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García Lorca vs. Esquivel:
A comparative study of women in Hispanic society as they are presented in *The House of Bernarda Alba* and *Like Water for Chocolate*

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“A la mesa y a la cama. Una sola vez se llama.”

Abstract

Family drama is the stuff of Hispanic *telenovelas*, or soap operas. It is also at the core of two widely-read works of twentieth-century Hispanic literature, namely *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (*The House of Bernarda Alba*, 1936) by Spanish writer Federico García Lorca and *Como agua para chocolate* (*Like Water for Chocolate*, 1989) by Mexican author Laura Esquivel. Despite the writers' vastly different backgrounds and literary influences, these two works possess striking similarities, particularly regarding the primacy of family and woman's role in Hispanic culture and society. There are numerous parallels: the composition of the respective families, setting, principal themes, tone, and symbolism. The purpose of this study is to explore the similarities and contrasts between Lorca's drama and Esquivel's novel. In the process, woman's role in the Hispanic family will be highlighted.

Family drama is the stuff of Hispanic *telenovelas*, or soap operas. It is also at the core of two widely-read works of twentieth-century Hispanic literature, namely *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (*The House of Bernarda Alba*, 1936) by Spanish writer Federico García Lorca and *Como agua para chocolate* (*Like Water for Chocolate*, 1989) by Mexican author Laura Esquivel. Despite the writers' vastly different backgrounds and literary influences, these two works possess striking similarities, particularly regarding the primacy of family and woman's role in Hispanic culture and society. There are numerous parallels: the composition of the respective families, setting, principal themes, tone, and symbolism. The purpose of this study is to explore the similarities and contrasts between Lorca's drama and Esquivel's novel. In the process, woman's role in the Hispanic family will be highlighted.

In order to fully understand the texts of these two authors it is important to first understand the authors themselves. This will allow the reader to better appreciate not only the works in question but also the creators of those works. Federico García Lorca was born on June 5, 1898 at Fuentevaqueros in the Spanish province of Granada. Laura Esquivel was born in Mexico City on September 30, 1950. García Lorca belongs to the Generation of 1927 while Esquivel is considered part of the Spanish American Post-Boom that emerged during the 1980s and 1990s. García Lorca's main genres are poetry and theater. *The House of Bernarda Alba* is the third of a dramatic trilogy. Esquivel, on the other hand, employs narrative later adapted to film. Both authors highlight gender roles and related themes in their works. García

Lorca also tends to focus on social outsiders, such as women, blacks, and gypsies. As a homosexual, García Lorca may have identified with other socially marginalized groups. At that time being homosexual in Spain was virtually unheard-of due to traditional codes of moral and social conduct, which condemned this lifestyle. Due to discrimination, García Lorca's works reveal an evolving negativity toward male characters when presented in interaction with women. This growing negativity eventually led to the exclusion of men from his works altogether (Lima 137). This exclusion of men is discussed later on.

The two families—Alba de Benavides and de la Garza—both resemble and diverge from the stereotypical Hispanic family. The fact that several generations of the extended family reside together, in contrast to the traditional Anglo nuclear family, usually results in a strong support network of family and friends, but here explodes into sibling rivalry, mother-daughter conflict and passion. While the system of Hispanic *amiguismo*, or connections, often leads to nepotism, or favoritism shown to relatives, it fails to function in these families where emotional and physical abuse is the norm.

Generally speaking, Hispanic families' daily lives display distinct gender roles in which the mother is almost always in charge of maintaining the household (feeding the children, cleaning the house, preparing meals, etc.), and the father is expected to work and be the breadwinner. In *The House of Bernarda Alba*, Bernarda clearly defines these roles: "Needle and thread for the female. A whip and a mule for

the male” (1452). María Elena de Valdés further sums up the role of Hispanic women, commenting: “She must be strong and far more clever than the men who supposedly protect her. She must be pious, observing all the religious requirements of a virtuous daughter, wife, and mother. She must exercise great care to keep her sentimental relations as private as possible, and, most important of all she must be in control of life in her house, which means essentially the kitchen and bedroom or food and sex.”

Hispanic men’s preconception that the women should perform exclusively domestic duties is a direct result of *machismo*, defined as “a strong or exaggerated sense of masculinity stressing attributes such as physical courage, virility, domination of women, and aggressiveness” (dictionary.com). It is very interesting to note that, according to this definition, both Bernarda and Mama Elena display characteristics of machismo, from physical abuse and domination of their own daughters and service staff, to aggressiveness toward anyone who dares question their authority.

Hispanic women are not only expected to maintain the household but also serve as religious teachers. The most widely practiced religion in Hispanic countries is Catholicism, which tends to be a very personal, private religion. As such, many Hispanic men do not attend church regularly because they do not feel compelled to gather in large groups to practice this very personal religion. Consequently, the majority of Hispanic churchgoers are women, and it has become their responsibility to teach young children the beliefs and customs of this religion. Since religion is such a big part of daily life, religious references are quite common in Hispanic literature as

practically everyone receives some religious education, and the general public can easily identify the references. As will be discussed later, some authors twist Catholic references while others use them in a more straightforward fashion.

Both García Lorca's drama and Esquivel's novel expose family scandal to public scrutiny. Both portray cruel, authoritarian, mothers—Bernarda Alba de Benavides and Elena de la Garza—of daughters forced to observe the tradition of female primogeniture, in which the eldest possesses the exclusive right of inheritance and must be the first to marry while the youngest must care for her mother until death. As widows, both Bernarda and Mama Elena have assumed the ordinarily male role of head of a multigenerational household of female family members and service staff. The youngest daughters in each family—Adela and Tita—resist conforming to convention and pay a stiff price—suicide in the case of Adela and a lifetime of unconsummated love in that of Tita--for their disobedience.

García Lorca's drama tells the tale of a strict, dictatorial mother, Bernarda Alba, and her five oppressed daughters—Angustias, Magdalena, Martirio, Amelia, and Adela. The youngest daughter, Adela, is in love with Pepe el Romano, and wants to marry him. This, however, is impossible because of the family tradition of primogeniture, which means that Angustias, the oldest and least attractive of the sisters, will marry Adela's boyfriend. This causes much turmoil in the house as Bernarda imposes strict rules on the whole household, one of which being that the daughters cannot associate with any men, and in order to ensure obedience, the

daughters are not allowed outside the house. Furthermore, Bernarda's second husband, Antonio María Benavides, has just passed away, and again citing tradition, Bernarda demands that the members of the household endure eight long years of mourning in observance of his death. In the end, Bernarda finds out that Adela has been carrying on with Pepe and fires shots at him. Believing that he is dead, Adela hangs herself and finally escapes her mother's controlling grip.

Similarly, Esquivel's novel is also the tale of a dogmatic mother, Mama Elena, and her three mistreated daughters—Gertrudis, Rosaura, and Josefita (Tita for short). Just like Adela, Tita has fallen in love with a young man, in this case Pedro Musquiz, but is forbidden to marry him because of a family tradition that the youngest daughter must care for her mother until death. When Pedro asks for Tita's hand in marriage, Mama Elena instead offers Rosaura, whom Pedro accepts with the hope of being near Tita. Just like in *The House of Bernarda Alba*, the father of this family has passed away, which explains the mother's more patriarchal role. In the end, Tita and Pedro do manage to consummate their forbidden love, but their intense passion kills Pedro. Rather than face living without him, Tita eats matches, which ignite an internal fire, allowing her to be reunited with Pedro in death.

The most logical place to begin examining the similarities and differences between these two texts is with the families themselves. It has already been noted that both families consist of a patriarchal mother and her oppressed daughters. It is not common for a Hispanic family to have a female head of household, but given that

in both instances the father is deceased, it has become necessary for these mothers to assume a more masculine role in the family. These women are so masculine that they almost appear to be completely cold-hearted and oftentimes cruel. They behave as if they were members of the animal kingdom, becoming the male leader of a harem of females and denying access to any other male (Lima 139). Both Mama Elena and Bernarda are very stern, both with their daughters and with the maids. Both women also use severe punishment when faced with defiance or protest.

Anger is the primary emotion these two mothers express, and they inflict both physical and verbal abuse on their daughters. Bernarda is furious with Angustias for watching men outside the door and hits her. Later, she becomes angry with Angustias again for wearing makeup during the eight-year mourning period and violently wipes it off her face. When Adela offers her a fan with colorful flowers on it (instead of a plain black one) at the funeral, Bernarda throws it on the floor. She also becomes enraged and beats Martirio for stealing Pepe's portrait from Angustias. In the final scene, she is once more furious when she learns that Adela has been with Pepe in the corral. Given all of this violent behavior, no one is really surprised when Bernarda shoots at Pepe at the end of the play (Rice 339). In comparison, Mama Elena is also characterized by fits of rage, especially when dealing with Tita. When Tita accidentally lets a few tears fall into the batter she is mixing for Rosaura's wedding cake, the consequence is that all of the guests fall ill and vomit. Tita's punishment for "poisoning" the wedding guests is an extremely violent beating,

followed by being locked in the barn loft for a few days to reflect on what she has done.

The youngest daughters' frustrated desire to marry, due to the imposed family tradition, is another of the many examples of the barbarous and frigid nature of these mothers. It is ironic to note that both mothers are hypocrites as well. Their decision to restrict their daughters by not allowing them to marry or have contact with men contrasts with the mother's own past actions. Bernarda will not allow her daughters near men, though she herself had two husbands. Furthermore, it is later revealed that Mama Elena had a love affair with a dark-skinned man. This affair resulted in the birth of Gertrudis, who does not know she is mulatto. It may be that the women's bad fortune with men in the past is the cause of this hypocrisy. Since they have suffered in the past, they believe it is necessary for their daughters to do so as well.

In addition to family members, both households also maintain a maid staff. In *The House of Bernarda Alba*, the servants are La Poncia and another maid. La Poncia is the main servant of the household and charges herself with giving advice and acting as an extra set of eyes and ears for Bernarda. At times she appears to be an ally of the daughters, but this misconception is disproved many times when she goes to Bernarda to report her findings. In direct contrast to La Poncia, the maid in *Like Water for Chocolate* is Nacha (short for Ignacia), who is a very kind woman. Shortly after Tita is born, Mama Elena finds that she has no milk with which to feed the baby, so she almost immediately gives the newborn into Nacha's care. This causes Tita to grow up

around the sights, sounds, and smells of the kitchen. In reality, Nacha is something of a surrogate mother to Tita and is certainly more nurturing than Mama Elena.

This presence of servants in both households represents very stratified societies divided into socioeconomic classes. In Lorca's play Bernarda's harsh treatment of the maids parallels their conduct toward a woman begging for table scraps. Similar to the cold way that Bernarda treats the maids, La Poncia denies the beggar woman food and runs her off the doorstep.

Both works feature well-to-do families who live in large rural estates. The only difference is that Bernarda's ranch is in Spain while Mama Elena's is located in Mexico. *The House of Bernarda Alba* is set in the 1930s during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). *Like Water for Chocolate* takes place in the 1910s around the time of the Mexican Revolution. Clearly, in both cases, the central action within each household is surrounded by outside influences of war and turmoil. It is interesting to note that the family conflicts reflect internal divisions within each country during a period of instability and civil war. Both within and without, wars are being fought over authority and power.

Despite the war metaphor, men are conspicuously absent in both texts. In *The House of Bernarda Alba*, men are heard but never seen. The cast list at the beginning of the play includes no men (Lima 138). The first invisible man is don Antonio María Benavides, whose death happens prior to the beginning of the action of the play.

Although male characters never make a physical appearance, their presence is

strongly felt. The play's opening scene depicts don Antonio's wake attended by family and neighbors. The most prominent male character is Pepe el Romano, who is mentioned many times but never actually appears onstage. Since Bernarda demands that her daughters stay away from men, the daughters' only contact with men is when they eavesdrop on them in the outdoor patio during their father's funeral. The women can also hear the farmers singing on their way to and from work. Also, when their neighbor Prudencia drops by for a social visit, sounds of a stallion kicking in his stall reverberate through the house. Prudencia characterizes the stallion as a male symbol with her comment: "Contentious as a man" (1509). Men are completely excluded from this household. When don Arturo arrives to arrange the distribution of the inheritance, he is forced to wait outside; the embroidery vendor who comes with material for Angustias' wedding is also kept outside. Likewise, the doctor who is treating Martirio is not allowed to enter the home, and Prudencia's husband is mentioned in conversation but never makes an appearance onstage (Lima 141).

Similarly, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, there are very few men. Pedro appears only a few times, and Mama Elena has an emasculating effect on him. Another male presence is Dr. John Brown, who cares for Tita when she suffers a mental breakdown, but he also is a weak character. The only truly virile man in either text is Juan, a follower of Mexican revolutionary leader Pancho Villa and Gertrudis' liberator. That he actually succeeds in taking Gertrudis away from her mother signifies that he has more power than Mama Elena, which is more than can be said for the other men.

The patriarchal mothers in these two texts ridicule each of the young suitors, Pepe and Pedro, and diminish their heroic status. When Bernarda shoots at Pepe el Romano, he flees the scene instead of standing up to her and taking Adela away with him (Lima 145). Similarly, as Tita and Pedro watch Gertrudis ride off with Juan, they consider eloping but Mama Elena interposes in their train of thought. Instead of putting Tita on his bicycle handlebars and pedaling her away, Pedro flees, fearful of being caught talking to her (Santos-Phillips 18).

García Lorca's drama and Esquivel's novel share four major themes: oppression, maintenance of appearances, forbidden love, and the notion that history repeats itself. Oppression is the most conspicuous and pivotal theme. The daughters—their emotions, desires, passions, and even their attempts at rebellion—are thwarted. The two domineering mothers oppress their daughters and endeavor to control their every thought and action. Stifling their emotions fuels this oppression. When Magdalena bursts into tears during the funeral of Bernarda's late husband, Bernarda immediately silences her by saying that if she wants to cry, she should "crawl under the bed" (141). One of the maids also cries at the death of her former master and is commanded to maintain "Silence!" Furthermore, the daughters are ordered to refrain from crying at the shock of Adela's suicide at the end of the play. For Bernarda, tears are a sign of feminine weakness. In comparison, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, when Tita's baby nephew Roberto dies, Mama Elena forbids anyone in the

house to cry because they all have too much work to do. Mourning must be done on their own time and in private.

Passion and desire are also subjugated. All the daughters in both families and even Bernarda's mother María Josefa aspire to marry as the only means of escaping from a dictatorial mother. By forbidding them to marry, or even date, the mother is trying to suffocate any incipient warm feelings with cold-hearted bitterness.

In a desperate attempt to break free from their oppression, several characters in both texts rebel. Four distinct types of rebellion are apparent in *The House of Bernarda Alba*: insanity/silence, running away (flight), suicide, and adultery. Both María Josefa and Tita defy Bernarda and Mama Elena with mental illness and silence. María Josefa is literally a prisoner in her daughter's home. Several times throughout the drama she screams to be let out of her "cell" because she wants to go to the seashore and marry a gorgeous man. In Tita's case, her mother's strict rules and barbaric behavior produces her mental breakdown. She loses the ability to speak and has to live with Dr. John Brown for many months to regain her sanity.

Gertrudis escapes oppression through flight. She becomes aroused by one of Tita's fantastic meals and runs away with Juan the Villista. Consequently, Mama Elena disinherits her and disposes of all of her photos and personal belongings.

Adela stands up against her mother and the Catholic Church by taking her own life. When she thinks that Pepe el Romano has been killed, she hangs herself rather than go on living under her mother's stern gaze. Tita also commits suicide

when Pedro dies, but only after Mama Elena has been dead for a few years. Tita's suicide is more a romantic sacrifice in the vein of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. When Pedro dies, Tita chooses to join him in death by eating matches that ignite an internal flame that precipitates spontaneous combustion and death.

Another case of rebellion appears in *The House of Bernarda Alba* at the end of Act 2 when Librada's daughter is killed by a large mob. She has committed adultery and as a result has had an illegitimate child. In order to cover up her sinful deed, she kills the child and hides the dead body under a rock, but a pack of dogs finds and brings the corpse to her very doorstep. The result is the ensuing social persecution, which leads to the girl's death.

Family honor and maintenance of appearances are themes in both works. When Adela thinks that Pepe el Romano is dead and hangs herself, Bernarda insists on covering up the truth of her affair by repeating "[m]y daughter has died a virgin" (190). Similarly, in *Like Water for Chocolate*, when Tita is no longer able to cope with her mother's brutality, she literally goes crazy. Rather than have a lunatic in her house, Mama Elena directs Dr. John Brown to remove her from the ranch.

Forbidden love is another principal theme. Adela cannot marry Pepe el Romano because her older sister is not yet married. When Pepe asks for Adela's hand, Angustias' is offered instead. Likewise, Tita can never marry Pedro because she is the youngest and is therefore required to remain single and care for her mother until she dies. As previously mentioned, Mama Elena herself has experienced

forbidden love, which resulted in her oldest daughter Gertrudis. Obviously, Mama Elena was seduced by her dark-skinned lover, but she was prevented from settling down with him.

Structurally, both texts communicate the notion that history repeats itself. *The House of Bernarda Alba* begins and ends with death in the family. Furthermore, Bernarda's first and last words in the drama (and actually the first and last words spoken by anyone) are "Silence!" In *Like Water for Chocolate*, the story begins and ends with Tita's great niece Esperanza expounding on cooking. Moreover, the chapters of the book chronicle a calendar year, beginning with January and ending with December. The cycle of oppression and cruelty is repeated when Rosaura informs Tita that she intends her daughter to carry on the family tradition of remaining an old maid in order to attend to her mother, foreshadowing that her own daughter will be unhappy just as Tita was.

Despite a multitude of other similarities, surprisingly these two works contrast greatly in tone. García Lorca's play is very serious while Esquivel's novel is very whimsical and playful, very much in the vein of magical realism. There is no laughter and no happiness in *The House of Bernarda Alba*. The tone is solemn as is the characters' behavior. While Adela is high-strung and passionate, her high spirits are crushed by parental tyranny. In *Like Water for Chocolate*, the tone is much lighter. When Tita is in the kitchen with Nacha, she is happy to be surrounded by the sensual sights and aromas. Nacha's comforting and nurturing presence promotes the more

whimsical and playful tone common in magical realist works. One example of magical realism is that every time Tita cooks something, she adds an extra emotional ingredient. When she cooks pheasants in rose petal sauce, she is elated because Pedro had given her roses to commemorate her new post as head chef. When a thorn accidentally pricks her, the rose petals become saturated with her blood, and this extra ingredient produces an aphrodisiac effect on Gertrudis. Another instance of the magic of Tita's cooking occurs when Mama Elena insists that Tita bake a wedding cake for Rosaura and Pedro. Some of her tears fall into the cake batter as she is mixing, and when the guests eat the cake they all become very ill and nostalgic, reflecting on lost love. However, food is not the only magical element in Esquivel's novel. Tita is haunted by both friendly and unfriendly ghosts—the spirit of her beloved Nacha as well as the specter of Mama Elena, who curses her from beyond the grave.

These two texts share a number of symbolic elements: religious references, symbols of heat/cold and tears, various colors, and emblematic character names. Religion pervades *The House of Bernarda Alba* as church bells toll throughout the play. When María Josefa attempts to escape from the house, she carries a lamb, a universal symbol of Christ's sacrifice that also foreshadows Adela's demise. Likewise, Adela's announcement that she is prepared to sacrifice everything, or assume a "crown of thorns," alludes to Christ and prefigures her tragic end. Similarly, numerous religious allusions are present in *Like Water for Chocolate*. When Tita

prepares pheasants in rose petal sauce, she manages to penetrate Pedro's body with food, an allusion to the Immaculate Conception. This new means of communication empowers her. Tita, who has created the meal, is a female god, mystically entering Pedro, comparable to the Virgin Mary. This phenomenon arouses Gertrudis, linking her to Jesus Christ, the product of sacred, indirect love. This scene is strongly reminiscent of Spanish mysticism, in which sacred love (i.e., love of God) is compared to profane (or erotic) love. While García Lorca's religious references are more conventional, Esquivel inverts religious symbolism and gives it a feminist component.

Both family houses are female compounds and are likened to prisons. In typical Andalusian style, Bernarda Alba's house literally has bars on the windows, and she keeps her mother locked up in her room, though María Josefa manages to break out from time to time. The home's decorative ironwork has become a means of confinement for its female residents and the house itself is something of a secular convent (Lima 140). While the daughters are clearly inmates, their mothers are equally confined by their own narrow beliefs and behavior. Both Bernarda and Mama Elena are so afraid of losing control over their female wards that they have become captives of their own vigilance. Both women stand guard over their homes at night when scandal threatens to dishonor their families (Santos-Phillips 13).

Bernarda's eldest daughter Angustias considers her home a living "hell," an image that accurately reflects the intense heat of a southern Spanish summer along with inflamed passions and a sense of eternal condemnation. In fact, all five of

Bernarda's daughters seethe with passion, and Adela's unquenchable thirst, which often awakens her at night, symbolizes her ardor. Similarly, in *Like Water for Chocolate* Mama Elena's strict rules create a prison-like environment. Tita enjoys freedom only in the kitchen, where she is able to relax and express her stifled emotions through cooking. Mama Elena's house, located in the northern Mexican desert, is also a stifling place of torment. Before going to bed at night, Mama Elena cuts a watermelon for refreshment from the summer heat. Gertrudis takes cool showers several times a day in an attempt to extinguish the flames of eroticism, but eventually, her passion ignites the bath house, and she bolts naked through a field, where Juan literally sweeps her off her feet. On the other hand, when Tita learns of Pedro's engagement to her older sister Rosaura, she experiences extreme cold and is unable to sleep. To distract her from the cold and insomnia, she weaves a large blanket, which magically ends up measuring over one kilometer in length. However, when Tita is near Pedro, she is "como agua para chocolate," which translates as "water at the boiling point." This Mexican idiom which gives title to the novel and film is used to describe an event or relationship that is so tense, hot, and extraordinary that it can only be compared to scalding water on the verge of boiling (de Valdés). At the end of the novel when Tita and Pedro finally come together, he bursts into flame. Dr. John Brown's Native American grandmother had earlier explained that each person is born with an internal matchbox that can only be ignited by a powerful emotion to produce a "splendor so dazzling that it would illuminate far beyond what we can

normally see; and then a brilliant tunnel would appear before our eyes, revealing the path we forgot the moment we were born, and summoning us to regain the divine origin we had lost" (116-17). When this happens to Pedro, Tita succeeds in setting ablaze her own internal matchbox by consuming matches.

Weeping is another symbolic element in both texts. Esquivel's Tita is very sensitive to onions. According to family legend, Tita's premature birth occurs in the kitchen while her mother is chopping onions. It seems that baby Tita was crying in the womb. Supposedly, so much salt remained on the floor after the birth water dried that Nacha saved it to use in recipes for many years to come. Later, Rosaura's wedding cake is flavored by Tita's salty tears, a symbol of her suppressed emotions. In Lorca's play *Angustias*' fiancé Pepe el Romano gives her an engagement ring with three pearls, instead of a traditional diamond. Family friend Prudencia interprets the pearls as symbolic tears, a foreshadowing of calamity.

Color symbolism is present in both texts. Black and white, a possible allusion to the struggle between good and evil in the Spanish Civil War, predominate in *The House of Bernarda Alba*. The color black takes precedence during the traditional eight-year mourning period declared by Bernarda, and she disciplines anyone, such as Adela who offers her a colorful fan at the funeral, daring to wear another color. Furthermore, Adela flaunts her new green dress, a symbol of life and vitality, in the privacy of the barnyard. In the midst of this drab black-and-white world, Adela strives unsuccessfully to break with past tradition. Youngest daughter Tita also

introduces color and sensuality through her cooking. In addition, she weaves a very large colorful blanket during her bouts of insomnia. Given Mexico's rich indigenous heritage, traditional Native American colors—especially red and black, symbols of life and death—are embedded in Mexican culture.

Finally, many of the characters in both works possess figurative names. Appropriately, given the prominence of the Catholic Church in Hispanic culture and society, many of the names in *The House of Bernarda Alba* are of religious origin. The name *Bernarda* derives from the German word for *bear* while the family name *Alba* signifies *dawn* or *daybreak*. This name fits Bernarda, who is as vicious as a mother bear protecting her young and at times is more animal than human. Bernarda's mother María Josefa has a compound name referring to the Holy Family—the Virgin Mary and her human husband Joseph. Ironically, her name alludes to a perfect family, though the Alba de Benavides clan is quite dysfunctional. Eldest daughter Angustias experiences the anguish inherent in her name; she is an old maid whose mother treats her more like a slave than a daughter. Though Adela is the promiscuous one, her sister Magdalena is named for reformed Biblical prostitute Mary Magdalene. The most embittered of the five sisters is Martirio, whose name means *martyr*. In the final scene she misleads Adela into thinking that Pepe is dead, thus creating a martyr of her own sister, who commits suicide. Family friend Prudencia, meaning *prudence*, offers common sense wisdom. The name of head maid La Poncia refers to Pontius Pilate, the judge responsible for Christ's crucifixion.

Likewise, many of the names in Esquivel's novel are symbolic as well. Mama Elena's name refers to Helen of Troy, the most beautiful woman in the world according to Greco-Roman legend, so it may be assumed that Tita's mother was once an attractive woman herself, as well as a source of conflict. *Gertrudis* is a suitable Germanic name, meaning *force of the sword*, for a woman who earns the title of General during the Mexican Revolution. Her sister Rosaura possesses an ironic name. Usually evoking an image of beauty and sweet fragrance, this Rosaura is repulsive in appearance. Not only is she overweight and flatulent, due to digestive problems, but she also has bad breath.

As in Lorca's play, *Like Water for Chocolate* includes religious names. Esquivel's protagonist is Tita, a nickname for Josefita, referring to the human father of Jesus. Her mentor Nacha, short for Ignacia, is a veiled reference to the founder of the Jesuits, St. Ignatius of Loyola; while Nacha lacks formal education, associated with the Jesuits, she is wise in the ways of the world and offers Tita guidance in times of despair. The name *Pedro* has dual connotations: St. Peter, who was the rock (*pedra*) on which the Catholic Church was founded. Pedro is Tita's protector and a "rock" for her to lean on in troubled times.

In conclusion, the two works examined in this study—*The House of Bernarda Alba* by Spanish writer Federico García Lorca and *Like Water for Chocolate* by Mexican author Laura Esquivel—feature family discord. Notwithstanding the

authors' diverse experience, these two works have much in common, and both spotlight the role of family and women in Hispanic culture and society.

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Honors Senior Project
Approval

Form 3 – Submit with completed thesis. All signatures must be obtained.

Name of candidate: Letisha Jenkins

Department: _____

Degree: Accounting / Spanish

Full title of project: Garcia Lorca vs. Esquivel: A comparative study of women in Hispanic society as they are presented in The House of Bernarda Alba and Like Water for Chocolate

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