

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Isabel Allende—novelist, feminist, and philanthropist—is one of the most widely-read authors in the world, having sold more than 75 million books. Chilean born in Peru, Isabel won worldwide acclaim in 1982 with the publication of her first novel, *The House of the Spirits*, which began as a letter to her dying grandfather. Since then, she has authored more than twenty five bestselling and critically acclaimed books, including *Daughter of Fortune*, *Island Beneath the Sea*, *Paula*, *The Japanese Lover*, *A Long Petal of the Sea* and her most recent memoir, *The Soul of a Woman*. Translated into more than forty two languages, Allende’s works entertain and educate readers by interweaving imaginative stories with significant historical events.

In addition to her work as a writer, Allende devotes much of her time to human rights causes. In 1996, following the death of her daughter Paula, she established a charitable foundation in her honor, which has awarded grants to more than 100 nonprofits worldwide, delivering life-changing care to hundreds of thousands of women and girls. More than 8 million have watched her TED Talks on leading a passionate life.

She has received fifteen honorary doctorates, including one from Harvard University, was inducted into the California Hall of Fame, received the PEN Center Lifetime Achievement Award, and the Anisfield-Wolf Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2014, President Barack Obama awarded Allende the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor, and in 2018 she received the Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters from the National Book Foundation. She lives in California.

- [Author’s website](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Each chapter begins with a quote from Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. How do those quotes frame the chapters? Was there a particular quote you liked best? Did your attention to these quotes change when Neruda became a character in the novel?
2. Discuss the significance of the title, A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA. What do you think it means?

3. Which character did you feel most drawn to, and why?
4. One page 41, Allende writes, “Despite this, the American officer still believed in the triumph of socialism. To him, equality was not only possible, but inevitable, and he practiced it like a religion.” How are ideals like socialism and equality represented in this novel? What other big concepts are examined?
5. What were your first impressions of Victor Dalmau and Roser Bruguera? How did your impressions change as the characters themselves transformed throughout the course of the novel?
6. When first asking Roser to marry him in order to secure a spot on the ship ferrying refugees to Chile, Victor asks if affection and respect can be enough for her. Do you think those two feelings are enough for any relationship, whether platonic or romantic? In what circumstances?
7. In the beginning of A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA, Allende writes about the many thousands of terrified refugees escaping to France, where a campaign of fear and hatred awaited them, about how nobody wanted these “filthy fugitives” or “repugnant beings who were going to spread epidemics, commit robberies and rape, and stir up a communist revolution.” Do you think those same sentiments towards refugees exist today? Why do you think refugees are so often stigmatized in history and in present day?
8. Each of the main characters experiences love at some point in the story --- Roser, Guillem, Victor, Ofelia, etc. What did you think of their different love stories? Which did you find the most realistic, the most heartbreaking or the most compelling? In what ways does love drive the plot of the book?
9. What role do politics play in this novel? How does Allende use conversations between characters --- like Juana, Felipe and Isidro --- to portray the tumultuous political climate during this time period? Why do you think these characters had different political opinions? Do you think different generations are destined to have conflicting opinions?
10. What do you think of Ofelia’s storyline? How did you feel about her decision to keep the baby and her family’s deception in telling her it died during childbirth? How was her life shaped by the decisions of men, from her father to her eventual husband Matias? What would have happened to her if Matias hadn’t married her?
11. How did you feel about the ending of A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA? Was it what you expected, what you hoped would happen? If not, how would you have constructed the ending?
12. What did you learn from reading A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA --- about this period in history, about Chilean culture or about human nature?

<https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/a-long-petal-of-the-sea/guide>

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

/ Starred Review */* Isabel Allende joins an illustrious group of novelists who have found a deep wellspring for fiction in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), beginning with Ernest Hemingway’s eye-witness-inspired *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, which was published just a year after those who were fighting to save an elected government were defeated

by fascist forces under General Francisco Franco, who was allied with Hitler and Mussolini. Hemingway covered the war, along with his third-wife-to-be Martha Gellhorn, and both appear in *Beautiful Exiles* (2018) by Meg Waite Clayton and *Love and Ruin* (2018) by Paula McLain. Distinguished Spanish writer Manuel Rivas' *The Carpenter's Pencil* (2001) is a deeply inquisitive and moving novel about the war, as are Alan Furst's *Midnight in Europe* (2014), *The Time in Between* (2011) by Maria Duenas (translated by Daniel Hahn), and Mary Gordon's *There Your Heart Lies* (2017). Now Helen Janeczek, in *The Girl with the Leica* (2019), and Allende explore the seismic impact on individual lives of Spain's devastating civil war in novels strikingly divergent in style and focus. Poet Pablo Neruda plays a small but key role in Janeczek's novel when he rescues two thousand Spanish war refugees and brings them to Chile. This actual voyage of mercy is the catalyst for Isabel Allende's *A Long Petal of the Sea*. Internationally revered as a virtuoso of lucidly well-told, utterly enrapturing fiction, Allende encapsulates the complicated horrors of the Spanish Civil War within the epic struggles of Victor Dalmau, the son of a music professor and an activist, and Roser Bruguera, a gifted student of Victor's father who falls in love with Victor's brother, a soldier, and is left bereft and pregnant when he's killed. Roser and Victor, destined to become a doctor after a stunning battlefield encounter, join the desperate exodus to France, where Spanish refugees are maligned as filthy criminals and detained in unconscionably wretched circumstances. When events deliver them to Neruda as he's selecting passengers for his sanctuary ship, they expediently marry to ensure their inclusion. Allende follows the course of their tumultuous, socially conscious lives, forever shadowed by the war's traumas, over the ensuing decades, contrasting their successful professional and unusual private lives with the hard slam to the right of Chilean politics as a U.S.-backed military coup takes down President Salvador Allende (a cousin of the author) and installs the dictator Augusto Pinochet. Once again, Victor is subjected to brutality in a concentration camp; once again he and Roser must flee their home. Allende deftly addresses war, displacement, violence, and loss in a novel of survival and love under siege, a tale that is seductively intimate and strategically charming with valor, perseverance, transcendent romance, and wondrous reunions providing narrative sweeteners to lure readers into contemplation of past atrocities and, covertly, of the disturbingly similar outrages of the present, in which refugees and immigrants are treated with appalling cruelty and fascist threats escalate around the warming world. -- Donna Seaman (Reviewed 10/1/2019) (Booklist, vol 116, number 3, p24).

Publisher's Weekly

/ Starred Review */* Spanning from 1938 to 1994, this majestic novel from Allende (*In the Midst of Winter*) focuses on Victor Dalmau, a 23-year-old medical student fighting in the Spanish Civil War on the Republican side when the novel opens. After Nationalist forces prevail, Victor and thousands of other Republican sympathizers flee Spain to avoid brutal reprisals. In France, he searches the packed refugee camps for Roser Bruguera, who is pregnant with his brother Guillem's child. Once he finds Roser, he breaks the news that Guillem has died in battle and that he has won a place on the *Winnipeg*, a ship that the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda has organized to transport Spanish refugees from Europe, where WWII is breaking out, to safety in Chile. Allowed to bring only family with him, Victor persuades Roser to marry him in name only. Though Victor has a brief, secret affair with well-off Ofelia del Solar, he begins to fall in love with Roser; they raise Roser's son, Marcel, together and build stable lives, he as a cardiologist and she as a widely respected musician. But when the Pinochet dictatorship unseats Chile's Marxist president in 1973, they find themselves once more endangered by their political views. Allende's assured prose vividly evokes her fictional characters, historical figures like Neruda, and decades of complex international history; her imagery makes the suffering of war and displacement palpable yet also does justice to human strength, hope and rebirth. Seamlessly juxtaposing exile with homecoming, otherness with belonging, and

tyranny with freedom, the novel feels both timeless and perfectly timed for today. (Jan.) --Staff (Reviewed 10/07/2019) (Publishers Weekly, vol 266, issue 40, p).

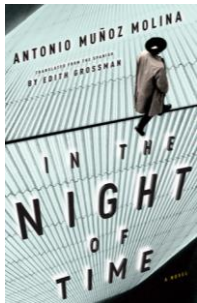
Library Journal

On September 3, 1939, the S.S. Winnipeg arrived in Valparaiso, Chile, with 2,200 refugees fleeing the fascist regime of Francisco Franco. Allende (*The House of the Spirits*) befriended one of these refugees, Victor Pey Casado, when she herself was living in exile in Venezuela, and places their struggles at the heart of this masterful historical saga. The novel begins with Victor Dalmau serving as a medic on the Republican side of the Spanish Civil War. After Franco prevails, Victor flees with Roser Bruguera, the pregnant girlfriend of his brother, who died in battle, and marries her "in name only" so they can get prized spots on the Winnipeg; the Winnipeg evacuation was organized by Pablo Neruda, whose description of Chile--long petal of sea and wine and snow--Allende borrows for her title. After arriving in Chile, Victor and Roser together raise Roser's son, Marcel. However, when the Chilean military overthrows the government led by Victor's friend, President Salvador Allende (real-life cousin of the author's father), the family must go on the move again. VERDICT Narrator Edoardo Ballerini renders the cast of well-drawn, colorful characters Technicolor vivid, and his nuanced reading of Allende's lyrical prose and her seamless blend of the historical and the fictional add to the pleasure of this inspiring story. For all literary collections.--Beth Farrell, Cleveland State Univ. Law Lib.

Kirkus Reviews

Two refugees from the Spanish Civil War cross the Atlantic Ocean to Chile and a half-century of political and personal upheavals. We meet Victor Dalmau and Roser Bruguera in 1938 as it is becoming increasingly clear that the Republican cause they support is doomed. When they reunite in France as penniless refugees, Roser has survived a harrowing flight across the Pyrenees while heavily pregnant and given birth to the son of Victor's brother Guillem, killed at the Battle of the Ebro. Victor, evacuated with the wounded he was tending in a makeshift hospital, learns of a ship outfitted by poet Pablo Neruda to take exiles to a new life in Chile, but he and Roser must marry in order to gain a berth. Allende (*In the Midst of Winter*, 2017, etc.) expertly sets up this forced intimacy between two very different people: Resolute, realistic Roser never looks back and doggedly pursues a musical career in Chile while Victor, despite being fast-tracked into medical school by socialist politician Salvador Allende (a relative of the author's), remains melancholy and nostalgic for his homeland. Their platonic affection deepens into physical love and lasting commitment in an episodic narrative that reaches a catastrophic climax with the 1973 coup overthrowing Chile's democratically elected government. For Victor and Roser, this is a painful reminder of their losses in Spain and the start of new suffering. The wealthy, conservative del Solar family provides a counterpoint to the idealistic Dalmaus; snobbish, right-wing patriarch Isidro and his hysterically religious wife, Laura, verge on caricature, but Allende paints more nuanced portraits of eldest son Felipe, who smooths the refugees' early days in Chile, and daughter Ofelia, whose brief affair with Victor has lasting consequences. Allende tends to describe emotions and events rather than delve into them, and she paints the historical backdrop in very broad strokes, but she is an engaging storyteller. A touching close in 1994 brings one more surprise and unexpected hope for the future to 80-year-old Victor. A trifle facile, but this decades-spanning drama is readable and engrossing throughout.

READALIKES



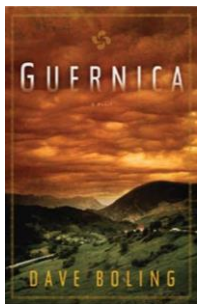
In the Night of Time by Antonio Munoz Molina

Abandoning his wife and children in war-torn Madrid, architect Ignacio Abel reflects upon the war he left behind, his transformation from bricklayer to bourgeois professional, and his all-consuming love affair with an American woman.



The Shadow King by Maaza Mengiste

Tending the wounded when her nation is invaded by Mussolini, an orphaned servant in 1935 Ethiopia helps disguise a gentle peasant as their exiled emperor to rally her fellow women in the fight against fascism.



Guernica by Dave Boling

Fleeing his home in 1935 after a conflict with a Spanish Civil Guard, Miguel Navarro attempts to make a new start in the culturally rich town of Guernica, where his shared love with charismatic dancer Miren Ansotegui is tested by the German Luftwaffe.