

Laura esquivel



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Laura Esquivel's "Like Water For Chocolate" is an epic novel set in Mexico at the turn of the twentieth century. It is a bittersweet love story between Tita and Pedro who through fate have kept them apart. The novel is divided into months and starts each chapter with a recipe from Tita's kitchen.

Throughout the novel we follow the seemingly doomed love affair between the two main protagonists of the book. Their affection for each other finally unites them in the afterlife at the end of the novel.

The novel is a good example of how the Spanish culture has influenced the new world, or the American continent. Likewise, the novel also is a reflection of Spanish culture principally through its culinary practices. In pre-columbian times, the indigenous peoples of America, revered chocolate or cacao and was often even used as both currency and commodity of trade. The Olmecs, Aztecs and other ancient members of Maya culture regularly included the drink from the cacao beans in their rituals.

But previously, the chocolate drink was reserved for the warriors and the elite and consumed only after and not during a meal. When Columbus discovered America, these cacao beans were then sent back to Europe and was widely accepted there alongside other food products from America like the potato, tomato and other grains.

"Like Water For Chocolate" vividly describes a typical rancheria in Mexico and here we get a glimpse of family life infused in long-held traditions as imposed by the grand matriarch. It is not uncommon for Spanish families to live in one roof even if the children are adults and married. It is quite the norm that married children and their spouses and children continue to live

with either the family of the wife or husband. In the novel, Tita is forbidden to marry, being the youngest daughter, she is expected to take care of her aging parents and helping out with household tasks.

A profusion of rituals and daily chores in the kitchen reveal to us readers the extent in which Spanish culture has been introduced to the new world.

Spanish breakfast occurs twice in a day. The early breakfast consists of bread and coffee with milk eaten at home before one sets off to work or school. A second breakfast occurs anytime between 10 and 11 o'clock in the morning consisting of sweet rolls or biscuits and a tostada – a toasted bread smeared with butter and served on a saucer with olive oil for dipping.

Sometimes the bread is served rubbed with tomato and garlic for a more robust flavor.

Lunch then occurs at 2 pm which may consist of an omelette, a sausage, and finished with fruit. This repast may be eaten with coffee or beer. After lunch, the customary siesta or afternoon nap commences. This nap may last up to two hours, wherein businesses are closed, and will only open around 4pm.

Thus is the unusual and laid-back attributes of the Spanish. In the evening, tapas is served, these are small servings of food or appetizers that may consist of vegetables, seafood, meat, chicken, sausages or just about anything that may be found in the kitchen.

This hours are spent eating and drinking wine. Tapas bars abound in the more urban areas in Spain and are regular fare for the citizenry. By 11pm, a real dinner is served. A hearty full-course of salad, soup, entrée, and dessert

followed by coffee or an aperitif caps the day. Then off to bed goes the typical Spaniard in what was a typical day spent.

The culinary traditions of Spain are steeped in their culture and daily life. The influence of these are far and wide covering the entire world as Spain set out to far reaches in search of wealth and territory. In their vast colonies, Spain brought these traditions with them and in turn imposed them on the local populace but also inter-mingling the local practices in turn. It is safe to conclude therefore that Spanish culinary traditions have been both recipient and donor. For Spain adapted to new world ingredients and manners of cooking.

The novel masterfully exploits the culinary richness of Spain and makes these the springboard on which the plot so brilliantly revolves around. The recipes we read in the book are presented in such that their preparation all the way to their consumption is woven into the lives and motives of the characters involved. The recipe for chocolate and rose petals illustrates this. When Tita cooks the rose petals into the chocolate she is consumed with passion and unrelenting desire for Pedro – and eventually transforms all those who imbibe the drink into a frenzy of heat, lust, love and desire as well.

Source: Davidson, Alan, *The Oxford Companion To Food*, 1999