CHAPTER 1
ISABEL ALLENDE AND THE MYTH OF JOAQUÍN MURIETA
Isabel Allende’s *Hija de la fortuna* (*Daughter of Fortune*, first published in 1999) challenges the very process of construction of memory and identity, and thereby, the process of mythification of reality, by using the popular Joaquín Murieta (or Murrieta or Murietta) myth as a catalyst. The present chapter explores Allende’s use of the Murieta myth in the context of the nineteenth century Americas, to illustrate the struggle of a first generation Latina in California.

This chapter is divided into three major sections. The first section lays down the backdrop of the Murieta myth. It gives a structural synopsis of the myth emphasising the cultural struggle centred on the myth. The second and the third sections constitute a detailed analysis of *Hija*. While the second focuses on the use of the Murieta myth in the novel and the process of mythification as depicted in the novel, the third shows how the novel actually distances itself from the popular myth and tells a different tale. On the one hand, these two sections relate the Murieta myth to the central thrust of the novel; on the other hand, delineate exactly how Allende explores the myth making process, and highlights, even as it rejects, the biased aspects of the myth by distancing her story from the myth.

I

Joaquín Murrieta es el producto de las circunstancias históricas ocurridas en California como resultado de la Guerra del 47 y el descubrimiento del oro el 24 de enero de 1848… (Leal, 1995: 2)
Joaquín Murrieta is the product of the historical circumstances occurred in California as a result of the War of 47 and the discovery of gold on 24th January 1848…

The news of the California gold rush broke out in 1848 and spread throughout the western hemisphere like a pandemic. Huge number of people from all over the world went out to California with the hope of becoming rich instantly. The temptation was much intense in the ‘poorer’ countries. In no time, the so-far deserted land was crushing under the weight of thousands of people from various parts of the world. And no sooner than this news of gold rush spread, United States of America snatched away this piece of land from México in 1850. The indigenous Californians were squeezed under the US army on the one hand, and loads of foreigners from all over the world on the other. Soon hierarchies were created on the basis of skin colour, and political and financial power to make the structure of Californian society quite complex:

…discrimination on grounds of perceived racial difference was a fact of life in California, as it was in most of America at this time. California Anglos generally considered men and women of Hispanic background to be more or less inferior… (Brands, 2002: 324)

Such a turbulent period shaped the conversion of the bandit Joaquín Murieta into the ‘Robin Hood’ hero.
A skeleton of the Murieta myth is as follows. Joaquín Murieta (or Murrieta or Murietta), either a Mexican or a Chilean, went to California during the gold rush. He was accompanied by a few members of his family. However, in California he was accused of several crimes. In 1853, Governor Bigler approved an act to capture or kill Joaquín, and authorized Captain Harry Love and company to do it. In the same year Captain Love killed two persons, supposedly, Joaquín and his accomplice Three-fingered Jack, and also received a reward. Joaquín’s head and Jack’s fingerless-hand were also displayed publicly in various parts of the country. The effect of this death and public display on the crime-graph of California was, however, contentious.

Soon after the public display a controversy arose (Ridge, 1995; Brands, 2002) regarding whether the person killed was actually the bandit Murieta. A number of articles appeared in various newspapers of the then California narrating the death of Murieta, sometimes projecting Murieta as a tragic hero, and sometimes denying the dead person to be the bandit Murieta. All these uncertainties, coupled with the mystery already attached

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1 Depending on the evidences obtained so far, most of the historians agree that there was a real person called Joaquín Murieta (or Murrieta or Murietta) who was born either in Sonora, in Southern Mexico; or in Quillota, Chile; in 1830 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joaquín_Murieta). A few versions state that there was actually a gang of five Joaquíns, namely, Joaquín Botellier, Joaquín Carrillo, Joaquín Murieta, Joaquín Ocomorenia, and Joaquín Valenzuela. (http://www.picacho.org/interest/Joaquín-murrieta.html). These versions, however, are not very widely accepted and it is only Joaquín Murieta who later becomes the mythic hero.

2 According to Brands he came to California – “…in the same migration of Sonorans that brought the first miners to Frémont’s Mariposa estate. Whether he actually worked on Frémont’s property is unclear, but unlike those Sonorans who headed back south in 1849, Joaquín stayed.” (2002: 324) William Mero adds that he was the son of Joaquin and Rosalia Murrieta, who later married Rosa Feliz. (Mero, 2008) The couple, along with a few other members of the Murieta and Feliz family came to California during the gold rush, in 1848-49. (www.cocohistory.com/ccctales.html).

3 Some versions (Ridge, 1955) claim that in California Murieta and the members of his family were mistreated by the “gringos”, which turn him into a revenge seeking bandit. Some other versions (Mero, 2008) claim Murieta to be a “cold-blooded killer of both Anglos and Orientals”. 

to the name Joaquín Murieta, enhanced the mythical element of the incident. Thus, the
ambience was pregnant enough to generate a myth.

The year after the execution of the supposed Joaquín Murieta, in 1854, an author
named John Rollin Ridge, better known in his pen-name Yellow Bird, published a book
titled *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta, the Celebrated California Bandit.*
This is the first novel of California, and also the first major and successful attempt to
mythify the life of Murieta – a culmination of the attempts which begun long ago in the
newspapers. Bird has never tried to elucidate his reasons for choosing the character of
Murieta, but it is said that the novel contains a lot of autobiographical elements. This
“dime novel” was an instant success and Murieta became a famous hero in California.

This fiction, however, was actually converted into ‘history’, when in 1859 the
*California Police Gazette* serially published the “true” history of Joaquín Murieta in ten
issues, which later was published as a paperback, *Joaquin Murieta: The Brigand Chief of
California.* This offers an elaborate version of the story portraying Murieta as a notorious
bandit, although a large part of the book is a verbatim copy of that of Ridge. Later the
myth was retold by a number of authors from various parts of the world, among which
the Spanish, French and Chilean versions are the most notables. One of the earliest
Chilean versions was by Roberto Hyenne, who adopted the myth from the French version
and in his book *El bandido chileno* (1906) he claimed Murieta to be a Chilean. Much

4 Jackson, in his introduction to Ridge’s book, has quoted a newspaper article which denied the death of
Murieta, engendering the controversy:

   It is too well known that Joaquin Murieta was not the person killed by Captain Love’s
   party at the Panoche Pass. The head exhibited in Stockton bears no resemblance to that
   individual, and this is positively asserted by those who have seen the real Murieta and the
   spurious head. (Ridge, 1955: XXV)

5 For a detail account of all the “piracy and re-piracy”, please refer to Jackson’s introduction to Ridge
(1955).
later, in 1962, appeared *Fulgor y muerte de Joaquín Murieta*, (*Splendour and Death of Joaquín Murieta*) a play by the famous Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, where he claimed Murieta to be a national hero, who fought for his countrymen in California. Thus the linguistic sign Murieta gradually becomes a mythic sign, which signifies a “Patriot”, an “Honourable Bandit” who protects his compatriots against the “gringos”, and slowly but surely, Murieta becomes a “recurrent myth” in Latin American literatures:

La leyenda de Joaquín Murrieta se extiende por dos hemisferios. Ha sido llevada al cine, al teatro, a la televisión. La narración ha pasado ya por casi cien versiones distintas en por lo menos, tres idiomas. Sin duda que el tema “Murrieta” es un mito recurrente en nuestros medios literarios. (Rojas, 1989: IX)

The legend of Joaquín Murrieta is spread across two hemispheres. It has been carried to film, theatre, and television. There exist almost hundred different versions of the narrative in, at least, three languages. Undoubtedly, the theme “Murrieta” is a recurrent myth in our literary systems.

All the versions of the Murieta myth, however, are exceptionally silent about Murieta’s sweetheart. The versions agree that Murieta was accompanied to California by his sweetheart/wife. The character of Murieta develops and changes across time,

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6 In fact, Neruda is one of those first authors to proclaim proudly Murieta’s Latin American identity. Ridge (1955) portrayed Murieta as a Mexican who had a reverence for the (North) Americans. The author of the Gazette has also followed Ridge in this regard, and has depicted Murieta as a person who hated his own culture and worshipped the North Americans. Thus both Ridge and the Gazette depicted Murieta from the perspective of the North Americans. In this sense Neruda truly wrote a birth certificate for Murieta, not only by making him Chilean, but the honourable bandit, “El bandido honorable.” (Neruda, 1972) Neruda’s Murieta felt no reverence for the “gringos”. On the contrary, Neruda delineated him as a national hero who protested against the exploitations of his compatriots in California, and also made them conscious about their Latin American identity, crossing the limits of narrow nationalism.

7 For a detail account of the incident, legend and myth of Joaquín Murrieta, see *Joaquín Murrieta: El Patrio* by Manuel Rojas. The book compares and contrasts minutely the ‘historical’ versions as well as the entire process of how Joaquín Murieta becomes the patriot or “El Patrio”.
revealing its potential strength to be used for various purposes. Nevertheless, none of the authors have paid any attention to the character of Murieta’s sweetheart. Although most of the versions refer to the sweetheart/wife, they still differ strikingly regarding the name of this wife or sweetheart. According to Ridge she was called Rosita. The Gazette claimed that after the murder of his first wife Caramela, Murieta fell in love with a woman called Clarina. According to Neruda, Murieta married Teresa during the trip to California. Thus none of these authors, who took pain to develop the character of a “bandit” into that of a “national hero”, paid any attention to the character of his sweetheart. She could not even gain a stable name, let alone a fully developed character; although, significantly, none of the authors denied her existence. The men-centric world, consciously or unconsciously, refuses to acknowledge the presence and importance of a woman in the life of a famous man, be it a bandit or a national hero. And from this point stems Allende’s attempt to de-mythify the Murieta myth. Allende explained in an interview with Katy Butler how she tried to be historically specific, but aimed also at the same time to portray history from a different perspective:

I found that almost everything written in the history books – and this is what they teach in school – had been written by the victors. The white males. …So my interest was to tell the story from the perspective of a woman and an immigrant of color. (Rodden, 2004: 271)

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8 The only exception is Marcus A. Stewart’s long verse *Rosita: A Californian Tale*, which, according to the author, is an attempt to blend the stories of Joaquin Murieta and Charley Parkhurst, a transvestite woman who became quite popular in California during 1860s. *Hija*, in fact, has some striking similarity with *Rosita*. 
By exploring the process of mythification, Allende actually unmasks the politics of patriarchies that conceals and belittles the role of a woman in the world.

II

Joaquin Murieta, however, is not the protagonist of Allende’s *Hija de la fortuna*. Allende’s protagonist is a foundling Eliza Sommers, and the book actually narrates her journey towards freedom. In this journey, the myth of Murieta plays the role of a catalyst.

Eliza Sommers, a foundling, was brought up in the house of the Sommers’ family in Valparaiso. This English family – consisting two brothers: Jeremy who worked in a British company, and John who was a captain of a ship and spent most of his time on sea; and a sister, Rose – lived in Chile. The family found Eliza, when she was a new-born baby, lying on their door step; and it was mainly due to Rose’s stubbornness that Jeremy was forced to accept that unknown baby in the house. Miss Rose wanted to make a “perfect English lady” out of Eliza, but when she was only 16 years old, Eliza fell in love with a worker of Jeremy’s office, named Joaquin Andieta. Their secret affair continued until the news of the California gold rush reached Chile, and Andieta, with the hope of becoming rich instantly, left secretly for California. Within a few weeks of his departure Eliza discovered her pregnancy and decided to go to California in search of Andieta. She left the Sommers’ house in secret and boarded a ship for California with the aid of Tao
Chi’en, the cook of John Sommers’ ship. Tao helped Eliza to survive the long journey and illness, and finally when they arrived in California, he, for some time, accompanied Eliza in her search for Andieta. Eliza, living a nomadic life, tried for almost four years to find out Andieta. Finally, being unable to find him she came back to San Francisco. There, while staying with Tao, she heard the news that the cut-off head of Joaquín Murieta would be displayed publicly, she went to see that head and replied “I am free”.

From the very beginning of this open-ended novel, Allende spells out the temporal and geographical backdrop of the story, not only within the format of the storyline, but also out of it. The title page of each chapter clearly mentions the time, and the map at the beginning of the book points out the importance of the geographical locations in the text. In fact, the map also shows the trajectory of Eliza’s journey, again drawing attention to the geo-political change of locations. Thus even before the formal beginning of the story, Allende attempts to situate her story within a proper geo-political and temporal background.

The novel is divided into three parts, each containing seven chapters. The first part, spanning from 1843-48, is set in Chile. It narrates Eliza’s arrival in the Sommers family, her childhood and adolescence days under the guidance of Miss Rose Sommers, and finally, Eliza falling in love with Joaquín Andieta. The second part narrates mainly Eliza’s secret voyage from Valparaíso to California during 1848-49. The third part is set in California right amidst the gold rush in 1850-53. Like many other novels of Allende, this novel is also narrated by multiple voices. Mainly it is a third person omniscient
narrator who narrates the story. Within that structure Allende has inserted the first person voice of Eliza speaking through her diary and letters to Tao.\(^9\)

Although *Hija* is not exactly a historical novel, still throughout the book Allende’s description of the socio-political situation of California corresponds exactly to the views of the historians. She also alludes to a lot of historical events, like the war between Mexico and United States, how Mexico lost its territory to United States, the Foreign Miners’ Tax etc. She portrays a truthful picture of the racial discrimination prevalent in the then Californian society. However, Allende has *never* referred to the historical person of Joaquin Murieta. Nor does she concern herself with the popular debate on whether this Murieta ever existed. She restricts herself to the realm of myth, and thereby explores the very process of mythification.

In order to explore the process of mythification Allende uses a character who will allow her to play on “History”, without getting entangled within it. The character of Joaquin Andieta – whose name resembles that of Murieta, but is not identical – is introduced in the first part of the novel as an eighteen year old man and a young intellectual with “the qualities of a natural leader.” (Allende, 2004: 59). He was a very poor man, but with an “electrifying personality”, and his dedication to the cause of people was evident since his early career:

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\(^9\) After the publication of Allende’s next novel *Retrato en sepia* (*Portrait in Sepia*) in 2000 it becomes clear that she has actually written a trilogy; and going by the storyline, *Hija* is the first part of it, *Retrato* the second, and *La casa de los espíritus* – Allende’s first novel, published in 1984 – the third and final part, a genealogy of the Sommers, Chi’en, del Valle and Trueba families spanning almost a hundred and thirty years, from 1830 to 1973 A.D.
No era hombre de muchas palabras este Joaquín, sino de acción, uno de los pocos con claridad y valor suficientes para transformar en impulso revolucionario las ideas de los libros… No poseía un abrigo decente, pero en invierno era el primero en madrugar para salir al repartir panfletos y pegar pancartas llamando a los trabajadores a la rebelión contra los abusos de los patrones… (Allende, 2007: 70)

This Joaquín was not a man of many words, but of action, one of the few with enough clearmindedness and courage to transform ideas from books into revolutionary impulses… He didn’t own a decent overcoat, but in winter he was the first to get up early to hand out pamphlets and paste up posters calling workers to rebel against employers’ abuses… (Allende, 2004: 59)

Eliza met this Andieta for the first time in the Sommers’ house – Allende specified the time explicitly, May 1848, to aid evocation of the Murieta myth – and happened to be head over heels in love with him – “Un río de lava ardiente la recorrió por dentro, la flaquearon los huesos y en un instante de pánico creyó que en verdad se estaba muriendo.” (94) [A river of flowing lava swept through her, melting her bones; and in an instant of panic she believed that she was actually dying. (81)]. Andieta, however, wanted to dominate Eliza from the very beginning by becoming her intellectual mentor, “mentor intellectual” (130).

The third person omniscient narrator also makes it clear that Eliza’s relationship with Andieta is neither based on love nor even on desire, but simply on an illusion – an illusion of being a ‘perfect lady’ with a husband, which has been infused into her mind by Miss Rose. Eliza was not discouraged by the fact that she could not communicate with

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10 All original quotations of *Hija* are from this edition. Henceforth only page numbers will be mentioned within parentheses after running quotations.

11 All English translations of *Hija* are from this edition. Henceforth only page numbers will be mentioned within parentheses after running quotations.
her lover. The purpose of Eliza’s education was to make her a perfect English ‘lady’ who existed for the sake of a husband; as was manifested through Miss Rose’s admonitions like:

Siéntate con las piernas juntas, camina derecha, no te apures, habla bajito, sonríe, no hagas morisquetas porque te llenarás de arrugas, cállate y finje interés, a los hombres les halaga que las mujeres los escuchen… (Allende, 2007: 431)

Sit with your knees together, stand up straight, never be in haste, speak in a low voice, smile, do not make faces because that causes wrinkles, be silent and feign interest, men are flattered by women who listen to them. (Allende, 2004: 392)

Such trainings never made Eliza conscious of her socio-political surroundings. Therefore, she understood nothing of Andieta’s overpowering political inclinations and his theories of social reform. Nevertheless, Eliza accepted Andieta without understanding him for she was taught the secret tactics of finding a ‘good’ husband was that she must allow the man to feel superior, “Debes conseguir que el hombre se sienta superior…” (87). Accustomed to such socialisation, Eliza felt what a ‘lady’ was supposed to feel – “Sólo deseaba servirlo incondicionalmente por el resto de su existencia, sacrificarse y sufrir para probar su abnegación, morir por él de ser necesario.” (131). [All she wanted was to serve him wholeheartedly for the rest of her life, to sacrifice herself and suffer to prove her selflessness, to die for him if necessary.” (115)]. Therefore, far from questioning her relationship with Andieta, Eliza began to idealize her lover “until he became an obsession.” (115). Her love for these ideas was so strong that she finally ended up in “inventing” a “perfect lover”: 
Había inventado un amante perfecto y nutría esa quimera con invencible porfía. Su imaginación compensaba los ingratos abrazos con su amante, que la dejaban perdida en el limbo oscuro del deseo insatisfecho. (Allende, 2007: 132)

… [Eliza] invented a perfect lover, and she obstinately nurtured that illusion. Her imagination compensated for the unrewarding embraces with her lover that left her in the dark limbo of unsatisfied desire. (Allende, 2004: 115)

Thus, the first part of the novel, which apparently, has nothing to do with the Joaquín Murieta myth, plays a dual function. On the one hand, it elaborates the ‘traditional’ image of an ‘ideal’ woman through Eliza; on the other hand, through the affair between Eliza and Andieta, Allende develops carefully the inconsistent character of Joaquín Andieta, her first step to create the Murieta-Andieta ambiguity. In December 1848, having received the news of California gold rush, Joaquín Andieta left Chile for California with the hope of becoming reach, marrying Eliza, and providing a decent life for his mother; and without any knowledge of Eliza’s pregnancy which Eliza discovered six weeks after his leaving. Allende never again brings back this Andieta in her novel. However, Andieta is always present in the novel through Eliza.

In the third part of the novel Allende moves on to the second step towards building up the Andieta-Murieta ambiguity, and in order to enhance the ambiguity she emphasises the disappearance of Joaquín Andieta. The third person omniscient narrator provides a detailed picture of Eliza’s search for Andieta, and gradually the search returns more and more ambiguous answers. At her very first enquiry regarding Joaquín’s
whereabouts, Eliza got a positive answer – “...Joaquín Andieta había partido en dirección a los placeres de Sacramento hacía por lo menos un par de meses...” (259) [...Joaquín Andieta had started off in the direction of the placers of Sacramento at least a couple of months ago... (231)]. The second enquiry, however, did not turn out to be that positive. This time a person informed Eliza that he had heard about a man named Joaquín whose last name might be Andieta – “Sabía de un tal Joaquín y el apellido le sonaba como Andieta...” (293). And then Joaquín Andieta disappeared completely, as none of the others could tell Eliza anything about Andieta. And gradually Andieta faded away even from Eliza's mind too:

Joaquín Andieta empezaba a esfumarse, su [de Eliza] buena memoria no alcanzaba a precisar con claridad los rasgos del amante, debía releer las cartas de amor para estar cierta de que en verdad él había existido, se habían amado y las noches en el cuarto de los armarios no eran un infundió de su imaginación. (Allende, 2007: 307)

Joaquín Andieta was beginning to fade away; her excellent memory could not limn her lover’s features clearly; she had to reread his love letters to be sure that in truth he had existed, that they had loved one another and that the nights in the room of armoires were not her invention. (Allende, 2004: 278)

However, while searching for Andieta, Eliza discovered that everyone in California had heard about a certain Joaquín Murieta. Thus, in the third part of the novel, for the first time, Allende introduces Joaquín Murieta. Nonetheless, she never refers to the character/person of Joaquín Murieta directly. The third person narrator refers to the
rumours and newspaper articles regarding Murieta, following the Murieta legend very carefully in all its details.

Eliza’s search for Andieta also enables Allende to point out the function of rumour and newspapers in mythmaking. Rumour, due to its oral and ‘public’ nature, has the great advantage of concealing the author’s identity.\textsuperscript{12} Newspaper – which supposedly should report \textit{facts} – seems to be an important and useful device of mythmaking. Its reputation as ‘factual’ has always helped the myth makers to claim verisimilitude for their stories.\textsuperscript{13}

En esos días salió en el periódico local una breve noticia sobre un bandido chileno o mexicano, no había certeza, llamado Joaquín Murieta, quien estaba adquiriendo cierta fama a lo largo, y ancho de la Veta Madre.” (Allende, 2007: 361)

During that time, a brief news item was published in the local newspaper about a Chilean or a Mexican – no one was sure which – bandit named Joaquín Murieta, who was becoming famous up and down the mother lode.” (Allende, 2004: 328)

Significantly, the physical descriptions of this Murieta tallied exactly with Eliza’s Andieta, which broadens the scope to create the Andieta-Murieta ambiguity. Once she asked the Three-fingered Jack, (a figure also associated with the Murieta myth) about Joaquín Andieta, describing the physique of Andieta. On hearing that description Jack

\textsuperscript{12} For a detail discussion on the role of rumour in mythmaking see the chapter on Mahasweta Devi.

\textsuperscript{13} It is interesting to note here that Ridge, the first person to mythify Joaquín Murieta, has also, on more than one occasion, quoted newspaper articles in his book.
could identify the man with Joaquín Murieta. Further, through Jack, Allende also brings into play the controversy regarding Murieta’s citizenship:

– No muy alto, con el pelo y los ojos negros, la piel blanca, como yo, pero no nos parecemos. Es delgado, musculoso, valiente y apasionado. Cuando habla todos se callan.
– Así es Joaquín Murieta, pero no es chileno, es mexicano. (341)

He’s not very tall, and he has black hair and eyes and white skin, like me, but we don’t look alike. He’s thin, muscular, brave and passionate. When he talks everyone listens. That’s Joaquín Murieta all right, but he’s not Chilean, he’s Mexican. (Allende, 2004: 310)

Thus Allende deploys all the details of the Murieta myth including the popular controversy regarding his origin and his accomplice the Three-Fingered Jack; and simultaneously heightens the Murieta-Andieta ambiguity.

In fact, Eliza’s Andieta resembles Murieta not only in the first name and physique, but also in ideology and personality. Eliza could relate the exploits of Murieta with the political standpoint and aspirations of the passionate youth Andieta:

Aunque al principio había rechazado la posibilidad de que su Joaquín fuera el mismo de los espeluznantes atracos, pronto se convenció de que el personaje calzaba perfectamente con el joven de sus recuerdos. También él se rebelaba contra el abuso y tenía la obsesión de ayudar a los desvalidos. (Allende, 2007: 396)

Although at first she had rejected the possibility that her Joaquín was the one responsible for the bloodcurdling attacks, she soon was convinced that the person jibed perfectly with the young man she remembered. He, too, had
rebelled against abuses and was obsessed with helping the downtrodden. (Allende, 2004: 360)

Actually, Murieta’s ‘Robin Hood’ image conforms exactly to Andieta’s political stances, which the narrator describes as his “political romanticism” (112) –

También [Andieta] se consideraba enemigo de la oligarquía, por inútil y decadente, y del gobierno, porque no representaba los intereses del pueblo, sino de los ricos…El joven estaba dispuesto a jugarse la vida por la gloria inútil de un relámpago de heroísmo… (Allende, 2007: 129)

He (Andieta) also considered himself an enemy of the useless and decadent oligarchy, and of the government because it did not represent the interests of the people, only the rich…He was prepared to give his life for the pointless glory of a burst of heroism…( Allende, 2004: 112)

The Murieta-Andieta ambiguity actually helps in unravelling the myth making process, which Allende does without ever referring directly to the Murieta myth, but following its trajectory. In the fifth chapter of the third section Allende uses the character of Jacob Freemont to develop the myth of Murieta, or rather, to demonstrate the myth making process. Incidentally, the character of Jacob Freemont bears a lot of similarity with that of John Rollin Ridge.

Allende’s attempts to compare and contrast her own story with popular versions of the Murieta myth become ever so prominent when in Freemont’s story we find a distinct echo of that of Ridge. Ridge was born in Georgia and belonged to the Cherokee community. According to hearsay, after killing a man he fled to California, where he worked as a journalist. Later he wrote the chronicle of Murieta in his pen name Yellow
Bird. Allende creates the character of Jacob Todd, (the person who later becomes Jacob Freemont) an Englishman, who goes to Chile with the aim of preaching the Protestant faith. However, Allende deftly uses the situation to point out the materialistic worldview of Todd, as well as to tear away the evangelical mask of religion:

En una de esas fanfarronadas de hombre vividor con demasiada cerveza en el cuerpo, apostó en una mesa de juego en su club en Londres que podía venderbiblias en cualquier punto del planeta. (Allende, 2007: 22)

With the braggadocio of a high-living man with too much beer in his belly, he had bet at a gaming table in his London club that he could sell Bibles anywhere on the planet. (Allende, 2004: 13)

Such imposed religiosity was soon replaced by amorous challenge, which eventually led Todd’s Bible salesmanship to a disastrous end, and he – not wishing to be identified as the fraud missionary Jacob Todd – changed his name into Jacob Freemont, and went to California to write articles on the gold fever.

In the context of mythification, Allende also brings in the question of reception/consumption. Although Freemont was writing his articles from the “New World” of California, Allende explicitly specifies Freemont’s target readers by mentioning that his articles on gold rush were published in “England as well as in Boston and New York” – “…escribía artículos de prensa sobre la fiebre del oro, que se publicaban regularmente en Inglaterra y también en Boston y Nueva York.” (321). Meaning, myths generated at the cost of the ‘third world’ are consumed by the ‘first
world’. In this context it is also important to remember that Miss Rose’s pornographies were also very popular in Europe.

Allende explicitly reveals how Jacob Freemont deploys the myth as a commodity-in-demand that will satisfy his material desires. While explaining why suddenly Freemont becomes so interested in mythifying a few stray hearsays, Allende indicates the reasons behind fabrication of a myth. Freemont realised that stories on the decaying gold rush would no longer attract his readers in Boston or England, where the bloodcurdling stories of Murieta – “a gold mine more productive than many in the mother lode.” (339) – could create a “sensation”, thereby bringing him money and fame:

Thus, by delineating how Freemont, quite consciously, created a legend of Murieta out of the then socio-political situation, Allende draws attention to the socio-political condition that generates myths. María Herrera-Sobek (2000) has analysed the mythification of Murieta in the light of Eric Hobsbawm’s theories on social bandits.
Herrera-Sobek believes that the social bandits ("bandido social") are products of the society. A society, when feels threatened by some external force – especially when an agrarian society is threatened by industrial or capitalist forces – creates such a heroic figure to give vent to their feelings. The people, in the hope of changing the reality, actually mythify it, and sustain their hopes through the myths. Given the racial and social discriminations, the desire of the poor miners to become rich instantly, and the Anglos’ intention to take advantage of the miners’ poverty and their own political power; the Californian society was quite ripe to accept a legendary figure like Robin Hood as their saviour. Freemont (and Ridge) actually uses this situation to present his mythic hero. He therefore, carefully edits and suppresses facts to meet the demand for a legendary figure:

Freemont sospechaba que eran varios individuos y no uno solo, pero se cuidaba de decirlo, eso habría descalabrado la leyenda. En cambio tuvo la inspiración de llamarlo “el Robin Hood de California”, con lo cual prendió de inmediato una hoguera de controversia racial. (Allende, 2007: 372)

Freemont suspected that there were several “Murietas”, not one, but he was careful not to write that because it would have diminished the legend. On the other hand, he had the inspired ideas of labelling Murieta “the Robin Hood of California”, which immediately sparked a wildfire of racial controversy. (Allende, 2004: 338)

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14 In fact, these social bandits have remarkable similarity with the epic heroes. Both these groups are personifications of the best values of their respective community, they are representative figures of that community and are worshipped by the community.

15 Ridge had also labelled his Murieta as the Rinaldo Rinaldini of California, which draws attention to the similarities between Allende and Ridge –

It is now fully ascertained that there were only two (Joaquins), whose proper names were Joaquín Murieta and Joaquín Valenzuela, the latter being nothing more than a distinguished subordinate to the first, who is the Rinaldo Rinaldini of California. (Ridge, 1955: 7)
Thus, Freemont began to create a legendary hero improving upon the stray rumours and hearsays. He utilized his position as a newspaper reporter to create this hero, and following the traditional formulae of the heroic epics\textsuperscript{16}, he describes the physique of the man – “Sin haberlo visto nunca, el periodista lo describía como un joven de viril estampa, con las facciones de un noble español y coraje de torero.” (373). [Without ever having seen him, the newspaperman described Murieta as a young man of virile mien, with the features of a noble Spaniard and the courage of a bullfighter. (338-39)]. Freemont rightly guessed that a vivid physical description of his hero would lend veracity to his stories.\textsuperscript{17}

By drawing on both rumours and newspaper reports, Allende also points out the difference between the two. Rumour, by virtue of its oral nature, can be circulated anonymously, and to a certain extent, its power emerges from this very anonymity. Newspaper reports, however, are written, and must bear some sort of a signature. It is the signature that renders newspaper reports as ‘facts’, and the absence of a signature turns rumours into ‘fantasy’. Since his newspaper articles required a signature, Freemont wanted to use this veracity to its fullest by making his articles more experiential. And interview is the best method to do so, as it requires face-to-face presence (at least, in mid-nineteenth century) of both the interviewer and the interviewee:

\textsuperscript{16} A detail physical description of the epic hero is one of the various formulae of almost all the primary and secondary epics in all over the world. For a detail discussion on epic formula, please refer to Dev Sen (1968). In fact, the thematic structure of the Murieta legend bears striking resemblance with that of the epics. For thematic structures of epic, see Dev Sen (1974).

\textsuperscript{17} In fact, it again calls on mind the similarity between Freemont and Ridge, for the latter has also described Murieta with great care and detail:

He was then eighteen years of age, a little over the medium height, slenderly but gracefully built, and active as a young tiger. His complexion was neither very dark or very light, but clear and brilliant, and his countenance is pronounced to have been at that time, exceedingly handsome and attractive. (1955: 8-9)
Se le ocurrió [a Freemont] entrevistar al tal Joaquín, si el tipo realmente existía, para escribir su biografía si fuera una fabula, el tema daba para una novela. Su trabajo como autor consistiría simplemente en escribirla en un tono heroico para gusto del populacho. California necesitaba sus propios mitos y leyendas, sostenía Freemont… (Allende, 2007: 373)

He [Freemont] decided he must interview this Joaquín, if the fellow really existed, and write his biography, and it were all a fable he would turn into a novel. His work as author would consist simply of writing in a heroic tone to satisfy the common man’s tastes. California needed its myths and legends, Freemont maintained. (Allende, 2004: 339)\(^{18}\)

In the newspaper Freemont wrote about his imagined meetings with Murieta with two major purposes. Firstly, the interviews bore irrefutable proof of his camaraderie with Murieta, thus providing an experiential flavour for his ‘fictions’. Secondly, these “interviews” increased Freemont’s esteem among his readers and colleagues:

…el fugitivo en persona le había encargado [a Freemont] la misión de escribir sus proezas, porque se consideraba el vengador de los españoles oprimidos y alguien debía asumir la tarea de dar a él y a su causa el lugar correspondiente en la naciente historia de California. (Allende, 2007: 377)

…the fugitive himself had commissioned him [Freemont] to write about his feats because he thought of himself as the avenger of oppressed Spanish peoples and someone had to assume the responsibility of according him and his cause a proper place in the developing history of California. (Allende, 2004: 343)

\(^{18}\) Freemont’s concern for creating myths and legends for California again reminds us of Ridge, who has expressed a similar concern; that he has written the book, “…to contribute my mite to those materials out of which the early history of California shall one day be composed.” (Ridge, 1955: 7).
Thus, in Allende’s novel, with “little journalism” and “more than enough fiction” (343) Freemont constructed the legend of Joaquín Murieta, the job that in real life, Ridge did. Soon Freemont’s articles achieved enough fame for him and his Murieta, and as there was a ready demand for a heroic figure, gradually Murieta became a popular hero, and then a myth:

Sus artículos sobre Joaquín Murieta se habían convertido en la obsesión de la prensa. Surgían cada día testimonios ajenos confirmando sus palabras; docenas de individuos aseguraban haberlo visto y lo describían igual al personaje de su invención. (Allende, 2007: 394)

His articles on Joaquín Murieta had become the hottest item in the press. Every day came new testimonials confirming what he had written; dozens of individuals swore they had seen Murieta and described him exactly as the character Freemont had invented. (Allende, 2004: 357)

In this context, Allende also draws attention to the process of selection and elimination inherent in the process of mythification. Whenever Freemont came across controversial statements he, “…selected the opinions that best suited his image of the bandit” (342) and portrayed him accordingly. Thus Freemont was consciously manipulating the image of Murieta. In fact, this process of selection and elimination is one of the most important and basic step towards mythification.

Freemont’s version of the Murieta story tallies almost exactly with that of Ridge, which, on the one hand, shows the power of Ridge’s story; and on the other hand, highlights the process of mythification in real life. Numerous ‘exploits’ of Murieta that Allende mentions also corresponds with the popular versions of the myth, for instance,
killing several Americans and six Chinese people etc. She also follows the historical facts, like the decree of the governor, the reward for Murieta’s head, and captain Love’s effort to kill Murieta. Finally her version of the death of Murieta also tallies with the legendary versions, including the fact that his head and Jack’s hand were on public display for several days. However, at the end, moving away from Ridge’s story, Allende raises doubt regarding Murieta’s death in order to keep intact the ambiguity that she has created so far:

Tampoco había quien pudiera identificar a Joaquín Murieta; él (Freemont) se presentó a ver la cabeza y no pudo asegurar que fuera la del bandido que conoció, aunque había cierto parecido, dijo. (Allende, 2007: 438)

Nor had anyone been able to identify Joaquín Murieta: Freemont himself went to see the head and could not be sure it was the bandit he knew, although it certainly resembled him, he said. (Allende, 2004: 398)

Unlike Ridge, Allende, has maintained the Murieta-Andieta ambiguity, because it is precisely this ambiguity that she is utilising. For Ridge it was important to ascertain Murieta’s death in order to ensure the historical value of his work and to prevent any sequel to crop up. Allende, however, maintains this ambiguity till the end of the novel. Thus through this novel, she, on the one hand, explores the myth making process – the process through which Joaquín Murieta became the legendary hero, “El Patrio”; on the other hand, exploring this entire process of mythification helps her to point out the gender

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19 Ridge has stated explicitly that Murieta actually died, “It was important to prove, to the satisfaction of the public, that the famous and bloody bandit was actually killed, else the fact would be eternally doubted…” (Ridge, 1955: 155) As a contributor to the history of California Ridge’s attempt was to wipe off any doubt that might hamper the veracity of his text.
biased nature of the myth or the myth making process; Simultaneously, through her own narrative – the narrative of Eliza – Allende creates a feminist version of the Murieta myth.

III

As her first step towards deconstructing the making of memory/history/reality, Allende explores the process of its construction by challenging the very idea of memory/history, for history is nothing but a record of memory. Little Eliza was given two different versions about her appearance in the Sommers’ house, one by the English lady Miss Rose and the other by Mama Fresia, the indigenous servant of the house. The former asserted that she was a child with English blood who was left in the Sommers’ doorstep covered in “batiste silk” and “mink coverlet” and with six gold coins: “…para ser educada en los sólidos principios de la fe protestante y el idioma ingles” (12). […to be brought up in the solid principles of the Protestant faith and the English language. (4)]. Mama Fresia, on the other hand, revealed to her the actual version of the event – that she was left at the Sommers’ doorstep in a soap crate, and covered with nothing but a sweater – proclaiming her indigenous origin. Eliza, however, did not like this version due to its stark contrast to Miss Rose’s version. She, therefore, created a version of her own that
was more realistic than Miss Rose’s version, but not as rustic as Mama Fresia’s, which
depicted how memory could be manipulated. Further, by mentioning that Eliza writes
down her invented memory in her diary, Allende even challenges the veracity of ‘diary’,
which is considered to be important for writing one’s biography:

Eliza se convenció de que era hija de un naufragio y no de
una madre desnaturalizada capaz de abandonarla desnuda
en la incertidumbre de un día de marzo. Escribió en su
diario que un pescador la encontró en la playa entre los
restos de un barco destrozado, la envolvió en su chaleco y
la dejó ante la casa más grande del barrio de los ingleses.
Con años concluyó que ese cuento no estaba mal de todo:
hay cierta poesía y misterio en lo que devuelve el mar.
(Allende, 2007: 15)

Eliza convinced herself that she was the child of a
shipwreck and not of an unnatural mother capable of
abandoning her...She wrote in her diary that a fisherman
had found her on the beach amid the debris of a beached
ship, wrapped her in his sweater, and left her at the finest
house in the English colony. As time passed she concluded
that this story wasn’t bad at all: there is a certain poetry and
mystery about what the sea washes up. (Allende, 2004: 6)

This example of construction of memory, however, contrasts the omniscient
narrator’s claim that Eliza is bestowed with an excellent memory – “Todo el mundo nace
con algún talento especial y Eliza Sommers descubrió temprano que ella tenía dos: buen
olfato y buena memoria.” (11). [Everyone is born with some special talent, and Eliza
Sommers discovered early that she had two: a good sense of smell and a good
memory.](1) Such apparent contradictions actually intensify the challenge that Allende
poses to Memory, History and such other concepts. The challenge becomes more explicit
when, a within a few lines, the narrative alludes to plural versions instead of an Absolute one, by revealing that Eliza has “many memories, both real and illusory”, and it is almost like living two lives – “…sus recuerdos reales o ilusorios eran muchos y fue como vivir dos veces.” (11).

Allende’s concept of memory/reality is expounded through a simile when the third person narrator compares Eliza’s memory to the hold of a ship – “…su memoria era como la barriga del buque donde se conocieron, vasta y sombría, replete de cajas, barriles y sacos donde se acumulaban los acontecimientos de toda su existencia.” (1). […her memory was like the hold of the ship…vast and somber, bursting with boxes, barrels, and sacks in which all the events of her life were jammed.(1)]. Signifying that, memory is a fixed and close space, and like the hold of a ship, it is also crammed with events or happenings, and at the same time, continuously moving. This movement is spatial as well as temporal. Thus, Allende deftly introduces her readers to the plurality of history/reality and process of fabricating history/memory/reality, or the process of mythification of reality – a very important aspect of the novel, which she has explored in greater details in connection to the myth of Murieta.

Memory, in fact, plays a very crucial part in the process of mythification. Myths have often been defined as articulation of collective memory. (Burridge, 1967). Real incidents are often mythified out of the desire to memorize them, and lack of any proper evidences or documents pave the ground for mythification – as has been the case with the Murieta myth – like Eliza creates a false memory of her birth. In this novel, in contrast to the process of mythification, Allende has constantly emphasized the need to memorize.
One of the most important means of memorisation is documentation. Eliza preserved Andieta’s love letters as ‘documents’ of their affair. Initially she thought these documents would help her in retrieving her lover, but finally, she realised that ‘documents’ could serve only to remember the lost person or thing, but could not help in retrieving that person or thing. On deciding to burn her love letters she refused to carry on the burden of the memory of her lost lover. However, she found it necessary to “immortalize them [the love letters] in the photograph” as an evidence of the incident, as a proof that her memory of Andieta was a “real” memory and not “illusory” (1); and moreover, her act of searching for Andieta was real. Long ago, Miss Rose also “had her portrait painted with three hands” (395), but Eliza, being a bit more advanced in time, wanted a daguerreotype. Thus Allende uses not only writing but also photographs as methods to concretise memory.20

Eliza’s journey from Valparaiso to California is the pivotal point of the text, which, eventually, turns out to be not merely a physical journey but also a mental journey for Eliza. It carries her not just from Chile to California, but from the life of a “protégée” to that of an independent human being. Allende here delineates the process of how a person can ‘become’ a human being. This is not exactly an existentialist process of ‘becoming’, but rather what Paulo Freire (1973, 1998) calls the process of ‘humanisation’, the process through which a person learns to relate her/himself critically to her/his surroundings. Eliza’s English and French education never taught her this process of humanisation. This was something that she learnt from her experience. She had never faced any existentialist dilemma earlier. When she set out for California, she

20 For a detailed study of the use of photographs in this novel, see André (2002).
was pretty sure that the only thing she wanted was to find out her lost lover. With all the love and care in the Sommers house, Eliza was also given to understand that she was a “protégée” — “…no soy de esta familia…Si me porto mal me mandan donde las monjas papistas.” (33) [...I do not belong to this family...(and) if I do not behave they will send me off to the Papist nuns. (24)]. She was certain that the Sommers would not tolerate her relationship with Andieta, a poor worker of their company and devoid of English blood; let alone the news of her pregnancy. And once she left the Sommers’ house in secret, there was no way she could go back there, because simply by leaving her home in secret she had lost the honour of a ‘lady’. All these reasons made her desperate to seek out Andieta. Hence she made the abysmal trip to California in the hold of a ship. Her miscarriage in the hold of the ship symbolizes break up of her tie with Andieta, with her past, with her life as a “protégée”; where she had to practice ways of attracting and satisfying a man/husband.

The process of humanisation becomes clearer when in California Eliza falls “in love with freedom” (275). Her roaming self-education makes her question the household-education that she has received in Valparaiso — “She had aspired to virtue but now she questioned the meaning of the word.” (275). In Sacramento, the third person omniscient narrator draws attention to Eliza’s rearing process in Chile. While trying to care for her, the Sommers had actually dehumanised her, and the dehumanised state was manifested through her fear:

Había vivido entre cuatro paredes en casa de los Sommers, en un ambiente inmutable, donde el tiempo rodaba en
The journey helps Eliza to overcome all her fears, to know the world, and to stand face to face with the world, with life. By overcoming her fears she actually triumphs over several social and moral barriers that the society has created on a woman’s way to become humanised. Stepping out of those boundaries Eliza felt, “she was flying free, like a condor” (276). She was also aware of her new-found strength – “Estoy encontrando nuevas fuerzas en mí, que tal vez siempre tuve, pero no conocía porque hasta ahora no había necesitado ejercerlas.” (305). [I am finding new strength in myself; I may always
have had it and just didn’t know because I’d never had to call on it. (276.)] The experiences of her nomadic life matured her and humanized her.

The narrative strategy of the text also gives us important insights into the process of Eliza’s humanisation. Significantly, at this point, while depicting Eliza’s transformation from an ‘English lady’ into an independent human being, the third person omniscient narrator of the text, suddenly takes recourse to the first person voice of Eliza speaking through her diary and letters to Tao. This shift in the narrator’s voice provides the readers a direct insight into Eliza’s psyche, and functions as an effective strategy to explore the process of her psychological transformation. Once she has depicted the transformation, Allende again goes back to the third person omniscient voice.

Further, the transformation is heightened by the use of imagery – an advantage that fiction has over History. Eliza’s psychological maturity is beautifully delineated with an imagery when in California Eliza wakes up one morning “with the full light of dawn in her face” (276) – “la luz del amanecer en la cara…” (305); in contrast to the “ambiente immutable” [stagnant atmosphere] of her Valparaíso home where “la línea del horizonte apenas se vislumbraba a través del atormentadas ventanas” (304) [she could barely glimpse the horizon through distorted windowpanes. (275)]. Through these two imageries, “the full light of dawn in her face” and a “glimpse of the horizon through distorted windowpanes”, Allende delineates a crucial change of Eliza’s state of being. Her life in Valparaíso was like a life inside a cocoon, a confined life, where she could only have a “glimpse of the horizon through distorted windowpanes”; whereas, in California there was no barrier, no “distorted windowpanes” between Eliza and the open
sky. So she could wake up with “the full light of dawn in her face”. Eliza is now enlightened enough to face the world, and no longer needs a sheltered life.

The process of humanisation becomes complete when Eliza stands on a par with the outer world, when she understands the ‘other’ and is not constantly afraid of ‘them’. In Valparaiso, she has never been able to understand Andieta’s character. She made it her ‘duty’ to love him, without comprehending. Nevertheless, the new Eliza in California begins to understand Joaquín Andieta, she can explain his “political romanticism”. Now that Eliza herself has got a taste of freedom, she begins to understand Andieta’s obsession with freedom:

Al fin entiendo a Joaquín, cuando robaba horas preciosas de nuestro amor para hablarme de libertad. De modo que era esto…era esta euforia, esta luz, esta dicha tan intensa como la de los escasos momentos de amor compartido que puedo recordar. (Allende, 2007: 306)

Finally I understand Joaquín, why he stole precious hours from our love to talk to me about freedom. So, this is what he meant … it was this euphoria, this light, this happiness as intense as the few moments of shared love I can remember. (Allende, 2004: 277)

However, this idea of humanisation is not based on an abstract idea of de-sexed human beings; on the contrary, it acknowledges multiple identities of a person. When Eliza really becomes an independent human being, she no longer feels it necessary to camouflage herself as a man. Later, back in San Francisco, Eliza’s elaborate and “rapturous exploration” (388) of her body is actually a return to femininity, a passionate
celebration of femininity, and this femininity has no conflict with Eliza’s other works/identities. While dressing as a woman again she realizes that, “…con cada prenda que se ponía iba conquistando sus dudas y afirmando su deseo de volver a ser mujer.” (433). […]with each garment she put on she was overcoming her doubts and confirming her desire to be a woman again.”(393)]. Eliza is now humanised because she can relate herself critically to her surroundings (Freire, 1973), acknowledging her multiple identities.

Although this new-found femininity is also gendered to a certain extent, yet it is something different from the ideas of femininity that Eliza has been accustomed to. While wandering in Mother Lode in search of Andieta in the guise of Joaquín’s brother, Eliza mentioned to Tao in a letter, “Es un fastidio ser hombre, pero ser mujer es un fastidio peor.” (306). [It is tedious to be a man, but being a woman is worse still. (277)]. Because, since her childhood days Eliza has been taught to fear her sexual identity:

Mama Fresia la había prevenido contra el albur de la feminidad, “te cambiará el cuerpo, se te nublarán las ideas y cualquier hombre podrá hacer contigo lo que le venga en gana”, decía… (Allende, 2007: 433)

Mama Fresa had warned her about the risks of womanhood: “Your body will change, your thoughts will be jumbled, and any man will be able to do what he wants with you,” she had said… (Allende, 2004: 393)

Thus Eliza was taught to consider her sexual identity as a barrier on her way to humanisation. However, in California, she learnt through her experiences that her sexual
identity could coexist peacefully with her ontological identity. The day she awakened “with the full light of dawn in her face”, it dawned to her that “she had lost her fear of fear.” (276).

Allende, however, foregrounds the positive aspects of feminisation by showing that Eliza’s feminisation actually helps her in becoming more fully human. All the qualities that helped Eliza survive in California – especially cooking, reading, playing piano and nursing – are learnt as part of the process of her feminisation in Chile; and the last one was sharpened by Tao. In fact, the life of a protégée also prepared Eliza to accept hardships. All these qualities helped her to communicate with the ‘other’; unlike Andieta, who had none of these merits.

The character of Eliza, in fact, is very much like Joaquín Andieta; a likeness which enhances the difference of their attitude, and thereby highlights the critique of Andieta/Murieta. Unlike Andieta, Eliza never had any grand scale ambition of saving humanity; she did not want to “go” anywhere, but incidentally, in this novel Eliza did all those things that Andieta aspired to do, and even more. However, her methodology was radically different. Andieta considered himself as one of the populace and wanted to serve the people, but his methodology was bookish and not pragmatic. The critique of that methodology becomes explicit when the third person narrator points out the impracticality of Andieta’s sincere efforts to transgress the boundaries:

No poseía un abrigo decente, pero en invierno era el primero en madrugar para salir a repartir panfletos y pegar pancartas llamando a los trabajadores a la rebelión contra los abusos de los patrones, o a los marineros contra los
He didn’t own a decent overcoat, but in winter he was the first to get up early to hand out pamphlets and paste up posters calling workers to rebel against employers’ abuses, or sailors against captain’s and ship companies, an often futile labor since most of those to whom the notices were directed were illiterate. His calls for justice were lost at the mercy of the wind and human indifference. (Allende, 2004: 59)

In Hija, sometimes Allende has blended variety of tones in the voice of the third person narrator, for instance, consider the above quotation. The first half of the quotation “He didn’t own…ship companies” tells about Andieta’s endeavour to protest against the “employers’ abuses”. The fact that he did not have a “decent overcoat”, yet he “was the first to get up early” even in the wintry mornings of Chile highlights the sincerity of his efforts of fighting against the ‘powerful’. He fought for justice, and he did not care even if he himself was hurt. However, immediately after that, the narrator points out the drawbacks of Andieta’s earnest attempts by referring to it as “an often futile labor”. In the last sentence, a third voice acknowledges that Andieta’s “calls” are indeed for “justice”. This voice shows empathy and respect for this poor would-be leader, who dreams to make people conscious about the “employers’ abuses” and to establish equality. The sympathy, however, is immediately followed by criticism, pointing out the shortcomings of Andieta’s methodology – “his calls for justice were lost at the mercy of the wind and human indifference” – that establishing ‘justice’ in a country where most of the population is illiterate is not an easy task, that pamphlets and posters are not the best
methods of campaigning there, and each country or rather, each situation demands its own method of campaigning. Thus the author deftly blends several voices in these two sentences utilising the power of language to its fullest.

In contrast to Andieta’s concept of justice, Allende emphasizes the importance of care by drawing attention to the qualitative difference between what Andieta wanted to achieve by establishing justice, and what Eliza finally achieves through her care for others. Through her emphasis on care Allende actually contrasts and challenges the male-centric versions of the Murieta myth, which revolve around men who went to the foreign land to be the “masters of their destiny” (277) and ignores completely the sufferings and contributions of women who went there, not being tempted by gold, but simply to care for their near and dear ones. Ironically, however, these women are remembered neither in the ‘mainstream’ history, nor in the ‘popular’ legends and myths; neither by the ‘powerful’ nor by the ‘powerless’. Andieta wanted to establish equality, but his method was violent. The night before Andieta left for California, he, along with his friends, “…él se llevó la mano derecha al corazón para jurar en nombre de la patria que daría su vida por la democracia y la justicia.” (143) […placed his right hand over his heart and swore, in the name of the republic, that he would give his life for democracy and justice. (127)]. In California Eliza was never able to find any trace of this man; only heard tales of theft and murder ascribed to a certain Joaquin Murieta who, apparently, cared neither for democracy nor for justice. Nevertheless, she herself spent her nomadic days in serving others – be it by cooking excellent food for them or by treating and curing the injured and
ill persons, or by writing letters for them. She could even take the risk of amputating Jack’s fingers.

By helping and respecting the ‘others’, Eliza creates a world of her own which may not have political democracy or justice, but which is democratic and just in the true sense of the words. Eliza tried to establish equality through caring for others, by sharing others’ sorrows, by making sure that no one was hurt. A number of scholars believe that caring is a feminist attribute, one of the various “virtues” associated with women. Carol Gilligan (1982) has argued that the process of moral development of women always differs from that of men, because women always care for others. From their childhood women learn to relate themselves to the other through the mother, while men always resort to violence because they cannot relate themselves to the ‘other’ so easily. Women or the care agent therefore, emphasizes on the need to build up and maintain relationships with others. According to Gilligan, due to their distinct moral development, women always prioritize the need of not hurting anyone, while men learn to prioritize justice, and do not care whether they hurt anyone in the process of establishing justice. Following this logic the difference between Eliza and Andieta’s methodology can be ascribed to their gendered difference. Joaquín emphasizes on justice, but does not ‘care’ for the ‘other’, while Eliza always tries to make sure that nobody is hurt.

However, it is important to note that besides using care as a strategy as opposed to violence, Allende is also challenging the very concept of care as a feminine attribute. It is rather a human attribute, for not only Eliza but Tao, the Chinese “zhong yi” (healer) and John Sommers’ cook, also cares. In fact, he helped Eliza to improve her nursing skills
that she learnt from Mama Fresia. And for the same reason he tried to rescue the “singsong girls”, at the cost of his own money, and finally paying for it his own life.21

Significantly, it is Tao, a person with strong belief in roots, who initiates Eliza in her journey to freedom, which highlights that by leaving her ‘home’ in secret and wandering all over the world, Eliza does not reject the idea of home or root. Their friendship is a very important aspect of the novel. Tao helped Eliza to leave Valparaíso in secret and to board the ship for California, and also saved her life when she was about to die in the hold of the ship from the miscarriage. Gradually, he became her best friend, her only correspondence during her solitary wanderings in Mother Lode. Nevertheless, unlike Eliza, Tao was a person deeply rooted in his culture. He knew his origin and had profound respect for that – “Tao Chi’en podía recitar los nombres de todos sus antepasados, hasta los más remotos y venerables tatarabuelos muertos hacia más de un siglo.” (14). [Tao Chi’en could recite the names of all his ancestors, back to the most remote and venerable great-great-grandparents dead now for more than a century. (5)]. He was a person who wanted to amalgamate the positive aspects of various cultures for the greater good of humanity, like while treating his patients he blended his knowledge of western medicines along with his acupuncture needles.

While challenging the definitions of home and root fabricated by the ‘powerful’ group(s), Eliza also constructs new definitions from the point of view of the ‘powerless’. The very birth of Eliza – a child conceived out of wedlock by unknown parents, and abandoned soon after birth – challenges the patriarchal notions of family and

21 This has been narrated in Retrato.
motherhood. By abandoning the newborn baby, Eliza’s mother challenges the very concept of an ‘ideal’ mother who is expected to be responsible and caring enough to raise a child; even if that child is conceived out of wedlock, that is, out of social sanction, and may be, without love. Nevertheless, Eliza, in the process of humanising herself, also construes new definitions of home, root and world. For her, home is not the closure to live protected by someone’s authority, the basic unit of the state, with a lot of rules and regulations. She wants to make the world her home by building new relationships, incessantly extending the circle of interactions. Even after knowing that she was a mere “protégée” of the Sommers, she cared for Miss Rose and decided to send her a portrait. Thus on the one hand, Allende depicts the importance of roots; on the other hand, shows that family is not necessarily a biological one. Thus Allende not only challenges certain concepts fabricated by the ‘powerful’, but also offers a different definition of those concepts.

It is, however, very significant that, while challenging the concepts like family, home, roots and such other, Allende does not create yet another power structure by imposing any particular definition(s) of these concepts upon the world. On the contrary she wants to create an inclusive world. For instance, unlike Eliza, Tao Chi’en had a biological family. Even though the family did not care much for Tao, he wanted to be buried in his village beside his ancestors. Eliza – though does not share Tao’s concept of root or spiritual beliefs, and through her life establishes a completely different definition of root – respects Tao’s wish and undertakes the journey from San Francisco to China to
bury her husband in his homeland (in *Retrato*).\textsuperscript{22} Thus Allende is challenging the concept of a world where everything is defined by the ‘powerful’ and is creating a polygonal world with a variety of persons and opinions. Eliza and Tao’s marriage (in *Retrato*) actually signifies that there is no conflict among these various views, and in fact, they can be complimentary to each other. Significantly, Tao is the one who believed in the philosophy of karma and transmigration of souls. He believed, “You don’t go anywhere in life, Eliza, you just keep walking.” (395). But it is Eliza who puts this theory into practice by continuing to walk for the rest of her life.

The process of humanisation helps Eliza not only to understand herself and her fellow persons, but also to communicate with the ‘others’ and contribute to their process of humanisation. By selecting a Chinese companion for Eliza, Allende brings in the Chinese connection. It is historically true that a lot of people from China went to California during the gold rush. Incidentally, the journey from Valparaíso to California is a psychological journey not only for Eliza, but also for Tao. This formidable “zhong yi” was brought up to worship the traditional image of an ‘ideal’ Chinese woman, and he dreamt to marry such a “delicate young woman with beautiful feet” (170), who would – “…le daría hijos varones y sería fácil domar su carácter para hacerla verdaderamente sumisa.” (192). […give him male children and it would be easy to tame her nature and make her truly submissive. (171)]. The last thing he wanted was to “live the rest of his days with a wife who has large feet and a strong character.” (171). He also married such an ‘ideal’ woman, but unfortunately her beautiful “golden lilies” (170) made her too

\textsuperscript{22} Eliza’s journey does not end in *Hija*. It continues in *Retrato*. Despite having a ‘settled life’ with Tao and their children and grand-daughter, after Tao’s death she goes to China to bury Tao’s dead body there, and after that she becomes a globe trotter.
weak to survive. The shock of her death made Tao realize the necessity of good health. This Tao Chi’en gradually fell in love with the determined and strong character of Eliza. She became his best companion, medical assistant and finally he had to seek her help in saving the “singsong girls” – again crossing the boundaries of gender, nation and culture. This transformation actually shows how a biased person comes to accept and acknowledge the presence and contribution of women in daily life, in the world, in history.

Allende deftly contrasts the transformation of Tao, to the myth of Murieta to underline the biased nature of the myth and the very process of myth making. Besides criticising this biasness, she also demonstrates that this biased perspective can be changed, and the change can contribute to the greater advantage of humanity. Because, it is only with the active help of Eliza, that Tao was able to save a few “singsong girls”.

The thematic of exile is very important in most of Allende’s fictions. Allende has explained in an interview (Richards, 2008) that by exile she meant alienation from the majority. In this sense, a marginalised person is always in exile, be it in or out of the country. And most importantly, Allende views this state of exile as a positive force of life which helps a human being realise her/his full potential, and thus contributes in the process of humanisation:

I would say that my protagonists and most of my characters are always marginals. Even if they're not exiled in the sense

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23 In various novels (La casa de los espíritus, De amor y de sombra, Inés del alma mía), Allende has used exile as a recurrent theme and in most cases she has emphasised on the positive aspect of exile. A number of scholars have ascribed this to the fact that Allende herself has spent a few years in exile. In fact, there striking resemblances between Eliza and Allende.
that they have to leave the country. They are exiled from the big umbrella of the establishment. I like people who stand on the edge and therefore are not sheltered. And that is when you have to bring out all the strength that you have inside and if you live sheltered you never use it, because you don't need it. But when you go to a situation that is extreme – like a war or whatever or when you're a martyr – then you need all of that strength and you realize that you have this incredible source of energy inside. That it's there when we reach for it. (Richards, 2008)

Eliza and Tao represent two different varieties of forced exile; the former is forced by the situation, and the latter is forced physically. However, in both cases Allende emphasises the positive aspect of exile. Eliza’s life in Valparaiso was a sheltered life. In her case exile signifies exile from her country, her family, from her known world. The moment she set out to California – although she did it willingly – she knew that the door of that world has closed for her. She told Tao, “In Chile a woman like me is worse off than one of your singsong girls.” (364) However, it is this exile that taught her to surpass her trainings of conducting herself like a perfect English ‘lady’ and to become a human being. She realised her full strength only when she left that shelter and stood face to face with the world. In course of the journey she realised that so far she had been only a ‘lady’, but then, transgressing a number of boundaries, she became a human being. Tao, on the other hand, was abducted from his own country because there was one sailor short in John Somers’ ship. But finally when Tao ended up in California, he realised the difference between that country and his own. And although he always wanted to go back to his own country, he could never do so in his life, for he realised and accepted the fact
that in California he could utilise his strength to its fullest, while in China he would be only a “Fourth Son”. So he thought, “I’m better off here” (364).

On the one hand, Eliza and Tao’s decision to dwell in San Francisco draws attention to the luring aspect of the ‘West’, on the other hand, on deciding to stay back in San Francisco, they actually accepted their position in the fringes of the society. For in USA a Latina like Eliza and a ‘celestial’ like Tao would never be able to become part of the ‘mainstream’. Even though Allende points out that “Racism is nothing new” (363), on leaving their country, both Eliza and Tao, give up their privileged positions that they enjoyed in their own country. In this sense their exile continues throughout their life.

Through Eliza’s exposure to the world at large, Allende also challenges the concepts of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ women. In California Eliza earned her living either by cooking or by nursing; two attributes generally associated with the model of ‘feminine’ and are considered as duties of ‘good’ and ‘virtuous’ women. Eliza learnt the first from Mama Fresia, and the second jointly from Mama Fresia and Tao – transgressing the boundaries of class, race, culture and nation. And interestingly, during the epidemic, it is Joe Rompehuesos (in the English translation referred as Joe Bonecrusher) and her sex workers, the “soiled doves”, who helped in nursing the sick and the injured. In fact, it was with the help of these women that Eliza operated the fingers of Jack. During the epidemic of dysentery Joe and her girls looked after the ailing persons, and again, the third person omniscient voice explained that Joe and her girls were grateful for having these chances to care for the others. Due to their profession, the sex workers are generally considered as ‘evils’ or ‘impure’. Nursing the ills gave the “soiled doves” a chance to feel “virtuous”,

68
‘noble’ and ‘selfless’. This, on the one hand, highlights the construction of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ women; and on the other hand, challenges the construction by depicting that even the ‘bad’ sex workers can be ‘good’ and caring:

Apenas se enteraba de que alguien estaba en trance de muerte en alguna cabaña lejana Joe pedía prestado un par de caballos en la herrería y se iba con Babalú a socorrer al desgraciado. …Joe hacía de comer para el enfermo, lo limpiaba, le lavaba la ropa y lo consolaba releyendo por centésima vez las cartas de su familia lejana,…Si el hombre estaba muy mal, Joe lo envolvía en mantas, lo atravesaba como un saco en su cabalgadura y se lo llevaba a su casa, donde las mujeres lo cuidaban con vocación de enfermeras, contentas ante la oportunidad de sentirse virtuosas.” (Allende, 2007: 332-33)

As soon as Joe heard about someone near death in some distant cabin, she borrowed a couple of horses from the blacksmith and rode with Babalú to help the poor devil. …Joe would cook for the stricken miner, clean him up, wash his clothes, and console him by reading letters from his far-off family for the hundredth time…If the man was really bad off, Joe would wrap him in blankets, throw him over her horse like a sack of flour, and take him back home, where the girls would look after him with the dedication of nurses, happy to have the chance to feel virtuous. (Allende, 2004: 301)

Racism, is another important thematic in this text. Allende explores various facets of racism in various contexts. The fact that race plays a very important role in the process of mythification is depicted by the difference between the ‘white’ and the Latin American versions of the Murieta myth. Besides a vivid and realistic description of racism in California during the years of gold rush, Allende also depicts other facets of racism. For instance, how in China, the Americans are regarded as “fan güey” or the hatred against
the Indians in Chile. As John Sommers put it, “here (in Chile) everyone has a touch of Indian blood, even those of the upper classes. They do not admit it, of course. Indian blood is hidden like the plague.” (19).

Throughout the novel, Allende has problematized the notion of gender by challenging the concepts like masculine and feminine. Men and women have, generally, been regarded as two binary opposites, defined by a lot of binary terms like, intelligent-emotional, strong-tender, brave-timid, and so on and so forth. (Bhasin, 2000) Almost all the women characters of Allende actually trounce these binaries. For instance, the madam of the “travelling bawdy house”, Joe Rompehuesos is a “large woman with hyperbolic breasts” who prefers to dress “in men’s cloths”. (283). She regarded herself as “…one of God’s serious mistakes, a man condemned to the body of a woman…” (331). Nevertheless the miners were very fond of this woman because she had “a motherly heart” (301) because she cared for everybody. The apparent contradiction implies that caring has nothing to do with femininity. Allende has challenged not only feminine and masculine attitudes, but also aptitudes through Paulina del Valle. She had a rare knack for business, and finally, she proved to be better in business than her husband. Most importantly, unlike many women, Paulina was also bold enough to claim a percentage of her husband’s profit.

Eliza challenges the popular notions of masculine and feminine through her dress, her courage and her intellect. She was intelligent enough to surmise the privileged position of men in this world. Therefore, in California she dressed like a man to gain a share of that privilege. Here she draws attention to the comfort of men’s clothing, as
opposed to women’s, pointing out how dressing ‘customs’ can also be hierarchical – “Se sentía tan cómoda en ropa de hombre que se preguntaba si alguna vez podría vestirse nuevamente de mujer.” (326). [She felt so comfortable in men’s cloths that she wondered whether she would ever be able to dress like a woman again. (295)]. Apart from comfort, the men’s clothing gives her something much more valuable – it gives her freedom – “…la ropa de hombre le daba una libertad desconocida, nunca se había sentido tan invisible. …Acostumbrada a la prisión de las enaguas, ahora respiraba a todo pulmón.” (249). [man’s clothing gave her an unfamiliar freedom; she had never felt so invisible…Accustomed to the prison of her petticoats, she could now breathe deeply.(222)].

Although Eliza used men’s clothing in California, her confusions clearly depict how deep-seated a ‘custom’ can be. While her stay with Joe Rompehuesos and company as the Chile Boy, sometimes, Eliza has to play the role of an “ingénue”. And although she played it quite successfully, her confession to Tao that this role playing was actually affecting her mental stability, showed the power of dressing ‘custom’. Women’s dresses are not only designed to impede their movements, but are also made a part of their ontological identity. Significantly, this confession comes from the first person voice of Eliza, which heightens the confusion:

…y todo el mundo se maravillaba de lo bien que hacía el papel de mujer. Tuve que dejarlos porque la confusión me estaba enloqueciendo, ya no sabía si soy mujer vestida de hombre, hombre vestido de mujer o una aberración de la naturaleza. (Allende, 2007: 303)
everyone was amazed by how well I played the part of a woman. I couldn’t stay with them though, because the confusion was driving me crazy; I didn’t know whether I was a woman dressed as a man, a man dressed as a woman, or an aberration of nature. (Allende, 2004: 274)

Eliza also challenges the popular binary of ‘strong’ men and ‘weak’ women. In her disguise of Elías Andieta, Eliza has always been criticised by the giant Babalú the Bad for being a “lily-livered weakling” (297), for not being tough and strong like a man, while Joe’s girls have always regarded her as a homosexual. But eventually it turns out that only this “delicate Chile Boy” (307) has the courage and nerve to amputate Jack’s fingers in order to save him from gangrene. Once the amputation is over, even Babalú acknowledges the strength of the “delicate Chile Boy”, which heightens Allende’s mockery of such concepts:

Babalú, el Malo, quien había permanecido lo mas lejos posible del espectáculo, se acerco tímidamente, con su gorro de bebe en la mano.
– Eres todo un hombre, Chilenito – murmuro, admirado.
(Allende, 2007: 340)

Babalú the Bad, who had kept his distance from the spectacle, walked up timidly, baby’s cap in hand, and admiringly murmured: “You’re a real man, Chile Boy.”
(Allende, 2004: 308)

The politics behind patriarchal control of women’s sexuality is exposed through the characters of Eliza, Miss Rose and the sex workers. By continuing her relationship
with Andieta irrespective of the family’s disapproval, Eliza challenges the familial control over a women’s body. Besides, her relationships with Andieta and Tao, challenge the class and racial hierarchies, respectively; for Andieta was too poor for the Sommers’ status and Tao was a “celestial”. By selecting them, Eliza also refuses to conform to Miss Rose’s ideas, that women marry in order to be maintained, “Ninguna mujer con dos dedos de frente se casa para que la entretengan, sino para que la mantengan.” (86). [No woman with an ounce of sense gets married to be entertained, she marries to be maintained. (74)].

Eliza’s protector, the perfect English lady Miss Rose, protests against the patriarchal control by refusing to marry. Miss Rose never made any explicit protest against her disrupted affair with Bretzner. However, her protest becomes much more intensified when the third person narrator reveals that this ‘lady’ is actually the author of a series of very popular pornography signed by “An Anonymous Lady”. An interesting insight into sexuality and patriarchy can be found in how successfully these books transgress the boundaries of class, nation and culture: “En Europa circulaban secretamente en ediciones de lujo entre señorones y coleccionistas, pero las mayores ganancias se obtenían de ediciones para consumo popular.” (319). [In Europe, they circulated secretly in deluxe editions among wealthy gentlemen and collectors, but the greatest profits came from the editions for popular consumptions. (288)].

24 Nevertheless, it is also important to note that despite the tiring process of becoming a lady, Miss Rose actually nourishes Eliza’s freedom-seeking spirit from the very beginning, which Eliza confesses later – “she (Eliza) was grateful to her for the large spaces of internal freedom she had given her.” (12).

25 In fact, there are a lot of similarities between Eliza and Miss Rose. The first affairs of both these women were catastrophes, and both of them were able to overcome it in their own ways.
In this novel the body becomes a recurrent motif, be it male body or female. The significance of the body varies according to the time, space and context (Foucault 1979, 1995). Allende gives us a clear physical description of almost all the major characters in the novel. The descriptions may not be elaborate, but they make it easier for the readers to imagine the body of that character. And it is important because generally we are used to think that a person is a combination of mind and body. However, Allende actually breaks this construct and depicts how ‘body’ is a cultural construction.

The construct that female sexual body is a commodity to be consumed by the male is thoroughly challenged by the sex worker Azucena Placeres, who advised Eliza explicitly that, “Si para comer hay que vender el poto, se vende. No puedes fijarte en detalles a estas alturas, niña.” (245). [If in order to eat you have to hustle your ass, you’ll hustle your ass. You can’t be choosy at this point girl. (220)]. Breaking a lot of social taboos she gives women the right to use her body as she wants. On the other hand, we find Ah Toy, one of the various historical characters of this novel, who charged “an ounce of gold for the privilege of looking at her.” (293). It is interesting to note here that both these characters deploy the patriarchal construction of ‘female body as a commodity’, but they used it for their own gain. In fact, all the sex workers in the ship regarded their profession as a way to freedom and wealth, and therefore, rejected the proposals for marriage – “…pues habían hecho tan penoso viaje para ser libres y ricas, dijeron, no para convertirse en sirvientes sin sueldo del primer pobretón que les propusiera casamiento.” (241). […]they said, they had made this tedious voyage in order to be free and rich, not to become an unpaid servant to the first beggar who asked them to

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26 Allende’s sex workers are mostly revolutionary characters. In her first novel, La casa, she created the character of a sex worker, Transito Soto, who established a sex workers’ cooperative.
marry. (216)]. Besides challenging the institution of marriage, such rejections also open up a different horizon for the ‘body commercial’.

Presentation of female sexual body as commodity is nothing new, but, so far, it was restricted mainly to the patriarchal media. Allende’s ‘prostitutes’ deployed a similar strategy; only in this case, they are not mere subjects/commodities, but also the ‘entrepreneurs’. They deftly exploited the male obsession with the female sexual body to earn their living. Besides, the abuse and exploitation of the female body has been delineated through the “singsong girls”, and the flourishing enterprise of Chinese prostitution in the United States of America, which is also a historical fact. In contrast to these characters, Eliza’s passionate celebration of her body contrasts the patriarchal construction of the female sexual body.

‘Clothed body’ provides interesting insight into the system of patriarchies and cultural imperialism. The society determines how a male or female body should be clothed, and thus clothing becomes a part of human identity. The power of clothing is emphasized through Eliza’s identity crisis that she faced in the disguise of Elias Andieta. The role of apparels as a device of cultural imperialism is expressed through Tao Chi’en. In America, he had to cut off his queue and dress like an American in order to be well received among the Americans. On deciding to dress as an American, Tao Chi’en succumbs to the hegemony. The intensity of such hegemonic power becomes explicit when Tao’s American clothing and haircut can arouse “a certain awe” even among the Chinese, although apparently they reject the American fashion. Such connections between dress and respect reflect clearly how clothing is an important means of cultural hegemony:
Su nueva figura destacaba en la muchedumbre del barrio chino, pero descubrió que lo aceptaban mucho mejor afuera y abrían las puertas de lugares que antes le estaban vedados. …La trenza se consideraba sagrada y la decisión de cortársela probaba el propósito de no volver a China e instalarse de firme en América, una imperdonable traición al emperador, la patria y los antepasados. Sin embargo, su traje y su peinado también causaban cierta maravilla, pues indicaban que tenía acceso al mundo de los americanos. (Allende, 2007: 367-68)

His (Tao’s) new aspect made him stand out in Chinatown but he discovered that he was much better received outside it, and that doors opened that had been closed to him before. …A queue was considered sacred and the decision to cut it proved that he did not intend to go back to China but, rather, to stay in America, an unpardonable betrayal of the emperor, his country, and his ancestors. His clothing and his haircut, nevertheless, were also the source of a certain awe, for they indicated that he had access to the world of Americans. (Allende, 2004: 334)

In contrast, Miss Rose Sommers’ body offers a much complicated case. She designed her dresses according to a London magazine, again being a prey to the popular construction of female clothed body. Nevertheless, she did not follow the local dressing ‘customs’ – “No usaba, como las chilenas, un manto negro para cubrirse cuando salía…a pesar de que en la calle solían mirarla como si fuera una cortesana.” (35). [She did not, like Chilean women, wear a black mantle over her head when she went out…even though people stared at her in the street as if she were a courtesan. (26)]. It is noteworthy here, that her courage to refuse to dress in accordance with the social norm of Chile, perhaps stems from her English identity, her sense of belonging to a ‘superior’ culture.
In spite of being a ‘spinster’, Rose refuses to view this status as a stigma and thus challenges the patriarchal construction of women sexuality. On the other hand, by accepting the ‘standards’ of a ‘beautiful’ female sexual body, she succumbs to the patriarchal notion of ‘beauty’ and ‘feminine’:

Not only in the context of the body, but in several other contexts too, Allende has underscored the process of cultural hegemony, particularly, the English influence in Chile. All the Sommers were proud of their English identity so much so that even their house in Valparaiso was designed after London-style, irrespective of the discrepant climate, landscape and life style:

...la casa pretendía imitar el estilo en biga entonces en Londres, pero las exigencias del terreno, el clima y la vida de Chile habían obligado a hacerle modificaciones sustanciales y el resultado era un adefesio. (Allende, 2007: 14)
...the house was meant to imitate a style then in vogue in London, but the exigencies of landscape, climate, and life in Chile had forced substantial changes and the result was an unfortunate hodgepodge. (Allende, 2004: 6)

Jacob Todd, the new Englishman in Chile noticed that even the “Signs on several shops were in English” (21).

Cultural imperialism in the guise of religion is another important focus of the novel. The English missionary Jacob Todd came to Chile in order to sell Bible and spread Christianity. John Sommers pointed out to him that, “Las creencias ajenas son supersticiones, Mr. Todd. Las nuestras se llaman religión.” (27) [Interesting that the beliefs of others are labelled mere superstitions, Mr. Todd. Ours we call religion. (18)]. Allende also draws attention to how religion is deployed to subjugate women. For instance, as Miss Rose’s guest pointed out that in Chile, doctors are not permitted to use anaesthesia on women, because, “Aquí hay mucha oposición de los católicos para eso. La maldición bíblica sobre la mujer es parir con dolor…” (36) [Here we encounter major oppositions on the part of the Catholics. The biblical curse on women is that they bring forth children with pain...(26)], nevertheless, men might be exonerated from their curse to “earn their living from the sweat of others’ brows.”(27).

Eliza’s voyage is actually a journey towards humanisation, towards declassification. Tao Chi’en initiates Eliza into this journey, but she makes this journey alone. Eliza’s changing of dress before the voyage is actually a symbol of her declassing
herself. Along with the cloths she also shreds off the false notions of gender, class etc., that she has learnt in the patriarchal society:

A medida que sus atuendos de niña inglesa se amontonaban en el suelo, iba perdiendo uno a uno los contactos con la realidad conocida y entrando inexorablemente en la entrena ilusión que sería su vida en los próximos años. Tuvo claramente la sensación de empezar otra historia en la que ella era protagonista y narradora a la vez. (Allende, 2007: 170)

As the articles of a young English lady’s clothing piled up on the floor one by one, she was losing contact with known reality and irreversibly entering the strange illusion that would be her life in the months to come. She had the clear sensation of beginning a new story in which she was both protagonist and narrator. (Allende, 2004: 152)

This process of declassification ripens in California, where standing right amidst the multitude without even Tao to protect her, Eliza overcomes her life of a dependent and becomes an independent human being. While spending her days along with other miners; eating, drinking and sleeping with them, sharing their hopes and sorrows, Eliza realizes that transgressing her identity of a ‘lady’, she has become a human being, a part of the mass. The shift in the narrator’s voice at this point from third person to first person has been an excellent strategy to delineate Eliza’s conscientization.27 By recounting her experiences to Tao in various letters, Eliza truly becomes both the protagonist and the

27 Another term borrowed from Paulo Freire. Freire uses the term “conscientização” to refer to the process of becoming conscious about one’s state of dehumanization from which point begins one’s struggle to become humanized. For details, please see Freire (1973).
narrator. So far, she has been only a ‘daughter of fortune’, a person totally dependent on fortune. But now, symbolically, she becomes the sole controller of her life:

Ahora soy uno más de los incontables aventureros dispersos por las orillas de estos ríos translúcidos y los faldeos de estos montes eternos. Son hombres orgullosos, con solo el cielo por encima de sus sombreros, que no se inclinan ante nadie porque están inventando la igualdad. Y yo quiero ser uno de ellos. Algunos caminan victoriosos con una bolsa de oro a la espalda y otros derrotados sólo cargan con desilusiones y deudas, pero todos se sienten dueños de sus destinos, de la tierra que pisan, del futuro, de su propia irrevocable dignidad. Después de conocerlos no puedo volver a ser una señorita como Miss Rose pretendía. (Allende, 2007: 305-6)

Now I am only one of thousands of adventurers scattered along the banks of these crystal-clear rivers and among the foothills of these eternal mountains. Here men are proud, with no one above them but the sky overhead; they bow to no one because they are inventing equality. And I want to be one of them. Some are winners with sacks of gold slung over their backs; some, defeated, carry nothing but disillusion and debts, but they all believe they are masters of their destiny, of the ground they walk on, of the future, of their own undeniable dignity. After knowing them I can never be the lady Miss Rose intended me to be. (Allende, 2004: 277)

Towards the end of the novel, upon her return to San Francisco, Eliza goes back to a classed and gendered identity; nevertheless this identity is different from her previous identity. In San Francisco Eliza becomes a woman who works and earns her own living, who, despite being a Chilean, lives in a Chinese barrio, with a Chinese who dresses as an American, and who provides shelter to the “singsong girls” in her own
house in order to save them. Eliza was used to transgressing boundaries since her childhood – the invisible boundaries between Miss Rose’s space of an English lady and Mama Fresia’s space of an Indian maid-servant:


Nevertheless, this Eliza did within her home and as a child. In San Francisco, as a woman, she breaks the boundaries which are far stronger than the invisible wall between Miss Rose and Mama Fresia. She breaks these boundaries quite consciously and knowingly, assuming the full responsibility for it. Thus, crushing a number of social ‘norms’ Eliza – unlike the previous ‘lady’ Eliza – dares to live her own life in her own way. In fact, due to all the uncertainties of her origin, Eliza realizes early in her life that, “What matters is what you do in this world, not how you come into it…” (5); and throughout her life she lives up to this theory.
At the end of her journey, Eliza cannot find Andieta, but she succeeds in her journey of humanisation. Breaking through the life of a protégée in an English ‘upper’ class family, Eliza becomes one of multitude, she becomes humanised, and above all, she becomes her own self. In fact, in course of her journey she realizes that she is actually not looking for a lost lover, “No solo se había cansado de buscarlo, en el fondo prefería no encontrarlo…” (409) [Not only was she tired of looking for him [Andieta], but deep down she did not want to find him…(370)]. Hence, the very question of whether she found Andieta, became irrelevant. Allende, therefore, does not feel the need to answer this question. Nonetheless, she makes it clear that Eliza achieves what she has intended to achieve. After her journey and all the nomadic experiences, finally Eliza realizes that she is “free”, and thus she fulfils the quest for freedom:

– ¿Era él? – preguntó Tao Chi’en
– Ya estoy libre… – replicó ella… (Allende, 2007: 439)

“Was it him?” asked Tao Chi’en.
“I am free,” she replied…. (Allende, 2004: 399)

In this novel, Allende successfully portrays a polygonal world with various persons and opinions. She has carefully chosen the backdrop of California gold rush, so that she will be able to depict a wide variety of people, a world as inclusive as possible. However, this polygonal world is, by no means, a utopia. Apart from the map at the beginning, throughout the novel Allende’s constant references to historical events and characters, and a vivid portrait of the then socio-political situation prove that the novel is grounded into lived reality. In contrast to this reality – through the character/myth of
Murieta – Allende exposes the process of mythification to demonstrate that both the ‘reality’ and the ‘myth’ created in that reality, are equally biased in nature. She draws attention to that invisible force which shapes the discourses of both the ‘powerful’ and ‘powerless’ groups through certain beliefs, institutions or ‘customs’. Simultaneously, through the story of Eliza and Tao, she shows that it is possible to construct a less-biased reality/history/world.

Allende’s *Hija* thus becomes not only another Latin American version of the Murieta myth, but a feminist reading of the myth. Further, by making her protagonist an indigenous American, a motherless child, a ‘protégée’ in an English family, a first generation ‘latina’ immigrant in California, a woman who dresses as a man and lives with other men or sometimes with some “prostitutes”, and later in a Chinese barrio with a Chinese man who dresses like an American, Allende adds several dimensions to her feminist reading of the myth, making her feminism not just a version of a ‘western movement’ but an uprising ‘from below’. Through this ‘fiction’ she tells us a story ‘from below’, a story which has never become a part of ‘history’.