

I. *Like Water for Chocolate* and the Issues of Gender and Sexuality

The novel *Like Water for Chocolate*, written by Mexican novelist Laura Esquivel, revolves around the life of a woman, Tita De La Garza. It shows how most of the youngest daughter of middle and upper class family live amid sacrifices, sufferings, and contentment. This project argues that Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* is written in the style of magical realism. It hybridizes the magic events of character and setting with that of worldly reality. Esquivel's novel *Like Water for Chocolate* employs third-person narrator to tell the story of her dead family. The novel mixes two important elements of family's life: love and food. Esquivel called *Like Water for Chocolate* an instalment novel with family recipes structured according to the months of the year beginning with January; it combines elements of a cookbook and a romance novel and is actually a parody of both genres.

Esquivel was born on September 30, 1950, in Mexico City, Mexico. The third of four children of Julio Caesar Esquivel, a telegraph operator, and his wife Josephina. Esquivel grew up in Mexico City and attended the Escuela Normal de Maestros, the teacher's college. After teaching school for eight years, Esquivel began writing and directing for children's theatre. In the early 1980s she wrote the screenplay for the Mexican film *Chido One*, directed by her husband Alfosno Arau and released in 1985. Arau also directed her screenplay for *Like Water for Chocolate*, released in Mexico in 1989 and in the United States in 1993. *Like Water for Chocolate* became a best seller in Mexico and the United States and has been translated into numerous languages. Esquivel often explores the relationship between men and women in Mexico in her work. She is best known for *Like Water for Chocolate* (1990), an imaginative and compelling combination of novel and cookbook. In an interview with Molly O'Neill in *The New York Times*, Esquivel explains:

I grew up in a modern home, but my grandmother lived across the street in an old house that was built when churches were illegal in Mexico. She had a chapel in the home, right between the kitchen and dining room. The smell of nuts and chillies and garlic got all mixed up with the smells from the chapel, my grandmother's carnations, the liniments and healing herb. (2)

These experiences in her family's kitchen provided the inspiration for her first novel. Esquivel has continued to show her creative flair and lyrical style in her later work. Accompanied by a collection of music, her second novel *The Law of Love* (1996) combined romance and science fiction. Esquivel again creates a magical world where love becomes the dominant force of life. The novel includes illustrations and a compact disc of music to accompany it. *Between the Fires* (2000) featured essays on life, love, and food. Published in 2001, *Swift as Desire*, a tribute to her dead father, attempts to uncover the mystery of why the author-persona's parents, once deeply in love, eventually stopped communicating. Her novel, *Malinche* (2006) explores the life of a near mythic figure in Mexican history- the women who served as Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortés's interpreter and mistress.

In the Foreword to the cookbook *An Appetite for Passion*, Esquivel comments about her first and the popular novel *Like Water for Chocolate*:

I wrote my first novel with the intention of giving the transferring of love in the kitchen the appreciation it deserves. I am convinced, just as Tita is in my novel, that we can every other activity we engage in. When this affective charge is powerful, it is impossible for it to pass unnoticed. Others feel it, touch it, and enjoy it. I find confirmation of that each day that passes. (28)

Esquivel's title comes from a saying common in some countries of Latin America. "Like Water for Chocolate" means to be literally and figuratively "a boiling point." In Mexico, for example, hot chocolate is often prepared by dissolving a tablet of chocolate not in milk (hence the expression). The novel's main character, Tita De La Garza, uses the expression metaphorically, to signal how mad she is about having to remain in her house – as the youngest daughter—taking care of her mother while her sisters are free to live their lives. *Like Water for Chocolate* can be distilled into the stories of two women, Tita De La Garza and her mother, the formidable Mama Elena. The trajectory of their struggle against one another is the axis around which the entire novel turns. Tita, the protagonist strives for love, freedom, and individuality, and Mama Elena, the chief antagonist, stands as the prime oppositions to the fulfilment of these goals. This mother- daughter relationship is fraught with difficulty from its inception, when Tita is brought into the world prematurely after her father's sudden death. Mama Elena is the opposite of nurturer, never forging any bond with Tita. Tita develops a relationship with a food that gives her the power to nurture and give outlet to her emotion. Tita is born on a kitchen table in Mexico on the eve of the Mexican revolution.

While a closer reading of the text shows that all of the female characters are stronger than their male counterparts. It's Tita rather than Pedro, who finally dares to confront her mother and Rosaura, Tita reflects in the novel, is the projection of the sense of celebration of femininity in deeper level. The text thus accentuates the concept of celebration of femininity, as Jane Flax asserts: "Women's minds are also seen as reflecting the qualities of four stereotypically female activities and bodies." Even feminists sometimes say women reason and write differently and have different interests and motives than men" (51).

Tita wields a significant amount of power through the strange effects of her cooking. Throughout the novel, patriarchy is imposed upon Tita by her mother, who may represent a modern form of patriarchy through mimesis. Although Tita is repressed, she is empowered by her role in the kitchen, as every time she cooks a meal, her emotions are literally transported into those who eat the food. This may be perceived as an example of essentialist feminist perspective, as Tita is empowered through her feminine role. At a very tender age, Tita is instilled with a deep love for food “for Tita, the joy of living was wrapped up in the delights of food” (Esquivel 7). Her mother, on the other hand, may be a symbol for patriarchy through a matriarchal figure. Her death and Tita’s final rejection of her ghost spirit may symbolize the end of patriarchy’s tyranny. In contrast Pedro, and indeed the other male characters, is portrayed as being indecisive and weak.

Academically, the novel has been the subject of much analysis. Its required reading in many schools, colleges, and universities shows this fact. This interest comes, in part, from the novel’s seemingly common story - lovers who cannot get together – and a fastpaced plot. However, what sets the novel apart from a simple romance is the cycle of failed romance: Mama Elena is kept away from her lover because he is poor and mulatto; the family cook, Nacha, never finds a partner; Rosaura marries Pedro knowing that he loves Tita; and Dr. John Brown loves Tita but cannot marry.

Another feature of the novel is its magical realism, intermingled with humour, life experience, and, recipes. Magical realism is a technique employed by many Latin American writers in which time- shifts, dreams, and surrealistic descriptions. M.H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* writes “the present day novels of magic realism achieve their effects in large part by exploiting a realistic manner in rendering

event that are in themselves fantastic absurd, or flatly impossible”(270). According to Abrams, the features of magic realism are weaving “an ever sitting pattern, a sharply etched ‘realism’ in representing in ordinary events and details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as with materials derived from myth and fairy tales” (203). In this novel, Esquivel chooses a Mexican family tradition that revolves around the youngest daughter Tita, who because of local system is seduced to a life of service to her mother. Tita cannot marry, cannot date, she only serves Mama Elena. Therefore Tita is thrust into the role of caregiver. During her youth, Tita is exiled to the kitchen, where she learns various recipes and cooking skills from Nacha, the family’s Indian servant. Mama Elena is a tyrannical parent, and Tita’s only refuge becomes the kitchen, where she pours her emotions into her cooking. She subtly rebels by rechanneling her feelings for him into the creation of delicious meals that express her passionate and giving nature. On the surface, the novel is a Mexican love story that charms the palate and heart.

The female characters are confined to stereotypical gender roles. They are confined within the kitchen, babysitting, mothering, and nurturing. Nevertheless, they are stronger than their counterparts as the latter are weak, timid and indecisive. Why the women are more powerful in the family although they are confined to the feminine roles is a researchable issue.

In *Like Water for Chocolate*, Esquivel uses the revolution to explore themes of masculinity and gender identity, and examine how individuals appropriate for themselves the revolution’s goal of liberty. As it is set in Esquivel’s homeland Mexico it represents the Mexican culture. When the protagonist of novel Tita wants to marry her lover Pedro her mother, the formidable Mama Elena says to Tita:

If he intends to ask for your hand, tell him not to bother. He'll be wasting his time and mine too. You know perfectly well that being the youngest daughter means you have to take care of me until the day I die...that's it for today. You don't have an opinion, and that's all I want to hear about it. For generations, not a single person in my family has ever questioned this tradition, and no daughter of mine is going to be the one to start. (13-14)

This strategy leads the reader to explore the feminist properties of *Like Water for Chocolate*, which is evident in the depictions of Tita's struggle to gain independence and develop her identity, and also in the fact that this struggle is depicted at all. In creating this female- centred cast of characters, Esquivel has created a bittersweet tale of love and loss and a compelling exploration of a women's search for identity and fulfilment.

By celebrating cooking, babysitting, nurturing and other household chores, and their body, the female characters like Tita, her youngest daughter and her grandma command the dominance over their male counterparts. In *Like Water for Chocolate*, it is evident that female characters dominant the story. The novel as primarily concerned with feminine identity and female contribution to the formation of the Mexican national identity. The central focus within novel rests upon the creation of feminine space, most notably in the kitchen. Through Tita's creativity in the kitchen, she finds an outlet for her suppressed emotions. Thus, ironically while Mama Elena tries to control Tita by confining her to the kitchen and forcing her to prepare all of the family's meal. Tita is also able to strengthen her relationship with others and to gain a clearer sense of her. There Tita's role becomes a traditionally female one that of selfless nurturer, placing the needs of others before her own. In this

limited role Tita struggles to find a sense of identity. Victor Zomudio- Taylor, when commenting upon the use of first person diary, cookbook, and *Feuilleton* traditions, states: “These genres have traditionally circumscribed women’s voices through a mode of self-representation situated within sites of domestic everyday life...these sites...are transformed into sources of self-fashioning affirmation and resistance”(46).

However, the extent to which this narrative succeeds in transforming into a feminine affirmation or reflects “real women’s lives” should be approached with caution. Esquivel takes the traditional Mexican view of women through its head, thus portraying women through predominantly male characteristics and men the so-called ‘weaker sex’. The male characters within the novel also depict various traits that are typically seen as feminine. For example, Pedro is long-suffering, as seen by his willingness to wait a life for the woman he loves, while also being nurturing and patient. Such femininity is also portrayed by characters such as Sargent Trevifio, who despite being a male, manages to decipher recipes, which are normally perceived as being a female domain, while Gertrudis is unable to understand its code, as seen by her reading the “recipe as if she were reading hieroglyphics.”

In this connection this thesis argues that all of the female characters in the novel are strong enough and happy doing their household work than the male and also there is feminine quality in male characters that clarifies the celebration of femininity. Esquivel imagines a world in which men are physically present only occasionally, though the legacy of sexism and the confinement of women to the domestic sphere persist. Esquivel does not offer her readers the vision of a utopian sisterhood, but rather insight into the way women are restricted by standards of societal propriety perpetuated by other women.

Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* has been diversely interpreted by the various critics from the very outset of its publication. Despite its popularity with the public, *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989) has often been dismissed as a "poor imitation of male canon" (111). However, and as argued by Ibson, "Esquivel 'feminizes' her novel by presenting a community of women sustained through an activity- the preparation of food- that transcends social barriers of class, race, and generation" (112). As such, this text will portray the way in which Esquivel's life affected her life by considering the way in which Mama Elena De La Garza uses her power as the "head of the household" in order to dominate and control her daughters.

Esquivel uses scenes such as this in order to address the way in which tradition and conventional attitudes are so entrenched within Mexican society. Halevi-Wise elaborates upon women's stereotypical tradition and argues as "her use of food, in which women are faced with "rules she has not made an over which she has no control" (123). The violence that Tita suffers at the hands of her mother is also depictive of male brutality, for example, Mama Elena appears to be made up of characteristics that are normally attributed to men. Although, for example, Pedro claims to lose Tita, but instead accepts Rosaura to challenge her mother's refusal to allow him to marry Tita, but instead accepts Rosaura as his bride. Furthermore, his weak nature is displayed in his refusal to consummate his marriage, as well as the fact that the only reason that he chooses to do so is because "lord, this is not lust or lewdness, but to make a child to serve you" (52).

The structure of *Like Water for Chocolate* as a novel in monthly instalment with recipes, romances, and home remedies, "as it is subtitled, establishes the filter through which the reader will experience the world of the novel. Like Tita – whose knowledge of life is "based on the kitchen" – she says:

The reader must explore the work through the role and power of food, guided by the recipes and remedies that begin each chapter. The division of the novel into “monthly installment” conjures up the image of serial narratives published in periodicals (often women’s magazine). This organization, along with the matter-of-fact that the novel offers substantial opportunities for feminist analysis. In this regard Harmony Wu observes “...the text itself doubles back against its own feminist pretensions, resulting in what is ultimately a conservative text.” (178)

She also argues that the patriarchal focus is never subverted and that real protagonists are Esperanza and Alex whose “union is productive and marries together the two classes, races and nations” (189). She concludes that this marriage lays “the foundation of natural family bonds between Mexican and the United States in the past appeals for a dependency” (189).

Contemporary Mexico, although having accepted certain feminine values and the equality of women, is still a nation is coloured by predominantly male conceptions of society and the role of women. Franco highlights this contradiction in his essay “Going Public: Reinhabiting the Private” as the “sentimentalization of womanhood” (41). Similarly Ibson mentions “not biologically determined but learned through oral tradition” (114).

Different critics show their interest on her novel critiquing it from different point of views. Among them Kathleen M. Gleason expresses her views differently as she comments on the novel as the story of post-modern parody. She says:

The association of fire and passion has been made so often in literature and art as to have become common place and Esquivel makes the most

of that fact. Hutcheon writes that parody resembles metaphor in the both require that the decoder constructs a second meaning through inferences about surface statements and supplement the foreground with acknowledgement and knowledge of a background context. (33-34)

Here, M. Gleen interprets the novel as a post-modern parody. According to Gleen in *Like Water for Chocolate* the association of fire and passion, cooking and loving and so on is fundamental in Laura Esquivel's work. So many metaphors in this novel also prove this novel as a parody.

On the other hand, the use of the social change in this novel with an apparent disregard for socio-economic conditions is something that re-evaluates the relationship between the text and characters. Here, Victoria Martinez raises the socio-economic issue in this novel. In this context she says:

Nevertheless, bourgeois characters never discuss in land reform, better economic conditions, or education. The narrative does homage to Mexico's indigenous past, and this appreciation for the indigenous manifests itself in Tita. If the middle-upper-class Mexicans of the porfiriato disdain their national produce that is where Tita rebels, she embraces the foods, spices, and wools of the reign; she feels love for Nacha and respect for Chenchu. She also spends more time with the servants than with her family and she appropriates their space and tasks. However, she also accepts the wealth and position of her family; she never really abandons her social status and she maintains a food hold in the outside of the kitchen. (33)

In this way, indicating the socio-economic condition in *Like Water for Chocolate* as Tita loves and respects her servants she does not make any difference on upper and lower class people. She has the feeling of respects of labour. Thus Martinez goes through critical view point of Marxism.

Regarding all these issues and commentaries, it is evident that Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* has been analyzed from various perspectives. The present research uses specially gynocriticism to analyze the text. There exists a strong need to carry out research on the play from a new perspective. Without a proper study on these issues, the meaning of the text will still remain incomplete.

Gynocriticism is the study of women writers and of the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women. Gynocritics includes the psychodynamics of female creativity and individual or collective female career. It also includes the evolution and rules of a female literary tradition. Feminists' literary critics who use the term 'Gynocritics' concentrate on text written by women. In other words, Gynocritics is the observation on women's writing from the perspective of women. Elaine Showalter's name is associated with the term 'gynocriticism' which was developed as an alternative to phallogocentric criticism. Unlike phallogocentric criticism, gynocriticism aims at recovering the silenced women writers of the past for reconsideration and makes them available to readers. Showalter makes a distinction between two kinds of criticisms: feminist critique which is "concerned with *woman as reader* – with woman as the consumer of male-produced literature, . . . , awakening us to the significance of its sexual codes," and *gynocritics* which is "concerned with *woman as writer* – with woman as the producer of textual meaning, with history, themes, genres, and structures of literature by woman" (1226). She has developed this special type of woman-centered criticism as a new model based on the woman's

experience rather than a blind addiction to an adoption of masculine theories and models.

Similarly, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* are some of the most significant feminist texts of the twentieth century in which she discusses the economic and social condition of women writers from the very beginning of the modern history of England. In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf argues, "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (4).

Thus the primary objective of the study is to discuss about the feminists discourse of celebration of femininity. On the surface level, the novel is progressive to explore the repressive impact of tradition on women and a celebration of their willingness to break from tradition. This research also aims at subverting the patriarchal where motherhood is regarded as the natural evolution of women's life. Mama Elena, on the other hand, may be a symbol for patriarchy through a matriarchal figure. Her death, and Tita's final rejection of her ghost spirit may symbolize the end of patriarchy's tyranny. According to Gilbert and Gubar, "women must kill the aesthetic ideal through which they themselves have been 'killed' into art. And similarly, all women writers must kill the angel's necessary opposite and double, the 'monster' in the house, whose medusa-face also kills creativity" (812). Perhaps this is exactly what *Like Water for Chocolate* is doing. Anyway, the study aims at establishing the importance of female to make the deliberate choice to conduct life in their own. Liberation is an illusory ideal in a society and identity built on tradition but, like the female characters, it is one worth striving for. The three women like Mama Elena, Gertrudis, Tita, they all tried to gain their freedom from their respective parents, but not all of them had a good outcome. Tita and Gertrudis were able to gain their freedom at the end of the novel. They both had a chance to be with their true

love before they die and to do what they wanted to do. Whereas, Mama Elena died not being able to live with her true love and still attached to their family's tradition.

Patriarchy creates the ideology of superiority and inferiority. The so-called binary position of man and woman is handed down from generation to generation through practice. Wives are regarded as the commodity of their husbands. Feminist critics want to deconstruct this male-made definition and revolt against this view and definition in search of their own self identity, emancipation, and equality. Simon de Beauvoir's book, *The Second Sex* raises feminist consciousness by appealing to the idea that liberation for men too. She takes the art, literature and philosophy as symbols of liberty. She says:

A woman who expands her energy, who has responsibilities, who knows how harsh is the struggle against the world's opposition, needs-like the male-not only to satisfy her physical desires by agreeable sexual adventures. Now, there are still many social circles in which her freedom in this matter is not concretely recognized; if she exercises it, burdensome hypocrisy is demanded of her. (696)

Through these lines, it is clear that by satisfying her physical desire according to the agreeable sexual adventures woman not only risks her reputation but also the career. But men are free from these risks. This difference is due to traditional attitudes and the special nature of feminine eroticism.

Considering women's life only for pregnancy, child birth and child rearing patriarchal society tries to dominate woman and confine woman within the four walls of household activities. Women are suppressed and oppressed in such society granting them limited role. Pregnancy always hinders female to celebrate their individuality. Some feminists take pregnancy as the deformation of body. In the postmodern time,

women want to be as free and genius as men. Thus women are massively suppressed and have been confined within narrow domesticity.

Through the socialization of physical violence over wives by their husbands, patriarchal society dominates women. Husband sees his wife as a helper and behaves her as a commodity. In the male dominated society, women's existence is othered and considered to be inferior and subservient to male sex. Women are tortured by male. In this sense, the following lines by Catherine Mackinnon are relevant to quote:

Women bound, women battered, women tortured, women humiliated, women degraded and defiled, women killed- or to be fair to the soft core-women sexually accessible, have able, there for them, wanting to be taken and used, with perhaps just a little of light bondage. (220)

This shows the male violence over female. Women are taken as the property of men. Women are battered, tortured, humiliated, degraded, and even they may be killed if they do not obey the patriarchal society. So, perfect freedom is not possible in existing patriarchal society.

Traditions are customs handed down from generation to generation to preserve history, culture or teachings. In *Like Water for Chocolate*, the De La Garza family tradition restricts Tita from marrying Pedro only because she has to care her mother until she died. Tita, here is, on the senselessness of this tradition. If the youngest daughter in the family has to remain unmarried and take care of her mother, who will take care of the daughter when she got old? What if the family produced no daughter? In the novel she writes:

She wanted to know who started this family tradition. It would be nice if she could let that genius know about one little flaw in this perfect plan for taking care of women in their old age .Or are daughters who

stay home and take care of their mothers not expected to survive too long after the parents death? and besides, she would like to know what kind of studies had established that the youngest daughter and not the eldest daughter is best suited to care for their mother. If she could not marry, was she at least allowed to experience love? Or not even that?
(11-12)

If Mama Elena did acknowledge this loophole, then there would be an issue regarding Tita's right and her equality among her sisters. Like other daughters of Mama Elena, Tita also by birth is of her daughter. However, her rights, her equality and her mother's attitude towards her make Tita seem of lower status and almost like a servant.

In the novel, Mama Elena is almost inhuman; showing no soft feelings toward Tita. Mama Elena is being extremely selfish in not allowing Tita to marry Pedro, the love of her life. Matriarch of the De La Garza family, Mama Elena rules the ranch with her iron will. The most telling description of her is in regards to her ability to carve watermelon. Esquivel's comment about Mama Elena at one point in the narrative: "Unquestionably, when it came to dividing, dismantling, dismembering, desolating, detaching, dispossessing, destroying or dominating, Mama Elena was a pro"(96). In fact, Mama Elena is so cruel and miserable.

Although this study makes significant use of concepts developed in feminist scholarship, it does not offer a comprehensive analysis of feminist literary theory. Rather an analysis of gynocritics concepts developed by Simon De Beauvoir, Susan Gubar and Elaine Showalter remain the primary theorists in the text. Given the nature of research, available time and resources, this study does not offer an analysis of magical realism and other dominant issues prevailing in the novel.

This research has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter presents a brief introduction, including the literature review and a discussion on the propriety and significance of topic and its hypothesis. The second chapter applies the theoretical tool to read the text and prove the hypothesis. The major tool has been gynocriticism used to see the celebration of femininity in Esquivel's text. Finally, the last chapter is the conclusion of the research drawn on the basis of the textual analysis offered in the second chapter.

II. Celebration of Femininity in Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*

This research explores the resistance and condition of women in a patriarchal society and change in traditional attitudes towards authority and freedom of expression. Tita operates magically and passionately within the perceived confines of patriarchy to control her environment and convey her feelings through food. Food and cooking is paradoxical in that, on one hand, it offers the ability to break away, reconfigure or challenge traditional social norms regarding marginalized others, in this case women in the kitchen, but on the other, by positing Tita firmly in a stereotypical role and imbuing her with supernatural powers, these very notions are confirmed, which is celebration of femininity in the novel.

Like Water for Chocolate, is the love story of a woman who is forbidden from love because of a tradition that forces the main character, Tita, to dedicate her life to her mother until she dies. Forbidden to marry his lover Tita, Pedro marries Tita's older sister to stay close to Tita. "Mama Elena sticks to her belief in their family's tradition that the youngest daughter has to take care of her mother until she dies" (10-11). Both Gertrudis and Tita do not like what Mama Elena's "family tradition." Because Tita was the youngest, she has been questioning herself on why is there such an absurd tradition in their family. "If she couldn't marry, was she at least allowed to experience love? Or not even that?" (10). The strongest element that Esquivel includes in *Like Water for Chocolate* to depict patriarchy is Mama Elena herself. She is a strong and self-reliant woman who does not accept challenges to her tyrannical rule and leads her house with an iron fist. She rigorously forbids Tita to express her feelings as well as her own point of view about the family tradition. She is a harsh, cruel woman who is far-removed from the traditional view of mothers. As Wollstonecraft says, parenting is a God-given duty to men and to women, but women, as they are responsible for

reproduction, is even more beholden to the rearing of their children. Wollstencraft says a great deal about parenting “obeying a parent only on account of his being a parent, shackles the mind, and prepares it for a slavish submission to any power but reason” (153). Since society demands they behave like children themselves, they are often poor parents. Their own silliness, ignorance, and capriciousness lead them to raise unruly, spoiled children. If they have daughters, they instill the same unfortunate values in them. Some mothers, repressed by the nature of their sex, tyrannize over their children and thus violate the laws of nature. Wollstonecraft advocates for education reform for women so that, among other things, they will be better mothers. Instead, Mama Elena is portrayed as an evil mother - an authoritarian, tyrannical, twisted woman, who takes delight in using her power to destroy her daughters - while also being “merciless, killing with a single blow” (47).

While most feminist literature would view the kitchen as a space that oppresses women and limits their opportunities, Esquivel presents the De La Garza kitchen as a weapon for subversive action. Only strong, independent women who are willing to break with traditional values are allowed in this space. Gynocriticism, examines the female struggle for identity and the social construct of gender. If gender is inherently constructed from an ideology, then that ideology is by nature, indeterminate and fluid, susceptible to the analysis of differences. According to Elaine Showalter gynocriticism is the study of not only the female as a gender status but also the ‘internalized consciousnesses of the female. Although it may seem strange to choose food preparation, a stereotypical female duty, as the main method through which the women in *Like Water for Chocolate* are able to express their controversial ideas, one must take into account the audience for whom Esquivel originally writes “Mexican women who have almost certainly grown up with a very strong tradition of

what is appropriate behavior for a proper woman” (65). She does not take for granted the power of family values and tradition but rather incorporates them into her novel.

Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* is a treatise on overcoming the ways in which women in her time are oppressed and denied their potential in society, with concomitant problems for their households and society as a whole. Women are taught to indulge their emotions and thus have unhappy marriages because passion cannot be sustained. Virtue should not be relative to gender; as both men and women were created by God and have souls, they have the same kind of propensity to exercise reason and develop virtue. Female dependence as seen in her day is not natural. Women’s confinement in the home and inability to participate in the public sphere results in their insipidness and pettiness. Wollstonecraft wants to inspire a “revolution in female manners.” She says:

The great misfortune is this, that they both acquire manners before morals and knowledge of life before they have from reflection, any acquaintance with the grand ideal outline of human nature. The consequence is natural; satisfied with common nature, they become a prey to prejudices, and taking all their opinions on credit, they blindly submit to authority. (24)

Generally confined to the private sphere of their homes, where they spend their time conforming to social manners, women become acclimated to staying there rather than entering the public sphere. They tend not to hold substantial jobs, participate in politics, attain advanced education, discuss and debate the major ideas of the day, or take on noble, heroic duties. Their education is fragmentary and lacking, so coupled with their confinement, they become ignorant and caught in the social prejudices of their age. The males in their lives make their decisions for them because they have

become too delicate. This power is arbitrary except that social structures have enforced and reinforced women's need to submit to the authority of others. Since both men and women were endowed with souls by their creator, men do not have a 'natural' hegemony over women on the level of individual rights, but their differences in physical strength are carried over in society to falsely justify male hegemony in many other areas of life.

Mama Elena in Esquivel's text is essentially an agent of Patriarchy, where she also possesses complex characteristics that are suggestive of feminine power and independence that pose a significant threat to male supremacy. She is portrayed as strong, resourceful and fearless as underscored in her confrontation with rebel soldiers. Though they are represented as stereotypical concepts of woman as servant/nourisher, and yet create a sense of secrecy, empowerment and reverential respect for those that wield such culinary authority.

Tita is a powerful force, which subverts notions of her status as victim. It is by virtue of her culinary power that Tita becomes rule breaker and rebel, paradoxically wielding her power from within the sacred yet traditional domain of the kitchen. Food is the source of Tita's power and the kitchen is the battlefield from which she explores and creates extraordinary and unrivaled culinary delights. By a strange process of osmosis, she is able to convey intense emotional experience through food. Scholars like Valdes celebrate the novel as a "feminist recuperation of artistic creativity within the confinement of the house" (190). Tita's cooking ability is central to a theme that offers a sense of both empowerment, and paradoxically domestic servitude.

Superficially, the recipes confirm that women's place is in the kitchen, and that her role throughout the ages is that of nurturer, a role infused with notions of self-denial, and wavering levels of social esteem. However the recipes also reflect the

power, secrecy and intergenerational prestige imbued with having this level of culinary knowledge. The recipes point to a culinary aristocratic oligarchy in Nancha, Tita and Chenchu, who literally have the power of life and death, healing and sexual energy through the ancient wisdom found in the kitchen. In this way the recipes themselves suggest a type of covert rebellion from within the ranks of the disenfranchised. For many, all elements of food preparation found within the text are ideal sites for establishing a female community and “even a feminist utopia from which to contest patriarchal power” (30). While for other critics, cooking, the kitchen and women are images that confirm a masculine hegemony rather than undermine it. The love and legacy of Nancha keep Tita whole and full. Though she sacrifices her time and energy to serve the people around her, she does it because the kitchen is her refuge – cooking is her language. “Though she didn’t know how to read or write, when it came to cooking she knew everything there was to know” (4). She certainly longs for Pedro, but she never questions her only existence and self-sufficiency when he is emotionally or physically distant. While the ranch may be filled with tension and turmoil and toxicity, especially for the women who live there, it is also a place that demonstrates the power of women to survive independently.

Tita’s mother, on the other hand, is depicted as a selfish masculine monster that is demonized for her tyranny. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s essay, “Madwoman in the Attic,” analyzes the way women are depicted in literature of the twentieth century, analyzing the way that women were either angels or monsters, but always something other-worldly. However, not all the women in the story are depicted as angels or monsters. In the novel, Tita and her childhood nanny, Nancha, are the angels in the household—they exhibit “submissiveness, modesty, selflessness” (816). Gertrudis, one of Tita’s sisters, after eating one of Tita’s meals that Tita made

when feeling an intense passion for Pedro, runs off the ranch to make love to a Mexican soldier. After disappearing for several months, Gertrudis returns as a soldier who leads Mexican revolutionary troops in the war, and despite her masculine position, remains an object of attraction for the troops. She is a duplicitous woman: understanding, independent, sexualized, and, somehow, still feminine. She is neither an angel nor a monster; she is innately human and heroic.

Although at first glance this novel may seem to reinforce traditional gender roles, it is instead revolutionizing them. Tita ends up making love to her Pedro both while he is married to her sister and after they die. Although her behavior might be deemed unpious and unchaste by traditional standards, she is nevertheless a sympathetic and admirable character in the novel. According to Gilbert and Gubar, “women must kill the aesthetic ideal through which they themselves have been ‘killed’ into art. And similarly, all women writers must kill the angel’s necessary opposite and double, the ‘monster’ in the house, whose medusa-face also kills creativity” (812). Similarly in the novel, Mama Elena may be a symbol for patriarchy through a matriarchal figure. “Tita had said the magic words that would make Mama Elena disappear forever. The imposing figure of her mother began to shrink until it became no more than a tiny light. As the ghost faded away, a sense of relief grew inside Tita’s body...” (199-200). Mama Elena’s death, and Tita’s final rejection of her ghost spirit may symbolize the end of patriarchy’s tyranny.

In this novel, the central story revolves around the life of the protagonist Tita and twelve different delicious foods. Each food and recipe is used as the medium to show the love, romances as well as feeling and emotion. Tita is struggling for independence and looking to claim her personal identity. Thus, Esquivel employs food as a symbol to articulate Tita's struggle to gain identity, because food represents

both what Tita desires and her emotions, which define her character. The role of food can be understood through these lines Caseburg says “Therefore, food functions in strong connection with women. In ancient texts like the Bible, Eve, the first woman, is intimately connected with food, and it is in her vulnerability that she is tempted to ingest forbidden fruit that changes the course of human history” (18). Food is the direct cause of a person’s physical and emotional state and food also serves as a channel through which one person’s emotions can be transmitted to another. For instance, alone in the kitchen, Nacha tastes the cake icing to see if Tita’s tears have made it salty. She finds the flavor unchanged, but is suddenly overcome with a sense of immense loss. She remembers her own lost, youthful love and takes sick with an ache so terrible that she cannot attend the wedding:

When she had finished beating the meringue, it occurred to Nacha to lick some of the icing off her finger to see if Tita’s tears had affected the flavor. No, it did not seem to have been affected; yet without knowing why, Nacha was suddenly overcome with an intense longing. One after another, she thought back on all the wedding banquets she had prepared for the De La Garza family, ever cherishing the illusion that the next wedding would be her own. (36)

Here, through the wedding cake ‘Chabela’ that has been prepared by Tita has shown the strong power of her emotion. Cake with Tita’s tear gives Nacha’s the flashback of her past life and becomes the medium to take her life.

The fantastic elements of Tita’s cooking, providing images of a perspiring, lovelorn and frustrated cook therefore relegating Tita to a role of servitude and underscoring a sense of her marginalized place in the world. Food is the chosen

medium for this culinary genius and it is from the unlikely domain of the kitchen that she controls her environment and others:

The moment they took their first bite of the cake, everyone was flooded with a great wave of longing. Even Pedro, usually so proper, was having trouble holding back his tears. Mama Elena, who had not shed a single tear over her husband's death, was sobbing silently. But the weeping was just the first symptom of a strange intoxication—an acute attack of pain and frustration—that seized the guests and scattered them across the patio and the grounds and in the bathrooms, all of them wailing over the lost love. (39)

The wedding of Rosaura and Pedro marks the first instance when Tita wields, albeit unknowingly, the power that food offers her. Afflicted by sadness, Tita pours her emotions into the food she prepares by means of her tears; it is relevant here to recall the flood of tears in which Tita was born. Tita's tears induce incessant vomiting and a terrible sense of loss among the wedding guests. However, more than a mere echo of Tita's sorrow, these effects constitute a violent and amplified expression of emotion, as the cake inflicts actual pain afterwards, Pedro tells Tita his reasons for marrying Rosaura, and the two reconcile.

Later, the jealousy and bitterness Tita feels toward Rosaura is transferred again into Tita's cooking, and the food gives Rosaura bad breath, flatulence, and horrible body odor. Fitz Simmons says:

She is so repugnant that Pedro is driven from her, and Rosaura's baby is given to Tita to nurture. Despite this, Tita's emotions continue to be transferred into her cooking. For instance the rose-petal sauce that Tita

makes is most certainly an aphrodisiac and is also the first time a clear statement is made suggesting that food is a sign symptoms. (167)

Tita makes the unusual concoction out of rose petals, from the roses given to her by Pedro. In this regard:

Tita clasped the roses to her chest so tightly that when she got to the, the roses, which had been mostly pink, had turned quite red from the blood that was flowing from Tita's hands and breasts. They were beautiful. She couldn't just throw them in the trash; in the first place, she'd never been given flowers before, and second, they were from Pedro. All at once she seemed to hear Nacha's voice dictating a recipe involving rose petals. Tita had nearly forgotten it because it called for pheasants, which they didn't raise on the ranch. (48)

She pricks her finger on the rose and thus blood is infused into the delicate sauce which has a profound effect on all who partake. With her primary form of expression limited to food, Tita takes the illicit token of love from Pedro and returns the gift, transforming it into a meal filled with lust. Nevertheless cooking is still viewed as manual and everyday labor which automatically becomes associated with tasks assigned to those people marginalized by class, gender and race.

In the novel, the ranch is a women-dominated space though not women-only spaces, as there are male workers on the ranch. Elaine Showalter is basically known for her term gynocriticism. It is based on the principle that there is a profound difference between man's and women's writing and later is dominated. So gynocriticism is related to developing the framework to study the literature written by woman in all aspects of their production, motivation, analysis and interpretation. According to Showalter, "The program of gynocriticism is to construct a culture a

female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experiences, rather than to adopt male modes and theories" (172). The reading of women's text will try to study the world of domesticity, experiences of gestation, menstruation, childbirth, nurturing, mother-daughter relationship and woman-woman relationship. This should study the personal and affectional issues of women. While in the novel, the De La Garza family is comprised only of women at the beginning of the story, Pedro is a family factor from the start – and soon marries into the family, as well. Still the family's house – and importantly, its kitchen – is primarily occupied by women. While Mama Elena tells the priest "I've never needed a man for anything; all by myself, I've done all right with my ranch and my daughters. Men aren't that important in this life"—she said emphatically—"nor is the revolution as dangerous as you make it out! It's worse to have chiles with no water around!" (80), she does not seem to find women important in this life, either. She is concerned with her own wellbeing and reputation, and therefore wants Tita to remain unmarried and Rosaura to marry – these decisions have nothing to do with her daughters' wellbeing or desires. Perhaps Mama Elena really means to belittle love, not men, since she has actually given up on any loving relationships. The text does not describe her own home, but we do know that her one romantic love ended tragically, and this seems like to be her reason for giving up on all love and relationship.

There are those, however, who challenge traditional feminist critiques of the text and suggest a different type of feminist re-reading and interpretation that celebrates female cohesion and artistry. Jaffe, for instance, says:

Less than 20% of Mexican women worked outside the home in the 70s and their domesticity is not a trap as most feminists are inclined to

view. Their domesticity, as symbolized by the kitchen in *'Like Water for Chocolate'*, is a vehicle for their creativity and a collective experience shared with other women of different classes that promote female solidarity.' Indeed food preparation is highly ritualized giving it a significance of almost religious proportions. According to Valdez 'the culmination of this process of food as art and communication is food as communion. (23)

Tita as merely a gifted cook who is a victim of patriarchy. Mary Wollstonecraft in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* argues "If women are by nature inferior to men, their virtues must be the same in quality, if not in degree, or virtue is a relative idea; consequently, their conduct should be founded on the same principles, and have the same aim" (26). One of the major arguments Wollstonecraft challenges in her work is that women are 'naturally' inferior to men from a moral perspective. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and others believed this (indeed, most men and women in the 18th century did), and Rousseau in particular asserted that women's virtues were different than men's. Wollstonecraft strongly disagreed, explaining that while men were physically superior to women, both sexes were endowed with souls by their Creator and are able to develop their reason and endeavor to perfect their virtue. Even if men could demonstrate a better ability to be virtuous than women could, everyone has the same virtues strive for. Tita does not follow the mere tradition. She celebrates while violating the patriarchal rules and regulations. Tita is conscious and precursors. She is conscious about women's compulsion or choice about choose the life of angel or a monster. Following lines of the text help to understand the situation:

Virginia Woolf wrote, "Across the broad continent of a woman's life falls the shadow of a sword." On one side of that sword, she said, there

lies convention and tradition and order, wherever “all is correct”. But on the other side of that sword, if you are crazy enough to cross it and choose a life that does not follow convention, all is confusion.

“Nothing follows a regular course”. Her argument was that the crossing the shadow of that sword may bring a far more interesting existence to a woman, but you can bet it will also be more perilous.

(100)

Hence, the violation of patriarchal norms only gives further pain to the women. By presenting the analogy of the sword, the dangerous condition of women is shown in the society. Esquivel feminizes her novel through the exaggeration of traits traditionally associated with women such as irrationality and sensitivity. Showalter in her book *Toward a Feminist Poetics* “feminine activities such as cooking and storytelling, is thus a means of undermining the patriarchal system” (131). Esquivel appropriates elements of the popular discourse, with its emphasis on such feminine activities.

However, to maintain the proper existence, one has to take the risk. Life provides the existence of the women. In convention, tradition and order all is correct which is strategically made to support the patriarchy. To find female’s distinctive power, one has to blur the patriarchal socialization. In this context Gilbert and Gubar say:

Such socio-sexual differentiation means that as Elaine Showalter has suggested, women writers participate in a quite different literary subculture, which has its own distinctive literary tradition, even though it defines itself in relation to the “main”, male-dominated, literary culture and distinctive history. (50)

So here, in the novel when Tita is going to get married with John, Pedro wants Tita to stop for marrying but Tita becomes conscious and saying “Pedro, you’re hardly the one to tell me what I should or shouldn’t do. When you were going to get married, I didn’t ask you not to do it, even though your wedding destroyed me. You have your life, now leave me in peace to have mine” (48-49). So, female should create their own female sub culture.

Like Water for Chocolate adopts the technique of magical realism.

Postmodernism’s pastiche and collage, post-colonialism’s mythmaking tendency, alienation, displacement, diasporas, cultural disjunctions, imagination and hybridity and of ‘magic realism’ being a relevant postmodern and postcolonial terminology collocates and subverts the binary opposition like life and death, male and female, old and young, and so on to show the emptiness of going headlong forecasts the imagined uplifting after life as well. While addressing post colonialism, magic realism is a means to pitch the gap created out migration and colonization for involver’s mental solace. Tita’s connection with the kitchen is not enforced but was almost supernaturally and prenatally determined.

The magical realism has the definition of being magical and unreal. Some male critics have suggested Esquivel’s use of magical realism in the novel. For instance Ibsen says “magical realism is specifically male and Esquivel’s use of it confirms male literary prowess” (133). However, the specific way in which Esquivel utilizes magical realism negates this sort of accusation. One must note that she almost exclusively confines her usage of magical realism to the kitchen—a gendered space of which Gabriel Garcia Marquez most likely would not readily take possession. By limiting her use of magical realism to her female characters and the female atmosphere of the kitchen, Esquivel demonstrates that women can appropriate the

techniques of magical realism and make them uniquely female. Moreover, she makes her use of magical realism as a tool to subvert traditional female roles/attitudes more acceptable to her Mexican readership. Tita wept a river of tears even before she was born: “Tita made her entrance into this world prematurely, right there on the kitchen table amid the smells of simmering noodle soup, thyme, bay leaves and coriander, steamed milk, garlic and, of course, onion” (9).

Like Water for Chocolate is a novel that is densely populated with women, and each woman represents a distinct version of femininity. Some women are clever and rebellious, others are doting and domestic, and others simply fit into describable mold. In the novel Esquivel exposes her strong feminist attitude through a controlling first person limited narration and a detailed, descriptive portrayal of the characters. This exploitation of feminist views supports two major themes: change in traditional attitudes towards authority and freedom of expression. Esquivel shows how Mexican women can overcome the powerful traditional authority of men and the traditional mindset of women; and how women can overcome society's suppression and express themselves freely. In this connection Mary Wollstonecraft in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* says:

Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, *outward* obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for at least twenty years of their lives. (19)

This, in essence, is the major reason Wollstonecraft identifies regarding why women are subordinate to men: every facet of their upbringing from the moment they enter

the world is oriented toward rendering them weak, docile, and dependent upon men. Women are socialized to only want to be beautiful so they can attract men. They delight in their own meekness and diminished bodily strength. They engage in rivalries with other women. They are focused on no other concerns or duties because they are confined to the private sphere. They cannot exercise reason or truly perfect their souls since they linger in this dependent state. Mothers shape and mold their daughters' characters, which are even further ossified into silliness when they attend boarding schools. In their youth they are attracted to men of ill repute because they desire gallant men and seek to indulge their fantasies and sentimentalities. All of this is due to their upbringing; they rarely have any way of breaking out of this structure of teachings. But, in the novel Esquivel presents her characters as a strong and independent women such as while the rebels enter into the rank they were frightened by Mama Elena as “It really was hard to meet Mama Elena’s gaze, even for the captain. There was something daunting about it. It produced a nameless fear in those who suffered it; they felt tried and convinced for their offenses. They fell prisoner to a childlike fear of maternal authority” (90).

Like Water for Chocolate can be read as an allegorical examination of the Mexican Revolution, tracing the effects of the conflicting ideologies underlying the revolution through the displacement onto the family structure. At once removed and central to understanding the narrative, this portrayal of the Mexican Revolution valorizes and romanticizes the contributions of women. It both informs the spectator that this is at once a historical reenactment of the Revolution at a micro level, the family, and through the family constructs a critique of the Revolution as it pertains to female identity in terms of power, economics, and race. A critical examination of the narrative construction, character development, and cinematography will illustrate how

this focus upon the role of women within the era of the Mexican Revolution is more a reflection of contemporary gendered-social roles than an accurate portrayal of Revolutionary ideals. Kristine Ibsen observes about the literary source that provides a starting point for this exploration. In the construction of a Mexican national identity, the dominant discourse has focused upon the patriarchal domination of family, favoring the construction of male identity over female identity, especially in terms of utilizing the Mexican Revolution to support the state. She says:

The use of traditional resources has the potential to become revolutionary when reorganized from the vantage point of women or any other marginalized group. The fact that Esquivel has chosen discourses not just outside the canon but specifically associated with women's values and experiences allows her to set forth an alternative to the hegemonic standard, based upon the real women's lives. (117)

Similarly, Victor Zamudio-Taylor, when commenting upon the use of first-person diary, cookbook, and feuilleton traditions, states, "These genres have traditionally circumscribed women's voices through a mode of self-representation situated within sites of domestic everyday life...these sites...are transformed into sources of self-fashioning affirmation and resistance" (46). However, the extent to which this narrative succeeds in transforming into a feminine affirmation or reflects "real women's lives" should be approached with caution.

The formation of community, one that exerts expectations, within both texts resides in the various people encountered at the hacienda. Mama Elena's three daughters, Rosaura, Gertrudis, and Tita each embody one of the conflicting ideologies that inform the struggle of the Mexican Revolution. Rosaura, as the eldest daughter and at the top end of the economic hierarchy, also strives to maintain a tyrannical

tradition in text. Gertrudis, the middle and illegitimate daughter, has no defined place within the social hierarchy of the hacienda and is the only one of the three to actively participate in the revolution occurring outside the hacienda. Tita, closely associated with the mestizo culture through her close bond to Nacha, the head cook, and food, is the oppressed, fighting within the domestic sphere for rights denied to her. Each of these three daughters represents a different approach to the social condition imparted upon them from stifling traditions.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their book *The Madwoman in the Attic* write: “Denied the economic, social and psychological status ordinarily essential to creativity; denied the right, skill and education to tell their own stories with confidence, woman who did not retreat into angelic silence seems at first to have had very limited options” (71). Gilbert and Gubar say that women are lacking possession from the period of civilization. They lack economic, social and psychological status. They don’t possess skill and right of education which enhances their confidence. Women are supposed to have angelic silences who never speak about themselves. Similarly, in the novel from the day Tita was born, her fate was already sealed, and she would be expected to acknowledge tradition. Her life was not hers to live, for Mama Elena—her mother—dictated everything that she did, for whose house was it if not Mama Elena's, who made it clear that in the De La Garza family everyone should obey. There was nothing Tita could say to change anything, and being quite aware Esquivel writes:

Tita knew perfectly well that all these questions would have to be buried forever in the archive of questions that have no answers. In the De La Garza family, one obeyed—immediately. Ignoring Tita

completely, a very angry Mama Elena left the kitchen, and for the next week she didn't speak a single word to her. (12)

Moreover, Esquivel shows the trapped of protagonist Tita with the culture and tradition including other characters. It also deals with the role of Mexican society and its inextricable link with the emotion and feeling of an individual. The characters are bounded with the family tradition such traditional norms which are passed down to generations and destroy one's life without the care of anyone's feeling.

Though Tita is suffering from cultural norms initially she is able to break the norms and she is awarded with her lover Pedro at the end. Esperanza is another major character who is also bound with same social rule. In this regard, Esquivel comments:

It wasn't the first time they had argued about Esperanza. That had been when Rosaura insisted that her daughter shouldn't attend school, since it would be a waste of time. If Esperanza's only lot in life was to take care of her mother forever, she didn't have any need for fancy ideas; what she needed was to study piano, singing, and dancing. Mastering those talents would be tremendously useful, first of all, because Esperanza could provide Rosaura with marvelous afternoons of entertainment and amusement, and second, because she would stand out at society her balls for spectacular performance. With great effort, after three long conversations, they managed to convince Rosaura that besides singing, dancing, and performing at the piano, Esperanza need to be able to talk about interesting subjects when she was around, and for that she had to go to school. (239)

But later due to Tita's struggle she is freed. She gets marry with Alex rather to become a caregiver of her freedom and identity the whole life she is able to win the society at last.

Gynocriticism examines the female struggle for identity and the social construct of gender. If gender is inherently constructed from an ideology, then that ideology is by nature, indeterminate and fluid, susceptible to the analysis of differences. According to Elaine Showalter gynocriticism is the study of not only the female as a gender status but also the 'internalized consciousnesses of the female. Gynocriticism is the study of feminist literature written by female writers inclusive of the interrogation of female authorship, images, the feminine experience and ideology, and the history and development of the female literary tradition.

Gynocriticism celebrated a distinctive "voice" in women's literature across genres and periods that it explained in terms of women's cultural position as an oppressed group; of women's experiences, especially experiences of male domination and of female bonding; and of psychological traits supposedly typical of women such as empathy and fluid ego boundaries. Another widely influential text was Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), which derived common themes and images in "a distinctively female literary tradition" from cultural structures on female expression, creativity, and authority. "Toward a Feminist Poetics" further distinguished feminist critique, the tough, demystifying practices of women reading sexist men, from gynocritics, the study of "woman as writer ... with the history, themes, genres, and structures of literature by women."

The spark of feminism originated in a work of Mary Wollstonecraft called *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. She belongs to the first wave of egalitarian feminists who demanded equality with men. Woolf also advanced the notion that

while women were indeed the victims of men, they colluded in their own domestic and professional victimization by acting as a “looking glass” and reflecting back to men the image they (men) desired. Virginia Woolf’s general contribution to feminism was her recognition that gender identity was socially constructed and can be challenged and transformed. Moreover, Woolf also believed that women had always faced social and; economic obstacles to their literary ambitions, and was herself conscious of the restricted education she had received. Woolf wanted femininity to be conscious so that she might escape from gender confrontation. In pursuit of this, she adopted the Bloomsbury sexual ethics of androgyny and hoped to achieve a balance between male self-realization and female self-realization. On the other hand, the most influential American critic of the second generation was Elaine Showalter. Showalter (1977) outlined a literary history of women writers, which showed the configuration of their material, psychological and ideological determinants and promoted both a feminist critique (concerned with women readers) and a “gynocritique” (concerned with women writers). Showalter’s title *Women's Writing and Gynocriticism* indicated her debt to Virginia Woolf and as Mary Eagleton (1986) she pointed out that their projects were markedly similar: A passion for women's writing and feminist research linked both critics.

The idea of feminine, female, and feminist is not new, (Wollstonecraft talked of “female consciousness”, Woolf had also “looked within and life” of female’s “myriad impressions”), but Showalter presented them as a literary discourse, coining and practising ‘gynocritics’. Virginia Woolf used term “feminist” repeatedly in her *A Room of Her Own* in order to convey sense of individual female identity, but feminist might be used phallogcentrically. Therefore Showalter proposed the theory of ‘gynocritics’, as they give foundation of thinking woman as woman, as intellectual

being, as creative artist, individual, and singular. But they were more sociological, political, and personal than literary. Showalter textualises woman by embedding her identity as a significant content of any literature. She coined the term ‘gynocritics’ to describe literary criticism based in a feminine perspective. Probably the best description Showalter gives of gynocritics is in *Toward a Feminist Poetics*:

In contrast to (an) angry or loving fixation on male literature, the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture. (131)

This does not mean that the goal of gynocritics is to erase the differences between male and female writing; gynocritics is not “on a pilgrimage to the promised land in which gender would lose its power, in which all texts would be sexless and equal, like angels” (266). Rather gynocritics aims to understand the specificity of women’s writing not as a product of sexism but as a fundamental aspect of female reality.

In Eequivel’s text, Tita succeeds in retrospectively freeing herself from her mother’s tight grip and suffocating observance. The strong impact that her mother’s attitude has on Tita continues after her death when she appears to her as a ghost and denounces her feelings for Pedro. Despite her fear, the temptation grows inside her to resist the rigid rules that her mother imposed in household and life. The tension between Tita and Mama Elena reaches its peak when mother confronts daughter from the afterlife with the utmost accusation of indecency. Tita’s pregnancy turns out to be

a phantom, just like her mother is one now. Realizing once and for all that Mama Elena has no means to inflict her power on her any longer, Tita speaks up against her mother's ghost and confronts her with her own indecency, revealing her true feelings for Mama Elena. She says:

“I know who I am! who has a perfect right to live her life as she pleases. Once and for all, leave me alone; I won't put up with you! I've always hated you!” Tita had said the magic words that would make Mama Elena disappear forever. The imposing figure of her mother began to shrink until it became no more than a tiny light. As the ghost faded away, a sense of relief grew inside Tita's body. (199)

This quote also shows that Tita has grown to understand her value as woman when she declares her right on independence and self-realization. It is then that Mama Elena's ghost leaves her forever in peace as Tita is no longer bound by patriarchal rule. Esquivel shows here that it is necessary and important for women to develop self-consciousness in order to take a stance against the oppressive order.

Moreover Tita starts to write a cookbook as additional connection to Gertrudis and another form of liberation. While she is unable to openly object to her mother, cooking and writing become her motivational and subversive outlets. The parallel between cooking and writing becomes evident when the narrator compares Tita with a poet:

Just as a poet plays with words, Tita juggled ingredients and quantities at will, obtaining phenomenal results, and all for nothing: her best efforts were in vain. She couldn't drag a single word of appreciation out of Pedro's mouth. What she didn't know was that Mama Elena had

“asked” Pedro to stop praising the meals, on the grounds that it made Rosaura feel insecure, when she was fat and misshapen because of her pregnancy, to have to listen to him compliment Tita in the of praising the delicious food she cooked.(69)

Writing also becomes a way of expression of the self for Tita and therefore a form of resistance against the patriarchal order that denies her expression of feelings. The second mode of feminist criticism (i.e. gynocritics) ...is the study of women *as writers*, and its subjects are history, styles themes, genres, and structures of writing, by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition...unlike the feminist critique, gynocritics offers many theoretical opportunities...it is no longer ideological dilemma of reconciling revisionary pluralisms but the essential question of difference. The gynocritics is an answer to the questions like “How can we (female writers) constitute women as a distinct literary group? What is the difference of women’s writing?” In order to possess one’s room, money, fiction, thinking, status etc. one must maintain one’s individuality with difference or one’s singular thinking. Tita’s writing of the cookbook itself can thus be viewed as a revolutionary act, as she appropriates a traditionally masculine domain and uses it for her own purpose, filling it with new meaning and content. Through allowing Tita to express her resistance through cooking on the one hand and writing on the other, Esquivel connects both traditionally masculine and feminine activities and puts them on the same level of importance: If a woman knows how to cook, she also knows how to write.

In fact, it is through writing that Tita starts to communicate again with the outside world after her temporary insanity. It is important to note that once again a

man, Dr. Brown, helps her in this liberating moment when she declares in written words. In this regard “That night, when John Brown entered the laboratory, he was pleased to see the writing on the wall, in firm phosphorescent letters: “Because I don’t want to.” With those words Tita had taken her first step toward freedom (118). The written word serves as first step toward her self-understanding and allows her to manifest her objection against heteronomic structures. Virginia Woolf in her book *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) says, “[A] woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction: and that as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unsolved”(13). Woolf here advocates for the separate room for women where they can write freely and exercise their mental faculty. In this way, she displays the independence of women and wants to dissolve the difference between male and female and wants to go towards absolute equality and purposes for androgyny. Her ultimate belief is that women can freely develop their artistic talents if they achieved social and economic equality with men.

Esquivel here implies that, like men, women can become or do whatever they want once they are freed from patriarchal structures and have become aware of their own potential. At the end of the novel, Tita does exactly that when she follows her lover Pedro into death, making this decision at her own will. Tita’s resistance, although she is successful in finding new ways of expressing herself, does thus not truly provide her with the freedom that she desires, but it does engender a new generation of women who achieve the liberation that Tita imagined for herself. In the same way that Tita’s cooking provokes Gertrudis’s break with the oppressive structures on the ranch, her caring for her niece Esperanza allows the girl to live a life in more freedom, receive a formal education, and marry whom she wants. In this regard:

Having brought off the wedding between Alex and Esperanza was Tita's greatest triumph. How proud she felt to see Esperanza so self-confident, so intelligent, so perfectly prepared, so happy, so capable, and at the same time, so feminine and womanly, in the fullest sense of the word. She looked so beautiful in her wedding gown, waltzing with Alex to "The Eyes of Youth."(240)

In addition to giving them never-ending work, society's constant observation of women's behavior and actions assures that they act in line with the patriarchal expectations. One of the neighbors of the De La Garza family, Paquita Lobo, functions as scout and guardian of the dominant order at social events. She curiously inquires whether Tita is drunk or pregnant and asks about her future living arrangements after Esperanza's wedding and Rosaura's death Paquita says "How awful, Tita! What are you going to do now?" inquired Paquita venomously. "Without Esperanza in the house you're not going to be able to live with Pedro. Oh, but before you move someplace else, give me the recipe for these chiles in walnut sauce. How exquisite they look!"(240). Besides her role as protector of the social etiquette, Paquita resembles the typical gossiping woman that is controlled by envy and curiosity. Tita's suffering gives her some form of satisfaction in her own limited world, and just like other members of the dinner and wedding parties at the De La Garza ranch, Paquita is eager to see Tita fail to fulfill the official script of obedient and decent daughter in order to justify the righteousness of her own submissive existence. This is in line with Helene Cixous's observation "the primary enemy of a woman is not necessarily a man, but other women who attempt to eliminate and put into place those who openly express their femininity and cross the boundaries that the

male-dominated society confronts them with, thus endangering the patriarchal concepts of feminine and masculine” (42).

The strongest element that Esquivel includes in *Like Water for Chocolate* to depict patriarchy is Mama Elena herself. Mama Elena always finds fault in how Tita prepares the meals or cares for her, an indication that it is quite impossible for a woman to measure up to patriarchy’s ideal. Nonetheless, Mama Elena’s death does not lead to Tita’s liberation, since her sister’s marriage to her lover Pedro prohibits any form of public encounters between the two lovers. The patriarchal order is again perpetuated through Rosaura, who imitates her mother after her death. Unlike Tita, Rosaura never questions her mother and submissively accepts any imposed regulations on female behavior. The love triangle between Rosaura, Pedro, and Tita continues until Rosaura’s death and the wedding of Esperanza almost two decades later. It is only then that Tita and Pedro are able to develop an indifferent attitude toward the public opinion about their relationship.

To sum up, it is set against the backdrop of the Mexican Revolution, the imaginative combination of romance novel and cookbook explores the relationship between men and women and society through the history of the De La Garza family. In the novel, the kitchen emerges as the most significant part of the house and becomes the source of knowledge and understanding of love and life. Along with the recipes that are presented in each of the twelve chapters, the story of Tita and the other members of the family is told by an omniscient narrative voice. The conflicts that arise between the protagonists are centered on the rebellion of the two younger daughters, Tita and Gertrudis, against their mother’s authority, which can be understood as the result of the domination of patriarchy in Mexican society. The fact that the daughters resist their mother’s authority not only represents the liberating

spirit of the revolution with respect to the traditional role of women, but also the relationship between women and the predominant social discourse on gender roles at the time when the novel was published.

The youngest daughter of Mama Elena and main protagonist of the novel, Tita, was born and raised in the kitchen. The maid Nacha playfully introduced her to the culinary secrets of her ancestors and taught her what she knew about life and love. Tita sees the outside world through culinary eyes and has a strong connection to food. Her emotions are thoroughly linked to the pleasure and joy of eating and cooking, and it is through the preparation of meals that she best expresses her inner life within her environment. This causes many conflicts during which Tita grows in her willpower and confidence until she finally speaks out against her mother. As head of the family, Mama Elena personifies the patriarchal order. Her family and ranch can be understood as a small part of Mexican patriarchy in which the daughters try to mold their feminine identity. The patriarchal repression of female sexuality is another factor that limits the daughters. Esquivel inverts that theme through presenting on the one hand Gertrudis, who breaks out of the ruling structures, and Tita, who remains interwoven with them but gains a certain control over her oppressive environment through her cooking, a typically feminine and thus seemingly superficial activity. Food and its preparation as well as the kitchen as woman's space play a prominent role in *Like Water for Chocolate*.

In line with the concept of genealogy, the novel inverts the cultural constructs that prescribe the paradigm of the ideal female as domestic, submissive, self-sacrificing, and disempowered and depicts the female characters as stronger and more decisive than the male protagonists, who are only of secondary importance. The masculinity of the male protagonists is minimized as well. The greatest gender

inversion is experienced by Pedro. Unlike a traditional romance hero, he rides a bicycle and is unable to free Tita from her mother's rule because of his weakness and passivity. As such in *Like Water for Chocolate*, Esquivel examines the possible roles that women can assume in a patriarchal society.

III. Assertion of Female Selfhood

Esquivel portrays the male characters in *Like Water for Chocolate* as weak, insipid and incapable of making important decisions. The men in the novel are manipulated and coerced by various women into situations the women deem appropriate. Pedro allows himself to be talked into marrying Rosaura. He allows himself to be sent away to America. At the conclusion of the novel, he does ask Tita to marry him, but it is ultimately Tita who decides whether she will marry him or not. Dr. Brown is also portrayed as a passive character. He does not hold Tita to their engagement; he allows her to go with Pedro. Esquivel is able to parody the romance novel genre through her use of weak, ineffectual male characters. In the traditional romance novel strong, swaggering men rule the lives of the docile female, dictating how women live. Each woman in the De La Garza family represents a distinct version of femininity and has her own way to deal with the obstacles presented by tradition and patriarchy. Esquivel effectively rejects the traditional romance novel hierarchy by empowering her female characters with intelligence and strength or traits typically associated with male characters.

Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*; raises the question of culture and the construction of the discourse by which it shapes individual identity. In this novel, she presents the twentieth century Mexican socio historical fact and its rigid social norms and shows how it affects an individual's life creating the Tita as a main character. She is presented as a strong and bold character to fight with the cultural norms though she is emotional and bounded inside the kitchen. To break this sort of social norms lots of supernatural incidents happen throughout the novel.

Tita, the protagonist turns opposite from traditional cultural norms and life style and wants freedom. She becomes ready to face the challenges of the upcoming life. She only shares her feelings with food. She pours her emotion into her food.

When her tyrannical Mama Elena orders her to remain unmarried as a caregiver till her death she shares her feelings with the food inside the kitchen. Ultimately her struggle helps to gain freedom and to give individual identity. The novel follows Tita's life from birth to death, focusing mostly on her tortured relationship with Pedro, and her struggle and eventual triumph in pursuit of love and individuality. Esperanza, the second child of Rosaura and Pedro and the mother of the narrator of the novel is also prohibited like Tita from marrying. She is raised by Tita in the kitchen. Esquivel has used this character to show Tita's success to break the social norms and to get freedom because Esperanza's marriage to Alex breaks the De La Garza family traditions that disallows the marriage of the youngest daughter.

Esquivel's novel deals with the anatomy of love and its psychological impact in the society where rules, norms, systems are of the prominent importance. The fact that Mama Elena rejects all other cooks after she is convinced of Tita's harmful intentions demonstrates once more that patriarchy's concept of ideal femininity can hardly be reached. It is also interesting to note that the fear of her daughter's liberation leads to Mama Elena's death. However, instead of understanding her daughter's desires and supporting her in her attempts to break with the rules that are imposed on her, Mama Elena perpetuates the patriarchal order in an even stricter manner to make up for her own presumably Tita becomes one with the food when her tears, milk, and blood dissolve in it and carry her emotional properties. In this sense, the kitchen becomes the ideal site from which to contest the patriarchal power as cooking becomes a powerful language for Tita that is geared toward liberating her feminine expression. Doubly marginalized as woman and youngest daughter, Gertrudis's participation in the revolutionary movement highlights woman's need to redefine her role in modern society in order to develop her full potential. Therefore, she embodies the break with the traditional stereotype of femininity that prescribes

and limits women to the private sphere. Esquivel mocks the typical romantic aspect included in the novel by describing it as overly ardent, explosive, and immensely satisfying. She does so especially at the end when the couple sets the entire ranch on fire through their lovemaking but, instead of getting happily married, dies in a passionate fire. She represents the break with the traditional stereotype of femininity that prescribes and limits women to the private sphere. In this episode her cooking also has a great impact on her sister. Gertrudis, who subsequently leaves the ranch in an act of sexual liberation. Tita's cooking thus affects her sister's life greatly as her subtle resistance stimulates Gertrudis's break with their mother's authority, the only way to escape and shape reality, though she remains within the traditional structures inappropriate behavior in an attempt to save her daughter from society's disapproval.

Inside the kitchen, sharing her emotion and feeling as well as her alienation she tries to learn about the inter connectedness of all lives about sacrifice, the everlasting value of love, the poisonous of lingering anger and value of her forgiveness. Food is the great equalizer. It cuts through all the obvious binary boundaries and is a recurring part of life for all partake. Mexican rural middle class women were to be 'strong and far cleverer' than the men who supposedly protected her. She must be pious, observing all the religious requirements of a virtuous daughter, wife and mother. She must exercise great care to keep her sentimental relations as private as possible, and most important of all, she must be in control of life in her house, which means essentially the kitchen. Thus, the novel asserts the female selfhood by portraying the female characters Tita and Gertrudis. They finally gain self-consciousness and self-independence through their resistance. Gertrudis, who breaks out of the ruling structure and Tita, who gains a certain control over her oppressive environment through her cooking, a stereotypically feminine and thus seemingly superficial activity

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