

The representation of  
lust in 'the house of  
the spirits' through  
the characters r...



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Lust is defined as ' a passionate desire for something' although often associated with sex; lust can also be directed towards power and control. Isabel Allende's novel *The House of The Spirits* unfolds in Latin America and follows the complex lives of three generations of the Trueba family. Often regarded as an allegory for mid-century Chile in the years leading up to the military coup, the novel was originally written in Spanish and published in 1982. The novel is distinct from the genre of magical realism because it depicts a realistic narrative whilst incorporating magical and mystical elements. The theme of lust prevails in the novel, embodied in many different forms, most commonly with the aim of attaining power and control. Throughout, Allende depicts the sexual manifestation of lust as a catalyst to destruction. Two narrators dominate the novel, Esteban Trueba and Alba, his granddaughter. Lust consumes the character of Esteban affecting all those around him, yet because only Esteban survives the whole novel it is his character, which most fully conveys the effects and consequences of living a life filled with lust, allowing Allende to employ lust as an allegory of the oppressive nature of upper class Chilean Society. Allende comments on the desire of the upper classes to seek political control through the character Esteban, a self-made man who becomes rich and powerful, eventually leading the Conservative party during the 1973 military coup.

Allende emphasizes the power that Rosa has over Esteban; the novel begins with a young upper class woman, Rosa, with whom Esteban falls in love at first sight. He vows to win her hand: ' I can still remember the exact moment when Rosa the Beautiful entered my life like a distracted angel who stole my soul as she went by.' Rosa is the object of Esteban's desires; his attraction

appears to be entirely physical – he falls in love with her before he speaks to her. Even her name, 'Rosa the Beautiful' implies that her beauty is all that defines her. But more than this Esteban says Rosa '... stole my soul'. The soul is defined as 'the spiritual or immaterial part of a human being or animal, regarded as immortal.' So when Esteban says she 'stole my soul' he acknowledges the loss of his immortal essence, thus his lust helps lead to his destruction. Rosa, through her beauty, has gained the power to destroy him beyond his mortality.

Esteban's lust for Rosa is not limited to sexual desire, he views Rosa as an asset to his status. In the jealous competition for her hand in marriage, Rosa becomes a prize in Esteban's pursuit of power and recognition. Allende depicts this through the idea that winning her hand is almost a game that all the men are playing. Rosa enters a shop and 'within a few minutes a whole circle of men had formed, their noses pressed against the window.'

Competition increases the intensity and determination of Esteban's desire to win. Rosa is treated like an object and is dehumanized by the men with 'noses pressed against the window,' which alludes to people looking in on an animal in a cage. Rosa is presented as unattainable due to physical and class barriers between her and any potential suitors. In the scene in the shop Allende is commenting on the fact that so many characters in the novel are driven by lust to the point of destruction. Lust is not love and is underpinned only by a desire for control and ultimately surrenders. Esteban's lust is repeatedly left unfulfilled, his love unrequited, leading him to a life of pain and anguish.

Esteban struggles to control his rages, which are most often driven by his unfulfilled primitive desires. Allende employs animal imagery to aid her development of themes throughout the novel. ' His horse played nasty tricks on him, suddenly becoming a formidable female, a hard, wild mountain flesh.' Esteban blames the horse for his strange desires, exposing his inability to recognize the power that his lust has over him. By letting him blame his feelings on a horse, Allende is highlighting Esteban's lack of understanding of what drives him. Esteban's desires build to the extent that he begins to see his horse as a sexual object. Horses throughout history have been animals that are easily controlled and dominated by humans, abused and constantly worked at the mercy of their owner. The horse an animal that man can control but that Esteban can't represents the weakness that his lust brings, leaving him desperate and clouding his judgement. The adjective ' formidable' describes something, which inspires fear through being large and powerful. Esteban's desires are described as formidable but Allende shows them as perverse; although he is constantly looking for power, he desires to be dominated; he seeks a physical relationship opposite to that which he has with Clara, his wife, who has rejected him. Allende is saying that a desire for absolute power and control transforms a man to a deranged, sexually tormented beast. Often the animals in the novel are in cages, Barrabás, the family dog, arrives in a cage, as all the animals at the zoo that Alba visits which leave her with a constant fear of confinement, foreshadowing the end of the novel. Clara releasing all the caged birds, imagery which connects the idea of freedom and confinement within Chilean Society. Furthermore Allende draws a parallel between Esteban and Barrabas, who cannot resist a female dog in heat. The ability to resist urges <https://assignbuster.com/the-representation-of-lust-in-the-house-of-the-spirits-through-the-characters-rosa-and-esteban/>

and to control emotion and desire by when the situation demands it, is that which distinguishes human from animal but Esteban often follows his body's desires and ignores his rational mind. Allende comments on the devastation that can be caused by lust and its transformative qualities that can turn a powerful man into a weak creature.

Allende exposes Esteban's primitive desires and lack of control, in the midst of his turmoil and anguish for Clara, Esteban is ' Begging her with his eye and drilling holes in the bathroom wall.' Esteban's lust is not purely sexual, he wants Clara's love and attention, yet he also wants to control her, he wants her to behave as he desires, to be attentive and loving to him. He is driven by these needs and his insecurity. Esteban is helpless and desperate until he has gained control. Allende isolates him revealing his weak desire for affection; she emphasizes Clara's power over him, that even her silence drives him crazy. Esteban drills the hole in the bathroom wall because he thinks that as a husband he is entitled to have whatever he wants even if it does not allow his wife privacy or respect. The hole in the wall connects to the recurring theme of men watching and objectifying women, first introduced the beginning when the men crowd around to watch Rosa in the shop, unbeknownst to her. Allende is commenting on how trapped women were in Chilean society, their absolute lack of privacy or right to reject the desires of their husbands. During Clara's most intimate times Esteban is watching her, feeling that he has managed to gain dominance over her. But Esteban's lust for power, driven by his physical and emotional desires projected onto Clara, recreates his actual instability and weakness. Allende is highlighting the fallacy of power in upper class Chilean society. She shows

that the characters with the least obvious power, like Clara, were in fact the most powerful, that whilst Esteban could beat, threaten, fire people and drill holes in walls, all it took was Clara's silence to send him into agony. Allende emphasizes that despite Esteban's sense of entitlement to power and dominance, he is also hypersensitive to this, especially from the upper class, from which he feels socially excluded regardless of his wealth. Esteban's insecurities are exposed constantly, his fear of Clara's spiritual side display his need to be in control and to understand everything that occurs. He is not in control of his own life because it is driven by fear and a continual seeking of approval from all those around him. Allende is highlighting that lust, although correlated to wealth and status, it is more importantly controlled by an individual's approach to life, that each character has the decision, whoever they are, to be in control of their desires and thus protect those around them.

In *The House of The Spirits*, Allende highlights the power that lust has to drive man to insanity; catalysts to lust such as jealousy, status and control are presented throughout the novel. In a society with such opposing classes and politics, people often crave what they cannot have and it is this desire for the unattainable that becomes destructive. Esteban lives through his desires, depicting the effects of lust on lives. Lust drives the objectification of women shown by Esteban and Clara's relationship. Freedom and confinement is also represented in the portrayal of women and by the use of animal imagery. The concept of lust was an element that Allende saw in Chilean society after the war; its dangers were obvious, which is why Allende

criticizes lust and its ultimate power to overtake all characters and essentially drive the novel.