

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

PÓS GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS-INGLÊS

**THE USES OF MAGIC REALISM IN HOLLYWOOD ADAPTATIONS OF  
ALLENDE'S *THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS* AND  
ESQUIVEL'S *LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE***

por

**ANA CAROLINA VIEIRA RODRIGUEZ**

Dissertação submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

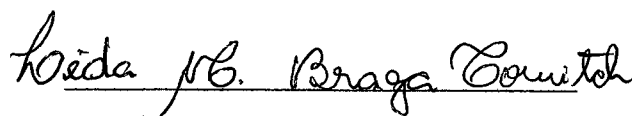
para obtenção do grau de MESTRE EM LETRAS

Florianópolis  
Fevereiro, 2001

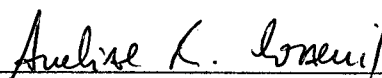
Esta dissertação de **Ana Carolina Vieira Rodriguez**, intitulada *The Uses of Magic Realism in Hollywood Adaptations of Allende's *The House of the Spirits* and Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate**, foi julgada adequada e aprovada em sua forma final pelo Programa de Pós-graduação em Inglês para obtenção do grau de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

Opção Literatura




Lêda Maria Braga Tomitch  
COORDENADORA

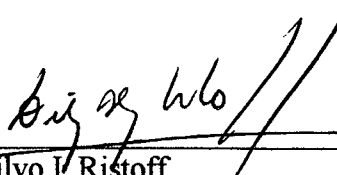


Anelise Reich Corseuil  
ORIENTADORA

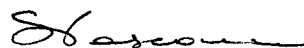
BANCA EXAMINADORA:



Anelise Reich Corseuil



Dilvo I. Ristoff



Sandra Guardini Teixeira Vasconcelos

Florianópolis, 19 de fevereiro de 2001.

**Para o Gorro, que me fez acreditar nos filmmakers.**

## AGRADECIMENTOS

Só foi possível realizar este trabalho com o apoio, incentivo e colaboração de várias pessoas. Gostaria de agradecer:

À CAPES e à Reitoria da universidade, pela bolsa de estudos adquirida durante o curso, que me permitiu desenvolver esta pesquisa.

A toda a minha família, pelo carinho e apoio, mas em especial à minha avó Maria Stella que, assim como as personagens Nívea, Clara e Blanca de *A Casa dos Espíritos*, me contava histórias na infância. À minha mãe Isabel, que me ensinou a gostar de ler, e que me apresentou os livros de Isabel Allende e Laura Esquivel. Ao meu pai Fernando, que me ensinou a conviver com as pessoas e a não ter preconceitos. Às minhas irmãs Gabriela e Maria Clara, pelo enorme companheirismo. À minha tia avó Georgette, pela grande ajuda durante o mestrado e por ter dito: “Tem tanta coisa boa pra gente estudar!” À minha tia e madrinha Maria Rita, por ser um exemplo para mim. À minha avó Célia, uma mulher que viveu em uma sociedade parecida com a de Tita, protagonista de *Como Água para Chocolate*, e às saudades dos meu avós Ury e Vieira, que me deram força.

À Arcanja, pelo carinho que tem por mim.

Às minhas amigas Kátia, Raquel, Buzzy, Andrea e Ucha, que vieram me visitar e que sempre me ouviram nas horas difíceis.

À Rubelise, Magali, ao Mano e ao Felipe, pela amizade.

Principalmente, agradeço ao Rodrigo, por toda a ajuda, paciência, pelo amor e por me incentivar a ter autoconfiança.

## ABSTRACT

THE USES OF MAGIC REALISM IN HOLLYWOOD ADAPTATIONS OF  
ALLENDE'S *THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS* AND  
ESQUIVEL'S *LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE*

ANA CAROLINA VIEIRA RODRIGUEZ

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA  
2001

Advisor: Anelise R. Corseuil

The objective of this study is to investigate how the literary aesthetics of magic realism, which is closely related to the Latin American social-political context, is translated into a Hollywood narrative. The work compares and contrasts the magic realist novels *The House of the Spirits* (1982), by Isabel Allende, and *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989), by Laura Esquivel, with their filmic adaptations. An analysis of the two cinematic productions, *The House of the Spirits* (1993), by Bille August, and *Like Water for Chocolate* (1993), directed by Alfonso Arau, in terms of film elements such as mise-en-scene (setting, lighting, costume, and behavior of characters), plot, narration, motivation, and lines of action, leads to the conclusion that Arau was more successful than August in transferring the magic realist aesthetics to the screen.

Número de páginas: 67

Número de palavras: 21.209

## RESUMO

THE USES OF MAGIC REALISM IN HOLLYWOOD ADAPTATIONS OF  
ALLENDE'S *THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS* AND  
ESQUIVEL'S *LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE*

ANA CAROLINA VIEIRA RODRIGUEZ

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA  
2001

Orientadora: Anelise R. Corseuil

O objetivo deste estudo é investigar como a estética do realismo mágico, que está diretamente ligada ao contexto sócio-político da América Latina, foi traduzida para uma narrativa Hollywoodiana. O trabalho realiza uma análise comparativa entre os romances do gênero realismo mágico *A Casa dos Espíritos* (1982), de Isabel Allende, e *Como Água Para Chocolate* (1989), de Laura Esquivel, e as adaptações dos livros ao cinema. Uma análise dos dois filmes, *A Casa dos Espíritos* (1993), de Bille August, e *Como Água Para Chocolate* (1993), dirigido por Alfonso Arau, em relação a elementos cinematográficos tais como mise-en-scene (cenário, iluminação, figurino e personagens), enredo, narrativa, motivação e linhas de ação nos leva à conclusão de que Arau obteve mais sucesso do que August ao transferir a estética do realismo mágico para o cinema.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

## INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

Magic Realism as a LiteraryAesthetics .....	01
---	----

## CHAPTER ONE

The Political Implications of Allende's and Esquivel's Novels .....	16
---	----

## CHAPTER TWO

The Uses of Magic Realism in Cinema .....	37
---	----

CONCLUSION .....	57
------------------	----

WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	64
---------------------------	----

**INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER:  
MAGIC REALISM AS A LITERARY AESTHETICS**

When compared to Isabel Allende's novel *The House of the Spirits*, 1982, the film of the same title, produced by Bille August in 1993, shows a very different approach to Allende's landmark use of the magic realist aesthetics. Magic realism is indeed a very superficial characteristic of the film, thus appearing in it as a curiosity. By contrast, Mexican director of *Like Water for Chocolate* (a 1993 adaptation of Laura Esquivel's 1989 novel also strongly marked by magic realism) Alfonso Arau is more successful when it comes to adapting this literary aesthetics to film.

The introductory chapter of this dissertation will present a definition of magic realism in literature, thus attempting to relate Allende's and Esquivel's novels with this aesthetics. The chapter will also situate the novels within their social-political context in Latin America. Brazilian critic Irlemar Chiampi in *O Realismo Maravilhoso* affirms that Latin American literature is strongly marked by obscure structures, by mythical and complex models. One of magic realism's devices is its emphasis on intuition, emotion, and the psychological aspects of its characters. These artistic features, in conjunction with historical and economic problems, provide some of the elements that allow Latin American authors to use literature as a tool for political struggle. Consequently, we can infer that magic realist novels could be considered a way through which these writers can denounce, on a larger scale, their political, cultural and social problems. By comparing and contrasting these two novels with their filmic adaptations, my ultimate goal is to analyze how the aesthetics of magic realism, in its close relation to the Latin American social-political context, is translated into a Hollywood narrative.



Since adaptations imply a specific reading of the books, I consider the films a form of reception of these Latin American novels in the United States. As Jane Tompkins defines David Bleich's theory of reception,

adults universally distinguish among three kinds of entities: objects, symbols and people. Literary works [would be] symbols, which are mental creations. The text is an object [only] because it has a physical existence; its meaning depends entirely on the process of symbolization that takes place in the mind of the reader. The initial symbolization is what Bleich calls "reader response." The effort to understand that response, to give it coherence or point, is a process of resymbolization that he calls interpretation. (Tompkins XX)

Most importantly for my work is Bleich's distinction "between an individual's response to literature, which is purely subjective, and the process by which his response becomes a form of knowledge." The community to which the reader belongs determines this process. Knowledge would be the process "of negotiation among members of an interpretative community." Consequently, educating would be "developing knowledge;" in other words, "a communal pursuit in which all parties are engaged on an equal [decision of] what counts as true" (Tompkins XX).

This definition seems useful for the analysis of the films for the following reason: the films can ideally be considered less objective and more symbolic than the books. As Bleich said, "the text is an object [only] because it has physical existence" (Tompkins XX). The film also has physical existence, since it is a 35-mm tape. However, while it is not available for renting, the spectator needs to go to the movie theater, which is a place where he cannot "touch" the film the same way that he touches a book. Thus, the mental process of symbolization that makes people respond to the film is privileged, since the audience needs to rely on his/her ability to make sense of the narrative. Although the audience does not have to create scenarios, faces, landscapes, for they are all there, ready, in front of them, devices such as image, sound, light, and costume help the

spectators actually identify with the plot and characters. Spectators make inferences in order to understand the reality of these characters within the film context.

Considering the directors of the films, we can deduce that their work, based on a piece of literature, is their individual subjective response to the novels. We know that they have read the novels and have gone through the processes of symbolization and resymbolization. From that, we can analyze how they have “interpreted” or “resymbolized” the nuances of magic realism’s politics on the screen. Moreover, assuming that Hollywood is a North American community, it is necessary to examine how this community, in conjunction with the director’s individual response, have portrayed magic realism and Latin America to, mainly, a North American audience, which is actually the target audience. It is important to highlight here that, although we can infer that both Bille August and Alfonso Arau are part of the Hollywood community, they are also influenced by alternative communities, since August is Danish and Arau Mexican. Second, if we remember that Hollywood productions are watched worldwide, there is a need to investigate how the response of the director, which is an individual response, as well as that of Hollywood, can influence other communities.

The first indication that the films are a form of reception of the books is how loyal to the plots the directors are. By reading the novels and watching the films, we can say that both films are considerably faithful to Allende’s and Esquivel’s plots. However, we have to examine how loyal the directors are to the themes of the books. As I have pointed out before, spectators can obviously make inferences and analyze a film in terms of its theme. I see the movies then, as symbols that aid the development of knowledge in a community through the negotiation of a decision of what is true, as posed by Bleich. If magic realism is a way through which Latin American authors, who are also part of an interpretative community, denounce their political, cultural, social

and economic problems, it is necessary to examine if these problems (which are part of Allende's and Esquivel's themes) are portrayed by August and Arau. In addition to that, if these themes are present in the films, it is important to observe how other interpretative communities receive them. In other words, I intend to examine how the films *The House of the Spirits* and *Like Water for Chocolate* readdress political and cultural elements that are present in the magic realist aesthetics employed in Allende's and Esquivel's novels.

First, let us define magic realism as an aesthetics in literature, in conjunction with a review of the criticism on the subject. As Suzanne Baker explains, "the term magic realism first appeared in the context of art, being coined by the German art critic Franz Roh to describe the work of post-expressionist artists in the mid-1920's"(1). According to María-Elena Angulo in *Magic Realism – Social Context and Discourse*, Roh started using the term in 1925, affirming that post-expressionists were "representing the mystery inherent in things" (3). It is important to perceive that the aim of these artists "was to shake habitual perceptions of their surroundings (...) by showing that there were different ways of perceiving everyday objects" (Baker 1). Roh explains that post-expressionists were re-creating the world by painting ordinary objects through an alternative magical perception (Baker 1). The translation of his book *Nach-Expressionismus (Magischer Realismus)* into Spanish generated, during the forties, literary criticism on the subject in Latin America (Angulo 4). According to Angulo, it is important "to consider that in Spanish America in the forties, the term was used to express a new literature inherent to the mentality and attitude of its writers" (4).

In 1948, two critics contributed with important insights on magic realism. The first one, Arturo Uslar Pietri, used the term as a reference to short stories of the thirties and forties in Venezuela. His idea, which follows Franz Roh's definition, is that these

texts present situations “where man is a mystery among realistic data” (Angulo 5). In the same year, Alejo Carpentier gave one of the main contributions to studies on magic realism by publishing, in the newspaper *El Nacional*, the prologue to his 1949 novel *El reino de este mundo*. In the prologue entitled “De lo real maravilloso americano,” Carpentier affirms that the American marvelous (“lo real maravilloso americano”) is indeed a natural marvelous, different from the artificiality of surrealists. He believes that it is a genre original of “all Latin America where it is possible to find natural historical and cultural phenomena” (Angulo 4). One of the most interesting passages of Carpentier’s definition is his statement that the American marvelous presupposes faith (Angulo 4). This idea will be expanded in the discussion about magic realism and fantastic literature, but for now, it is important to highlight that, as Angulo points out, Carpentier’s prologue has probably become successful because it calls Latin American writers to use America as a source of inspiration instead of Europe. As an example, his *El reino de este mundo* is about Haiti. In addition to that, the publication of his article took place exactly at a time when there was an attempt to define Latin American identity within the Western world (5).

Six years later, Angel Flores contributed to magic realism’s popularity by presenting a paper named “Magic Realism in Spanish American Fiction” at the Modern Language Association in New York. His article points out “the amalgamation of realism and fantasy” (Angulo 5) in literature, affirming that the genre was stimulated by Kafka, Proust, as well as by Borges and Mallea in Spanish America. Flores’ essay has been largely criticized, considered weak and inaccurate for its broad and diverse classification of authors and of the terms “realism” and “fantasy” (Angulo 5).

In 1967, Luis Leal’s “El realismo magico en la literatura hispano-americana,” besides disagreeing with Flores’s essay, presents some new important ideas on the topic.

According to Angulo, for Leal, magic realism cannot be associated to the fantastic or to surrealism because the former is only an attitude towards reality (6). He does not make a difference between the author's attitude and the reaction of characters in relation to the "magic" and the "real." However, Leal points out one of the main points in the definition of magic realism: the difference between the magic and the fantastic. Arturo Fox expands Leal's ideas by affirming that in magic realism, "the author's suspension of judgment is ontological," while in the fantastic, "there is 'ontological duality', which is exactly the opposite of magic realism" (Angulo 6). Considering that "ontology" is the branch of philosophy that deals with the being, we can see that Fox's statement guides us a step further towards the definition of magic realism. Both fantastic literature and magic realism deal with the being and with the supernatural. However, in magic realism, the author and the narrator do not judge supernatural events within the being or, in other words, within men's environment. Fantastic narratives, on the opposite, are characterized exactly by the author and narrator's constant question: Is it real or is it supernatural?

Before we focus on the difference between the two genres, let us examine two other definitions of the early critics present in Angulo's *Magic Realism – Social Context and Discourse*, as well as recent critics' ideas on magic realism. Floyd Merrel states that although magic realism is often present in its themes, its origins must be explored on a linguistic level, "which is the writer's way to express theme" (7). His conclusion is that "magic realism, in the final analysis, must be considered a local expression whose function and structure reveal a universal epistemological phenomenon" (qtd in Angulo 7). Moreover, although it is important to notice that not all Latin American fiction is necessarily magic realist, Jaime Alazraki expands Carpentier's idea that magic realist fiction must be differentiated by its American themes. Alazraki not only agrees with

Carpentier when he mentions the necessity of faith in magic realism, but also concludes that myth, legend and magic are the basis for this kind of fiction.

Suzanne Baker and Patricia Hart present recent criticism on magic realism. They introduce their own ideas on the genre, as well as other critics' definitions that will be of paramount importance for my analysis of the novels *The House of the Spirits* and *Like Water for Chocolate*. Baker affirms that, in magic realism, "normal, plausible, everyday events co-exist on the same level as supernatural, extraordinary and even fantastic events whose authenticity is never questioned" (1). She mentions that

in her book *Magical Realism and the Fantastic*, Amaryll Chanady explains that magic realism is characterized by two conflicting but autonomously coherent perspectives, one based on an "enlightened" and rational view of reality and the other based on the acceptance of the supernatural as part of the everyday world. Thus, the central concept of magic realism in literature is its insistence on the co-existence of the magic and the real. (1)

For Patricia Hart, in her book *Narrative Magic in the Fiction of Isabel Allende*,

*magic* [refers] to events counter (or apparently counter) to natural law; *realism* [refers] to narrative that attempts to mirror nature; and *magical realism* [can be] defined as narration in which:

1. the real and the magic are juxtaposed;
2. this juxtaposition is narrated matter-of-factly;
3. the apparently impossible event leads to a deeper truth that holds outside the novel;
4. conventional notions of time, place, matter and identity are challenged; and
5. the effect of reading the fiction may be to change the reader's prejudice about what reality is. (27)

Realism can be seen as an attempt to mirror life, as posed by Hart. However, as a literary movement, it is important to consider the specific historical moment of its rise. According to C. Hugh Holman in *Handbook to Literature*, realism appeared in the nineteenth century, partly in reaction to romanticism, and it had the novel as its center. For him, "realism defines a literary method, a philosophical and political attitude, and a particular kind of subject matter" (qtd in Hart13). From Holman's words, we can infer

that the realistic novel appeared as a political reaction to romanticism. As a testimony to this political force, Holman continues by classifying realism as a “middle-class art.” He calls attention to the fact that “generally, the realist is a believer in democracy, and that the materials he elects to describe are the common, the average, the everyday” (qtd in Hart13).

Through Holman’s words, I will try to highlight the political side of magic realism. If we consider that “magic” refers to events that are contrary to natural laws and “realism” to the portrayal of everyday nature, we can infer that authors called magic realists apparently had to deal with a contradiction. Hart affirms that this contradiction was characterized by two conflicting forces: (1) “an attempt to mirror life faithfully,” and (2) “an idealistic desire to use literature for a change” (18). In magic realism, literature becomes the means to transcend the banal and the mundane. Angel Valbuena Briones helps to develop this idea by affirming that magic realism is directly linked to “a conflict between realism and idealism” (Hart 24). In Spanish America, authors such as Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Carlos Fuentes had to find their “own solution to the dilemma of presenting Latin American life realistically and at the same time “correctly” according to [their] personal philosophy” (Hart16). Hart concludes that these authors found alternative solutions to this problem, but they all received, “at one time or another, the label of magic realists” (16).

Magic realism had its boom in Latin America with the publication of Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, in 1967. García Márquez has won the Nobel Prize of Literature for his work and has influenced several Latin American authors. Isabel Allende and Laura Esquivel are considered magic realist authors when it comes to their novels *The House of the Spirits*, 1982, and *Like Water for Chocolate*,

1989. Considering that their novels are posterior to the boom of magic realism, for the understanding of the political aspects of magic realism, it is worth examining what was happening in Latin American literature by the sixties. According to Hart, from 1964 on,

much of Latin American literature is a body of work well aware of the threat of cultural imperialism from the north, wrestling with a desire to write like the great European and North American masters (notably Faulkner) and at the same time having something of their own, something unique. (Hart 19)

Since the definition of space is a paramount characteristic of realist novels, it is important to notice that, according to Robert Wilson, magic realism produces a “space in which the spatial effects of canonical realism and those of axiomatic fantasy are interwoven (...), space is hybrid (opposite and conflicting properties are co-present)” (qtd in Baker 2). He refers to magic realist space as a “dual spatiality.” To emphasize Wilson’s ideas, Suzanne Baker explains that “magic realism does not create imaginary worlds. What it does create, through its “dual spatiality,” is a space where alternative realities and different perceptions of the world can be conceived” (3). Applying their view to this study, space in the novels, as well as in the films, is very well defined. In *The House of the Spirits*, conflicting events happen especially in Três Marias, the farm where, at the same time that we watch workers trying to form labor unions, we also see old healers sending ants away by simply talking to them. In *Like Water for Chocolate*, the kitchen is a “magic” space, a place where people fall in love, cry, or see ghosts.

Following Baker’s ideas, a movement from space to politics allows a better understanding of the reasons why magic realism is often linked to social-political issues. The fictional space becomes the means for political or domestic struggle. As she exposes,

magic realism raises questions about the nature of the worlds we inhabit (...) In opposition to straightforward, rational and controlled order, which is the dominant style of imperialism, magic realism mixes fantasy and reality,



fact and myth, while resisting classical expectations of closure and unity.  
(4)

Many of Allende's and Esquivel's characters struggle against social obligations. They fight, above all, for freedom, be it political or personal freedom. In an interview given to Joan Smith for the Salon Journal, Laura Esquivel actually affirms that what she wants "to communicate to people is that they should disobey the social rules that do not pertain to them, they should rebel against what is not personally true" (3).

In relation to Allende's novel more specifically, Elvia Lizeth Escobedo, in her essay "The Power Behind the Language of Isabel Allende," calls attention to the fact that "Allende links language with history" (1). She affirms that

the Trueba family history (...) contrasts strikingly with Chile's recorded history. The history of the country is manipulated by the military through their control of literature and the mass media. This allows them to create their own version of history and to erase what they don't approve of, whether it be true or not. Unlike the country's history, which is altered, hidden and forgotten, the story of the Del Valle and the Trueba families remains intact. (1)

If we consider Chanady's ideas on magic realism as having its base on "social, historical and political references" (qtd. in Baker 1) true, then we can agree with Escobedo when she concludes that "for Allende, words hold the power to recall history, be it the history of a country or a family" (5). Although neither of the revolutions is named in the novels, on the one hand, Laura Esquivel invites us to be in contact with the Mexican Revolution of 1910. On the other hand, we can notice that Allende's novel takes place in an unknown Latin American country. However, the two narrators of the novel take us inevitably to experience Chile's history, which involve the government of Salvador Allende and Pinochet's military coup, an issue that is still today being addressed by the media.

Another critic, Jodi Denny, has also contributed to studies on Allende. In her essay "Exploring the Masculine and Feminine in Isabel Allende's *The House of the*

*Spirits*,” Denny foregrounds that “the novel illustrates the dangers of an imbalance of the masculine and feminine within the individual, the family, and nation” (1). She affirms that “by weaving fiction and fact within the novel so delicately, Allende explores the implication of this integration of masculine and feminine forces in the real, tangible world, particularly in Latin America” (2). Denny continues by suggesting that Allende uses magic realism to show the integration of masculine and feminine: “the real and the magical are juxtaposed in the novel, corresponding to the rational and the irrational, the masculine and the feminine, respectively. The magical becomes an integral link to the survival of the real” (3). Once more, this analysis of the novel takes us a step further in the studies of magic realism as a defined aesthetics.

*The House of the Spirits* and *Like Water for Chocolate* share the fact that female narrators tell personal versions of their family history, which includes the history of Chile and Mexico respectively. Verónica Cortínez, in “La construcción del pasado en ‘La verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España’ y ‘La casa de los espíritus’,” argues that Alba, one of Allende’s narrators (Esteban Trueba, the patriarch, is the second narrator of the novel), actually wanted to correct the version of history previously written by the official government (323). Patricia Hart seems to agree with Cortínez, suggesting that tale telling, one of Allende’s main points in the novel, can be analyzed, among other aspects, as a way to preserve history manipulated by the military in Chile. Just as Alba is motivated to write about her family, story telling is then seen as a motivation for action, especially as a force for political and social change (81).

Esquivel has also found a new way to recount official history. According to Kristine Ibsen in “On Recipes, Reading and Revolution: Postboom Parody in *Como Agua Para Chocolate*,” the “alternate [personal] version” of events recorded by the protagonist Tita is different from the canonized discourse (135). The author inverts

female and male behavior, questions conventional roles, and plays with a “highly masculine tradition of the literature (and cinema) of the Mexican Revolution” by simply retelling history from a female point-of-view (136). Ibsen explains that “Esquivel effects a re-evaluation of official discourse since the history that has been recorded does not always conform to the fantastic nature of perceived reality” (136). *Like Water for Chocolate* uses food and food metaphors as a narrative device that unifies time and space disconnections, taking the characters and the readers “into a sensual dimension of reality” (138). In Ibsen’s view, the novel’s emphasis on food suggests a focus on “what is practical and tangible over what is abstract and theoretical” (139). The fact that recipes make the novel resemble a women’s magazine, however, not only emphasizes a woman’s sense of community, but also focuses on the ideology of domesticity, so strong in the nineteenth century (139). At the specific time of the revolution chosen by Esquivel, women’s magazines gave rules of etiquette and social advice, “which limited the woman’s social existence to a sphere of activity within the family institution” (139). By using magic realism through food metaphors, Esquivel plays with popular literature and “questions the ‘seriousness’ of canonized [male] discourse” (138). She foregrounds that “real women (...) may have ‘masculine’ attributes such as strength and courage, just as real men may show ‘feminine’, nurturing sides” (143). Tita is a protagonist who embodies strength and the feminine, since she can, at the same time produce fire with her food, and nurse her little nephew without even being sexually active. On the opposite, Sargento Trevino, one of Gertrudis’s (Tita’s sister) soldiers, can, at the same time, shoot enemies and prepare baked cookies. Gertrudis herself is a very interesting character: at a time when women were expected to be virgins until they got married, she becomes a prostitute in order to

satisfy her relentless sexual desire. She then joins the army and becomes a general (“generalita”). Nevertheless, she is unable to cook anything.

The aspect of women’s limitation in the nineteenth century is also explored by Marta Contreras in “La novela: Como agua para chocolate de Laura Esquivel. La película: Como agua para chocolate, dirección de Alfonso Arau.” She calls our attention to the fact that the Mexican tradition can be associated, on the one hand, to women in terms of prohibition, and, on the other, to prohibition in a bloody local history. In her view, prohibition, or in other words, repression, causes revolution, prostitution, fire, and death, aspects that are all present in Esquivel’s novel. According to Contreras, what Esquivel proposes (and what is also present in the film) is that the characters fight for freedom eagerly through eroticism. The prohibition of bodily desire makes it more desirable; thus, sexual love becomes a goal of all characters (119-20).

Besides the analysis provided here on the relationship between history, social reality and magic realism, it is necessary to examine some aspects of fantastic literature. Tzvetan Todorov affirms that the fantastic is a literary genre sustained by ambiguity: “reality or dream? truth or illusion? (...) In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world” (25). The reader or the character that experiences this event has to decide if “the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings” (25). Todorov explains that the fantastic is exactly the hesitation experienced by the reader and/or the character; once s/he decides if the event is a dream or part of reality, s/he will move to other sub-genres. If the laws of reason can explain the event, its genre is said to be *uncanny*. If the reader/character accepts the event as supernatural, it is called *marvelous* (*The Fantastic* 25).

Considering that fantastic literature presupposes the reader/character's hesitation towards the supernatural, we can already notice that it is different from magic realism, in which the extraordinary co-exists with the real. Besides, one indication that magic realism should not be associated with fantastic literature is that, as Carpentier mentioned in *El reino de este mundo*, it occurs in everyday life (Hart 21). The fantastic, thus, is characterized by doubt, while, magic realism, as Carpentier defined, requires faith in the supernatural.

Amaryll Chanady also separates the fantastic from the magic, affirming that what distinguishes the two is the narrator. She states that, although magic realism includes the presence of fantastic events, there is always a connection with the real in it (Baker 1). Above all, and most importantly, since my study relies on the relationship between Latin America's social-political context and magic realism, it is necessary to perceive magic realism as "grounded in a recognizable reality through social, historical and political references" (qtd in Baker 1). The narrator of the fantastic, on the contrary, can ignore "the laws of logic and the physical world, and [can] recount an action that may be absurd or supernatural" (qtd in Baker 1). The magic realist narrator should never question the extraordinary events present in the story; instead, he should treat them with equilibrium and objectivity (Baker 1). If we assume that human beings are only familiar with the real and that magic realism includes the supernatural within everyday reality, we can understand why, for Chanady, the fantastic has a reliable narrator, while the magic counts on an unreliable and eccentric narrator. David Young, in *Magic Realist Fiction: An Anthology*, also sees the narrator's attitude within the novel as a crucial element in magic realist fictions. He believes that, by narrating supernatural events matter-of-factly, the narrator leads the reader to be skeptical about his previous idea of the *real* and perhaps to reconstruct his concept of it (Hart 24). Indeed, such elements

can be seen in the novels *The House of the Spirits* and *Like Water for Chocolate*. Girls really burning up with passion, and playing the piano with the mind co-exist with social rules of marriage, for instance, and political struggle.

Concluding, although the presence of magic in everyday reality and the position of the narrator are important elements that separate magic realism and fantastic literature, Amaryll Chanady does see three common characteristics between them. They are (1) "the natural juxtaposed with the supernatural; (2) the emphasis on the resolution of an antimony in the fictional world; and (3) an authorial reticence" (Hart 22).

In chapter one, a close reading of the two novels and further criticism on them will be presented. As an attempt to portray Latin America in the late nineteen sixties more closely, I will explore political, cultural and economic issues, which can help to contextualize these novels within their own historical time. Aspects of the narrative such as point-of-view, characterization and creation of supernatural and real events within the plot will be addressed.

A comparison of the two films in terms of mise-en-scene, narration, plot, the stories' lines of action, and on the types of motivation created to unify the movies will be made in chapter two. This chapter compares and contrasts both films, since they can be read as a recontextualization of the magic realist aesthetics employed by Esquivel and Allende into a Hollywood classical narrative.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF**  
**ALLENDE'S AND ESQUIVEL'S NOVELS**

1. *THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS*

*The House of the Spirits* (1982) is Isabel Allende's first novel. As she suggests, the book is rather autobiographical, although the story mixes real events with fiction:

I have written *The House of the Spirits* as an exorcism, as a way to pull out the ghosts I carried inside me; they had rebelled and would not leave me alone... In a primitive way, I have given the word power to revive the dead, to gather the ones who had disappeared, to reconstruct the lost world. (*Eva Luna* 1987)<sup>1</sup>

Allende was born in Lima, Peru, in 1942, by accident, as she usually says, for she was raised in Chile and she considers herself a Chilean. As a journalist, she worked for several newspapers and magazines, as well as for television programs. She organized book publications – for children, mainly – in various Chilean publishing houses until her voluntary exile in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1976, three years after the military coup in Chile. She wrote humor articles for a newspaper in Chile and later in Caracas. Before her first novel, she published plays, which were acted out in Chile. After *The House of the Spirits*, Allende published several other successful novels, such as *Of Love and Shadows* (1984), *Eva Luna* (1987), *Stories of Eva Luna* (1988), *The Infinite Plan* (1991), *Paula* (1994), and others. Influenced by magic realism, she became one of the best known Latin American writers, and her books were translated into more than twenty-five languages.

Her name is inevitably associated to her uncle's, Chile's former president Salvador Allende, who was overthrown by the army in 1973. Within this historical

context, it seems natural that many of her books, and especially *The House of the Spirits*, take place in 1970's Chile. Although she does not name the country of the novel, we can infer that her characters portray the society, economy and politics of Chile at that time. She gives special attention to issues such as the atrocities of military torture and the people's lack of freedom. As Allende herself points out in the jacket of *La Casa de Los Espiritus*, "in my books, I have wanted to tell the tragedy of this tortured continent, as well as the men and women's hope and struggle for a better world."<sup>2</sup> Considering what has been said about Allende, this first part of chapter one will focus on the relationship between *The House of the Spirits* and the magic realist aesthetics, as defined in the introductory chapter. I will especially highlight the relationship between politics and magic present in the novel.

*The House of the Spirits* starts with the introduction of Barrabás, a "giant" dog adopted by Clara, the protagonist. Later in the story, Barrabás disappears and is cruelly stabbed. The dog seems to be an appropriate metaphor for a novel that will show, through the development of the plot, innocent men and women being taken away from their houses and being killed without any explanation. Clara is part of the Del Valle family, which is constituted by herself, her father Severo, by her mother Nivea and her sister Rosa. Rosa is about to marry Esteban Trueba, who has a dying mother and a sister called Ferula. During a ceremony for the Liberal Party at the Del Valles's house, Rosa accidentally drinks poisoned liquor and dies. Esteban, who was working in a mine to save money for his wedding, becomes desperate and leaves for Trés Marias, an abandoned farm that belonged to his family. He decides to work and live there in order to ease the pain of losing Rosa. He organizes workers in the property and makes the farm a productive one. In a short period of time Trés Marias becomes extremely prosperous and Trueba, a wealthy man. Clara, who is a clairvoyant child, had foreseen



Rosa's death. Believing that she had caused the incident, Clara feels traumatized and decides not to talk anymore. She remains silent for ten years. Her first words after this period come out when Esteban Trueba, feeling lonely and sad, visits the Del Valles to ask Clara to marry him. Clara and Esteban get married and move to Três Marias. Since Mrs. Trueba had died, his sister Ferula goes with them, in spite of Esteban's opposition.

So far in the plot, the reader is already introduced to realistic, as well as to magic aspects of the characters. The Del Valles are prominent in their community. Severo Del Valle is an important senator and Nivea, a dedicated mother and wife. Clara moves objects without touching them, plays the piano with the mind and foresees events. Rosa is almost a mermaid. Sweet, with green hair, and delicate gestures, she "magnetizes" Trueba and spends most of her time stitching strange, abnormal animals in a blanket. Esteban, on the contrary, is a very impulsive and aggressive character. He is violent and does not measure the consequences of his acts. Besides, he was used to raping girls at Três Marias before his marriage, especially the daughters of peasants, who could not fight against their "patrón." Ferula is a religious woman used to taking care of her mother and other needy people. She is not married and does not know how to live unless by taking care of others. After her brother's wedding, she nurtures a deep love for Clara. Her relationship with Esteban becomes increasingly complicated because of this, until the day he tells Ferula to leave his property.

Clara and Esteban have a daughter, Blanca, and twin sons, Nicolás and Jaime. Blanca grows up in Três Marias, but the twins go to an English school in town. As Blanca becomes a grown up woman, she falls in love with Pedro Tercero, grandson of Pedro García, the oldest peasant in the farm. Esteban does not appreciate their relationship. Pedro is not only from a different social class, but he is also the one who tries to organize a workers' union on the farm, telling the peasants they deserve better

wages and working conditions. Blanca is sent to a school in the city, but she and Pedro meet secretly in the summer, during her vacations. Besides Três Marias, the family has a house in the city. It is called “the big house of the corner.” After a huge fight with Esteban, when he finds out that Blanca is pregnant, and the child’s father is Pedro, Clara and Blanca leave Três Marias and move there. In this house, Clara spends her days consulting spirits to find out about the past and the future.

As the plot develops, the reader comes to an understanding of the family’s political relations. Clara and Blanca are not interested in politics. Blanca, similarly to her aunt Rosa, likes to spend her days molding abnormal animals in clay, while Clara is too much involved with spirits and the house. However, their partners are political enemies. Pedro becomes a socialist activist in the farm, which leads Esteban to banish him from Três Marias. At the same time, Esteban Trueba becomes a right wing senator completely against “communists.” He even helps the military into power. Jaime, now a young doctor working at a public hospital, is also a socialist activist. Nicolás, on the contrary, is not involved in politics; he develops his spirituality through meditation and dance classes. Blanca’s daughter, Alba, learns to be a socialist from a very young age. Through conversations and readings with Uncle Jaime and, later, through her love affair with an activist classmate Miguel, Alba goes to extremes in the fight against militarism. The big house of the corner becomes a crucial setting, which is used not only to keep Jaime’s “prohibited” books, but also to hide people during the military government.

The novel comes to a political climax when the military take power and kill the President. By using capital letters to refer to the President and to the Poet, both intimate friends of Jaime’s, Allende increases the realistic aspect of the book. The figures of Salvador Allende (the President) and Pablo Neruda (the Poet) become apparent to the reader who is familiar with Chile’s history. The coup is described in detail with the

---

invasion and destruction of the presidential palace, and the murder of several people, including Jaime. The fact that Isabel Allende transcribes Salvador Allende's speech, moments before his death, increases the authenticity of Chile's political history. After his palace is invaded, the President, like Salvador Allende, refuses to resign. He then speaks to the whole country through the radio:

I address those who will be prosecuted in order to tell them that I will not resign: I will pay the people's loyalty with my life. I will always be with you. I have faith in our country and in its destiny. Others will overcome this moment and, very soon, large streets will be opened, through which the free man will pass and build a better society... These will be my last words. I am sure that my sacrifice will not be in vain. (325)<sup>3</sup>

Alba is caught and tortured by Esteban's bastard son, who had joined the army. Passages of torture and rape help to portray what happened to society at that time. Again, references to Chile are clear. The national stadium, a place where military kept, tortured and killed many civilians who were in favor of Salvador Allende's government, is one of the places in which Esteban looks for his granddaughter after she is taken from his own house. The national stadium also calls our attention to another character in the book, Pedro Tercero. Although the novel never shows him in the stadium, his characterization presents similarities to the Chilean activist singer Víctor Jara, who was killed there. Esteban Trueba chops three fingers out of Pedro's hand when he finds out that Blanca is pregnant. Víctor Jara's death is somehow obscure, for the government hid its circumstances. However, stories told by some of his companions, who survived prison and torture, became a legend. They claim that, when Jara's identity was discovered, his right-hand fingers were chopped out in the middle of the stadium, while he firmly outlived pain by singing and raising his bloody hand to the other prisoners (Hart 104). Besides having his hand mutilated like Jara's, Pedro was also an activist singer.

The characterization of society during the time of the President's government and after his death was also a reference to Chile, as well as a contribution to the political connotation of the novel. After the President won democratic elections, the people had, for the first time in their lives, enough money to buy food and to live a decent life. However, there was no food in the stores, no gasoline in gas stations, or any cleaning products. People had to stay in lines and stock food, for the lack of meat, vegetables and other goods started to be a nightmare. When truck drivers went on strike, it became clear that the matter was political, not a labor one. Society, as well as the President, was being sabotaged. Right after the coup, stores were filled with sophisticated products. The dirty city was cleaned and poor people, as if a miracle had happened, disappeared from the streets. Most relevantly, personal freedom was banished. Any political manifestation was forbidden. Books were censored. The military did their best to pretend the country was in peace, when, in the underground, people were being killed because of their political beliefs.

While the political aspect of *The House of the Spirits* is a crucial element of the novel's plot, "magic" seems to be a landmark of Isabel Allende's characters. They seem to reinforce the political strength of the novel. Clara's clairvoyance is marked by her foreseeing events, even though she cannot change the course of life to prevent accidents, death or suffering. According to Patricia Hart, Clara and Blanca are characters that seem to conform with the catastrophic situation of the country. They are opposed to Alba, who wants to fight for freedom and respect for her people. Clara's clairvoyance then would be a metaphor for her sensitivity in childhood and for passivity in adulthood (50). By opposing Clara and Blanca to Alba, Allende makes a political point. According to Hart, magic realism stands for a feminist perspective in the novel, for it portrays the economic and emotional dependence of women in that specific

historical moment (53-54). Considering Clara's passivity, in spite of her supernatural powers, we can understand why Hart affirms that in *The House of the Spirits*, "the real is used to undercut the magic. [Magic realism is placed] in trivial settings, ones that do little to affect the larger problems of contemporary Latin America" (38). Consequently, Allende invites us to measure the importance of politics in the definition of magic realism as a literary aesthetics. Although Alba is not clairvoyant like her grandmother, she is the real "magic" character, since she is able to make a change in people's lives.

Another magic realist trait appears in the portrayal of Rosa and Alba having green hair. Considering and contrasting both characters, we can notice that the two women are beautiful in alternative ways. Rosa's beauty and magic are in accordance with her physical appearance. Her green hair resembles the hair of a mermaid. By contrast, Alba's beauty and magic lie in her political force. Allende emphasizes that she does not have the physical beauty of the women in the family. Her green hair may even seem weird in combination with her face. However, she assures Alba's beauty when the activist Miguel sees her naked and confirms that she is extremely beautiful to his eyes. Not only her body, but also her personality, her force and strength of character attract Miguel. Green hair, thus, can be a symbol of beauty, but it can also emphasize the possible different senses of beauty. In addition, since Rosa died in the beginning of the novel, and Alba is pregnant in the end, their common green hair may be a metaphor for the spiritual aspect of the characters. As Hart calls our attention, Alba means "dawn" in Spanish, which is usually associated to the pink color (Rosa, in Spanish). The image of dawn, representing a new day, can be a metaphor for Alba's pregnancy, as well as for Rosa's death, which can convey death as a continuation of life. The idea of "a new day" is in accordance with the green color, which, in a Latin culture, stands for hope. In the

case of the novel, Alba represents hope for a better country and society, in opposition to the atrocities of dictatorship.

Esteban Trueba also carries a portion of magic in his character. The strong and violent man suddenly notices that he is shrinking, and diminishing in stature. The problem is that he is the only one who perceives it. He feels that his pants are too large, his shoes are loose, and his bed is too big. He confirms this after Clara's death. When lying down next to her dead body, he notices that Clara is taller than he is. Trueba's shrinkage may be in accordance with his personal and psychological traits. In the novel, Esteban compares himself to those whom he calls the "great politicians" of history: Napoleon and Hitler. As Hart suggests, Esteban is actually narrow-minded and has shrunken ideas (127). Still according to her, Trueba is a person who loses position and authority with age (131). After the military coup, his prominent position as a senator becomes useless. Another explanation for his problem may be related to his relationship with Clara. Esteban notices that he is losing the love of his wife after he beats her, which causes Clara and Blanca to move out of Trés Marias. She decides not to talk to him anymore and rejects him sexually. Deprived of his masculinity and of his wife's affection, Esteban feels pain and anxiety. According to Hart, after Clara's death, "he [definitely] feels shrunken and alone" (132). Hart points out though that there is a popular myth in Hispanic America called "el último estirón." Through this myth, people (usually with poor education) believe that the dead would grow a few centimeters (132). Hart does not think that Allende believes in this, but rather, she infers that the myth of "el último estirón" in the figure of Clara may be a clear magic portion of the narrative (132). I would further suggest that the myth can be a reference to Latin American beliefs. Considering that the question of Trueba's shrinkage remains unsolved, both the doctors' diagnosis (anxiety) and the myth have the same importance, conveying the idea

that science and magic have the same weight in a people's culture. To support this idea, I quote part of Kathryn L. Maus' essay *An Analysis of Female Characters Depicting a Blend of Feminism and Traditionalism in Selected Works by Isabel Allende*. The author points out that Allende's stories "reflect personal viewpoints on political and social issues, and she challenges the reader to evaluate these issues through the perspective of culture" (1).

Still referring to the importance of values and traditions in a culture, we can analyze the character of Old Pedro García, the oldest peasant on the farm. He is a healer who cures and mends Trueba's bones, after the farmhouse falls down on him during an earthquake. He also sends ants away of the plantation by simply having a conversation with them. Several techniques, from poison to a foreign specialist, had been tried before, but none of them worked. Allende seems to valorize the community's culture through Pedro García's character. Nevertheless, she also shows the dangers of ignoring science. The old man cures Trueba, but loses his daughter Pancha García, who dies of a stomach problem after receiving cattle feces as medicine. She is not taken to hospital because her father believed he could cure her.

Another element of Allende's narrative can be intimately related to magic realism's political implications in literature, as well as to the question of point-of-view in the novel: the power of books and of story telling. Clara had read her Uncle Marcos' "magic books" since a very young age. These magic books, which mentioned pirates and treasures, are revealed as classical children's books, like Robin Hood for example. Hart suggests that "the transmission of these magic books is depicted as an act of love in the novel" (71). Both Blanca and Alba were told these stories by their mothers, so was Pedro Tercero, by Blanca, and Old Pedro García, by Blanca and Pedro together. Still according to Hart, the magic books also have the power to stimulate creativity and the

desire to write (72). This stimulation applies mainly to Clara, who kept journals since she was a child, and to Alba, who was motivated to collect these journals and write about her family. It is crucial to remember that Alba was a political activist; she spent hours reading and discussing “prohibited” books with Jaime. In such case, we can associate story telling, reading and writing as a force for political and social change. Alba’s book, which turns out to be *The House of the Spirits* itself, since she is revealed as a narrator in the end, does not stick to Chile’s recorded history. By preserving the history of her family at a specific time and country, Alba actually accuses the distorted truth present in school books and in official history (Hart 72). Hart wisely affirms that, through Alba’s writings, “some of the deeper magic of these “libros mágicos” begins to emerge” (72). Story telling, used in a negative way, confirms the idea of love transmitted through books. Esteban García, Esteban Trueba’s bastard grandson, is not exposed to the magic of books in an affecting way. On the contrary, his illiterate grandmother Pancha García was raped by Trueba, and because of that, tells her grandson that he could have been as rich as Blanca and Alba. Living with this “torturing story” all his life, he joins the army and becomes Alba’s torturer, in a desperate search for revenge.

Alba’s revelation as a first-person narrator brings us the question of reliability. Both Alba and Esteban take turns telling their versions of the facts in the novel. Since both are characters within the plot, we could think that the narrative may have a strong emotional connotation, and thus be unreliable. Burgoyne suggests that one of the zones in which a narrator operates is called the “character-narrator, which tells a story from within the frame of the fictional world. In [Gerard] Genette’s terms, this is called Intradiegetic Narrator” (97). Adapting Genette’s definition to literature, this is the case of Alba, who can also be called a “homodiegetic” narrator. This type of narrator “relates



his or her own experiences or perceptions, and functions in his or her own story as [a character]” (97). Burgoyne emphasizes that

One of the features of character-narrators is that they can lie, make mistakes, or distort the facts of the fictional world. Unlike the impersonal narrator, character-narrators do not possess an automatic authentication authority: what they say must be tested, compared to other versions of the events, and judged according to the general characteristics of the milieu in which they reside. (101)

In Alba’s case, her narration can have traces of unreliability in the sense that she takes part in the events; she gets involved in the family’s problems, thus she is not impersonal. However, she is reliable if we consider that she is telling the story written in Clara’s diaries. Alba confirms her reliability in the last paragraph, when, with the diaries in her hands, she affirms that Clara wrote them for her to rescue the things of the past. In the case of Trueba, we could consider his parts of the narrative as being more filled with emotional and personal charge. Nevertheless, the main narrator is Alba, who organizes the diaries and includes her grandfather’s voice in the narrative. Considering this fact, it is possible to conclude that Allende seems to have mixed personal and impersonal narration, conveying a balanced presence of realistic and magic elements in the narrative. The magic of feelings and emotion is given as much value as facts.

## 2. *LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE*

Similarly to Allende’s *The House of the Spirits*, *Like Water for Chocolate* is also Laura Esquivel’s first novel. It was published in Mexico in 1989 and translated into English in 1991. Esquivel was born in Mexico City in 1950. Before starting to write and direct theater plays for children, she worked as a teacher for eight years. She is now the author of two novels, *Like Water for Chocolate* and *Law of Love* (1996). In addition, Esquivel spent many years writing screenplays. Her first screenplay, for the

film *Chido Guán, el Tacos de Oro* (1985) received a nomination for the Ariel Award of the Mexican Academy of Cinematographic Science and Arts, known as the Mexican “Oscar.” Her first novel became so successful that it was translated into more than twenty languages. Also, it was in the *New York Times*’ best-selling list for over a year, and it has sold more than three million copies. *Like Water for Chocolate* was adapted to film in 1993 by Esquivel’s ex-husband and movie director Alfonso Arau, but it had her own screenplay. The film, as well as the novel, received an extraordinary public and critical reception.

The basic plot of the novel deals with a family problem. Tita, the youngest daughter of Mamá Elena and sister of Rosaura and Gertrudis, is in love with her neighbor Pedro. She wants to marry him, but according to a family tradition, the youngest daughter cannot marry and has to take care of her mother until she dies. In a strange attitude, Pedro decides to marry Rosaura in order to be closer to Tita. He thus moves to “the ranch,” where the family lives. Through the analysis of some elements of the plot, setting, characters, and point-of-view, this second part of chapter one investigates how *Like Water for Chocolate* can be defined as a magic realist novel. The analysis of part one and part two together demonstrates that both Esquivel’s *Like Water for Chocolate* and Allende’s *The House of the Spirits* can be seen as magic realist pieces inextricably linked to a political realm.

Esquivel has portrayed the history of Mexico in her novel. The reader is supposed to infer this setting though, since the only reference to Mexico is the name of some small villages, as well as their proximity to Texas, in the United States. The geographical location becomes more specific within the development of the plot, when we become familiar with the Mexican Revolution of 1910 –1917. At this point, the viillistas and revolutionaries are in combat against the federal government. The

vielistas were the revolutionaries from the north of Mexico led by Pancho Villa. Together with the zapatistas, revolutionaries from the south who had Emiliano Zapata as their leader, the vielistas fought in guerrilla actions for agrarian causes. They were against the dictator Porfirio Diaz, who had won the elections of 1910 and was forced to resign by peasant guerrillas. The revolutionaries wanted to expropriate land from the rich in order to distribute them to peasants. Zapata's slogan was "Tierra y Libertad" ("Land and Liberty"). A popular, folkloric sentence reveals that even after his murder in 1919, Zapata still lives in the heart of people: "Zapata will continue to live as long as people believe that they have a right to their land and a right to govern themselves according to their deeply held beliefs and cultural values" (Fleming 3). This quotation seems to have guided Esquivel throughout *Like Water for Chocolate*, as the following analysis will show.

In relation to setting, the ranch where Tita's family lives could be considered an example of a big property "desired" by the revolutionaries, the "haciendas" at the time. The ranch actually suffers two invasions. In the first one, Mamá Elena is able to talk harshly, threaten the captain and his men, who just steal some doves from the barn and leave, making fun of the tough woman. Mamá Elena says that she expected the revolutionaries to be more violent, as she was told that they raped girls, killed people and stole everything. The second invasion is more violent, although it is not made by the revolutionaries. A group of bums enters the property; the men rape Chenchá, the maid, and hit Mamá Elena on the back. Tita's mother becomes physically disabled. By presenting the so called brute revolutionaries as less dangerous than a group of bums, Esquivel seems to be making a political point, guaranteeing the relevance of the revolutionaries' cause. Actually, when the armed captain enters the ranch, he stops by the door and tells Mamá Elena: "We came to ask

you in good faith that you collaborate with the cause” (73)<sup>4</sup>. He assures that no one will kill or disrespect such a brave woman, who has a rifle in her hands. The revolutionaries will continue proving their good will throughout the plot. Their features will be examined in more detail when referring to the characters.

Within the ranch, the kitchen is the most important and metaphorical setting of the novel. As it has been mentioned in the introductory chapter, it is in the kitchen that magic elements cause people to learn, love, cry, fear, and live magic emotions. Tita was born on the kitchen table, when Mamá Elena was chopping onions. As it is described in the book: “Tita was literally pushed to this world by an impressive flood of tears overflowing over the table and the kitchen floor” (4)<sup>5</sup>. When the sun had dried the tears up, Nacha, the cook, cleaned up the floor by filling a five-kilo bag with salt, which she used to cook for a long time. Because of her birth conditions, Tita became very fond of the kitchen. When she was two days old, her father died, and Mamá Elena, in shock, was not able to nurse her anymore. Tita then moved to the kitchen with Nacha, who fed her with tea and oatmeal. By living in the kitchen, Tita not only developed a sixth sense to everything that referred to food, but she also learned how to cook. Later in the story, it is in the kitchen that Pedro first sees Tita’s breast, while she grates a kind of seed, and confirms his love for her. It is also there that Nacha demonstrates all her love for Tita by teaching her how to prepare magic recipes. However, the kitchen is also a place of sadness when Mamá Elena obliges Tita to make the cake for Pedro and Rosaura’s wedding. Helped by Nacha, Tita works exhaustively until she bursts into tears over the cake’s dough. The magic effect happens on the next day, when all the guests who eat Tita’s cake suddenly start crying, feeling a sort of nostalgia for their lost loves. Nacha dies of sadness, but she continues to communicate with Tita through sensations conveyed by special dishes.

Finally, it is also in the kitchen that the ghost of the deceived Mamá Elena appears to curse Tita in the end of the story.

If the kitchen is part of a magic setting, Tita's character embodies a woman with supernatural powers. She conveys a strange kind of alchemy to her dishes, so that they influence the people who eat them. The most important example of this in the novel involves Pedro, Gertrudis, and a viilista revolutionary. Pedro gives Tita some red roses, with which she prepares a dish for the family supper. The food is so supernaturally aphrodisiac that "it seemed that they had discovered a new code of communication through which Tita was the emissary, Pedro the receptor, and Gertrudis the happy one who felt this singular sexual relation through food" (42)<sup>6</sup>. Gertrudis sweats and feels her body burning. She tries to take a shower, but the drops of water that touch her body evaporate and the small room with the shower is filled with flames. The smell of red roses that comes out of her body attracts a viilista in combat. He leaves the battlefield and follows his instinct until he sees Gertrudis running in his direction. Naked, she mounts the horse and they have sexual intercourse while the revolutionary takes Gertrudis away. A further analysis of Tita may show that she represents feminist behavior at a time when women were expected to be conformists, not activists. Since they were mostly restricted to the kitchen, Esquivel demonstrates, through Tita, that the kitchen is as much powerful as the battlefield, and that women are as strong as men.

Gertrudis seems to share this power with her sister Tita, but on a different level. After her escape with the captain, she moves to a brothel on the frontier, for she needs to have many men to accommodate her sexual desire. She then joins the revolution, becomes a "general," and leads a group of men in battles. Gertrudis has another kind of feminine strength: sensuality. By making use of it, she is able to be equal, if not

superior, to men. Gertrudis uses a “realistic” element, which is her body, in order to obtain a “magic” effect for women of her time: power. When general Gertrudis takes her group of men to the ranch for a cup of hot chocolate, we are able to have a closer contact with the revolutionaries. The feared men are gentle; they like to dance, sing, and even cook. Esquivel thus reinforces her apparent appreciation of the revolution’s cause. Besides, she shows the reader how magic elements of the narrative, such as Gertrudis’ escape, have a close relationship with politics. Both Gertrudis and the revolutionaries are closely associated with an attempt to escape from oppression, sexual and political. Gertrudis rebels against a patriarchal society and the revolutionaries rebel against patriarchal power structures.

Analyzing Mamá Elena and Rosaura, we will notice that they are different from Tita and Gertrudis. According to Kristine Ibsen, Rosaura and Mamá Elena are characterized by the superficiality of domesticity, for they are always worried about “decency” and “the proper way” (140). Mamá Elena has physical and emotional force. She threatens people, does hard work at the house and controls the whole ranch, but she does not seem to have contact with her own female nature. Rosaura is a conformist. She accepts rules and acts in accordance with Mamá Elena’s orders. She does not have sex with Pedro until the day he decides to have it, months after the wedding. In addition, she wants to continue the family tradition by forcing her only daughter to take care of her until death, and therefore not to marry. As Ibsen points out, Mamá Elena and Rosaura are distant from their femininity, since they cannot cook or raise their children well. They are opposed to Tita, who is able to nurse her nephew Roberto, Rosaura and Pedro’s first child, even though she is not sexually active yet (140). The comparison between Tita and Gertrudis with Mamá Elena and Rosaura suggests that the first ones, who are able to take advantage of their feminine

nature, acquire the real power, the magic. Tita cooks and Gertrudis uses her deep feminine sensuality in order to change situations and set themselves free from oppression.

Nacha and Chenchá also have healing powers that they convey to Tita through food. The food metaphor thus reveals a great deal of affection. Through food, people convey love. Nacha feeds Tita, Tita feeds her nephew, and Tita demonstrates her love for Pedro. Besides, Chenchá prepares healing soup for Tita when she is sick, and Tita uses potatoes to restore Pedro's skin when he is burned. The ones who are not willing to share love, Mamá Elena and Rosaura, not only do not cook, but they also do not appreciate food. Accordingly, during the dinner with the red roses dish, which caused Gertrudis to escape the ranch, Mamá Elena says that the food is too salty. Rosaura leaves the table saying that she feels sick.

As pointed out in the introductory chapter, Ibsen affirms that Esquivel questions conventional roles by inverting female and male behavior (141). This seems very apparent in the analysis of male characters in the novel. Pedro is much weaker than Tita. Throughout the story, Tita shows her force. In order to endure the pain of seeing her beloved one married to Rosaura, Tita is able to find internal force in her cooking. Moreover, she tirelessly fights Mamá Elena's orders. Pedro, on the contrary, is as much a conformist as Rosaura. He is not able to face Mamá Elena and does not fight to marry Tita. Even his father affirms that marrying Rosaura was a ridiculous thing to do, considering that his son was in love with Tita. John, the American family doctor who wants to marry Tita, is also a conformist. He does not fight for his love either. Instead, John waits for Tita to decide if she prefers to marry him or try to stay with Pedro. Going back to the passage in which Sargento Trevino is forced by Gertrudis to prepare cookies, Esquivel shows a man receiving orders from a woman. In that

specific passage, she suggests that the man, and not traditionally the woman (Gertrudis), knows how to cook. Furthermore, tough women, like Mamá Elena and Gertrudis, are portrayed in opposition to docile revolutionaries. By inverting female and male roles, Esquivel questions the power attributed to men for so many generations.

Another resource used to question the conventions of society is proposed with the death of Tita and Pedro in the end. In a magic combustion of love, the two lovers decide to marry and end up by being really inflamed with happiness. Their room is on fire, as well as the whole ranch. The only thing that is saved is Tita's recipe book, found among the ranch's remains. The idea of "happy end," so conventional in traditional stories, is somehow distorted. Pedro and Tita are happy, but dead in the end. Moreover, the novel conveys a spiritual message with this passage, considering that the two meet in a tunnel after they die and finally stay together.

The representation of the domestic space in the novel has a close relation to the contrast between prohibition and freedom. The domestic aspect, represented by recipes, housework, and family tradition, can be seen as a liberating force for some characters, and as prohibition for others. Mamá Elena is a woman who also had a repressed love. When she eats Tita's cake at the wedding, she goes to her room to look at a black man's picture. He is Gertrudis's father, although only Tita finds that out after Mamá Elena's death, by reading some of her letters to him. Feeling repressed, Mamá Elena is not able to overcome her sadness, and turns out to be a repressor herself. Tita, on the contrary, is impelled by prohibition to fight for her freedom. Instead of accepting her fate or becoming an oppressor like her mother, she finds another channel of communication with the world (her cooking) in order to balance her feminine and masculine internal force. Through cooking, which is mainly



a feminine activity, Tita acquires and transmits power, force to people, which are characteristics mainly associated to the masculine realm. Mamá Elena, instead, uses the domestic space as a place for oppression. Therefore, she only acquires bitterness and raises fear, rage, in the heart of the ones who live with her.

Moving to point-of view, Esquivel has used an effect that is similar to the one in Allende's novel. The narrator of *Like Water for Chocolate* is Tita's great-niece, who finds Tita's recipe books after her death and bases herself on them to tell the story. This fact conveys certain reliability to the narrator, once she has a source to use. However, we know that she was born after Tita's death; therefore, she did not know her. We can infer that her mother, Tita's niece, as well as other characters who met Tita, told her a great deal of the story. Considering that these characters were involved in the story, the narration could have a certain degree of unreliability. Nevertheless, the possible unreliability of the narrator is undermined by the valorization of oral story telling in a culture. Indeed, Ibsen comments on this aspect of the novel by saying that a possible "female language (...) is not biologically determined, but rather learned through oral tradition (142). Esquivel's narrator can also foreground the same feelings that the zapatistas feel towards their leader, since she ends the novel by affirming that her great-aunt "will continue living while there is someone to prepare her recipes" (205)<sup>7</sup>. The idea that Tita became an immortal, like Zapata, conveys her legitimate leadership in the family and her revolutionary strength, even though she did not use guns, but rather, domestic tools. The fact that people continue telling her story through generations emphasizes her figure as a legend, as well as the value of the spoken word in a society.

In sum, this second part of chapter one shows that Esquivel questions patriarchal society by inverting female and male behavior, by focusing on the

importance of oral tradition over documented facts, and by conveying her appreciation of the causes of the Mexican Revolution, thus showing alternatives of freedom in response to prohibition. Besides, the author emphasizes the food metaphor to convey affection and love. Most importantly, Esquivel is able to make all these political points to the audience by introducing magic within the ideology of domesticity. Her characters live magic sensations and events within the house, the kitchen and among traditions. Considering that the domestic space is the place where we all live every day, Esquivel's political messages tend to reach our own home. By touching our domestic space, Esquivel invites us to empathize with her revolutionary characters. In addition, one can say that the author calls our attention to the magic effect of books. By telling a story, the literary author is able to interfere in the reader's life. Moreover, by inverting characteristics of traditional novels such as the "happy" end and the role of men and women, Esquivel creates more than a political effect. She makes *Like Water for Chocolate* a "revolutionary novel" for every individual reader in his/her own domestic space.

## CHAPTER ONE – ENDNOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> Escrevi *A Casa dos Espíritos* como um exorcismo, uma forma de arrancar fantasmas que levava dentro de mim, que se haviam amotinado e não me deixavam em paz... De modo muito primitivo, atribuí à palavra o poder de ressuscitar os mortos, reunir os desaparecidos, reconstruir o mundo perdido. (*Eva Luna* 1987)

<sup>2</sup> En mis libros, he querido contar la tragedia de este torturado continente y la esperanza de los hombres y mujeres que luchan por un mundo mejor. (*La Casa de Los Espiritus*, 1982)

<sup>3</sup> Me dirijo a aquellos que serán perseguidos, para decirles que yo no voy a renunciar: pagaré con mi vida la lealtad del pueblo. Siempre estaré junto a ustedes. Tengo fe en la patria y su destino. Otros hombres superarán este momento y mucho más temprano que tarde se abrirán las grandes alamendas por donde pasará el hombre libre para construir una sociedad mejor ... Estas serán mis últimas palabras. Tengo la certeza de que mi sacrificio no será en vano. (*La Casa de Los Espiritus* 325)

<sup>4</sup> Viemos pedir-lhe por bem que coopere para a causa. (*Como Água Para Chocolate* 73)

<sup>5</sup> Tita foi literalmente empurrada para este mundo por uma torrente impressionante de lágrimas transbordando sobre a mesa e o chão da cozinha. (*Como Água Para Chocolate* 4)

<sup>6</sup> Parecia que tinham descoberto um código novo de comunicação no qual Tita era a emissora, Pedro o receptor e Gertrudis a felizarda em quem se sintetizava esta singular relação sexual através da comida. (*Como Água Para Chocolate* 42)

<sup>7</sup> [minha tia-avó, que] continuará vivendo enquanto houver alguém que cozinhe suas receitas. (*Como Água Para Chocolate* 205)

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE USES OF MAGIC REALISM IN CINEMA

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of the films *The House of the Spirits* (1993), directed by Bille August, and *Like Water for Chocolate* (1993), with direction of Alfonso Arau. Through an analysis of the films' use of mise-en-scene (setting, lighting, costume and behavior of characters), narration, plot, lines of action and motivation, this chapter investigates how the political implications of magic realism were transferred to the screen. Such a study can contribute to an understanding of the ways in which Latin American culture circulates in a vehicle of mass media, like Hollywood cinema. Also, as North American films are seen worldwide, it is important to investigate how our Latin culture is portrayed to other cultures.

Drawing from some critical reviews on both films, it is necessary to state that Arau's movie was praised by its magic realist approach, whereas *The House of the Spirits* received negative criticism in this respect. A review written by Roger Ebert for the *Chicago Sun-Times* states that "magic realism, which informs so many South American stories, is treated here [in *The House of the Spirits*] as a slightly embarrassing social gaffe, like passing wind" (2). The negative review informs the newspaper's reader that "the movie works on a certain level simply because it tells an interesting story. The characters are clearly drawn, the story provides ironic justice, and the locations establish a certain reality" (2). However, differently from *The House of the Spirits*, Ebert believes that *Like Water for Chocolate* "breathes from its roots and informs us with its passion" (2).

Another newspaper review written by *Washington Post* staff writer Desson Howe agrees with Ebert when it comes to the absence of magic realist qualities in the film. Howe points out that the "movie misses Allende's magic realism atmospherics (which flit between

surrealistic and political, black comic and deeply tragic) and her sense of depth” (2). Another *Washington Post* writer, Joe Brown, shares similar ideas with Howe. He believes that the director’s “stolid, straightforward direction isn’t suited to Allende’s magical realist voice, and aside from a few levitation tricks, he skimps on the story’s mystical/feminist subtext” (2).

*Like Water for Chocolate* reached the critics’ preferences. A review by Richard Corliss states that the film was “acted with subtle ferocity” and “directed with expansive tenderness” (2). By his following words, we can notice the critic’s understanding that the novel’s magic realism has been well transposed to the screen: “*Like Water for Chocolate* is a story of passion in bondage and death in a fire storm of desire too long withheld. Viewers (...) can enjoy the emotional splendor, gasp at the ghosts, cry with as much good cause as Tita (2). His conclusion is that “by comparison, with this banquet of feelings, most other movies are trail mix” (2).

Finally, an article by Priscilla Gac-Artigas, “Coincidencias y Divergencias en la Traducción a Imágenes de *La Casa de Los Espiritus* y *Como Agua para Chocolate*,” emphasizes the presence of politics in magic realism. Gac-Artigas says that, although the political context diverges in the two novels, both Allende and Esquivel deal with revolution. Both narratives present magic elements that co-exist with social and political aspects in Latin America (4). Gac-Artigas agrees with other critics when she affirms that magic realist features were not so well transferred to the film based on Allende’s novel. Nevertheless, she does not see it as a negative characteristic of the film. She points out that films are different from novels; what counts is the way one reads a novel or watches a film according to his/her dreams and imagination (5).

## NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND NARRATIVE VOICE

In an attempt to understand the criticism above, I will start my analysis through a comparison of the films in order to find common elements between them. Both films begin when the story has already taken place. The narrators will then retell the story according to their perspective. *The House of the Spirits* begins when Esteban, Blanca and Alba are returning to their farm in San Lucas, in 1973. Esteban is old; he affirms that “it’s good to be back,” but he feels bad because he misses Clara. From then on, we already know that there will be a return in time, so that we are able to find out what happened before the story reached that point. It is a circular narration, since the last scene starts as a repetition of the first. We notice that Clara has died and has left good memories with them, for Blanca, before starting to narrate the events that happened in the past, tells Esteban: “I think mom is with us now.” Similarly, *Like Water for Chocolate* starts with Tita’s great-niece’s explanation of how to cut onions without crying, a recipe she found in Tita’s recipe book. Tita is dead, and her great-niece will refer back to the year of 1910. These two narrators thus present us to Clara, Tita, and their life stories. In fact, both films have a circular narration; the two end where they began. This is a resource also used by Allende and Esquivel, although, in the novels, the readers will only find out who the narrators are in the end.

In addition, both directors seem faithful to Allende’s and Esquivel’s spiritual themes. Allende’s ideas of freedom and spiritual strength are emphasized by Blanca’s words. Blanca is shown driving to Trés Marias in the beginning and in the end. We know that, from there, she is going to meet her boyfriend Pedro, who is exiled in Canada. After being tortured by the military, she affirms that revenge is not important, that life is her daughter Alba, Pedro, and above all, “this very moment.” Her father dies a little before that and is taken away by his wife Clara to “the other side.” It is important to notice that Blanca’s character was mingled with the role of Alba in the novel, since Blanca is the one who is tortured. *Like Water for*

*Chocolate* also conveys the novel's spiritual idea of continuation of life after death. After telling the story, the narrator appears in the kitchen again, affirming that her great-aunt will continue living while someone prepares her recipes.

It is necessary to remark that August and Arau have chosen to establish specific dates for their films. Since the dates of 1973 and 1910 are respectively the dates of the military coup in Chile and of the Mexican Revolution, we can deduce that the directors went beyond the novels in their attempt to guarantee the political authenticity and similitude of their productions.

In relation to point-of-view, August made Blanca the narrator, instead of Alba. Alba is just a small girl in the film; she does not become an adult, like in the novel. Also, the narration of her grandfather Esteban Trueba, which complemented her view of the facts, was not included. In *Like Water for Chocolate*, Arau was faithful to the novel by choosing Tita's great-niece as the narrator. Although August changed Allende's point-of-view, both directors have female narrators who are also part of the families that they are portraying. Blanca bases her narration on her mother's diaries, and the recipe book guides Tita's great-niece. In both cases, we could raise questions of unreliability in the narration, since the narrators are involved in the stories. Nevertheless, we can see here a repetition of what happened to the narrators of the novels. In Blanca's case, Clara's diaries reassure her reliability. As for Tita's great-niece, we can also infer that, besides basing herself on the recipe book, she heard a good deal of the story through other people, since she was born after Tita's death. Like in Esquivel's novel, unreliability is undermined by the valorization of traditional oral tale telling.

## MISE-EN-SCENE

According to David Bordwell in the book *Film Art – An Introduction*, mise-en-scene is a French term used by film scholars and directors to refer to “the director’s control over what happens in a film frame” (169). Mise-en-scene originally “means “staging an action,” and it was first applied to the practice of directing plays” (169). Because of its “theatrical origins, mise-en-scene includes those aspects of film that overlap with the art of the theater: setting, lighting, costume, and the behavior of the figures” (169). For this study, it is important to highlight what Bordwell says about the relation between mise-en-scene and the issue of realism:

Just as viewers often remember this or that bit of mise-en-scene from a film, so viewers often judge mise-en-scene by standards of realism. A car may seem to be realistic for the period the film depicts, or a gesture may not seem realistic because “real people don’t act that way.” (170)

Moving to the elements of mise-en-scene, David Bordwell foregrounds that “since the earliest days of cinema, critics and audiences have understood that setting plays a more active role in the cinema than in most theatrical styles” (172). This is due to the fact that actors are the most responsible elements, in a theater production, for conveying drama. On the screen, other elements, such as a sunset on the beach or a windy street can create strong dramatic effects. As Bordwell explains, “cinema setting, then, can come to the forefront; it need not be only a container for human events but can dynamically enter the narrative action” (172). He points out that “the overall design of a setting can significantly shape how we understand story action” (174). The analysis of setting in August’s and Arau’s films reveals common elements between their productions. It is important to remark that both films have an urban setting and an agrarian one. In *The House of the Spirits*, the urban world is represented by the “big house of the corner” in the city, while the agrarian world counts with the farm of Très Marias. *Like Water for Chocolate* has scenes that take place on the streets of a Mexican city, as well as in Doctor John’s house in town. The “ranch” represents the countryside. These



elements are also present in Allende's and Esquivel's novels, and they are closely associated with political aspects. In both novels and in both films, the "revolution" happens in the country. In *The House of the Spirits*, the peasants are encouraged to rebel and form a labor union. In *Like Water for Chocolate*, the revolutionaries want to expropriate the "haciendas" in benefit of the land workers. By being faithful to the novels in this respect, August and Arau continue to emphasize the political connotation of their movies.

The characterization of some actors and their behavior in these settings reveal a great deal of the novels' ideas of freedom and prohibition. Esteban Trueba is as violent as Mamá Elena. Both characters could be considered dictators in their families, since they dictate rules, control people, and do not allow freedom to their daughters. Três Marias and the ranch thus would be their "headquarters," or in other words, places of oppression. This is clear if we think that other characters, like Clara and Blanca in August's production, as well as Tita and Gertrudis, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, are in search of freedom. The audience can notice that they only look for freedom outside the houses. Clara feels free when she teaches the sons of peasants at an outside school. Esteban soon forbids her to do this, since he fears that the children will become "politicized." Blanca and Pedro also have to feel free from the house; Blanca escapes from her room at night, and their love encounters are by the river. Clara leaves with Blanca for the "big house on the corner" when Esteban violently hits her on the face during an argument. She never returns to Três Marias or speaks to Esteban again. In *Like Water for Chocolate*, Gertrudis escapes to a brothel, which makes Mamá Elena decide to reject her. When Tita feels too oppressed, she climbs up to the attic, a place where Mamá Elena does not go. The only thing she fears is height. Furthermore, when Tita's nephew Roberto dies, Tita feels so desperate that she moves to the doctor's house in town. In order to send Pedro away from Tita, Mamá Elena makes Rosaura, Pedro and Roberto move to Texas. Since Tita was secretly nursing her nephew, the boy dies of hunger. Tita rebels against Mamá

Elena and promises not to return to the ranch. Arau's film emphasizes the opposition between freedom and oppression by making Tita return to the ranch only after Mamá Elena's death. In the novel, Tita returns when her mother becomes a paraplegic.

August and Arau seem loyal to the novels' political connotation, since the portrayal of the internal family dictatorship can be seen as a metaphor for political dictatorship. By portraying older characters, like Esteban and Mamá Elena, as conservatives and oppressors, they oppose them to younger, idealist ones, like Tita and Blanca. By including a date in the films, they establish the time of oppression as the historical time for dictatorship in Chile and Mexico. In addition, both directors are faithful to the novels when it comes to classifying two kinds of dictatorship: a governmental and a familiar one. In *The House of the Spirits*, Trueba loses power as he becomes old. During the tough years of military government, the state senator does not have political influence anymore. Clara rejects the sexually active man who raped girls in the past. The Conservative Party is dismantled. The film, as well as the novel, suggests that the military dictatorship is worse than the family one. By contrast, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, the dictator Porfirio Díaz is not even mentioned. In Mexico's history, Díaz was forced to resign by the guerrillas. On the contrary, Mamá Elena, the family dictator, seems to be much stronger. Even after death, she appears as a ghost to curse Tita and Pedro's love. Considering this, one can notice that Arau's film and Esquivel's novel suggest that a family dictatorship is more dangerous than a governmental one.

Even though the directors assure the political argument of their films, it is through the contrast of the productions that we will be able to notice how Arau was more faithful to the political aspects of Latin American magic realism than August. We can understand that Alfonso Arau searched for a reinforcement of the Latin causes by his choice of actors and actresses. Considering that Esquivel's novel takes place in a Latin country, the director chose Spanish-speaking actors for his production. Bille August, on the contrary, selected English-

speaking Hollywood stars for the roles. The fact that the actors can not even pronounce their Hispanic names without an English accent in *The House of the Spirits* may distance the audience from a Latin environment, and therefore from Latin American political causes. By presenting famous actors and actresses, such as Jeremy Irons, Meryl Streep, Winona Ryder, and Glenn Close, August reinforces his desire to make a consecrated production. He approximates his filmic language to the North American audience. Americans are not only used to these actors, but they also share the same culture and nationality. August even guarantees, in a sense, the popularity of his film, since Hollywood audiences like to watch films with such renowned actors. However, by failing to portray the subtleties of the Spanish language, August distances the film from the Latin American point-of-view. Arau's *Like Water for Chocolate* establishes a coherent perspective for the spectator, who "is" in a Mexican town and therefore hears the Spanish language.

The analysis of lighting in the films will reinforce the difference between the two productions. David Bordwell states that:

Much of the impact of an image comes from its manipulation of lighting. In cinema, lighting is more than just illumination that permits us to see the action. Lighter and darker areas within the frame help create the overall composition of each shot and thus guide our attention to certain objects and actions. (178)

The author explains that *lighting* is an element that may be analyzed in terms of "quality, direction, source and color" (179).

Considering the *quality* of lighting used by August and Arau, we can see that the two directors have alternative ways to deal with this element. Bordwell affirms that "*hard* lighting creates clearly defined shadows, whereas *soft* lighting creates a diffused illumination" (179). He exemplifies these concepts by pointing out that

in nature, the noonday sun creates hard light, while an overcast sky creates soft light. The terms are relative, and many lighting situations will fall in between the extremes, but we can in practice easily recognize the differences. (179)

Contrasting the films, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, Arau seems to make good use of hard lighting. The images, especially inside the ranch, are dark and filled with hazy shadows. The director creates a dark and gloomy environment, reinforcing the idea of prohibition, oppression, and blindness bred by dictatorship. Such luminosity is in accordance to Mamá Elena's own way of dressing and behaving. That atmosphere of darkness inside her ranch is opposed to outdoor scenes, which receive clear soft lighting, and can be associated with freedom. In addition, the use of darkness appears as a way to convey and hide sensuality and sexuality. The scene in which Tita prepares the dish with red roses is involved in a shady environment. Moreover, the scenes in which Tita and Pedro have sex are rather dark; only silhouettes are shown. In most of these scenes, the audience does not see the actors, but only hears them. *The House of the Spirits* presents different lighting. August mainly uses soft lighting both outdoors and indoors. Although the film becomes slightly darker in the end, the majority of scenes are clear. Even though Esteban Trueba is a family dictator similar to Mamá Elena, August does not reinforce his oppressing territory (Três Marias) through the use of darkness, in opposition to the freedom of outdoor scenes. Furthermore, the director does not use shadows to reinforce sensuality. For instance, Clara and Esteban's wedding night seems to take place during the day, due to the abundance of light used when the two hug on the bed and the scene fades out.

In reference to source, Bordwell foregrounds that:

Directors and cinematographers manipulating the lighting of the scene will start from the assumption that any subject normally requires two light sources: a *key light* and a *fill light*. The key light is the primary source, providing the dominant illumination and casting the strongest shadows. A fill is a less intense illumination which "fills in," softening or eliminating shadows cast by the key light. (180)

In *Like Water for Chocolate*, Arau emphasizes the magic aspects of the setting without any fill light to eliminate shadows. In the kitchen and in the ranch, darkness creates a mysterious, sinister, and magic environment. Shadows also eliminate the idea of cleanliness

and asepsis, giving the proper idea of a ranch in Latin America, which has dust, earth, and chickens around, for example. In *The House of the Spirits*, on the contrary, *key light* is used in conjunction with *fill light*, since most scenes are bright and clear. By presenting the scenes so clear, it seems that August distances the film from the mystic and obscure aspects of magic realism. Although *Três Marias* was depicted sixty-three years later than Mamá Elena's ranch, it is supposed to have dust, pets, plantation and earth. However, the setting of the film is incoherent, since the actors seem to live in an "aseptic farm," as clean as the White House in Washington.

Clara, the supernatural woman, mostly appears involved in a white aura. This aura applies to her character, but the exaggeration of whiteness eliminates the mystery about her personality. The opposition between oppression and freedom proposed by the characterization of a family dictatorship and a governmental one loses force, since all characters receive the same lighting treatment. For instance, the scenes of torture in jail are as bright as the one of Clara's wedding evening. In this case, the director eliminates shadows through his use of *key light* and *fill light* together. Actually, when Blanca is tortured, she is blindfolded. By shooting the scene in such a well illuminated environment, August gives to the audience the torturer's point-of-view. The director suddenly switches from Blanca's point-of view, who is responsible for the story's narration, to that of the torturer. In doing this, the film softens the event of torture, which is certainly much worse for a blindfolded person, and prevents the audience from feeling what Blanca is feeling. If we compare these scenes to the ones in *Like Water for Chocolate*, when Tita and Pedro have sex in the dark, we will be able to understand that August, differently from Arau, privileges sight over hearing. This attitude eliminates sensations, which is an essential element of magic realism.

Most importantly, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, Arau emphasizes the sympathy for the political revolution that Laura Esquivel shows in her novel. The scenes of the revolutionaries

coming to the ranch with Gertrudis for a cup of chocolate are bright and happy; the actors dance, laugh and sing. In opposition, the scene in which Tita is bathing Mamá Elena is surrounded by darkness in contrast with a strong beam of light coming from the door. The horror of oppression is contrasted with the sensation of freedom, since Tita is eager to leave the bathroom, while Mamá Elena shouts, accusing Tita of opening the door to let the cold in. Mamá Elena's stiffness and bitterness is opposed to the revolutionaries' happiness, and Arau's use of lighting reinforces this difference. Nevertheless, considering the scene of Blanca's torture, Allende's focus on people's political struggle in Chile opens space for the military point-of-view, since, by inverting Blanca's point-of-view to that of the torturer's, August privileges torture instead of the socialist revolution.

Analyzing lighting in terms of direction, Bordwell states that "the *direction* of lighting in a shot refers to the path of light from its source or sources to the object lit" (179). According to him, we can follow the path traced by the illumination of a film in five ways. *Frontal lighting* usually shows close-ups and eliminates shadows; *sidelighting* sculpts the character's features; *backlighting* creates silhouettes and illuminates contours; *underlighting* can create dramatic, even horror effects, for it distorts features; and finally, *top lighting* also reveals close-ups or direct illumination of a face (Bordwell 179). Two specific scenes, one of each film, will exemplify how the directors worked with lighting direction in their productions. In *Like Water for Chocolate*, Mamá Elena's ghost appears to torment Tita and Pedro until the day Tita is able to drive it away. In the scene of the ghost's banishment, Mamá Elena is at the window; her face is lit by an *underlight* that gives her a distorted, scary face. After many attempts, Tita manages to close the window for good, and the ghost disappears, leaving her free to love Pedro. Arau's manipulation of lighting in this scene helps to convey the ugly and monstrous face of the dictator in opposition to Tita's act of force and struggle for freedom. Moreover, in most scenes, Arau makes use of *backlighting*. This light

direction creates silhouettes and reveals only the absolute necessary about the characters, keeping the mystery which is necessary for one to enjoy magic realism. By contrast, in *The House of the Spirits*, Esteban Trueba's power is exaggerated when he hits Clara on the face. A *frontal light* illuminates Clara while she falls on the floor. A close-up shows blood in her mouth, establishing Clara's weakness in relation to Esteban's domain. The family dictatorship is reinforced by a subsequent scene, in which Esteban appears breaking objects in the house after Clara leaves for the city. Contrary to Arau, August makes more use of *frontal lighting*, which reveals "more than necessary" about the characters and eliminates other possible senses that could be suggested to the spectator, such as hearing or smelling, as in Arau's film.

Bille August's film becomes slightly darker in the end, when Clara and Esteban start to age. The "big house of the corner" in town is darker, in comparison to Três Marias. However, the shadows used by the director are not black, like in Arau's film. August preferred a bluish color that gives an atmosphere of calmness and perhaps sadness. This environment is in close connection with the character of Clara, who inherited the town house from her dead parents. The "big house of the corner" is actually her environment, in opposition to Esteban's Três Marias. The shadows and contrasts in the end of August's production help to portray the subtlety of Clara's clairvoyance and personality. Besides, the soft illumination establishes her territory. In addition, the use of *key* and *hard lighting* may represent the aging of the Truebas, as well as Clara's sadness for losing her parents. Alternatively, the black and brown colors used to characterize the ranch emphasize the political connotation of *Like Water for Chocolate*. The choice for stronger and heavier colors helps Arau to emphasize the idea of blindness and fear present in a dictatorial regime. The same fear that August fails to portray in Blanca's torturing.

Costume is another element that diminishes *The House of the Spirits'* political nature. In Isabel Allende's novel, Blanca is not a vain character. She actually wears old, repaired clothes. Alba, her daughter, is a young student wearing jeans and T-shirts. Since, as it has been stated, Blanca receives Alba's role in August's production, she is supposed to be a political activist. However, Blanca not only keeps the passive role that she has in the novel, but she also dresses elegant clothes, like suits and high heeled shoes, in the film. Her figure, portrayed as an aristocratic lady, weakens the political essence of her character. In *Like Water for Chocolate*, the costumes reinforce the politics of the film. Mamá Elena's black dress resembles a uniform, like that of a military dictator. In addition, her daughters' clothes are simple, sewn by themselves; they portray the simple life that the family has at the ranch.

#### **PLOT AND NARRATIVE MOTIVATION**

According to David Bordwell, when talking about Hollywood classical productions, it is through motivation that "a narrative justifies its story material and the plot's presentation of that story material" (19). The authors explain that "motivation may be of several sorts" (19). One of them is *compositional*, which refers to causal factors. In a classical story, there must be a relation of cause and effect among events. The second kind of motivation is related to reality, and for this reason, it is the one that interests this study most. *Realistic* motivation deals with verisimilitude and "extends to what we will consider plausible about a narrative action" (19). The third one is called *intertextual* motivation, and it refers to the conventions of a genre. As Bordwell exemplifies, "spontaneous singing in a musical may have little compositional or realistic motivation, but it is justified by the conventions of the genre" (19). Finally, *artistic* motivation calls attention to art and it is "rare and brief in classical films" (Bordwell 22). *Artistic* motivation aims at making "the audience appreciate the artificiality of what is seen" (21). The director acquires *artistic* motivation by "calling attention [of the



spectator] to the work's own artfulness" (21). Bordwell complements that "multiple motivation is one of the most characteristic ways that the classical film unifies itself" (19).

In order to begin the analysis of motivation in *The House of the Spirits* and in *Like Water for Chocolate*, I will trace common and alternative elements between them in this respect. First, it is important to understand that both films have several characteristics of a "classical Hollywood production." Bordwell explains that "we all have a notion of the typical Hollywood film. The very label carries a set of expectations, often apparently obvious about cinematic form and style" (3). We can say that August's and Arau's films share a "formula" with several other Hollywood dramas or family stories, since the two involve multiple motivation. In addition, their motivations are directly linked to Clara's and Tita's goals as the main characters. Bordwell refers to characters in films saying that, "Hollywood characters are goal-oriented. The hero desires something new to his/her situation, or the hero seeks to restore an original state of affairs" (16). He continues by affirming that "characters' goals produce causal chains" (16), which is a key element for *compositional* motivation.

In *The House of the Spirits*, Clara's goal, as the main character, is to show to her family that "there is a relationship between events in life" (her words in the film); and that values related to anger, revenge and blood are of no use. If we remember that Blanca's narration begins when the events had already taken place, we can understand that Clara reaches her goal in the beginning of the film. However, the audience does not know what her purpose is at this point. In the last scene, which is a return to the first one, Blanca affirms, with Clara's diary in her hands, that she now understands that "there is a relationship between events in life." Clara is a goal-oriented character, since all the events in the film are ruled by her objective. For instance, Esteban rapes a young lady in Trés Marias; she becomes pregnant and has a son, who receives the name of Esteban García. This boy grows up tormented, imagining that he could be as rich as Blanca, his sister. Later

in life, he eventually joins the army with the help of Esteban Trueba, and finally becomes Blanca's torturer after the military coup. When Blanca leaves jail, she concludes that there is a relationship between events. She understands that revenge would only cause more revolt, blood and rage. In this sense, *compositional* motivation seems to be in direct relation to Clara's intentions as a protagonist.

Similarly, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, Tita's goal is to set herself free from a family tradition and marry Pedro. Her desire for freedom increases because she is forbidden to marry. Prohibition is an important *compositional* device in the film, since, as Contreras points out in her article, "La novela: *Como agua para chocolate* de Laura Esquivel. La película: *Como agua para chocolate*, dirección de Alfonso Arau," "the prohibition of body desire makes it more desirable" (120). According to Contreras, prohibition in the film causes revolution, prostitution, fire, vomiting, and death (120). Rosaura and Pedro's wedding reveals one more example of *compositional* motivation in Arau's film. By moving into the ranch after the wedding, Tita is unable to forget her love for Pedro. She then begins to cook for him, which causes him to desperately love her, and simply ignore his new wife Rosaura. The death of Mamá Elena and of Rosaura is the definite cause for the two lovers to be together.

In terms of *realistic* motivation, we can say that Arau's film is more plausible than August's. As it has been analyzed, Arau characterizes the rural setting in accordance with a typical Latin American farm. He also approximates the costume and behavior of the characters in a way that the familiarity of the revolution is inside the ranch. Through a good characterization of the setting, costume and behavior of the actors, as well as with the choice of the Spanish language in the film, Arau manages to motivate the production realistically. In doing that, he copes with the possible lack of verisimilitude of the magic aspects within the real ones. The audience accepts magic elements, such as Tita's

aphrodisiac dishes, Gertrudis on fire, Mamá Elena's ghost, and Tita's ability to nurse her nephew Roberto, as real. Besides, in the same way that Esquivel does with her novel, Arau emphasizes the *magic* of a film, which is to make the spectator "enter" the screen and feel as part of the story. In other words, he makes the audience feel as in a "real," as well as in a "magic" Latin American setting.

On the contrary, August fails to portray crucial elements to the verisimilitude effect of the film. To begin with, the English-speaking actors do not make a Latin American setting plausible. Besides, Blanca's dressing as an aristocratic woman distances her from the role of a woman who is involved with a revolutionary, and most importantly, who is sympathetic with his causes. The setting of Três Marias is not well characterized; its cleanliness and organization do not resemble a rural setting. The fact that the film has so many problems of plausibility does not allow August to make good use of the magic elements inside the already problematic real world. In the context of the production, magic is almost exclusively tied to Clara and restricted to her clairvoyance, which is just one magic aspect of Allende's novel. Innumerable spirits and ghosts, girls with green hair, magic books and songs, references to Chilean legends and public figures such as Victor Jara, Pablo Neruda and Salvador Allende are left out. Some characters, like Blanca and Alba, are merged into one, and some are not even mentioned, like the twin brothers. Jaime, for instance, has a crucial role in building Alba's character as a revolutionary in the novel. These are points that seem to have motivated some critics to affirm that Bille August misses Allende's magic realism.

Since magic realism presupposes a co-existence of the real and the magic in everyday world, Arau showed his mastery in building a reliable "real world" to the audience. At the same time, this well characterized reality of a family in 1910 Mexico allowed him to introduce "magic" in a plausible way to this context. As for August, the fact that the "real world," which refers to an attempt to portray Chile in 1973, is not so plausible, causes magic

to be seen as a curiosity or as surrealistic, as the film critic Desson Howe suggested. Clara's supernatural powers do not seem integrated with her domestic space; on the contrary, the actors, the setting, costume, and lighting do not match with her clairvoyance. Since the domestic space itself is not reliable in the film, magic is not expected to be an integral part of this space. Clara's character contributes thus to the unreliability of the real and the magic on the screen. Furthermore, considering that politics is constantly associated with magic realism, it becomes clear that *Like Water for Chocolate* is a better adaptation than *The House of the Spirits* when we refer to Latin American political conflicts. Arau reinforces the political causes of Esquivel's novel through *realistic* motivation, while August weakens this aspect of Allende's novel.

Departing from the fact that Arau's *realistic* motivation guarantees the film's plausibility and reinforces the political aspect of the production, it is possible to conclude that *Like Water for Chocolate* has, in a sense, innovated *intertextual* motivation in Hollywood classical productions. Considering that *Like Water for Chocolate* can be included in the love story genre, the element of magic is not expected to be seen in this film genre. However, through the presentation of a carefully constructed real environment, Arau introduces *magic* in it. In this sense, Arau brings all the characteristics and peculiarities of magic realism in literature to the screen. *Artistic* motivation thus can be seen in details of costume, setting, and acting that permeate the film. Bille August, on the contrary, fails to motivate his film realistically. From this fact, we infer that Clara's supernatural powers do not fit in the conventions of the genre love story, in which *The House of the Spirits* can also be included. *Intertextual* motivation thus becomes one more aspect of the unreliability of the movie. Moreover, the non-plausibility of the setting, costume and acting weakens the possibility of *artistic* motivation in the production.

Finally, the analysis of the films' lines of action will provide one more reason for the understanding of why *Like Water for Chocolate* is a better adaptation than *The House of the Spirits* in its portrayal of politics. Bordwell points out that "the classical film has at least two lines of action, both causally linking the same group of characters. Almost invariably, one of these lines of action involves heterosexual romantic love" (16). The author explains that "the second line of action [usually] involves another sort of activity - business, spying, sports, politics, crime, show business - any activity, in short, which can provide a goal for the character" (16). He concludes that "the two lines of action advance as chains of cause and effect" (17).

Beginning with Bille August's film, Clara and Esteban's marriage establishes the first line of action, while Clara's clairvoyance marks the second one. As we have seen before, Clara's goal as a protagonist was to teach her family "the relationship between events in life." Since Rosa's death in the beginning of the movie, the audience follows a chain of events marked by a cause and effect relation, which is exactly what Clara called "the relationship between events." Clara's union with Esteban is possible only due to her sister's death. This first event causes the first line of action, which will help Clara to meet her objective. The protagonist's clairvoyance reveals that she knew, beforehand, that the world was ruled by a chain of cause and effect, but neither her family, nor the audience knew about that. Through the analysis of events in their lives, and considering that Clara had supernatural powers, the Truebas understood, in the end of the film, that there was really a relationship between events in life, as Blanca spells out. For instance, Esteban and Blanca realize that Clara would not have married Esteban if it were not for Rosa's death. Also, they realize that Blanca would not have been caught and tortured by military if Trueba had not raped a girl in his childhood, or if Blanca had not fallen in love with the political activist Pedro. When the weakened and old Esteban lies down and says "I miss Clara" in the end, he demonstrates his understanding of

how much Clara knew about the world. Blanca emphasizes this comprehension through her words: “now I understand the relationship between events.” By reading Clara’s diaries, they realize that her clairvoyance was not merely craziness. On the contrary, her powers revealed knowledge and wisdom. In this sense, the second line of action provides a reinforcement of the protagonist’s goal, while the first one helps to emphasize the chain of relations established by Clara’s goal.

Moving to *Like Water for Chocolate*, Pedro and Tita’s love affair reveals the first line of action. Tita’s cooking provides her with a second activity, a second line of action that allows her to reach her goal of marrying Pedro. On the one hand, the impossible union of the couple remains as a problem to be solved. On the other hand, the powerful dishes prepared by Tita are important tools for the consummation of this love. The food has the force of constantly seducing Pedro, killing Rosaura, who dies of food intolerance, and lowering Tita’s anxiety during her struggle for love and freedom. In the end of the film, Tita’s goal is partly reached when Pedro asks her to marry him. However, during a sexual encounter between the two lovers, a combustion of love kills them before the marriage.

The two films’ lines of action can be seen as a metaphor for the political struggle between oppressors and oppressed in Chile and Mexico. Clara’s objectives were achieved, even though she played a passive role. By simply being clairvoyant, she proved “the relationship between events.” Tita, on the contrary, had a clear active role, which allowed her to eliminate a family tradition that impeded her to marry. In *Like Water for Chocolate*, the paradigm *passivity* versus *activity* is thoroughly explored in political terms. Arau’s production emphasizes political struggle over passivity through the story’s lines of action. Bordwell explains that “other characters get defined by goals. (...) Characters may have complementary or independent goals” (16). Considering that August eliminated important political characters, such as Víctor Jara and Salvador Allende in his adaptation, he chose to

expose Clara as the main significant goal-oriented character. Since she was a passive character, a possible political line of action was also eliminated. In this sense, politics loses force in the two lines of action proposed by the film *The House of the Spirits*.

Considering the characteristics of the magic realist aesthetics in literature and the obligatory political implications of it in Latin America, it is possible to conclude that *Like Water for Chocolate* is faithful to Laura Esquivel's novel when it conveys the peculiarities of Latin America to a cinematic public. By contrast, *The House of the Spirits* fails to build the plausible environment in which the magic and the real can co-exist. The film fails to show the political, economic, and cultural aspects that create the conditions for the real and the magic to compete and complement each other.

## CONCLUSION

This study has presented a comparative analysis of two filmic adaptations of magic realist novels. The 1982 novel of Isabel Allende *The House of the Spirits* was adapted by Bille August in 1993, and Laura Esquivel's 1989 novel *Like Water for Chocolate* originated the homonymous film directed by Alfonso Arau in 1993. Through a comparison of the two films in terms of mise-en-scene, narration, plot, motivation and lines of action, the study has shown that the aesthetics of magic realism, which is in close connection with Latin American social-political context, was faithfully translated to the screen by Arau, whereas August partially failed to portray the political connotations of this literary genre.

The association of Allende's and Esquivel's novels with the magic realist aesthetics revealed the relationship between politics and magic realism. The analysis of the novels' plots, characters, and narration showed that both authors deal with elements of political reality, such as the military coup of 1973 in Chile and the Mexican Revolution of 1910 respectively. At the same time, they introduce magic traces to the plots, such as clairvoyance in *The House of the Spirits* and alchemy in *Like Water for Chocolate*. The authors mingle these traces with issues of prohibition and freedom, masculinity and femininity, tradition and society, thus approximating magic elements to everyday conflicts.

In addition, Allende's and Esquivel's texts rely on the early definitions of magic realism. In accordance with Carpentier's ideas in 1948, which stated that magic realism was inherent to Latin American history and culture, the two authors deeply explore historical and cultural characteristics of their countries. In *The House of the Spirits*, aspects of the society in 1973 Chile that show, for instance, prejudice against single



mothers, are illustrated by the character of Blanca, who is momentarily rejected by her father after she becomes pregnant. Moreover, ideological repression of students even before the military coup is shown by Alba and her boyfriend Miguel, whose protests against the government are constantly refrained. Pedro Tercero and the Poet, who are references to the figures of Víctor Jara and Pablo Neruda, portray cultural aspects, such as the power of political lyrics and poetry. Similarly, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, the behavior of obedience and passivity of women in 1910 Mexico is illustrated by Rosaura, who does not intend to disagree with any familial or social rule. The weight of family tradition is intensely explored by Tita and her conflicts with Mamá Elena. Sexual prohibition before marriage is ironically portrayed by Gertrudis, who becomes a prostitute. Furthermore, traditional masculine social power also receives an ironic treatment, since the women in the novel are often physically and psychologically stronger than the men.

Since, according to Baker, space in magic realism relies on a place where it is possible to see real and magic elements in everyday life, one can understand that Allende and Esquivel create the appropriate space for the co-existence of these elements in their novels. For instance, in *The House of the Spirits*, the jail is a place where, at the same time that Blanca is tortured, she also receives the “visit” of her dead mother Clara, whose spirit gives her strength. In *Like Water for Chocolate*, the kitchen equally shelters true love and magic dishes.

Alba and Esteban in *The House of the Spirits*, as well as Tita’s great-niece in *Like Water for Chocolate* distinguish themselves from narrators of fantastic literature and reinforce their roles of magic realist narrators. They act in accordance with Todorov’s theory, which affirms that, differently from narrators of fantastic literature, who have the objective of creating doubt in the reader, magic realist narrators should never

question the reliability of extraordinary events. Readers and characters of magic realism should accept the supernatural as part of reality. As examples, Alba tells about the magic of Old Pedro García, who mends Esteban's broken bones after an earthquake only with his hands, without questioning the truth of his acts. As for Tita's great-niece, Gertrudis on fire and Mamá Elena's ghost are treated as facts.

The comparison between the two films allows one to conclude that Alfonso Arau's production can involve the spectator in a plausible Latin American environment, where the magic and the real can co-exist. Furthermore, the director is faithful to the novel, thus bringing the political aspects of the literary aesthetics to cinema. By contrast, Bille August fails to build a coherent space in his film. Because of this, the director distances the audience from a Latin American environment, and from the social-political characteristics of magic realism.

In an attempt to explain the possible reasons for the difference in the adaptations, I recollect that both films are, as David Bordwell puts it, "classical Hollywood productions," since they share aspects of narration, plot, motivation, and lines of action. As an example, both movies have goal-oriented protagonists. Furthermore, they are mainly unified through compositional motivation, which is a common characteristic of "classical Hollywood productions." Although the films have common elements, *Like Water for Chocolate* has been more successful when it comes to transporting the magic realist aesthetics to the screen. Differently from the North American-European (German-Danish-Portuguese) production of *The House of the Spirits*, *Like Water for Chocolate*, which received funds from the Mexican government, seems to share with Latin American authors the desire to characterize life realistically, at the same time that the "magic reality" can be seen as the means through which characters can transform their political realities. The directors' nationalities can demonstrate further reasons for a

difference in terms of idealism. The Mexican production has obviously more reasons to denounce Latin American political problems than a North-American-European one.

Considering that the films are a form of reception of the novels, it is necessary to return to David Bleich's theory of reception presented in the introductory chapter. According to Bleich, the process of symbolization that an individual goes through when reading a text is called "reader response." The step taken to understand that response refers to the process of resymbolization or interpretation (Tompkins XX). In addition, Bleich separates an individual response to a text from a communal response, which makes a subjective individual response become a "form of knowledge" (Tompkins XX). Assuming that both films are individual responses to the novels, since they are the directors' responses, and that they are also the response of the Hollywood community, we can suggest some conclusions. The difference in the adaptations may be the result of alternative interpretations of magic realism as a literary aesthetics. On the one hand, the director of *The House of the Spirits* acted as if the cinema could use the story while "correcting" Allende's style. On the other hand, Arau was faithful to the wish of using art for a change shared by Latin American authors. The directors had different approaches to the contradiction of magic and real in the novels. By telling one more family saga, August did not present anything new to the spectators in terms of Latin American idealism or political expectations. Differently, Arau explored the genre magic realism through its construction of a domestic space that conveys magic as an alternative for the national or the military state.

Considering that Hollywood films are watched worldwide, we can assume that Alfonso Arau plays a major role in expressing the political and social elements involved in magic realism to communities around the world. By watching *Like Water for Chocolate*, people who do not know Mexico's political and cultural reality can have

a clear idea of the country in the beginning of the twentieth century. The adaptation of magic elements to the narrative, in combination with film elements such as lighting and costume introduces values and beliefs of the Latin culture to other cultural realities. By contrast, Bille August conveys an unreliable idea of Latin America to a diverse audience of Hollywood films. Although the story of the film is interesting, as the critic Roger Ebert suggests, August does not use the vehicle of Hollywood to make people learn about Latin America. His adaptation of the novel is focused on the story, rather than on the characteristics of the magic realistic genre and its political implications. This may cause communities outside Latin America to have a misconception of what Chile was like in the year of 1973.

The fact that the political implications of magic realism do not seem to apply to the film *The House of the Spirits*, while it “breaths from [*Like Water for Chocolate*’s] roots,” as put by the film critic Roger Ebert, seems to be due to an apparent contradiction: the political idealism present in Allende’s and Esquivel’s novels versus a “classical Hollywood production.” Since *Like Water for Chocolate* was much more praised by critics, it is apparent to me that Alfonso Arau was able to take advantage of the Hollywood style at the same time that he presented the domesticity of the magic to the audience. The alternative reality of Esquivel’s novel was not simply turned into a Hollywood spectacle. Rather, it co-exists with the daily routine of the characters within their domestic space.

Concluding, as a suggestion for further research on the films *The House of the Spirits* and *Like Water for Chocolate*, other elements can be investigated. A close reading of the scripts, in comparison with the novels, can show how the films readdress specific political passages of Allende’s and Esquivel’s texts. Through the scripts, it would be possible to analyze how language is used and translated into a filmic medium.

Considering that *The House of the Spirits* has almost four hundred pages, we can deduce that August had to select passages to fit into a two-hour film. In this case, we could investigate the narrative sequences of the novel in comparison to editing in August's production. In both films, studies on sound effect and music could be done in comparison to the description of sound in the novels. Considering that magic realism is a genre that privileges senses and sensations, we could see how the authors and the directors treat the sense of hearing.

Finally, as a suggestion for further research on the relationship between magic realism, politics and cinema, two other Latin American novels have been adapted to film: Gabriel García Márquez's *Eréndira* (1972) and Isabel Allende's *Of Love and Shadows* (1984). The film *Eréndira* was directed by Ruy Guerra in 1983 and *Of Love and Shadows* by Betty Kaplan in 1994. In her book *Narrative Magic in the Fiction of Isabel Allende*, Patricia Hart mentions her research on the influence of García Márquez on Isabel Allende. As an example, the fact that Allende gave the names of Nívea, Clara, Blanca, and Alba (all referring to the white color) to her characters in *The House of the Spirits* may be an ironic reference to García Márquez's innumerable Aurelianos and José Arcádios in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. As Clara Del Valle states in Allende's novel, "repeated names cause confusion in the notebooks that record family life" (Hart 174). However, Hart believes that García Márquez shows, in his novel *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (1985), "an increased sensitivity to the social condition of the Latin American woman," which may be an influence of Isabel Allende in his work (174). She points out that "the notion of Allende's influence on García Márquez (...) can be analyzed in García Márquez's use of magic with regard to love as compared to Allende's" (175). She concludes that

By showing how it is possible to claim that García Márquez did this in imitation of Isabel Allende due to simple chronology, I hope eventually to

undermine the original claim of Allende's imitation of García Márquez and argue for taking both on their own terms. (174)

By analyzing the two novels, *Eréndira* and *Of Love and Shadows*, it would be possible to investigate the relationship between Isabel Allende's and Gabriel García Márquez's texts. In addition, the filmic adaptations of these novels would contribute to studies of magic realism in cinema.

## WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY

### PRIMARY BIBLIOGRAPHY:

ALLENDE, Isabel. *A Casa dos Espíritos*. São Paulo: Difel, 1986.

ARAU, Alfonso. *Like Water for Chocolate*. Dir. Alfonso Arau. With Marco Lombardi, Lumi Cavazos, and Regina Torne. Miramax, 1993, 114 min.

BILLE, August. *The House of The Spirits*. Dir. Bille August. With Meryl Streep, Winona Ryder, Jeremy Irons, Glenn Close, and Antonio Banderas. Paris Video Filmes, 1993, 150min.

ESQUIVEL, Laura. *Como Água Para Chocolate*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1993.

### SECONDARY BIBLIOGRAPHY:

ALLENDE, Isabel. *La Casa de los Espiritus*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1997.

— — —. *De Amor e de Sombra*. São Paulo: Difel, 1986.

— — —. *Eva Luna*. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 1988.

— — —. *O Plano Infinito*. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 1993.

— — —. *Paula*. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 1995.

<[http://www.monmouth.edu/~pgacarti/CINE\\_LIT\\_Allende\\_Esquivel.htm](http://www.monmouth.edu/~pgacarti/CINE_LIT_Allende_Esquivel.htm)>

ANGULO, María-Elena. *Magic Realism – Social Context and Discourse*. New York and

BAKER, Suzanne. “Binarisms and duality: magic realism and postcolonialism.”

*Span number 36: Postcolonial Fictions*. 19 Nov. 1999.

<<http://www.tds.murdoch.edu.au/entinium/litserv/SPAN/36/Baker.html>>

- BORDWELL, David, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985.
- — —. *Film Art – An Introduction*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1997.
- BROWN, Joe. “The House of the Spirits (R).” *Washington Post*. 8 Mar. 2000. <[http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/thehouseofthespiritsrbrown\\_a0ae07.htm](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/thehouseofthespiritsrbrown_a0ae07.htm)>
- BURGOYNE, Robert, Robert Stam, and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis. *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- CHANADY, Amaryll B, *Magical Realism and The Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antimony*. New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1985.
- CHIAMPI, Irleamar. *O Realismo Maravilhoso*. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1980.
- CONTRERAS, Marta. “La novela: *Como agua para chocolate*, de Laura Esquivel. La película: *Como agua para chocolate*, dirección de Alfonso Arau.” *Acta Literaria* 21 (1996):117-22
- CORLISS, Richard. “Like Water for Chocolate: movie review” 21 Mar. 2000. <<http://www.lasmujeres.com/Chocolatereview.htm>>
- CORTÍNEZ, Verónica. “La construcción del pasado en *La verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* y *La Casa de los Espíritus*.” *Hispanic Review* 59 (1991):317-27.
- DACANAL, José Hildebrando. *Realismo Mágico*. Porto Alegre: Editora Feliciano, 1970.
- DENNY, Jodi. “Exploring the Masculine and Feminine in Isabel Allende’s *The House of the Spirits*.” Old Dominion University 1997. 10 Mar. 2000. <<http://www.pinn.net/~calvino/wc/essays/hos.html>>
- EBERT, Roger. “The House of the Spirits.” *Chicago Sun-Times*. 8 Mar. 2000. <[http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebert\\_reviews/1994/04/9184/.html](http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebert_reviews/1994/04/9184/.html)>



*Erêndira*. Dir. Ruy Guerra. With Irene Papas, Cláudia Ohana and Michael Lonsdale.  
NTSC, 1983, 100 min.

ESCOBEDO, Elvia Lizeth. "The Power Behind the Language of Isabel Allende."  
*Berkeley McNair Journal Winter, Vol. IV, 1996. Internet Public Library.* 10 Mar.  
2000. <<http://www-mcnair.berkeley.edu/96journal/escobedo.html>>

FLEMING, Margaret. "Street Names and Mexican History – Emiliano Zapata." *El Futuro Archives.* 15 Dec. 2000 <<http://biz.rtd.com/plaza/elfuturo/060kino.html>>

FURTADO, Filipe. *A Construção do Fantástico na Narrativa*. Lisboa: Horizonte  
Universitário, 1980.

GAG-ARTIGAS, Priscilla. "Coincidencias y Divergencias en la Traducción a  
Imágenes de La Casa de Los Espíritus y Como Agua para Chocolate."  
*Reflexiones.* 12 Feb. 2000.

HART, Patricia. *Narrative Magic in the Fiction of Isabel Allende*. Rutheford, Madison  
and Teaneck: Associated UP, 1989

HOLUB, Robert C. *Reception Theory – A Critical Introduction*. London and New York:  
Routledge, 1984.

HOWE, Desson. "The House of the Spirits (R)." *Washington Post.* 8 Mar. 2000.  
<[http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-  
srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/thehouseofthespiritshowe\\_a0b046.htm](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/thehouseofthespiritshowe_a0b046.htm)>

IBSEN, Kristine. "On Recipes, Reading and Revolution: Postboom Parody in *Como Agua Para Chocolate*." *Hispanic Review* 63 (1995):133-46.

KAPLAN, Betty. *Of Love and Shadows*. Dir. Betty Kaplan. With Jennifer Conneli and  
Antonio Banderas. Miramax, 1994, 105 min.  
London: Garland, 1995.

MÁRQUEZ, Gabriel García. *Cem Anos de Solidão*. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1995.

- — —. *A incrível e triste história de Cândida Erêndira e sua avó desalmada*. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1998.
- MAUS, Kathryn L. "An Analysis of Female Characters Depicting a Blend of Feminism and Traditionalism in Selected Works by Isabel Allende." *Academic Forum Online*. 13 Sep. 2000. <<http://hsu.edu/faculty/afo/1999-00/maus.htm>>
- Missing*. Videotape. Dir. Constantin Costa-Gavras. With Jack Lemmon and Sissy Spacek. Miramax, 1982, 122 min.
- MOYA-RAGGIO, Eliana. "De Amor y de Sombra: una aproximación a su lectura." *Acta Literária* 16 (1991):113-24.
- SMITH, Joan. "Laura Esquivel on *Like Water for Chocolate*, destiny and the thoughts of inanimate objects." *Salon Journal*. 19 Mar. 2000. <<http://www.salon.com/oct96/interview961104.html>>
- TODOROV, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. New York: Cornell UP, 1975.
- TOMPKINS, Jane P. (ed). *Reader-Response Criticism – From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1980.
- VILANOVA, Angel. "Algunas notas sobre las relaciones entre el cine y la literatura." *Revista de Literatura Hispanoamericana* 33 (1996):27-32
- WELKER, Glenn. "Zapata." *Indigenous Peoples' Literature*. 14 Dec. 2000. <<http://www.indians.org/welker/zapata.htm>>