

# Review: the house of the spirits

Life



In the novel, “ The House of the Spirits”, the author, Isabel Allende uses the symbolism of the house on the corner and the viewpoints of Esteban and Clara’s notebooks to show the reader that in order to understand the history of the Trueba family, multiple viewpoints must be taken into consideration. Through the use of symbolism, the house on the corner is representative of the Trueba’s history and how the family’s history is told through dichotomy. The house has two structures that must be observed in order to understand the entire home, one being inspired by Esteban, and the other being inspired by Clara.

The structure that Esteban builds is the outside and the foundation of the house. Esteban builds a “ cubic, dense, pompous house, which sits like a hat amidst its green and geometric surroundings”(92). This description represents how he tells his stories of history in the novel. Esteban doesn’t use magical realism, he has much less narration in comparison to Clara in the novel, and his writing is straightforward. The way Esteban is portrayed proves the exterior of the house to be representative of his narration as it is “ cubic” and “ dense”.

In contrast, Clara’s narration from her notebooks is much different from Esteban’s simple narration like the structure of the house. Clara doesn’t talk solely about important events, “ she also records trivialities” (1) and incidents that do not necessarily lead to anything. Clara’s peculiar and magical narration style is represented by the infrastructure of the house, “ full of protuberances and incrustations, of twisted staircases that lead to empty spaces, of turrets, or small windows and could not be opened, doors hanging in midair, and crooked hallways” (92).

The two narrations make up the entire Trueba history the same way the infrastructure and the outside make up the entire house. Each story is told in a different style to symbolize the structure of the house. Esteban's part in the creation of the exterior of the house is clean and dense which parallels the way he tells history. In contrast Clara's narration is more detailed, superfluous and includes the nuanced stories of the characters. Together, the exterior and interior make up the house, just as the two narrations make up the novel and the history of the Truebas.

With only one narrator, Clara or Esteban speaking at a time, the story of the Trueba family becomes skewed and unreliable due to Esteban's personal bias and Clara's magical point of view. With both histories presented the reader understands a more accurate and complete story. Allende uses the dichotomy of the house on the corner as a symbol to show that there are multiple sides to history. We also see two sides of history through Clara's notebooks and Esteban's narration.

With two narrations we get a comprehensive vision of history that can only be obtained by reading multiple perspectives. One way that Allende uses the narrations to show that understanding multiple viewpoints is necessary, is through the unreliability of the narrator. At the beginning of the novel we first experience magical realism when Clara's Uncle Marcos leaves the country on a "bird" that he builds and "[a]gainst all logic, on the second try the bird lifts off without mishap and with a certain elegance, accompanied by the creaking of its skeleton and the roar of its motor.

Flapping its wings and disappearing into the clouds”(13). We are unaware of what actually occurred in this event because we only see one perspective of what happened. Once both narrators’ are used in the novel, the reader is able to see more than one perspective of the events told and the reader is able to see the entire history, just like the exterior and the infrastructure of the house on the corner make up the entire house.

Esteban’s narration is biased and unreliable, but through the use of Clara’s notebooks we see the other side to Esteban’s time at Tres Marias as the patron. When Esteban recalls his leadership at Tres Marias he says, “ no ones going to convince me that I wasn’t a good patron”(51) and that he has “ been a good patron; there’s no doubt about it”(54). Shortly after, we hear from Clara’s notebooks of how “[n]ot a girl passed from puberty to adulthood that [Esteban] did not subject to the woods, the riverbank, or the wrought-iron bed”(63).

If the reader only heard Esteban’s narration, the reader would have only seen that he “ rebuilt chicken coops and stables”, “ rescued the oil fields”, and planned “ an irrigation system so the crops wouldn’t have to depend on the weather”(53). During his narration the reader sees all the positive things that he did, but with Clara’s notebooks the reader also sees the negative aspects of his time at Tres Marias. Along with seeing different events that occurred with multiple narrations we also see the feelings of multiple characters.

When Clara first arrives at Tres Marias “ she feels that she has finally discovered her mission in life”(105). While the reader understands

her motivation, Esteban is unaware that she has this drive to fulfill her mission in life. Esteban thinks she is just “charitable and generous” and wants to make “those around her happy-except [Esteban]”(178). Due to the telling of two narratives in the history of the Trueba family we are able to see the relationship dynamics from both sides, and as a result, understand the Trueba family history better.

In conclusion, Isabel Allende wrote the novel in a certain way to show the reader a different view of how history could be learned. She used the symbol of the house to show that to see the history there are various perspectives to understand just as there are various structures that make up the entire house. Allende wrote the novel through the perspective of Clara, Esteban, and others, so the reader is able to get the most comprehensive telling of the Trueba family history, and can see multiple sides in order to obtain the best understanding.