

Isabel Allende explores the experiences of three generations of the Trueba family members and the unnamed South American Country within which they reside in *The House of Spirits*. Though the setting of the country remains unnamed, the reader encounters multiple characters that remind us of ourselves. This starts with Rosa the Beautiful, the eldest daughter of the del Valle family, around 1900. Blessed with immense beauty and green hair she thought to marry, Esteban Trueba. Living a good life, the del Valle family is headed by the father, a politician and the mother, a political activist. However due to drinking poison intended for her father, Rosa dies and Esteban spends time away from society at his country estate, Tres Maria. There Esteban grows into a conservative, mean, and unhappy man, devoting his life to restoring his family name. In the process of restoring Tres Maria, Esteban, to satisfy his own urges, for power and sexual pleasure, begins raping the women of the countryside. In the process, he sires a bastard child, Esteban Garcia. He also seeks the pleasure of the brothel, often spending time at the Red Lantern where he meets the prostitute Tránsito Soto. In a rare act of generosity he gives her 50 peso to make her own way. An important character to note as Soto and Trueba would meet three important times through Esteban's life. Eventually Trueba, at the request of his mother on her deathbed, marries Clara del Valle, youngest sister to Rosa. As a young child people identified Clara as a threat due to her clairvoyant and telekinetic powers. Often kept away from the public, she nevertheless develops into Clara the Clairvoyant, through her backdoor kitchen readings. Her marriage to Trueba allows for her to continue her own eccentric existence and has no effect on her or her powers. The couple spends summers at the Tres Maria estate and the winters in the capital city of the unnamed country. Esteban would run into Soto on two occasions during time spent in the city. She offers to pay his favor back but he prefers that she owes him. On these two occasions the audience learns that she has been able to use her position

as a prostitute to work her way up in the social ladder. Further on Trueba runs for political office and wins, becoming a leading senator for the conservative party known for his bullying tactics and take-no-prisoners attitude. Eventually Clara bears three children; Blanca, the first born girl, and the twins Jamie and Nicolas. The family would live an ordinary existence in a house filled with spirits until the earthquake that strikes as the children become young adults. The earthquake that left thousands dead, the country in turmoil, Clara's marriage in ruin, and her powers shaken.

The story then turns to focus on Blanca, Jaime, and Nicolas. While all are supporting characters, they demonstrate the changes within generations. Jamie especially because of his left leaning socialist political ideas. Moreover, when the family first travels to Tres Maria with Blanca, she immediately meets and befriends a young boy, Pedro Tercero, the son of her father's foreman, beginning a relationship that spanned the both their lives. Eventually it gives way to a love that lasts through half a century and produces the 'last' Trueba generation, Alba.

Alba inherited many characteristics from the family, her hair from Rosa, her stubbornness from her grandfather, and intuition from her mother. Furthermore, she can invoke the spirits as Clara did though not for the same ends. However Alba, light of her grandfather's life, is significantly more left-leaning than the rest of her family, sans her uncle. Demonstrating once more that the times are changing for the country. Spending the first few years of her life at the side of her grandmother and mother she learns much by their side in the realm of spirits. Upon the death of Clara, Alba begins her private education. Upon entering college Alba meets Miguel, who emerges as the leader of a group of radical leftist fighters and the love of her life.

The years pass by and the country slips further into political upheaval. The conservatives lose the elections. And life turns upside down in a way not seen since the earthquake that shook the foundations of the Trueba estates. The children of Esteban live in exile or are killed, then

Esteban Garcia and military the kidnap Alba. The bastard son of rape assumes the form of the rapist and the cycle of terror for women continues, exhibiting that social class does not prevent violence. Eventually Trueba and Miguel work through their contacts and in the third and final meeting of Tránsito Soto and Esteban free Alaba. Soto had managed to grasp power through her running of the most famous prostitution house that the military frequents. Allowing for her to know the country and its secrets. demonstrating that the most unlikely of people in the simplest of positions possess power. Esteban dies shortly after of natural causes. At the end, the reader finds, that the cycle truly continues as the Trueba family lineage advances though the child Alba now carries. Allende implies that the turmoil for the country continued well after the book ended.

Through the plot one can see that though Esteban drives the story the real focus turns to the women of the Trueba family. For example, through the women the theme of family within the book shines. *House of Spirits* examines a plethora of relationships between all parents, children, and outsider blood connections. It also looks at how families function as a unit, trying to figure out what keeps them together. Moreover, each female, with their unique name, demonstrates a purity of being that allows for them to overcome the hardship endured throughout the century. Clara, clear, for her the story flows strong and clear, it begins and ends with her words. Blanca, white, though she's the woman most removed from the spiritual and political beliefs of her family, she nonetheless allows for the audience to start with a blank slate, a new generation. And Alba, a new dawn, she through acceptance of the child within her clears the slate, she breaks the pattern of violence that surrounds her family.

Thus, each of these women by way their own way of documenting their circumstances brings forth the theme of women and their femininity. Their names demonstrate the idea of the matriarchal line continuing on even though the last name can change. What's more the women of

the house are much more in touch with the things of spiritual nature than the men. This was a given for the family, Esteban allowed it within the house because he believed it was for the women. Magic and spirituality then evolve into a specific female ability. Which in turn illustrates a silent and often unacknowledged and un-believed-in power that women have, influence upon their situation. To most it would seem like magic, this book is done in the style of magical realism, however beyond that to these women having the ability influence their situation no matter what. Clara in turning away from Esteban, Blanca in continuing to see Pedro Garcia, and Alba in choosing to move to the future. In fact, Alba as our narrator claims that the novel would never have been written were it not for the intervention of Clara's ghost. Though at the time not understood it allowed for them to have hope in Alba's survival.

One last important thing to understand is that this book rich in character and content has a hidden background. The unnamed country. The violence mentioned within the book and the conservative to liberal political upheaval the country experienced in the background of the characters' experiences allows for the audience to connect those to the courage it takes to move forward. When a family faces the hardships mentioned within many forget numerous others are experiencing the same thing. The anonymous country thus evolves into a landscape, politically, socially, and culturally, that becomes anywhere in Latin America.

Allende allows for the experiences of the women to demonstrate many of the themes in order to not only add the much needed voice of the female to the Latin America experience but also demonstrate their experiences of violence in all the harsh details. The author's purpose is clear, exploration of violent experience and the effects on the family unit. Decisively, *House of Spirits*, showcases reality, not everyone gets a happy ending. I fully recommend reading it.