

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
“Of Love and Shadows”

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AREA 1:
READING & RESPONDING:
OF LOVE AND SHADOWS

Chapter 1
GENRE

Allende's novel embodies the key elements of fiction. *Of Love and Shadows* includes drama and tension that unfolds in detailed descriptions of places and characters. The novel is a saga of the consequences of political oppression. As an exile novel, *Of Love and Shadows* attempts to interpret real historical experiences. Allende's characters live in and dominate a world she has lost, but is trying to understand through her fiction. She presents the experiences of injustice and exile in her highly emotive political novel. Allende seeks to interpret reality through her writing.

Allende employs the literary style of 'magic realism', characterised by the Latin American literary "boom" era in the 1960s. She combines realism with fantasy and dreamlike elements. Though the political aspects of her fiction are quite real, her characters serve to enhance the illumination of the mundane through fantastical elements. The novel contains rich sensory detail, imagery and symbols, such as "shadows". Allende mixes political and magical romantic themes.

Of Love and Shadows was the basis for a film of the same title starring Antonio Banderas and Jennifer Connelly. The film is faithful to the Chilean reality at the time in which the novel is set and the political events occurred.

Chapter 2

STRUCTURE

Of Love and Shadows consists of two stories woven together by fact and fiction. The novel is based on the real historical event of the discovery of a hidden grave containing fifteen unidentified bodies in Chile, 1978; however, this clandestine grave is only unearthed in the last part of the novel. The first part of the novel is devoted to detailed introductions of the families through which the experiences of the tyrannical dictatorship are explored. In Part Two, the romantic relationship between Irene and Francisco grows as they search for Evangelina Ranquileo. Thus, the novel follows both a political and romantic saga.

The romantic saga of Irene and Francisco's relationship is complicated by Irene's engagement to Gustavo Morante and the loss of innocence she experiences as she witnesses violent and gruesome scenes for the first time in her life. The political saga is complicated by the difficulties in obtaining information and the truth regarding the "desperacidos". Both sagas are neatly concluded at the end.

Through shifts in narrative perspective Allende is able to give insight into the mind of both the culprits and victims of the Chilean military coup. The narrative slips between the presentation of events and reflections on the past experiences that have shaped the characters. The history of the Ranquileo, Leal and Beltrán families are scattered throughout the text and deliberately placed in order to assist the reader's understanding of the characteristics that motivate the behaviour of individuals.