revealing the trauma of Casilda's rape to the readers, Allende turns violence into a form of entertainment then justifies the rape by allowing Casilda to be freed by it. This reinforces the myth that women want to be raped and reduces women "to spectacles of victimization and violence" (Hesford 193). Allende turns Casilda's rape into a voyeuristic spectacle for the amusement of her readers. Through voyeurism, Casilda becomes a mere object of edification for Nicolàs

and an object of enjoyment for readers. Allende's choice to treat Casilda's rape so lightly opening it up for all to intrude upon does not create a strong feminist protagonist, but instead creates an objectified heroine.

This tale not only ends in a rape but it becomes about the rape. Allende chooses to end the story with Casilda being set free through rape. Women can overcome rape and come out stronger for it. They can identify their attackers and pursue justice. Casilda has no interest in pursuing justice for Nicolàs' actions. She falls in love with him and tries to save him from the justice he deserves when the soldiers arrive. She feels strongly her indebtedness to him. She is grateful to him as her savior. This rape reinforces the gender stereotype that women are weak and helpless and men are strong and domineering. That "women are construed as victims and men as ever-threatening rapist" (Hesford 194) is how Allende has cast this story. Casilda is the weak woman who needs a sexually powerful man to cure her of the oppression of morality, and Nicolàs is the strong sexually proficient rapist who can save her from a life of sexual frustration. This automatically places the man in the position of power and the woman in the position of underling because a man can be free without a woman but

a woman has to have a man to truly be free. Not just any man, Judge Hidalgo was clearly not enough, she needs a rough man that will assert his position of dominance and claim what he wants as his own whether he is entitled to it or not. Casilda is objectified through this reassertion of the gender and sexual stereotypes that are promoted in this story. Her salvation through rape is a false salvation.

Chapter 4

A False Happiness: The Disillusionment of Marìa in Isabel Allende's "Simple Marìa"

Isabel Allende, although known for her feministic style of writing, follows the unrealistic portrayals of

prostitutes set by her male counterparts in her collection of short stories *The Stories of Eva Luna*. Patricia Hart and other critics argue that Allende's treatment of prostitutes is different than that of her male colleagues, but in fact, Allende's treatment of the seemingly content prostitute Marìa and her co-workers in the tale "Simple Marìa" is equally unrealistic. The story is lacking in all of Allende's trademark feminism and is, in fact, supporting existing stereotypes and male fantasies through voyeurism and through the objectification of Marìa.

Allende claims in an interview with Farhat Iftekharuddin that she writes to change the gender status quo and refute stereotypes. She wants to write about strong women who overcome all odds to achieve and maintain a high quality of life and find happiness. Maria does not overcome any of the odds, does not achieve a high social status, does not refute stereotypes, and does not do anything towards changing the gender status quo.

In another interview, this time with John Rodden, Allende states that she likes to feature marginals such as prostitutes in her stories. She defines marginals as "people who stand unsheltered by the system, who somehow defy authority, defy the stereotypes" (118). However, none

of these aims are reached in “Simple Marìa.” Marìa may be unsheltered, but she neither defies authorities nor stereotypes. She is in every way complacent with the authorities in her life. She obeys her father, brothers and husband. The only way in which she deviates from the behavior expected of her is in her choice to become a prostitute, but she is not doing this to defy authorities; she is doing it as an attempt to return to a position of belonging to someone, thus reinforcing the stereotypes not defying them. Marìa is not happy in her search for love; she is disillusioned.

Philip Swanson argues that “the prostitute is often a positive figure in Allende’s world and even (through wealth generation and the achievement of influence over men) a possible figure of potential emancipation” (62); however, Marìa is far from an emancipated or influential figure. Marìa goes through her early life under the control of others, primarily her father and brothers. At sixteen, she is married off to a much older man, a man who did not want to marry her, but was blackmailed into the marriage. Marìa has no say in the matter; her parents see an opportunity to lessen the burden of caring for their mentally ill daughter by passing it onto someone else and seize it. Marìa now

lives within the dictates of her husband rather than her family, so she is no freer than she was in her at home with her father; only now a stranger controls her. When the couple consummates their relationship, Marìa's husband appears not to take into account her youth and innocence, so the experience is extremely traumatic for her causing her to become sick. Her husband has no romantic feelings and no respect for her; she is merely a burden he has been saddled with, and he believes that he should at least be able to get some sexual gratification out of the situation. Marìa holds no more influence over her elderly husband than she had over her family. She is hidden away by him just as she was hidden away by her parents. The couple stays home living like hermits even after their child is born. Marìa finally comes out of the stupor she has been in since the age of twelve, when she was hit by a train which mentally incapacitated her, but still she is imprisoned behind the walls of her husband's home. When he dies, Marìa is not emancipated by her widowhood, but returns once again to the control of her family. Then, as soon as Marìa begins to show interest in young men her age, the family ships her off to Spain without consulting her. Marìa is punished for being an ordinary girl. She is not free to experience her own emotions but is expected to stifle them and be who her

family expects her to be. Marìa is neither emancipated nor influential with any of the men who control her life.

While at sea following the tragic death of her son, Marìa falls into the arms of a Greek sailor; Marìa feels haunted on the ship by the ghost of her dead child and has no choice but to leave at the first opportunity. She couldn't stay and be tormented by her lost baby. Marìa and the sailor jump ship together to begin a life in the Caribbean. This appears to be a move towards freedom, but in reality, Marìa is exchanging one master for another: her family for the Greek sailor. Marìa feels relief from the constantly watching eyes of her father and brothers. She still cannot bring herself to lead her own life. She is constantly waiting on her sailor to come home believing he is filling the void left by the death of her son. Marìa shows no influence over her sailor. He continues to drink, fight, and gamble coming home to her only for sex. Then, despite her voracious sexual appetite, he becomes bored of her, tired of her clinginess, her neediness, and afraid of becoming stuck with her, he leaves. Because of this, Marìa, desperate for the connection she is missing with her sailor, begins to sell herself to random men hoping to recreate the feelings she has lost. "When the heat in her

bones and anxiety in her soul had become too much to bear, she went out to seek consolation with the first man who passed by" (Allende 160). Other random men follow this first stranger, but with each new client Marìa is attempting to feel again. Marìa spends the rest of her life waiting for the Greek sailor to return, meanwhile imagining that each of her sexual encounters is with him; it is in this way she sells the illusion of love to her clients but only serves to disillusion herself.

Marìa never truly knows love until her son is born. The love she bore her son is reciprocated equally, something Marìa has never experienced. When he died, Marìa was left alone in the world. The Greek's seduction of Marìa also elicits new feelings in her, feelings that are remarkably similar to the love she shared with her son and Marìa begins to believe that she can recreate the lost connection with her son and becomes obsessed with this possibility.

Jane Urquhart praises Allende's characters who are "slaves to their own passions and obsessions and highly susceptible to the lightning strike of romantic love" (25). This statement applies to Marìa; it is hardly a praiseworthy thing and in Marìa's case it is not a

feministic thing. Marìa's dependence on her passion and obsession to recreate the love she lost with the death of her son, first with the Greek and then with any passing man, rather than freeing her to pursue her own desires, enslave her in a life that she cannot escape. With every new sexual encounter she is trying to recreate the initial connection she felt with the Greek which she used as a surrogate to the lost relationship with her son. Marìa puts all of herself into each client hoping that she will again feel the love she lost. "She never saw them [clients] as anonymous objects, only the reflection of herself in the arms of her imaginary lover" (Allende 161). This is completely contradictory. If Marìa sees only herself in these encounters, then she is objectifying the men because she does not see them as themselves, but as what she needs them to be for her, a connection which turns out to be empty. They are anonymous because she does not know or care who they are. She is trying so hard to create a connection, they believe that she not only knows them, but cares deeply for them. Her clients in turn are using her to fulfill a sexual need and feel no more connection to her than to any other prostitute on the street. Marìa and her clients objectify each other. All of these encounters are brief, so Maria's imagined connection is brief and when the session

is completed nonexistent. Marìa's happiness is false. In addition to poverty "the strain of fending off disillusionment" (Allende 161) ages her before her time making it harder to feign a connection that is not there and harder to pretend that she is happy with her life.

David Buehrer cites Allende's ability "to suggest that female sexual ingenuity can convey both social status and financial gain" (105) in his essay "From Magical Realism to Fairy Tale: Isabel Allende's *The Stories of Eva Luna*." Allende endows Marìa, however, with neither money nor social status. Many people come to Marìa's bedside as she is dying, nearly everyone in the neighborhood, but had she truly held high social status nearly everyone in the city would have cared that she was dying. If she truly held a high status in the community, she would have become wealthy. The truth is that, overall very few people in the capitol care about the death of another prostitute. Few recognized in the "tiny grasshopper, that pathetic pile of bones, that little nobody . . . the pitiful old whore" (Allende 161-2) the beautiful young girl who could make every client feel like she was in love with him. Most likely Marìa is not even a thought in the heads of most of the citizens of Calle Repùblica, and especially to those of

high social status. Marìa was not made rich through her sexual prowess. Despite her renown as a lover, poverty "destroyed Marìa's freshness" (Allende 161). Marìa's disillusionment with life and her inability to fill the emptiness inside her with sex quickly cost her her looks. An ugly complexion, shorn off hair, and a skeletal figure all worked together to lose her jobs. Men would travel from around the world to see this legendary prostitute only to find a faded old woman and would leave in disappointment. Marìa's failure to find love prematurely ages her, causing her to lose business and throwing her into poverty, not only a monetary poverty, but an emotional and spiritual poverty.

The tone of this story is rather matter-of-fact. There is very little emotion displayed by Marìa, her co-workers, or the narrator. No one in the tale seems very distressed by the passing of this "living legend" (Allende 151) or the tragedies that fill her life. "Marìa's life was marked by sudden misfortunes, like the train that had claimed her mind and flung her into an irreversible childhood" (Allende 157). The two defining moments in Marìa's life, being hit by a train and the death of her son, are described as mere "misfortunes." Marìa lost many years and any chance at

independence when she was hit by a train, and she was heartbroken and flung into a life of searching for a replacement when her son died. These incidents were more than “misfortunes,” they were catastrophic. The emotionless tone of the narration reduces the importance of Marìa as a person because it gives the impression that she herself had no feelings, emotions, or thoughts of her own. Everything about Marìa’s life and death is simply told to the reader without any fanfare or depiction of what might be going on beneath the surface of the events of the story. It is relayed more like an unbiased news brief than a story about a beloved member of the community. This matter-of-fact tone causes a lack of relating to Marìa and so a lack of sympathy, empathy, or recognition of the tragedies that have made up Marìa’s life. Without recognition of how oppressed Marìa’s life is, there can be no discovery of the plight of women which is so prevalent in feminist literature.

As in the two stories discussed in the previous chapters, there is nearly no dialogue in this story. Maria’s only line is “’My time has come to die’” (Allende 152). She is given no other words. Like Hermelinda and Casilda, Marìa’s voice is stolen away by a third person

narrator. The reader is given no insight into her thoughts or feelings since after she declares that it is time to die all the events are revealed through her co-workers while they speculate about her life and the narrator who relays things as matter of fact and without giving any voice to what Marìa actually feels or experiences during any of her tragedies. If Marìa has no words of her own, she has no voice of her own.

There are many in discrepancies in Marìa's life story as told by her friends. As she lay dying, they tell how Marìa was hit by a train at the age of twelve and as a result was "incapable of reasoning," "inattentive and devoid of animosity," and "equipped to be happy" (Allende 155). These descriptions do not fit with other places in the story where Marìa shows all of these qualities. When she fights like a banshee to remain an independent business woman rather than work for a pimp. Then when her son dies, she clings to him until the crew is forced to pry his body from her arms. In both situations Marìa shows resolve, attention, logic, and emotions other than happiness. These discrepancies revel how little Marìa's colleagues actually value her as a person. They use her as an amusing diversion from their harsh lives. They assume Marìa finds enjoyment

in every sexual encounter she has with every man who seeks her out; however, Marìa is simply passing time the only way she knows how as she waits for her Greek sailor to return. He has taught her how to be a good lover and she is able to market this, but has little choice if she wishes to survive. Marìa's colleagues view her reserved nature and talent with resentment, so they make up stories about her life and feelings as a way to make themselves feel better about their own lives.

The aspect of voyeurism also exists in this story further objectifying Marìa. Her friends and coworkers see Marìa's life as a means of entertainment. They long for the opportunity to spy on Marìa's life. They want to see what she has seen and feel what she has felt, when they cannot get details from her they make up the rest according to their fancies. "Her friends uncovered scraps of information about her life and pieced them together patiently, filling in the blank spaces with fantasy, until they had reconstructed a past for her" (Allende 152). What they could not pry out of her they made up leaving Marìa no privacy, nothing to keep to herself. They then proceed to share this past with others, passing on all of Marìa's pain and tragedy for the entertainment of others. Buehrer argues

that Allende employs “a femino-centric work, or one that is especially insightful into the status or condition of women” (103). This is partially true. We can see the plight of Latin American women in Marìa’s lack of control over her own life and in her being forced into prostitution to survive. The text implies that Marìa falls into prostitution out of choice and out of sexual need, but truly Marìa becomes a prostitute because she is trying to survive.

Missing from this tale is the feminist piece, the piece in which Marìa is able to find happiness and overcome her plight through union with other women or on her own. Marìa’s friends do nothing to aid her. They are all in the same profession, the same situation, as she, but rather than band together to better their lives, as would be the case in a femino-centric tale with a feminist heroine, her coworkers make up stories about Marìa’s life. They pry into her past, forcing her to relive the horrors of the train accident and the death of her son, but they do not pry to help Marìa move on, they pry out of their own curiosity. The language they use to describe Marìa, “air of a queen,” “aristocratic manner,” and “unique behavior,” (152) hints that they resent Marìa’s class. They do not understand her

and are jealous of her ability to appear more royal than they. They are voyeurs into Marìa's life who care for Marìa for no other reason than entertainment value. She is different from them and they use her story as a release from their own hard lives. In a femino-centric work, Marìa and her colleagues would be freed from the pain of the past by working together and the interest of Marìa's friends would be in aiding Marìa, not turning her pain into amusing anecdotes. None of her friends take any step to save Marìa when she drinks the chocolate in which they believe she has added poison. At first they laugh at her for claiming to know she is about to die, then when it is clear what she has done, rather than get help or even a priest to perform last rights they inform the neighborhood and invite them all to watch Marìa die telling each other that of course Marìa did not really put poison in the chocolate, even though it is clear that she did. No one cares enough to stop Marìa's death; after all, it is more fun for them to allow Marìa to die. It offers a much more interesting story and in the end, they no longer have to put up with Marìa's airs.

One of Allende's goals as a feminist writer is to show what equality between the sexes might look like. Linda Gould Levine argues that in "Simple Marìa,"

> Differences between the sexes are significantly erased as Allende provides a utopian view of sexual politics in which sex as a business or a purely physical act is converted into a shared momentary illusion for the two parties involved. (81)

It is not true that this story shows a sexual utopia or that the illusion of a love is shared. That Marìa can anticipate her client's desires does not mean that she is having her own desires fulfilled or that her client feels any true or lasting connection to her, and that is what the men are: clients. They are not sexual partners; they are only clients. Marìa's clients come to her out of a "sordid urgency" (Allende 161) to have a need filled that they cannot fulfill themselves. Her ability to lose herself in the moment and her client's ability to feel wanted does not constitute an equal relationship. To be a true utopia, the sex would need to mean the same to both parties and both parties would be getting the same out of it. In Marìa's case the client is leaving the encounter fulfilled while

Marìa is leaving it empty. Her partner succeeded in obtaining sexual gratification, but Marìa did not succeed in recapturing her lost loves. Levine is correct when she states that prostitution is not about money for Marìa. Levine is wrong when she argues that sex is about pleasure for Marìa. She may receive some physical pleasure, but she receives no emotional pleasure or fulfillment from the sexual act. She receives nothing but emptiness and a reminder that she has no one. She continues to try recapturing the initial high she reached when she was introduced to sex by the Greek with each man she services, but that can never be, because like with any drug the high will never reach the same heights as at the first experience. She will never be in the vulnerable place she was in immediately after the death of her son. She cannot be fulfilled through this meaningless sex that so easily satisfies her partners, so the relationship will always be unequal. Marìa will always have less power and there is nothing utopian in this.

Marìa's clients take advantage of her need for love. She is desperate to find a real bond and only knows how to do so through sex. She has not had any true connections except for the one with her son. She convinces herself that

the physical pleasure she receives from the Greek sailor is the same as the love between herself and son. This leads her to believe that with the right partner she can recreate this bond. Men take advantage of this by travelling from all corners of the world to have sex with her. Not one man is looking for anything more than a passing moment of sexual gratification. None of them intend to stay with her or take her away from her life of poverty and false happiness. These men do not see Marìa as a real person; to them she is objectified into a myth, a legend to be obtained and bragged about to others. They are often disappointed and leave when they discover her to be old and dried up: "when he saw the legend reduced to ashes, many a man turned and walked away, deeply sadden" (161). They are not sorry for Marìa, but sorry for the prize they lost. They are not looking for a real women but an ideal. Marìa is to them nothing but momentary diversion.

Marìa spends her life searching for a surrogate relationship for the one with her son, so she is always far more invested in the sex than her client who is simply looking for a brief moment of immediate gratification. Marìa receives neither money nor status from her position as a prostitute; she receives no happiness. Marìa receives

only a life long wait for love.   There is very little realism in Allende’s portrayal of prostitution in this tale. It is argued by some critics that Allende attempts to show in Marìa a happy prostitute who can find true love in every sexual encounter. Prostitution is not a happy career. It is a career chosen out of necessity. For Marìa it is the only path to love that she can take. She has no education thanks to her accident, and her family tires of caring for her so sends her from one master to the next. Marìa wants to believe in love and find it, but in the end she finds only objectification and disillusionment which she needs to escape from. She can only see her way out through suicide. Suicide is very rarely the feminist method out of oppression. Marìa did not kill herself to make a point, to teach society a lesson, or to improve the status of women: Marìa killed herself because she was exhausted by a loveless life in which he was constantly objectified by everyone in her world.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Isabel Allende prides herself on being an advocate for women. She claims that she uses her writing as a tool for

change promoting a feminist agenda. In her first two novels she is quite successful at bringing to light the problems caused for women by an attitude of machismo, especially in Latin American countries. In third and fourth works, particularly in *Eva Luna* and *The Stories of Eva Luna*, Allende takes her methods of feminist advocacy past the praiseworthy act of empowering women, and she begins to objectify them as seen in the three examples of short stories from her collection discusses in the previous chapters, “Toad’s Mouth,” “The Judge’s Wife,” and “Simple Marìa.”

It is empowering to write heroines that can choose their own sexual partners. Women who are not trapped by machismic principles into abusive relationships with a man, or men, not of their own choosing are empowered. Sexual freedom can be a tool that empowers women. Allende utilizes this device frequently, but in the case of her short stories her heroines’ perceived sexual freedom is actually a cage Allende never allows them to break free of. Hermelinda carries her sexuality like a shield to protect her from the drovers she is surrounded by. The shield offers no protection, however, and she is unable to choose her partners because she has no true power in the isolated

and vulnerable position she holds in the pampas. Casilda spends most of the tale repressed sexually and is freed only when she is raped. Marìa uses sexual freedom as a portal to relationships, but she never succeeds in creating a real or lasting relationship because relationships cannot be based wholly on sex, which is all Marìa is ever able to receive from her clients. None of these women is empowered in any way from Allende's version of sexual freedom in these stories.

Despite the arguments that the plight of women is revealed through these stories, Allende's vivid and colorful language turns readers into voyeurs spying upon the tragic moments of the lives of her heroines for pleasure. The turning of "Toad's Mouth" into a pornographic tale, Casilda's salvation through rape, and the levity Marìa's suicide is treated with shows not empathy or sympathy, but apathy. All three heroine's stories are told with a lightness that is almost the equivalent of humor. Allende herself states that her stories are based in reality; to take anyone's tragedy and turn it into hilarity, dehumanizes them. By transforming her readers into voyeurs, Allende objectifies her heroines.

Hermelinda is literally made into an object in “Toad’s Mouth.” Casilda is freed by rape in “The Judge’s Wife.” Marìa is caught in a fruitless search for love in “Simple Marìa.” None of these would be considered feminist plotlines. Patricia Hart states that it is the happy endings that make Allende’s short stories feministic: “Allende manipulates these stories to achieve a perilous happy ending so rare in real life as to create a marvelous feeling of unreality in the reader” (115); none of these stories have a happy ending. Hermelinda trades one cage for another by leaving the drovers for a life with Pablo, whom she barely knows. Casilda loses her husband, is raped, and then loses her newly discovered lover. Marìa commits suicide after accepting that she will never find someone to love her. Furthermore, the feeling of “unreality” created by these absolutely anti-feminist endings is not “marvelous.” The reader is offended by the idea that Hermelinda is empowered when she rides off into the sunset with the machismic Pablo. The reader is disgusted by the idea that Casilda receives salvation through rape. The reader is distressed by the frivolity with which Marìa’s life and suicide are treated. These are not magical or feminist endings.

Allende wants to change the gender status quo and challenge gender stereotypes, but all three of these heroines maintain the status quo and support stereotypes. Hermelinda follows Pablo although she does not know him, implying that all women want is good sex and a man to run their lives. Casilda is saved when she is raped by a reprehensible outlaw, implying that women need to be violated in order to truly be whole and really want sex no matter what they say. Marìa “happily” spends her life as a prostitute and kills herself when she is no longer young or attractive enough to bring in clients, implying that a woman’s sole purpose is in pleasing men. All three stories support the idea that fantastic sex with an over-enthusiastic man is what life is about for women. All three stories support the idea that a woman’s main duty and pleasure in life is to take care of and please men. All three stories support the idea that women want and need men to dominate them in all aspects of their lives. None of these heroines have any choices or freedom, and none of them attain any choices or freedom by the end of their stories.

Allende may be trying to write to a feminist agenda in her collection of stories as she claims and as many critics

praise her for, but there are no feminist elements in these stories. Despite her goals, Allende manages only to disempower and objectify these female protagonists.

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