Magical Realist Historical Fiction by Women Writers: Isabel Allende’s The House of the Spirits and Gioconda Belli’s The Inhabited Woman

This study is based on two contemporary novels written by Latin American women writers: The House of the Spirits (1982) by Isabel Allende and The Inhabited Women (1988) by Gioconda Belli. The purpose of my study is to discuss the ways in which the female characters respond to the social and political imperatives that history imposes on them, as they also question traditional structures and move a step forward towards their personal liberation.

As witnesses of a political and social revolution in their countries, Allende and Belli articulate women’s voices, intertwine their personal experience and write alternative fictional stories which is mixed with the official story producing thus a new historical novel in Latin America. They also show that women are empowered through subtle means such as their collective memory, love and spirituality.

After introducing the concepts of the new historical novel in Latin America, and after reviewing ideas regarding concepts as magical realism and collective memory, I will discuss how magical realism as a mode of expression widely used by Latin American writers that bridges historical realities, spirituality, and collective memory to give Latin American women writers a distinctive voice in the 1980s. This distinctive voice in The House of the Spirit and The Inhabited Woman take advantage of the Boom male writer’s achievements and create their own spaces to portray the revolutionary times in the 1970s in which women made significant contributions independently and in their relationship with men.

Files in this item

- Beltramo_Maria_201501.MA.pdf
  - Size: 1.280Mb
  - Format: PDF
  - View/Open

This item appears in the following Collection(s)

- Theses & Dissertations - All (2011- [3990]
  - All deposited theses and dissertations
- Theses & Dissertations - Harvested by LAC [3805]
  - ETDs that will be harvested by Library and Archives Canada.
- Theses & Dissertations [13]
  - School of Languages and Literatures
Despite its apparently traditional structure, The House of the Spirits contains an enormous number of complicated twists of plot. 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, which, thanks to Clara, is always full of ghosts and spirits. This division of political groups reflects historical events in much of South America, at the approximate time of the action of the story, around the 1920s. As in The House of the Spirits, in Latin America the Catholic Church tended to be on the side of the Socialists. This story spans through the three generations of the Trueba family that comes from the parish of San Sebastian. Esteban Trueba, the patriarch, is enterprising and powerful. The characterization is good and detailed. The author has used the elements of magical realism in this novel while describing some of the characters like Rosa and Clara. Rosa has been described as a human mermaid, and Clara can communicate with the paranormal. Communication with the spirits becomes a permanent aspect of the novel.
the author somehow has treated this as a normal phenomena. The overall mood of the novel is like that of a family drama. A couple of events inspire horror. My Thoughts