

The significance of time as shown in chronicle of a death foretold and the house ...

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



The fragmentation of time features strongly in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* and *The House of the Spirits*. They both highlight the significant impact that time, and the past, has on narrative. It plays a key role in the development of both novels through the authors' use of structure. This structure is by no means linear, but an instrument in creating recurring themes. The numerous instances of foreshadowing and flashback have a great impact on both novels' development.

The thought that the past, present and future are closely entwined also lays the basis for fate, as repetition leads the reader to believe that the future is set and unchangeable. Time also gives the reader an insight into the recollection of the past and how witnesses can be unreliable. These two novels portray different methods of remembering the past. In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, interviews people who were present at the time whilst in *The House of the Spirits* Allende uses diaries as documented testimonies. The past is a very important element in the lives of both writers.

This aspect is highly amplified through their writing both on a personal level as well as a political and cultural level. The cyclical structure of both novels means that the use of flash backs are prevalent. In *The House of the Spirits* the transition between times is used to give different viewpoints as it follows a family over several generations. On the other hand Marquez is recounting his story twenty seven years after the event happened, which leads to a story that encompasses both past and present feelings on the matter, while also showing how different perspectives influence recollections.

The structure of the big house on the corner in *The House of the Spirits* is a metaphor for the structure of the entire novel. Esteban builds a house that on the surface is straightforward, if somewhat pretentious. Similarly, *The House of the Spirits* can be read as a traditional romance novel, following a single family over several generations. However, the narrator informs us as Esteban builds the house that it will end up full of complicated, twisted, and impractical additions.

Despite its apparently traditional structure, *The House of the Spirits* contains an enormous number of complicated twists of plot. These twists are created through the recollection of the past. The title of the novel underlines the association: *The House of the Spirits* refers both to the book as a whole and also to the big house on the corner. It symbolises the voices heard throughout the novel as a collection of memories to assist the reader in understanding the families' history.

The constant shifting from the past to the future underlines the cyclical nature and the development of fate in both novels. This is shown through the constant reminder that any one moment connects the past and future.

Allende frequently uses foreshadowing in *The House of the Spirits* to hint at the fate facing her characters. The foreshadowing occurs not only in Clara's prophecies, but also in direct comments by the narrator. In both novels the future is repeated as a certain event that cannot be changed.

In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, Marquez states over and over that "they were going to kill Santiago Nasar." 3 Clara's clairvoyance in *The House of*

the Spirits, continually allows her to understand people's fate which she believes cannot be changed. Clara is so certain about this point that she does nothing to try and stop it. She believes that the future cannot be changed and later that month " Esteban Trueba... howed up at the door to ask for Clara's hand. " 5 This frequent use of foreshadowing throughout both novels helps create a sense of fate at work. The use of testimonies is interspersed throughout both books. What he encounters is a town full of people with varying and often conflicting memories of the events he is investigating, just as they had differing views and perspectives on the victim.

Consequently, what begins as an attempt to fill the gaps, to find out once and for all what really happened that " dark and drizzly morning" 6 - or was it " bright and sunny" 7? - becomes instead a parody of any attempt to recapture and reconstruct the past. He describes it as trying to " put the broken mirror of memory back together from so many scattered shards. " 8 An impossible task when some pieces are forever lost. Marquez illustrates how pointless it is to expect to find a single ' truth' as there is no one single perspective which has precedence.

A completely contradictory view is portrayed in *The House of the Spirits*. On the novel's first page, the omniscient writer confides: " I would use notebooks to reclaim the past and overcome terrors of my own. " 9 Alba in fact tells this story by piecing together Esteban Trueba's memories, her own recollections, and Clara's writings from her " notebooks that bore witness to life. " 10 Alba actively seeks alternate views and turns to different sources to

fill out her picture of the past and find a personal understanding of what had gone before.

As she closes *The House of the Spirits*, Alba seems to speak in Allende's own voice as she proclaims: "Memory is fragile and the space of a single life so brief, passing so quickly that we never get a chance to see the relationship between events; we cannot gauge the consequences of our acts, and we believe in the fiction of past, present, and future, but it may also be true that everything happens simultaneously." 11 As is shown through the many instances of testimonies, the importance of the past is a theme that runs strongly through both novels.

In *My Invented Country*¹² Allende explained that "I wrote to ease my anguish" 13. Like Alba in the book Allende wrote as a way of grieving. Many of the characters are based on her relatives and the story follows her own memories as well as stories told to her by her grandfather. "The fictional family bears an alarming resemblance to my mother's" 14. Through this story she also recreates her lost country, Chile from which she was exiled and has always had a feeling of nostalgia. This relation to the past is woven through the novel and brings a personal element to the story.

Not only are personal experiences used to shape the novels, but political and cultural links are made. Allende uses the political turmoil she experienced in her native country for a backing to *The House of the Spirits*. Machismo which is an element used in *Chronicle* has deep roots in Latin American History. This use of personal as well as political and cultural past gives the novels a

certain realistic standing. Time is used as a gate way through which many aspects of these novels can be reached. Different view points can be attained as can the change of opinion through time.

Fate is woven through time which binds the past and future even closer together. Recounts are a commonly used method of rediscovering the past. Through Chronicle of a Death Foretold we learn of the impossible task of reconstructing the truth, as many believe that the whole truth can never be known especially after so many years. In The House of the Spirits Clara's writings are used as a way of piecing together their " true" family history. This personal history is added to the political and cultural past that encompasses the novels. Time plays a key role constructing and revealing a whole dimension of these novels.