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The female characters in Isabel Allende's novel, *House of the Spirits*, are generally depicted as the stronger of the sexes. It becomes apparent to the reader very early on that the author has a lot of respect for women; this is manifested in the fact that even characters who have many negative qualities are depicted sympathetically and as strong people. The three female characters who stand out the most in terms of these extremes are Clara, Tránsito Soto, and Amanda. Though Amanda is demeaned, Clara is honored deeply and Tránsito Soto is given equal status to every successful man mentioned.

At the beginning of the novel, Amanda is described as individual, unique, and strong-willed; however, by the end, this has all changed, and her poor circumstances have gotten the best of her. When Nicolás, her boyfriend, first comes over to her house after learning she is pregnant, he realizes for the first time that her strong, independent façade is just that: a façade ("He saw the disorder Amanda lived in and realized that until then he had known almost nothing about her...Poverty to him was an abstract, distant concept..." (234)). This is the first time the reader understands in just what level of squalor and deprivation she is living, and we are able to see her true life and background as opposed to the face she puts on for everybody else. The fact that she tries to create a personality for herself which contradicts this shows that Allende still wishes to depict her as a strong woman, but the fact that she has to live under these circumstances because of her own mistakes shows that she has some weakness in her. Another instance in which this shows is when Jaime is called upon to help Amanda, who is so sick from drug use that she must be hospitalized, and he sees that her situation

has declined even further. “ Her eyes were red and bloated, without luster, and her pupils were dilated, which gave her a frightened, helpless look” (337). This describes the exact extent to which her situation has harmed her. She is too weak to break out of the world into which she was born, which, granted, is a hard task, but this weakness could be interpreted as being demeaned, at least by the author, who did not give her enough ambition to accomplish what she wants to, which contrasts with virtually all the other female characters, who ultimately end up happy.

This is a stark contrast with Tránsito Soto, a prostitute whom Esteban visits frequently and who has so much ambition that it all but exudes from her pores. During one of Esteban’s first visits to her, she asks him if he will lend her fifty pesos; when he asks why, she says, “ For a train ticket, a red dress, high-heeled shoes, a bottle of perfume, and a permanent. That’s everything I need to start...” (69). It is implied that, at this point, she is not more than fifteen or sixteen years old, but even at fifteen, she knows exactly what she wants and is determined to do whatever is necessary to get it. She wants to make something of herself, and even before the reader ever sees her again, this passage invokes a feeling that she will succeed, or die trying. At the end of the novel when Esteban goes to pay her one last visit, this time for a favor of a different sort, she has changed and, lo and behold, accomplished what she had been determined to fifty years previously. “ She looked more like a concert pianist than the owner of a brothel...I [Esteban] was unable to be as informal as I’d been before” (416). This illustrates both the change Tránsito has gone through as well as the fact that her ambition is the one thing that has stayed consistent throughout her life, and that it has paid off. She has

used the fact that she is strong and driven to achieve her goals and make herself just as successful as any man; in a time during which women were generally thought of as inferior, the fact that she achieves a relatively equal status is astounding and very respectable.

Arguably the most sage character, male or female, Clara is depicted as very honorable throughout the novel, both in the opinion of the author and in the opinions of the other characters. After learning that Esteban is going to marry off their daughter, Blanca, against her will, Clara does not respond with violence or anger, but simply with silent coldness: “ Clara continued with her life, ignoring her husband and refusing to speak to him” (214). This reaction is definitely the most honorable way to handle the situation she is in, and her responding with such class shows the reader that Allende herself respects Clara, which is very important. Because Clara has been drawn as a very potent woman who has connections with the spiritual world, the author could have allowed her to react in many furious ways, but she did not. An instance in which it is proven that Clara is honored not only by the author but also by the other characters in the novel is after she is dead, and everybody she had helped in the past comes to her funeral: “ Clara’s funeral was an event. Even I [Esteban] could not explain where all those people appeared from to mourn my wife. I hadn’t realized she knew everyone” (294). This shows that, in life, Clara had always put others before herself and made friends with everybody. There are people who Clara had barely known who show up to mourn her death, which reveals that she had left such an impression upon them that they were compelled to come back for her funeral. If that isn’t honor, then what is?

Though the women in *House of the Spirits* cover a wide array of personality types and lives, their individual tales and characteristics acknowledge Allende's belief in strong females as role models. However, the fact that there are a few characters, such as Amanda, who do not achieve all they had planned to in life shows that the author has a realistic outlook on the world and does not believe that all women are all-powerful; she only hopes to help the reader understand that they are just as important as men, which she illustrates through Tránsito Soto, and that they deserve respect and honor, which she illustrates through Clara. These strong women play a large role in steering the direction of the novel, the same way that strong women play a large role in steering the direction of the world as a whole.