

# House of spirits – epigraph by pablo neruda

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How does the epigraph relate to the greater message in the novel? An epigraph is a quotation, phrase or motto at the beginning of a piece of literary work, thus setting forth a theme for the piece of literature. In this case, this epigraph gives the readers a small gist and theme of what to expect when they read the novel. "The House of Spirits" is a novel which was written by Isabel Allende. This story revolves around family life, mainly around two upper-class families; the Del Valle and the Trueba family and was originally written in Spanish, then translated to many different languages, English being one.

The story is set in a Latin-American country. The epigraph by Pablo Neruda has a much deeper meaning which the reader has to implore. In a nut-shell, the epigraph talks about two things; life and death. Pablo Neruda is Chilean by nationality, which may also suggest that this 'Latin country' we think the novel is set in, may very well be Chile. The first line asks a question which when thought about, not many people have an answer to.

Together with the second line, we can reflect to the novel because even though we may exaggerate and say we live a thousand years, the crucial events that define an individual's life take place in the matter of just a few days and at the end of the day it is those events that decide the fate of a person's life. We can connect this to the novel by using the example of Esteban Trueba and Clara, when after he hits her, she decides not to speak to him, nor to use her maiden name and never to wear their wedding ring ever again.

It was that one moment that sealed their fate, and their real personality was reflected. “ For a week, or for several centuries? ”- this line makes us think, how one small contribution to the world can change a person’s life. He will be remembered for years and years to come, just for that one small thing he may have contributed to the world, in a matter of minutes. The fourth line makes us reflect back on life.

All along, as individuals we have thought of death just ‘ happening’ and getting over. Like an event. But this novel makes us think otherwise. It portrays itself as a long process. Dona Ester is a very good example from the novel regarding this. Her life is already declining and there is nothing that she can do to change that fact. It is like she has already begun to die, a slow process, she is just counting her days till that ‘ moment’. We can also look at death in another way.

In a certain situation, death may also mean not physically leaving the world or your mortal body, but killing something, leaving something behind. We can use the example of Esteban Trueba and Clara, as when he hits her and she decides not to converse with him anymore, it is the beginning of the ‘ death’ of their relationship. Another comment on the epigraph I would like to make is that everywhere, Pablo Neruda has used “ he” and “ man”, suggesting that at the time he wrote it, the society he was living in was a male-dominated society.

This is also reflected in the book as the inequality to women is clearly shown all through. Ironically, this poem has 5 lines and also there are 5 generations in one of the most important families in the book; the Del Valle family:

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grandmother, Nivea, Rosa, Clara, Blanca and Alba. This epigraph gives us a surface picture of what to expect in this novel, but as we have seen, if we go deeper to explore, there can be so many more meanings to it.