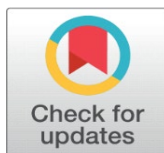
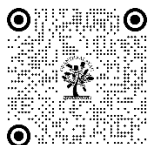


# CONCEALED HISTORIES: LETTERS AS CHANNELS OF SUSTENTATION OF FEMALE MEMORY AND INHERITANCE IN ISABEL ALLENDE'S THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS

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## ABSTRACT

The prime focus of this essay is the use of letters for the preservation of female memory and its legacy in the novel by the female Chilean writer Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*. Journals and writeups play a crucial role in preserving the experiences and memories of female characters in the novel, providing a way to sustain and transfer memory across generations. Allende's text uses such techniques of communication that are private and personal to substantiate the lives and experiences of women, aiding to guard and forward the emotional and cultural legacy of women in a patriarchal world.

**Keywords:** Preservation, Journals, Substantiate, Concealed, And Female

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*The House of the Spirits* is a novel written by the female Chilean author Isabel Allende. The novel is a family saga demonstrating the legacy of four generations. It depicts the political, economic, and social status of women in society. It pays attention to many aspects of Chilean society, focussing prominently on the lives of women who are mistreated and abused by patriarchy. The novel crafts a story in which journals, letters, and personal writeups are provided a significant role for keeping women's memory, lineage, and identity in a society suppressed by patriarchs. With the help of these letters and written forms, Allende's female characters resist the potency of patriarchy and historical eradication, finding an instrument to preserve their voice and asserting their agency across time. In the complex narrative of the novel, letters and personal writeups are more than just a simple record; they play the role of lifelines and connect generations, providing each woman in the family an opportunity to inherit and analyse the resilience, affliction, and love of her foregoers. For instance, the matriarch of the house, Clara, uses letters and journals as a method of preserving her life experiences, noting her visions, dreams, and daily activities that someday will be revealed to her descendants. Her practice of writing cannot be considered just an act of personal habit but it is specifically an intentional act related to her heritage. Through her writings she ensures that her life – often abused and undermined by the men around her – is available through her testimony to coming generations. Therefore, this aids her granddaughter Alba to know her family's past more accurately and she immerses herself in Clara's journals and letters. She finds a source of strength and

concealed history in them. Alba reconnects with her family's past after reading Clara's letters and acquires deeper clarity with respect to her own identity, creating a generational bond that provides power and resilience to cope with patriarchal and political violence. Letters in the novel are women's narratives which are often handled in the margins that are personal spaces away from documented history. The letters and journals of the women in the novel create an alternative storehouse for a female-focussed history that captures the true emotional and social realities of their lives. The letters exchanged between Pedro Tercero and Blanca unfold the hidden stories of resilience, love, pain, and defiance which would have been overlooked by the traditional accounts of the Trueba family. Concealed journals and letters allow women to have control over their narratives and act as powerful channels of defiance and self-sustentation. Journals and letters are used in *The House of the Spirits* to assert women's agency, to establish their identity, and resist societal constraints. In the work of other Latin American female writers, we find parallel and contrasting ways of doing the same. For instance, in the works of Maria Luisa Bombal, various narrative techniques are applied to assert the inner lives of the females in the novels. In her novel *House of Mist*, the female protagonist often feels trapped by patriarchal norms and their authority. Therefore, to resist these norms she uses her memory and fantasies to escape such a situation. However, unlike Allende's female characters, Bombal's female characters do not use letters and journals to document their trajectory but their fantasies and memories work as forms of resistance. Therefore, the writings of these female Latin American writers depict the harsh reality of a society in which women are confined and suppressed under the authoritarian act of patriarchs. Thus they find different means and media to resist such force and to document their histories and the lives of their foregoers to build a deep understanding of the family past, which also provides strength and resilience that can be passed on through successive generations.

## 2. TEXTUAL DISCUSSION

"Barrabàs came to us by sea, the child Clara wrote in her delicate calligraphy. She was already in the habit of writing down important matter, and afterward, when she was mute, she also recorded trivialities, never suspecting that fifty years later I would use her note books to reclaim the past and overcome terrors of my own" (Allende 7) –These are the opening lines of the novel in Clara's voice that introduce the readers to Clara's role as a recorder of family history. Therefore, it becomes clear that her journals will familiarize the readers with family events, magical activities, secrets, and family history. Alba, the granddaughter of Clara, relies on her (Clara's) letters and journals to understand her own traumatic past and heritage. Therefore, the very first lines of the novel indicate that Clara's habit of writing everything will structure the reader's understanding and reinforce journaling as a medium for capturing and preserving memories, empowering descendants, and unfolding many personal and political aspects that define the novel.

*The House of the Spirits*, which is set in Chile, features the life of the Trueba family across several generations. Its female characters (Clara, Blanca, and Alba) face an environment structured by a rigid power hierarchy and gender roles. But the letters and journals of these leading female characters become tools for the conservation and transmission of family history. Clara's notebooks provide the bridge between generations and allow them to claim control over their narratives. Clara del Valle is a figure of resilience and strength, indulging herself in her mystical world of spirits and visions. She is a clairvoyant who can move things from one place to another without touching them and can predict the future. Her letters are the primary source of a recorded family legacy. She records not only her daily life but also her dreams and her predictions that offer deep insights to her descendants. For instance, we get to know the power of letters when Blanca writes to her mother Clara when she was away from her and in an unhappy marriage.

Had it not been for the letters Clara and Blanca exchanged, that entire period would have remained submerged in a jumble of faded, timeworn memories. Their abundant correspondence salvaged events from the mists of improbable facts. From the very first letter she received from her daughter after her wedding, Clara could tell that her separation from Blanca would not last long. (Allende 280)

We see here how the writing of letters establishes solidarity among women and aids them with strength and resilience to cope with bad times. Another instance from the novel that displays the excellent benefits of letter takes place when Clara, along with her husband, goes to see Fèrula at her residence.

He groped his way, and a moment later lit a candle. His figure stood out grotesquely and his face, deformed by the light from below, floated halfway to the ceiling, while his giant shadow danced against the walls. Clara described this scene in her note books that bore witness to life in minute detail: the two dark rooms, their walls stained with damp, the small dirty bathroom without running water, the kitchen in which there were only a few dry crusts of bread and a jar with a little tea in it. (Allende 174)

This is how Alba comes to know about her poor aunt Fèrula and how she was treated by her father. We see how the journals and minute details of the event are relevant to the narrative of the novel, thus helping women in the novel to build solidarity and emotional connections with each other. Apart from these journals and letters, Alba's own writing also shapes the chronicle of the family history.

Alba is highly inspired by her grandmother's writing habit. Her writings become a medium through which she can process her affliction and trauma and conserve her family's heritage. Alba belongs to the last generation mentioned in the novel. She imbibes the habit of journaling from her grandmother; this enhances her understanding of her family and she learns to be resilient in the face of patriarchal oppression. During the time when she is tortured by her grandfather's illegitimate grandchild, Esteban Garcia, she remembers the writings of Clara, which aids her to cope and endure the affliction of the torture. Alba also starts writing in the doghouse in which she is caged to survive the pain. However, she does not write those thoughts physically on paper but piles up each thought and situation going through her mind so compactly that she narrates each incident in minute detail to her grandfather after she is evacuated from the doghouse (Allende 467). Journaling helps Alba to rebuild her identity after the traumatic events in her life and provides strength to her identity in a social upheaval. Therefore, journaling thoughts and daily activities assists women to fight and to negate the authority of the oppressors.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

My methodological approach for this article seeks to observe and analyse the importance of the role of journals and letters in Isabel Allende's novel *The House of the Spirits*, particularly emphasizing its symbolic role and also its narrative and thematic features. My research for this article applies a text-based and qualitative approach to examine how written trajectories and documents illustrate female agency, memory, and resilience against political and patriarchal oppression. A close reading of the novel *The House of the Spirits* correlates and registers scenes where journals and letters play crucial roles. Remarkable instances, such as Blanca's letters to her mother Clara, Alba's writings, Clara's writeup and journals, and Fèrula's emotional letters to her sister-in-law are foregrounded as axis points. During the close reading, each episode linked with journals and letters is decoded and analysed, based on key aspects such as identity, resilience, memory, and solidarity. These orderly annotations ensure a comprehensive view of the ways in which journals and letters contribute to the development of each female character and the depth of the theme. My primary source of this article is the text itself, prominently the paragraphs in which there are references to journals and the letters of females. I have also compared the techniques of other Latin American female writers that are related to the preservation of history with Allende's use of letters and journals in her novel *The House of the Spirits*.

### 4. CONCLUSION

The exploration of journals and letters in the novel *The House of the Spirits* unfolds many written records as a focal tool for preserving the heritage and memory that fosters resilience, female identity, and their agency. Fèrula, Clara, Blanca, and Alba use journals and letters to document family history, maintain bonds and solidarity among themselves across time. Allende's female characters voice their protest against both societal and familial constraints through journals and letters that are symbols of identity, continuity and legacy. In sum, *The House of the Spirits* is a novel that captures the essence of Latin American society with the help of the letters of her female characters, which preserve and carry concealed history. It is important to note here that the novel *The House of the Spirits* was itself developed from a letter written in 1981 by the author to her sick grandfather. The novel began life as a rooted personal project, but it accommodates the political, economic, and social trajectory of Chile.

Living in exile, Allende felt the need to connect with her family and heritage and she wrote to her grandfather to convey the stories, memories, and the core of Chile that he had passed to her and to conserve the history of her family in the face of persecution and the losses she bore. The letter was eventually transformed into the novel that also blends magical realism, political and personal history, depicting Allende's family legacy and Chile's political turmoil. It would not be wrong to say that Allende's letter as transformed into the novel *The House of the Spirits* helps its readers to have a deep understanding of Latin American society and the endurance of women in a patriarchal world.

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