

## Iconoclasm in Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*.

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*Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate (LWC) is a parody of popular myths. She presents the novel as a romance novel, but inverts the genre in all sense. The female characters are headstrong and even the female protagonist, Tita, are capable of manipulating the food, one of the basic necessities of life, that she cooks for the family. Her mood swings effect those who consume the food that she cooks also. But almost all the male characters are passive ones, including the lead character, Pedro. So, in all sense the author has broken the image of the romantic novel genre and presents the idea before the readers that even such an iconoclastic approach can be 'romantic' as such.*

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Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate (LWC)* is all-in-one a book about the Mexican Revolution, a cook book, a romance, a work abounding in magic realism, etc. It is a parody of popular myths. Although Esquivel presents this novel as a romance, she is actually breaking the image of the 'so called romance genre'. Damsels in distress, savior knights in full armours, highly masculine heroes who are capable of headstrong decision making, home as the single ideal female space, etc. that are all part of the ordinary romance novels, are shattered. Instead, we find a totally subjugated hero who escapes from all major events in life.

Esquivel begins her assault on romance genre by inverting the existing patterns. Unlike the usual romance heroes who are very aggressive, decisive, domineering, etc. our hero, Pedro, is very swaggering, passive and weak. When Mama Elena (the protagonist's mother) objects to the marriage of Tita (the protagonist) and Pedro, instead of eloping with her, he decides to marry her elder sister Rosaura, as a means to remain close to Tita. Mama Elena is pictured as a headstrong woman who objects to their marriage tightly upholding to the tradition that the youngest daughter should remain a spinster to look after the mother till the mother's death. Esquivel places Tita in the kitchen, obviously the most secure place in the household, where romantic heroines are meant to be; but Tita in the kitchen is with all the powers. The mental state of Tita is automatically transferred into the food that she; she is the master of all the spices and food that is being cooked by her. For instance, we find the scene where the chickens fight after having the food given to them by an 'angry' Tita. Also, everybody is seen wailing about lost love after eating the sumptuous meal prepared by Tita on the occasion of Rosaura's marriage. Another instance of her magical powers with food is when her sister Gertrudis flees out of uncontrollable passion after eating the tasty rose petal sauce that Tita makes from the rose flowers that Pedro gives her.

Another inversion can be seen in the nature of burning passion that exists between romance couples. Besides the fact that Tita and Pedro are denied of any of these burning passions, Pedro remains sterile, and 'uninterested' in his own legal wife. The only passionate 'love scene' in this novel is the one between Gertrudis and Juan, a revolutionary. Gertrudis mockingly represents a damsel in 'erotic' distress, running naked across the Mexican plains, who is rescued not by a neatly armored knight on a horse back, but by a shabbily dressed, war torn, revolutionary on a horse back. Even when Pedro witnesses this, unable to act bravely and out of fury, he 'escapes' on his rickety bicycle; of course, not the apt vehicle for a romantic hero.

When historical evidences were not enough to highlight the women, who participated in the Mexican Revolution, Esquivel draws Gertrudis as the leader of the revolutionary army, who orders around, making all the men warriors on heels, waiting for her commands. When the revolutionaries enter the ranch to attack and seize all their belongings, it is Mama Elena who points a gun towards them, ordering them to back off. This again is another method of inverting the existing stereotype where men act as the saviors and protectors and women are forced to remain in the household.

However, Esquivel brings in a strong comparison between the characters of Gertrudis and Tita. Tita is shown as a docile female who is restricted in all means by her own mother and the society; whereas, Gertrudis breaks all traditions and stereotypes and eventually evolves as a strong 'macho woman'. The short 'madness'

episode that Tita undergoes is her urge to liberate herself from the traditional constraints that she is going through.

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