

The representation of women and marriage  
in *Like Water for Chocolate* and *Women  
with Big Eyes*



By Veronica Soto & Elide Tinajero  
Capstone 2020  
Advisor: Dr. Carolyn González

# Agenda

- Project inspiration
- Purpose of the investigation
- Research questions
- Literary review
- Analysis of the project
- Conclusion
- Acknowledgments
- Bibliography



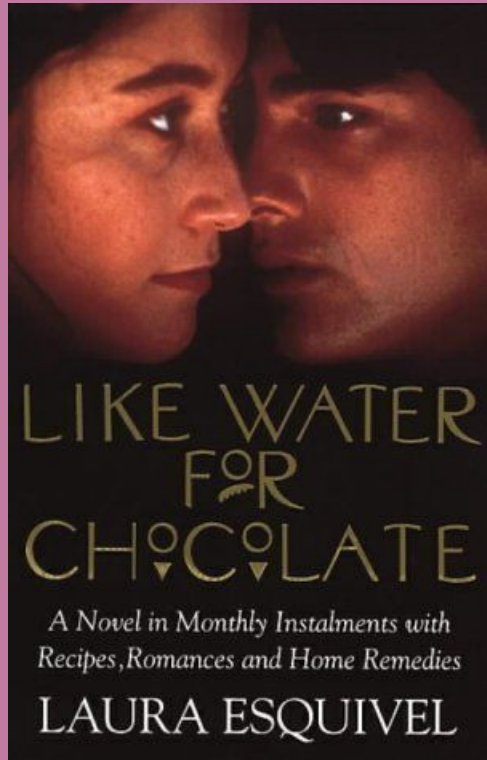
# Project inspiration

We wondered if the authors proposed a different way of loving, even if it is outside of marriage, or if they sought to convey the message that women achieve their total freedom only after fulfilling the tradition of getting married. We also wondered if they were suggesting that perhaps we (as female readers) do not value housework and duties in the home as much as we should.



# Purpose of the investigation

The main purpose of this research is to analyze how Mexican women and traditions, as well as marriage, are represented in two novels: *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989) by Laura Esquivel and *Women With Big Eyes* (1990) by Ángeles Mastretta.



# Research Questions

1. How is marriage and the role of women in marriage represented?
2. What impact do the traditions in the two novels have on the marriages in the texts?
3. Why are they represented in this way and what effect does this representation of marriage have on the novels?



# Literary Review



Fuente:  
fllickr.com

## Mexican Revolution (1910)

- Caused by social inequality, labor exploitation, injustice and lack of freedom of expression.

(Olcott et al.21) and (Salas 38)

- The dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz ends. (1876-1910)
- The main revolutionaries include Francisco I. Madero, Emiliano Zapata, Francisco Villa, Venustiano Carranza, and Álvaro Obregón.
- The emblem of the revolution are the *soldaderas* or *coronelas*. They were wives, mothers, warriors, sexual partners, and domestic servants. They marched for idealism, survival, to gain status, or even for marriage. (Olcott et al. 5) (Rooms 11,44)

# Literary Review (continued)

## The Female Boom (1960-1990)

Fuente: piqsels.com



- The female boom has been discredited by critics because it is considered “light” literature that is appealing to a mass audience and excessively linked to marketing.
- It is literature that breaks borders between the elite and massive diffusion, and that looks to reach a new reading public.
- During the 60s and 70s
  - Literature focused on experiences of female protagonists in a patriarchal society.
- During the late 80s
  - New artistic representations emerged more in tune with the current changes in society.

# Literary Review (continued)

## Light Literature



Fuente: pxhere.com

- So-called “light literature” is a synonymous with the female boom, and the term is used to classify literature produced under this movement.
- The term arises in the late 1980s
- Light literature is not seen as leading to questioning and analysis.
- The term was used designate those easily accessible readings in which commercialization prevails over aesthetic quality, stylistic mastery, or innovative formal elements.
- Ángeles Mastretta and Laura Esquivel refuse to be classified under the label of light literature.



# Literary Review (continued)



Fuente:pxfuel.com

## Mexican Feminism

- Women demand the right to vote in May 1911, after their significant participation in the Mexican revolution of 1910. (Tuñón 93)
- In 1915, the first feminist council was formed in Tabasco. It causes the need to elevate education to help overcome religious fanaticism. (Tuñón 94)
- In 1916, the Second Congress in Yucatan helps women understand their own bodies, noting that sexual desires are strong in both men and women. (Tuñón 94)
- From 1920 to 1940, thousands of public school teachers aided literacy training and political work. These women were promoters and activists who led to the entrance of modernity. (Olcott et al.15)

# Analysis

The representation of marriage in *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989) by Laura Esquivel.

- a. Women are victims of marriage
- b. Female resistance presented by means of the kitchen
- c. The kitchen changes the revolution



# Analysis (continued)

The representation of marriage in *Women with Big Eyes* (1990) by Ángeles Mastretta.

- a. The disappointment of marriage.
- b. Psychological, physical or imaginary resistance.
- c. The Revolution leads to change.



Fuente: pxhere.com



Fuente: flickr.com

# Connections between both texts

- In both novels, women continue with values, practices, and beliefs that place them in a position of oppression, and living between the traditional and the modern. (Gómez and Reyes 394)
- In both works, the role of women is mostly limited to domestic chores. Yet, these household chores are seen as a pleasure, and not as a duty.
- Age plays an important role in marriage, and women traditionally marry between seventeen and twenty years of age. Otherwise they are called spinsters, impure, or even considered prostitutes.
- The formation of marriage was based on finding a husband with a high social and economic position. (Castañeda 79)
- We see that the two novels present passive resistance (being obedient) towards feminism and not all women take active resistance (freedom of expression). (Gómez and Reyes 394)

# Differences between both texts

- Both novels are part of the female boom because they highlight the female role, but in different ways. *Like Water for Chocolate* focuses more on describing women as victims of marriage. On the other hand, in *Women with Big Eyes*, marriage is presented as the only option for women.
- In the novel *Like Water for Chocolate*, women show resistance to marriage through the kitchen, while in *Women with Big Eyes*, women present psychological, physical and imaginary resistance to marriage.



# Conclusion

- Both texts aim to show how it is better to marry with love, rather than just for convenience or to obtain a higher social status.
- *Like Water for Chocolate* argues that one can love outside of marriage. This is exemplified by the protagonist. Furthermore, after the Revolution, women chose to study and not to marry.
- Both novels were written based on the historical context of the Mexican Revolution, because although the revolution caused the death of many, positive changes in women's rights ensued, including highlighting their role as welders, wives, mothers, and cooks.
- In *Like Water for Chocolate*, women are represented as victims of marriage.
- In *Women with Big Eyes*, women choose marriage as a way to happiness, although they do not obtain their desired result.
- In *Women with Big Eyes*, women chose to be happy and free regardless of whether they are married or unmarried.

# Acknowledgments

- Dr. Carolyn González for her support in carrying out this project
- Dr. Sekine
- Gus Leonard
- Classmates and members of the Faculty.
- Thank you

# Bibliography

- Adoum, Jorge Enrique. "De La Literatura De Protesta a La Literatura "Light"." *Hispanamérica* 29.86 (2000): 93-103. Web.
- Esquivel, Laura. *Como Agua Para Chocolate: Novela De Entregas Mensuales Con Recetas, Amores Y Remedios Caseros*. New York: Anchor, 1992. Print.
- Finnegan, Lavery, Finnegan, Nuala, and Lavery, Jane Elizabeth. *The Boom Femenino in Mexico: Reading Contemporary Women's Writing*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010. Web.
- Finnegan, Nuala, and Jane Elizabeth Lavery. *The Boom Femenino in Mexico: Reading Contemporary Women's Writing*. Cambridge Scholars, 2010.
- Gomez-Ramirez, Oralia, and Luz Veronica Reyes Cruz. "Las Jóvenes y El Feminismo: ¿Indiferencia o Compromiso?" *Estudios Feministas*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2008, pp. 387-408. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/24327742](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24327742).
- Mastretta, Angeles. *Mujeres De Ojos Grandes*. Aguilar, León y Cal, 1990.
- Salas, Elizabeth. *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military Myth and History*. Univ. of Tex. Pr., 1990.
- Tuñón Pablos, Julia , *Women in México*, 1st ed. México City, 1999.