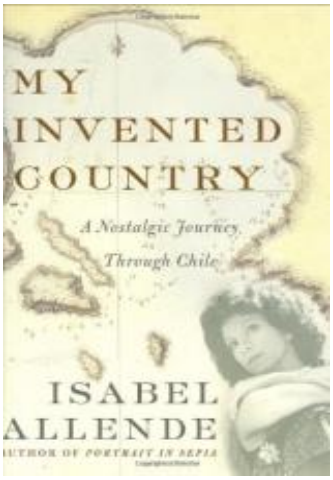
# Invented Country: A Nostalgic Journey Through Chile

by Isabel Allende




## About the Book

One of the most original writers of her generation, Isabel Allende has crafted novels, short stories, and memoirs that chart the landscape of the soul. Now she recalls the lost world of her roots, a version of Chile that vanished when General Pinochet's military junta erupted on September 11, 1973. Her uncle, President Salvador Allende Gossens, was assassinated in the coup. The social climate that had permitted her candid journalism was replaced by a brutal dictatorship. Accompanied by her husband and children, she fled into exile, taking with her a writer's vivid memories of magnificent landscapes, eccentric relatives, and an endlessly fascinating culture whose history is nothing short of mythical. Offering an evocative tour of Allende's often misunderstood homeland, **My Invented Country** transports us to compelling locales, while capturing the tumultuous events that led Allende to recognize her storytelling gifts.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** What are your initial impressions of Chile as Isabel Allende presents it in her opening scenes? Does the landscape correspond to its inhabitants? In what ways does Allende's persona reflect this geography?

**2.** The book's title reminds us of the subjectivity of memory. What recollections of your hometown might be shaped by your unique point of view? How would you describe your "invented" place of origin?

**3.** Allende describes herself as a charismatic woman who speaks frankly, wears bold colors, and savors her meals without worrying about cholesterol. Do these traits make her more of an exception in California or in Chile?

**4.** Allende powerfully recalls the aftermath of the September 11 military coup that launched Pinochet's reign of terror in 1973. She describes the fallout in personal terms: families torn apart by informants, a nation's faith in its electorate shaken, a vibrant cultural climate replaced by one of suppression. Discuss the parallels and distinctions between the

trauma of Chile's 9/11 events and those that occurred in the United States exactly twenty-eight years later.

**5.** Despite the many wrenching occurrences in **My Invented Country**, Allende maintains a tone that is poetic yet also ironic and deliciously humorous. What is the effect this voice? What do you make of the gap that sometimes keeps Allende and her husband from appreciating each other's jokes?

**6.** What did **My Invented Country** reveal about Chilean attitudes towards sexism, racism and political correctness? How might this memoir have shifted had the author been male, or mestizo?

**7.** Relatives -- particularly grandparents -- played a distinctive role in shaping Allende's sense of self and inspiring much of her fiction. She even maintains an almost daily correspondence with her mother. Which of your relatives most heavily influenced your character, and your sense of imagination?

**8.** Allende writes that Chilean status was not heavily tied to wealth before the Pinochet years, but in contemporary Chile the ruling class is extremely affluent -- possibly at the expense of a once-sizeable middle class. Is this situation uniquely Chilean, or do you believe that the 1970s and 1980s were marked by similar economic shifts around the world?

**9.** **My Invented Country** is as much travelogue as memoir. What did you discover about the distinctions between various countries of South America, particularly Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Venezuela? How does Allende's South America compare to the other locales she has lived in, such as the Middle East and Europe?

**10.** Allende's fiction often features characters who have unusual perceptions of reality, or are able to tap spiritual worlds as easily as tangible ones. Does **My Invented Country** evoke any of these themes? In what way does it complete the memories recorded in her memoir **Paula**?

**11.** In what sense does **My Invented Country** read like a novel?

**12.** Did the book change your perception of your American identity?

**13.** In what ways is Allende a quintessential American?

**14.** In the book's second-to-last paragraph, Allende writes that "For the moment, California is my home, and Chile is the land of my nostalgia." Is your home also the land of your nostalgia?

## Author Bio

Isabel Allende, born in Peru and raised in Chile, is a novelist, feminist and philanthropist. She is one of the most widely read authors in the world, having sold more than 80 million copies of her books across 42 languages. She is the author of several bestselling and critically acclaimed books, including MY NAME IS EMILIA DEL VALLE, THE WIND KNOWS MY NAME, VIOLETA, A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA, THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS, OF LOVE AND SHADOWS, EVA LUNA and PAULA.

In addition to her work as a writer, Isabel devotes much of her time to human rights causes. She has received 15 honorary doctorates, been inducted into the California Hall of Fame, and received the PEN Center Lifetime

Achievement Award and the Anisfield-Wolf Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2014, President Barack Obama awarded her 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 with her husband and dogs.

## Critical Praise

"Dazzling as a kaleidoscope: an artful tumbling and knocking that throws light and reveals strange depths."

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