

Mel Boland

Displacement in Isabel Allende's Fiction, 1982–2000



PETER LANG

Preface

Isabel Allende's work is suffused with experiences of, and references to, displacement, and her personal experiences of exile and migration have informed character development and the thematic content of her fiction. Allende's first foray into the world of fiction was the now globally and critically acclaimed *La casa de los espíritus* [*The House of the Spirits*] in 1982, a fictionalized panorama of twentieth-century Chilean society. *La casa de los espíritus* was written by Allende in self-imposed exile, and the reflections on and interrelations between personal, national and universal histories continue to inform her writing today.

This study examines the relevance of the concept of displacement to the seven works of fiction by Allende published between 1982 and 2000. This discussion comprises five chapters: in Chapter 1, displacement is introduced and traced through Allende's fiction in broad terms. In Chapter 2, the relevance of displacement to the development of the character of Esteban Trueba in *La casa de los espíritus* is explored through his relationship with inhabitants on his family's country estate, Las Tres Marías, and it is argued that Trueba's trajectory in the novel is underscored by a constant awareness of social and geographical displacement. In Chapter 3, appearance, disappearance and displacement are explored in Allende's second novel, *De amor y de sombra* [*Of Love and Shadows*], which was published in 1984. A carnivalesque reading of the text, informed by the work of Russian literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, is used to suggest that this novel displays an underlying coherence, and highlights rampant subversive activity, a key element in Allende's fiction. In Chapter 4, oral language and silence are examined in *Eva Luna* [*Eva Luna*] (1987) and the short-story spin-off collection, *Cuentos de Eva Luna* [*The Stories of Eva Luna*] (1989), and it is argued that Allende reinstates the primacy of oral language through written language in *Eva Luna*, while she illustrates the power of silence and reticence in *Cuentos de Eva Luna*. In Chapter 5, the question of cultural

displacement is examined through an analysis of three novels, published following Allende's relocation to the United States: that is, *El plan infinito* [*The Infinite Plan*] (1991), *Hija de la fortuna* [*Daughter of Fortune*] (1999) and *Retrato en sepia* [*Portrait in Sepia*] (2000). In this chapter, relationships between the individual and the community, as well as the variety of reflections of inner and outer conflicts experienced by characters, are explored.

This study argues that the recurring motif of displacement in Allende's writings illustrates the writer's concerted, nuanced engagement with issues of identity and a search for belonging. Allende's fiction moves beyond the confines of Latin America into a more international setting, and reflects her own experiences of displacement. Her fiction explores cross-cultural concerns of key relevance to contemporary global society. Moves in Allende's fiction towards the treatment of global concerns are juxtaposed with the growing importance of the individual, as a sense of displacement becomes increasingly internalized and indeed embraced by characters in her work.