

Candidate 4**To what extent does Laura Esquivel use the symbolism of food to enhance emotions in “Como Agua para Chocolate”?**

‘Como Agua Para Chocolate’ is a melodramatic novel written by Laura Esquivel, a Mexican writer famous for the way she portrays Magic Realism. This is explored through the use of literary techniques in the novel, visual representations and elements in the film and the real historical events that were relevant to the setting of the story, influencing how the main key elements act in the outcome of the plot. Esquivel cleverly uses food in her story as a carrier of emotions she wants to enhance and thus affect the different characters in the novel.

The 1989 novel, narrates the story of Tita de la Garza, a young girl growing up on a remote Mexican ranch following an ancient family rule; that she must care for her mother until her last days, giving up any chance of love. However, she falls in love with Pedro, a boy who later on marries Tita’s sister, Rosaura, just to be closer to his real love, Tita. It’s set in the midst of the Mexican revolution and each chapter starts on a different month, describing a different recipe. Through these recipes, using the symbols and Magic Realism they create through food, the readers are able to understand Tita’s emotions throughout the novel and thus her life.

One of the strongest emotions in ‘Como Agua para Chocolate’ is the sadness that Tita feels in multiple chapters throughout the novel. One part where it stands out is when Rosaura and Pedro get married. Tita is overcome with grief, watching her sister and lover get married and while she is baking the wedding cake starts crying. Her tears start rolling into the cake mix making it more liquid and more difficult for it to harden:

“Tardaron más de lo acostumbrado pues la masa no podía espesar debido a las lágrimas de Tita.”¹

The wedding cake in this chapter is used as a symbol in the novel of Rosaura and Pedro’s wedding and their union so therefore represents the betrayal that Tita feels between her and the couple. This quote creates an image which seems to make the tears flow massively, which

¹ Esquivel, Laura: ‘Como Agua para Chocolate’, Chapter 2, page 31

strengthens this idea of making the cake mix embedded with sadness and not able to harden, relating to how Tita feels at the moment: weak and unable to see past the wedding and into her future happiness and growth. This chapter is filmed in a way that is meant to be seen as humorous by the viewers while also maintaining an image that lets us know how much Tita is suffering on the inside as Esquivel uses humour to enhance sadness and grief. It is effective, as the guests all start crying and vomiting extremely. The quote:

“Ni uno solo escapó del hechizo y solo algunos afortunados llegaron a tiempo a los baños; los que no, participaron de la vomitona colectiva que se organizó en pleno patio”²

supports this idea of them being affected by the recipes that Tita prepares. The word choice used by Esquivel, “*Ni uno solo*” indicates that everyone was involved and therefore everyone as a group is able to experience her sadness. This hints at how far her emotions can expand reaching a lot of characters, thus giving us an idea of how powerful they are. This shows us an indication of how she feels. Another choice of words, “*vomitona colectiva*” including the use of a suffix (-ona) to augment the meaning of the word suggests that people were extremely sick and therefore shows us, by using an exaggerated reaction, how strong Tita’s emotions were and how they were able to make so many people feel this extreme sadness and grief. This is one of the main chapters, where we see Magic Realism affect people around Tita and her recipes, successfully highlighting the emotions she is able to convey through the food she cooks.

Another strong emotion that Tita creates through her recipes and that we feel throughout the novel is love. In Chapter 3, Tita cooks ‘Codornices en pétalos de rosas’, a recipe inspired by the roses that Pedro gives her. When the present is discovered by Mamá Elena, she instructs Tita to get rid of them. However, Tita uses this symbol of love and passion to cook her recipe and the food creates a strange effect throughout the family but in particular, in her sister Gertrudis who is ready for love and desire:

² Esquivel, Laura: ‘Como Agua para Chocolate’, Chapter 2, page 39

“Parecía que el alimento que estaba ingiriendo producía en ella un efecto afrodisíaco, pues empezó a sentir que un intenso calor le invadía las piernas”³

The important and significant ingredient in this recipe are the roses, gifted by Pedro as a symbol of love for Tita. Thus, this emotion is magically carried in them. This makes the meal carry the same love and passion that the two lovers feel for each other. The roses act as a symbol to carry this emotion and affect the people around Tita, once again showing how her recipes influence the behaviour of characters in the novel and film. This scene is particularly focused on Gertrudis, who we later discover is the love child of Mamá Elena and her past lover and therefore illegitimate child who has been waiting for her chance in love and to be desired. By her behaviour after ingesting the food: *“el alimento que estaba ingiriendo”*, we are given hints that she has been waiting for this moment her whole life as such powerful food makes her react in this way for the first time. The word *“ingiriendo”* has connotations for eagerly eating, showing that Gertrudis is dying to feel these emotions and thus can't wait to eat the powerful food. By eating this meal, her hidden feelings suddenly wake up and take over, and she runs away from home with a complete stranger to explore the passion hidden inside her. The use of word choice in *“intenso calor”* demonstrates how passionate Gertrudis is and allows the readers to know how powerful the emotions that Tita creates using food can become in others and gives us an idea of how people around her are affected. Relating back to the roses and the motive of these emotions, the writer describes the roses as pink and after being coated in Tita's blood, they turn red, giving connotations for change which relates to Gertrudis' sudden effect by them, as we are shown that she is growing as a woman. It also becomes the official colour of love and desire, further supporting this idea. Overall, this scene is particularly good at showing how characters are affected by the food Tita puts her emotions into, focusing more on Gertrudis sexual release and how she feels and changes throughout. This helps the readers understand how powerful emotions can become when they are triggered by the use of food that Tita touches and the recipes she prepares.

One other emotion created by Tita's cooking through her recipes is compassion. In Chapter 4, when Roberto is born after a stressful pregnancy, Rosaura is not able to feed her own baby

³ Esquivel, Laura: 'Como Agua para Chocolate', Chapter 3, page 49

and is too sick to leave her bed. Therefore the responsibility of taking care of the baby falls on Tita, thus deepening their relationship and making them closer. However, the child doesn't seem to accept any types of food or liquids so Tita starts despairing and makes him think she is feeding him. Magically, milk from Tita is produced and she is able to feed him, creating a bond with Roberto like no other:

“El niño se pescó del pezón con desesperación y succionó y succionó, con fuerza tan descomunal, que logró sacarle leche a Tita”⁴

The milk that Tita is able to produce becomes a symbol of compassion and maternal love as something that should be natural for a mother, becomes a supernatural thing for her. This shows the readers another side to Tita, providing us with evidence that throughout the chapters in this novel, she is maturing as a woman and as a character. The use of repetition *“y succionó y succionó”* emphasises the high amount of milk that the baby drinks and so that Tita produces. This gives the readers an idea that she is so desperate to take care of this baby that she is magically able to do this, proving how maternal she is. The word choice *“descomunal”* reflects on the baby's strength to survive. This can link to Tita trying to take care of the baby and make sure he lives even if he initially isn't eating, further supporting her maternal love and compassion. A symbol of closeness between the two is created and makes the story link back to Tita's relationship with Nacha, years back, when she acted as Tita's nurturer and taught her all she knows now. Also, the close link between both Mama Elena and Rosaura not being able to produce milk further supports this tie between the two generations that makes the story seem complete to the reader. However, it foreshadows that this situation may not work out as Tita's life and relationships haven't always been good and easy, making the readers more interested in reading more and continuing the story to find out what happens. This hints that history is repeating itself and makes Tita like a second mother to the child and definitely more prominent, once again adding weight to how food emphasises emotions throughout the novel.

In conclusion, it is clear Laura Esquivel, like many other South American writers has been known to use Magic Realism to create a story that engages the audience efficiently. This

⁴ Esquivel, Laura: 'Como Agua para Chocolate', Chapter 4, page 71

means she creates a surreal (but not realistic) and yet magical narrative which makes the readers interested in reading further. In 'Como Agua para Chocolate', Tita uses her recipes to channel her emotions through the food she cooks and this is made extremely clear through the way Laura Esquivel narrates her story through the chapters. This shows that Tita's cooking affects other characters around her and at some points even herself. The writer uses several examples of situations in terms of recipes in the chapters where food becomes a symbol that enhances emotions in the characters in the novel and film.

1599 WORDS (excluding quotes and title)

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