

Brian Morris
LAH 2734-601
Film Analysis: *Like Water for Chocolate*

Like Water for Chocolate is a fairytale, love story. I must admit that the first time I watched it I didn't care for it much except for the cinematography. After seeing it a few times however, it grew on me. I guess the problem I had with it was the fairytale aspect; the magic in the food, the spirits, the matches within. I realize that these are superstitions or metaphors. I think I just had a problem with how some of them were portrayed. As I said before however, after watching it a few times, I was able to look past most of that and see it for what it was.

Before I get into the gender roles, I want to say a few things about the heritage. Coming (partially) from a Mexican heritage, I could identify with the film. My grandmother was born in Mexico. Her family migrated to California in the first quarter of the twentieth century. They had converted to Catholicism. They brought with them many superstitions and a rich history. My grandmother's uncle fought in Pancho Villa's army. Food was a major part of this family. Recipes were passed down. Meals could take all day to prepare. Many times the food would be mostly prepared the day before the dinner. Much care was taken in the preparation of all dishes; from the main course down to the finishing touches. It gave me a sense of nostalgia to see a depiction of history that was around the time of my grandmother's birth; and to see what many people must have experienced during the time of the revolution.

The gender roles in this film seem to be firmly placed. Men are the head of the house. They are the breadwinners and protectors. The women are the homemakers. They are the nourishment; the nurses, the cook, the maid. They are also supposed to

honor their men. The mother, Elena, seemed to fall short on a few of these roles. She had an affair with another man and gave birth to his child. After her husband's death, she became bitter. I think this was because of a combination of two things. The first was the fact that her husband died when he learned this horrible truth. The second was that she was never with her true love because she had to remain respectful to her family and her heritage. This, over the years, made her frustrated. The frustration led her to be cold and have no remorse or compassion. She ended up passing her own guilt and sorrow on to her children.

In many ways, Elena took over her husband's role after his death. She did not then go to be with Gertrudis' father. She remained on the ranch and assumed the head of the household. She did not do any cooking, or caring for her daughters. Those duties were handled by Nacha, the live-in cook/nanny. Elena delegated all the rules of the house. She was the one to decline Pedro's proposal to Tita. She disowned her daughter's (Gertrudis) name and forbid anyone to speak of her in the house. These are decisions that would have most likely been made by the man of the house, given the time period.

Gertrudis had similarities to her mother, Elena. Only Gertrudis did not hide the things she did, unlike her mother. Elena had an affair and kept it secret. She upheld the traditions and honor that was expected of decent people for the time, by not letting the truth be known. Gertrudis, on the other hand, broke away from her mother's shackles and lived how she wanted to.

Tita was a combination of Gertrudis and Elena. She did things secretly, but did rebel at times. She also upheld the traditions and abided by her mother's every command, that is until she finally couldn't take it anymore. Tita's boiling point was

when her mother shed no tears at the news of her grandson's death and then forbid the others from expressing their emotions. Tita nearly lost herself, but finally realized that she too was free from her mother's chains.

The film seems to focus more on the roles of the women, but there are a few men whose characters are developed. Pedro is one of these men. He starts out as a boy, but even at an early age he had his eyes on Tita. As a young man, he had matured into a well mannered and respectable person. He does what is expected of any man for the time, to ask the parents for their blessing to marry their daughter. In this case, he only has Elena to ask. She is set in her ways, and will not let Tita marry. This is where Pedro begins his deceit. He agrees to marry Tita's sister, Rosaura, just so that he can be close to Tita. Although Pedro is a well mannered and respectful young man, the action he is taking is one that is looked down upon by everyone. That is why he, they, must keep it secret. In this respect, Pedro is violating the norms of his culture at the time, as well as Tita.

Pedro's father has a very small part in the film. He disagrees with Pedro's decision to marry Rosaura. He thinks it makes them look like fools. This is another role that men play. They must maintain their honor and status quo. Pedro's acceptance to marry Rosaura made them look weak in his father's eyes. Pedro explains to his father why he did it. We never really get to hear what his father thinks of it, but he never says anything about it throughout the rest of the film. I assume that he understands his son's feelings and keeps quiet. His son is now a man and can make his own decisions and face any consequences that occur.

The other man that plays a significant part in this film is the doctor, John. He has his eyes on Tita early on as well. John is portrayed as a good man. He is the doctor for

the ladies at the ranch. He is partially from indigenous heritage but also (I assume) North American. He sets aside the fact that Tita had an affair with Pedro, because he loves her. He gives Tita the choice to be with Pedro or to be with him. He only wants her to be happy. He is the greatest protector portrayed in the film. He does come off a little on the soft side when compared to the other men and the generic role that men should play for the time period. In my opinion, he was the better man and Tita should have chosen him. One thing I was confused about is that it never tells us if he and Tita were married or not. It goes from him telling her to make a choice, then fast forwards ten or so year to the wedding of his son to Pedro's daughter, Esperanza. At this point, Pedro and Tita have decided to be together, 22 years after their first crush.

Like Water for Chocolate is a type of *Romeo and Juliet* story. It is about a forbidden love that will never die. The main problem I had with this film other than the fairytale aspect was the fact that there are a lot of details left out. It focuses on Tita and Pedro, which I understand are the protagonists of this film. It tells a story of two people's irrational love for one another; which in the end, costs them their lives. I feel that Pedro and Tita were kind of stuck in their childhood or adolescence, because they never really grow up. Their love for each other is so strong that it rules their lives and, ultimately, costs them everything. It is like the story John told Tita about the match and the fire of the soul. They both let the entire book of matches be ignited. This blinded them from all reason. It hindered their growth as individuals. It also caused them to commit the ultimate sacrifice; their lives for their love.

