



Magical realism in  
*Like Water for Chocolate*  
A Novel in Monthly Installments,  
with Recipes, Romances, and Home  
Remedies  
by Laura Esquivel

By: Dora Estela Márquez  
Advisor: Dr. Donaldo Urioste  
California State University Monterey Bay  
Spring 2017

# Content

---

- I. Introduction
  - II. Inspiration & purpose
  - III. Research questions
  - IV. Term origin
  - V. "Magical Realism" as a literary style
  - VI. Magical Realism writers
  - VII. Definition and characteristics
  - VIII. Latin American writers
    - a. Laura Esquivel
  - IX. Novel summary
    - a. Magical Realism examples
  - X. Conclusion
  - XI. Bibliography
-

---

# Significant & inspiration of study

- To expand my Latin American literature knowledge.
  - To learn about the Latin American writers' writing styles.
  - Analyze Magical Realism in one of my favorite novels.
  - Personal similarities with Tita, the main character.
  - Love for the culinary art.
-

---

# Abstract

The main objective of this research project is to discuss and analyze Magical Realism in the novel. This project is divided into three sections.

- I first take into consideration the emergence, the basic characteristics and the first writers of magical realism as a literary style.
  - In addition, I also acknowledge the principal writers that availed themselves to the the genre in Mexico and in Latin America.
  - Finally, and most importantly I focus on Laura Esquivel and offer an analysis of her literary masterpiece, *Like Water for Chocolate*; unveiling, identifying and explaining the different elements of magical realism.
-

---

# Research questions

- What is Magic Realism?
- When was "Magic Realism" originated?
- Who introduced Magic Realism to literature?
- What Latin American writers used Magic Realism?
- What are the characteristics of Magical Realism?
- What examples of Magical Realism are there in *Like Water for Chocolate*?

---

# The origin of the term “Magical realism”



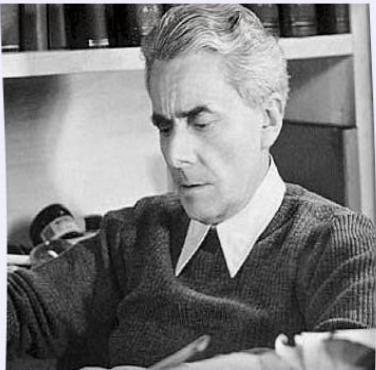
- In 1925, Franz Roh was the first one to used the term “magical realism” as title for his book, where he explains and criticizes the new post-expressionist painting style.
  - He uses this expression to refer to paintings reflecting an alternate reality.
-

---

According to Roh, "Magical Realism is the procedure of realizing from the inside out to unravel the mystery that hides and throbs in the world."



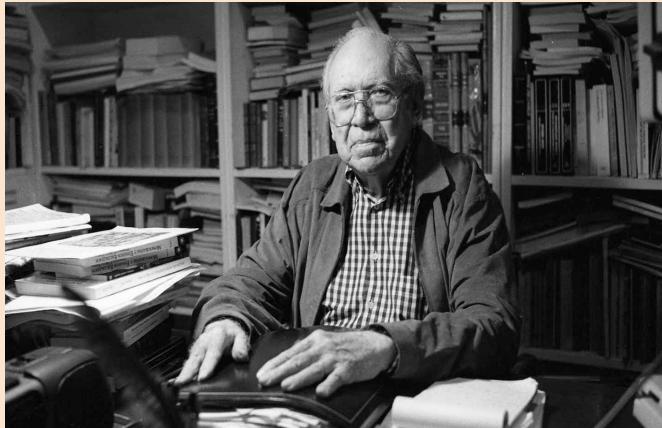
# Magical realism in Europe



Massimo  
Bontempelli

- The first one to implement magical realism in literature was Massimo Bontempelli.
- He used the term "to refer to the dualism between reality and mystery, exposing the covert magic between matter and the magical atmosphere that feels unseen."

# Magical Realism in Latin America



Arturo Uslar Pietri  
(*Las lanzas coloradas*, 1931)



Miguel Ángel Asturias  
(*Hombres de maíz*, 1949)

---

# Alejo Carpentier

- Carpentier derives its own term and calls it "marvellous realism".
- Exclusively from America.
- The fantastic is inherent to the natural and human realities.
- *El reino de este mundo* (1949).



---

# What is Magical Realism?

- Magical realism is a literary style that has gained worldwide popularity and which relates most in Latin America during the Boom.
  - Literary critics have tried to develop the definition of "magic realism" in order to explain its features.
  - Magical realism is a form of writing in which the author, through a variety of artistic techniques, combines supernatural, magical, fantastic or exaggerated effects into ordinary elements and thus gives the reader a magic realistic representation.
-

---

# Magical Realism characteristics

- There are fantastic, magical and absurd elements that the characters consider normal, but for the reader are unexplained.
  - The writer incorporates myths and legends, customs and superstitions, faith and techniques of exaggeration.
  - Characters can die, revive, or return as ghosts and they are able to communicate with the living.
  - There are no boundaries between real unreal.
  - Magical realism often draws on historical events.
-

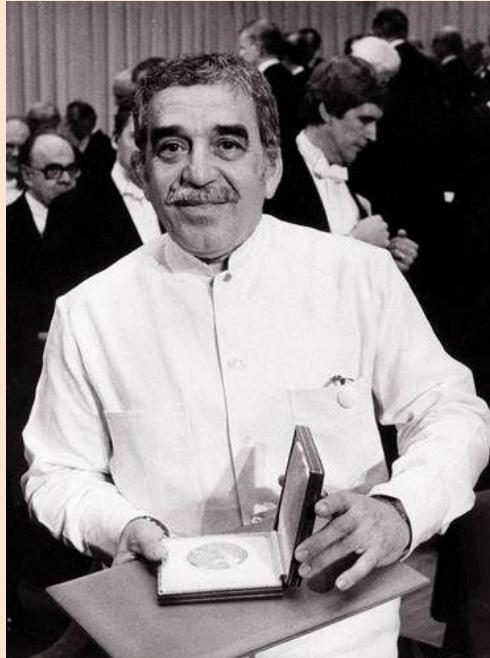
---

# Latin American Boom

- A literary phenomenon in the 1960's and 70's when writers from Latin America explored new ideas and came to international recognition in a way that had not happened previously.
  - Magic realism was the most important result of this phenomenon.
  - Some “Boom” writers include Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar from Argentina, Mario Vargas Llosa from Perú, Gabriel García Márquez from Colombian, among others.
-

---

# Main Latin American Magical Realism representative



Gabriel García Márquez - *Cien años de soledad* (1965)

---

---

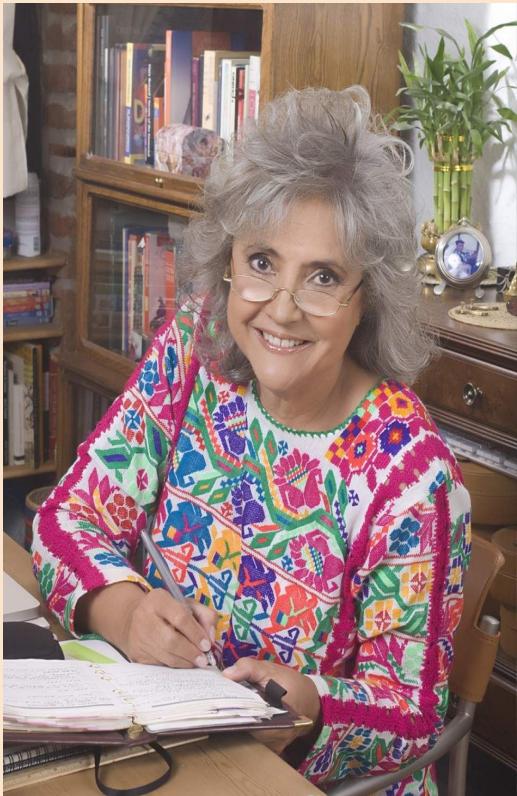
# Magical Realism Mexican writers



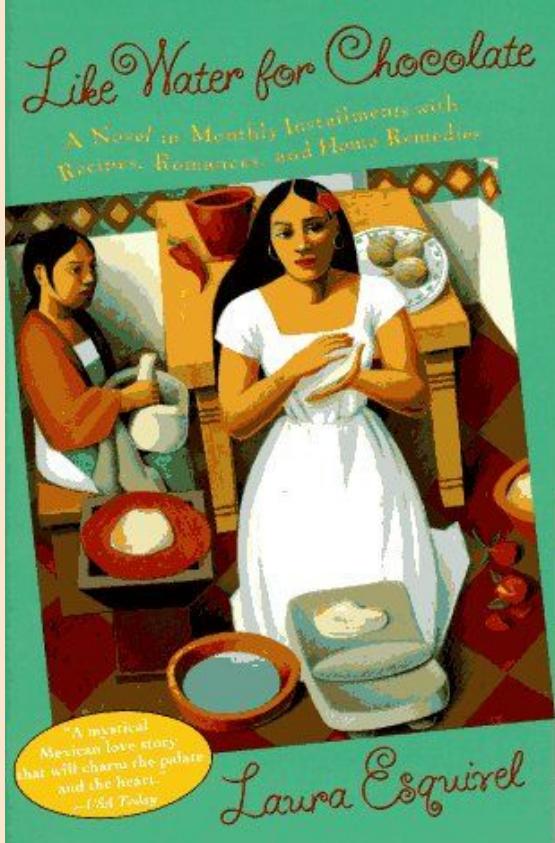
Juan Rulfo  
Pedro Páramo, 1955

---

# Laura Esquivel



- Born on September 30, 1950, in Mexico City, Mexico
- Laura Esquivel began writing while working as a kindergarten teacher. She wrote plays for her students and wrote children's television programs during the 1970s and 1980s.
- Her first novel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, became internationally beloved.
- Her other titles include *The Law of Love*, *Malinche* and *Between the Fires*.



# Like Water for Chocolate

The novel consists of twelve chapters corresponding to the twelve months of the year, and each presents a recipe. The chapters begin with the explanation of how to prepare the specific recipe and continues telling the events of the novel. It's a story of a frustrated love, full of magic, unusual and supernatural situations.

## The title

What is its meaning?

- 
- Laura Esquivel's *Like Water For Chocolate* tells the story of Tita De La Garza, the youngest daughter in a family living in Mexico at the turn of the twentieth century.
  - Tita & Pedro are in love but she can't marry him due to a family tradition. Pedro marries Tita's oldest sister, Rosaura.
  - Tita can transmits her feelings through the dishes she cooks.
  - Rosaura and Pedro have their first baby (Roberto) and Tita loves him.
  - Pedro and Tita get closer and Mama Elena arranges for Pedro's family to move to Texas.
  - This separation devastates and soon news arrives that Roberto has died, most likely due to his removal from Tita's care.
-

- 
- Causing Tita a breakdown, and Mama Elena asks Dr. Brown to take her to a mental hospital
  - Thanks to the good care of John, she recuperates and she decides never to return to the ranch.
  - She was forced to return to care for her mother, but Mama Elena bitterly rejects Tita's good will. Not long after, Mama Elena is found dead.
  - The death of Mama Elena frees Tita from the family tradition and she accepts to marry John.
  - Rosaura and Pedro have returned to the ranch and have a second child, Esperanza.
  - The night that John officially asks Pedro to bless the marriage, Pedro makes love to her, taking her virginity.
-

- 
- Tita is certain that she is pregnant and knows that she will have to end her engagement to John.
  - The affair between Pedro and Tita prompts the return of Mama Elena, who comes in spirit form to curse Tita and her unborn child. Tita is distraught and has no one in whom she can confide.
  - Tita tells Pedro that she might be pregnant and he is gladdened.
  - Outraged, Mama Elena's ghost returns, violently threatening Tita and declaring that she must leave the ranch.
  - For the first time, Tita stands up for herself and in forceful words, declares her autonomy, banishing her mother's spirit, which shrinks from an imposing presence into a tiny fiery light.
-

- 
- Tita confesses to John her relations with Pedro and finishes her relationship with him.
  - Years pass, and Esperanza and Alex, the son of John Brown get marry.
  - Rosaura has died, freeing her only daughter, Esperanza, from the stricture that had previously forbidden her, as it had Tita, from marrying.
  - With Rosaura dead and Esperanza married, Tita and Pedro are finally free to express their love in the open.
  - On their first night together, Tita and Pedro experience love so intense that both are led to a tunnel that will carry them to the afterlife.
  - Tita returns and she realizes that Pedro has already crossed over.
  - Wanting desperately to be with him, Tita attempts to ignite her inner fire.
-

- When she succeeds she reenters the luminous tunnel and meets Pedro in the spirit world.
- The final union of their bodies and spirits sets fire to the entire ranch, and the only remnant left of their love is the recipe book in which Tita recorded her wisdom.



---

# Examples of magical realism

## Tita's magical birth

“The way Nacha told it, Tita was literally washed into this world on a great tide of tears that spilled over the edge of the table and flooded across the kitchen floor. That afternoon, when the uproar had subsided and the water had been dried up by the sun, Nacha swept up the residue the tears had left on the red stone floor. There was enough salt to fill a ten-pound-sack --- it was used for cooking and lasted a long time” (6).

---

---

## Exaggeration of the unreal and the everyday

"Finally she went to her sewing box and pulled out the bedspread she had started the day Pedro first spoke of marriage. A bedspread like that, a crocheted one, takes about a year to complete. Exactly the length of time Pedro and Tita had planned to wait before getting married. She decided to use the yarn, not to let it go to waste, and so she worked on the bedspread and wept furiously, weeping and working until dawn, and threw it over herself" (19).

---

---

# Tita's feelings transmitted through the food

## Wedding Cake

- “When she finished beating the meringue, it occurred to Nacha to lick some of the icing off her finger to see if Tita’s tears had affected the flavor. No, the flavor did not seem to have been affected; yet without knowing why, Nacha was suddenly overcome with an intense longing” (35).
- “The moment they took their first bite of the cake, everyone was flooded with a great wave of longing. Even Pedro, usually so proper, was having trouble holding his tears. Mama Elena, who hadn’t shed a single tear over her husband’s death, was sobbing silently” (39).

---

## Quail in Rose Petal Sauce

- “But something strange was happening to Gertrudis.” (51)
  - “On her the food seemed to act as an aphrodisiac; she began to feel an intense heat pulsing through her limbs. An itch in her center of her body kept her from setting properly in her chair.” (51)
  - “Gertrudis was really stricken, her whole body was dripping with sweat. Her sweat was pink, and it smelled like roses, a lovely strong smell. In desperate need of a shower, she ran to get it ready”(53).
  - “Her body was giving off so much heat that the wooden walls began to split and burst into flames” (54).
  - “The scent of roses given off by her body had traveled a long, long way” (55).
  - “The aroma from Gertrudis’ body guided him [Juan]” (55).
-

---

# The appearance of Ghosts

A furious Mama Elena came into her room and said to her:

"See what you've done now? You and Pedro are shameless. If you don't want blood to flow in this house, go where you can't do any harm to anybody, before it's too late."

"The one who should be going is you. I'm tired of your tormenting me. Leave me in peace once and for all!"

"Not until you behave like a good woman, or a decent one at least!"

"What do you mean, decent? Like you?"

"Yes."

---

---

"But that's just what I'm doing! Or didn't you have an illicit child?"

"You will be condemned to hell for talking to me like this!"

"No more than you!"

"Shut your mouth! Who do you think you are?"

"I know who I am! A person who has a perfect right to live her life as she pleases. Once and for all, leave me alone! I won't put up with you! I hate you, I've always hated you!" (199).

---

---

## The use of myth

“My grandmother had a very interesting theory; she said that each of us is born with a box of matches inside us but we can’t strike them all by ourselves; just as in the experiment, we need oxygen and a candle to help. In this case, the oxygen, for example, would come from the breath of the person you love; the candle could be any kind of food, music, caress, word, or sound that engenders the explosion that lights on of the matches”...

Each person has to discover what will set off those explosions in order to live, since the combustion that occurs when one of them is ignited is what nourishes the soul. That fire, in short, is its food” (115).

---

---

## The “magical” End

“Little by little her vision began to brighten until the tunnel again appeared before her eyes. There at its entrance was the luminous figure of Pedro waiting for her. Tita did not hesitate. She let herself go to the encounter, and they wrapped each other in a long embrace; again experiencing an amorous climax, they left together for the lost Eden. Never again would they be apart.

At that moment the fiery bodies of Pedro and Tita began to throw off glowing sparks. They set on fire the bedspread, which ignited the entire ranch. The animals had fled just in time to save themselves from the inferno! The dark room was transformed into an erupting volcano” (245).

---

---

# Conclusion

In his novel, Esquivel is able to transmit to the rest of the world part of the Mexican culture through gastronomy using realistic magical elements. When telling us the love story between its protagonists, Esquivel shows us her great capacity of writing using fantastic, magical, unreal and supernatural elements. Although most of the examples we find in the novel are unrealistic, the way in which the author projects them, makes us create a magical world, where the unimaginable can happen. Perhaps that is the most interesting part of Magical Realism; To get away from reality, from the monotony, and from the routine to play to create an alternate reality. To date there is no precise definition of what Magic Realism is, so we can deduce that apart from the examples we could identify and analyze in this novel, there are many other examples.

---

---

# Bibliography

## Primary sources:

Esquivel, Laura. *Como Agua Para Chocolate : Novela De Entregas Mensuales, Con Recetas, Amores Y Remedios Caseros*. México, D.F.: Planeta, 2003.

Esquivel, Laura. *Like Water for Chocolate : A Novel in Monthly Installments, with Recipes, Romances, and Home Remedies*. New York: Anchor Books, 1995.

## Secondary sources:

Aguilera, Ana María Leiva. *La Construcción Del Realismo En Algunas Obras De La Narrativa Hispanoamericana Del Siglo XX*. n.p.: 2014.

Ayora, Jorge, and E. Dale Carter. "Antologia Del Realismo Magico." *The Modern Language Journal*, 56.8 (1972): 532.

Camayd-Freixas, Erik. "Realismo Magico Y Primitivismo En La Novela Hispanoamericana De Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Angel Asturias, Juan Rulfo Y Gabriel Garcia Marquez." , (1995):.

D'Amato, M. "The Narrative Art of Massimo Bontempelli." , (1969):

Faris, Wendy. *Ordinary Enchantments : Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004.

*Magical Realism : Theory, History, Community*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995.

---

**Thank you!**

---