

The house of the spirits



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

How is humour used to unravel the natures of the main characters and why is it used for the main theme of social injustice in Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* and Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy*?

Humour is defined as writings and other material created to make people laugh[1]. It has been used to grasp the attention of the readers, with its main purpose being to entertain. In both *The House of the Spirits* and *Houseboy*, humour has been used from the very beginnings of the novel to really acquire the concentration of the readers and keep them captivated. Besides than adding vibrancy to the characters, humour might also serve to highlight key underlying themes in the literary work. The focus of this essay will be on how the writers have utilised humour to reveal the nature of the main characters, either by describing their characters actions in an amusing way or how their risibility provides indirect insights into how they perceive the world around them. It shall also address why writers incorporate this literary technique with main theme of social injustice in their works.

In both the texts above, the writers have used humour from the very beginning whilst introducing their main characters; this usage engrosses the reader to develop interest in the character.

The House of the Spirits begins with a dramatic opening in a church deliverance. Perhaps, why Allende chose to start the novel setting in a church could be to emphasize the importance of religion to the people of that particular region, but the bathos comes by an abrupt statement by Clara: " *the voice of little Clara was heard in all its purity " psst! Father Restrepo! If that story about hell is a lie, we're all fucked, aren't we..."* The reader surely didn't expect to hear such a statement from a 10 year old girl.

This shows us that Clara is very bold and forthright about her views as she is able to question what she is being taught in the church about hell. Many people simply believe everything they are taught through religion but certainly not Clara. The language itself is very amusing besides the context. 'psst!' the use of this onomatopoeia shows the disrespect for the Father as it undermines his status by mocking him during a sermon. The highly inappropriate use of the word 'fucked' in front of the public shocks everyone. This radical, carefree nature of hers' is what brings about the humour in this piece thus it serves to be a very pertinent introduction to Clara and sets the platform for the reader to expect more unusual doings throughout the novel.

Like Allende, Oyono introduces Toundi with humour. Toundi narrates of how he is proud to read and write and wants to copy the "white's man custom" of keeping a diary. This tells us that young Toundi is naive and filled with desire of learning a lot about the 'white men'. The joy he gets by being literate tells us that this character is filled with promise in the future and determination. He is also revealed to be mischievous child as he had been making fun of father Gilbert but he is nonetheless the main character which undergoes metamorphosis over the course of the story. Thus humour has been successfully used to reveal the character traits, make them more colourful, interesting, lively and keep the reader engaged actively.

Clara's character in *The House of the Spirits* has been revealed further in the novel as the story progresses in various occasions, the humour usually comes out when she does something unusual and also to note is the fact that her strangeness was an attribute of her character: she is a telekinetic; is

rarely attentive; she can predict futures, read dreams, and, lives a very introvert life but still she amalgamates the family together, and is extremely caring for others. The humorous bits of kinesthetic abilities, being rarely attentive (which itself is ironic as discussed later) are the key to understanding Clara's character.

When Esteban is shouting at Clara." *Clara let him scream his head off and bang on the furniture until he was exhausted. Then inattentive as ever, she asked him if he knew how to wiggle his ears*". Clara is being scolded by her husband and all she is concerned is whether he can ' *wiggle his ears*'. This shows us Clara's absent mindedness and care-free nature. It also serves to show us how Clara prohibits anyone from forcing her by offering resistance by being ' *inattentive*'. She will never directly express her disgust but rather suppress it in a subtle manner. This shows us that her character is refined in the sense she does not have a strong body language or rebellious nature but still is very firm by not allowing herself to be oppressed even by her husband.. Again humour has been used to reveal her character trait.

On the other hand, Toundi further reveals his character further when he first came to meet Father Gilbert. The Father would use to come to the village and toss " little lumps of sugar like throwing corn to chicken". The use of little lumps of sugar, though is humorous, it also indicates how easily native Cameroonian people were converted to Christians in the hope of a better life, but later most of them would remain in poverty or be killed. Here humour has been juxtaposed with social injustice but to imply it in a more subtle way so as not to make the reader very sad with emotions. Toundi continues to describe how he too would fight for these lumps of sugar- and this tells us

that Toundi is a boisterous kid who did not shy away from what he didn't like- but unlike Clara in The House of the Spirits, he is willing to fight for it. It also reinforces the point made earlier about what allure 'white men' especially Father Gilbert held for Toundi.