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“Recipes, aromas, memories and sexuality in Esquivel, Ferré, and Allende”

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ABSTRACT: In recent years there has been a surge in literary production by female Latin American writers. Some of these writers, such as Isabel Allende, Laura Esquivel, and Rosario Ferré, weave a tale in which elements of sexuality, food, and memories intertwine as their characters affirm their identities. This becomes patent in the works of *Like Water for Chocolate* by Esquivel, *Maldito Amor* by Ferré and *Daughter of Fortune* by Allende. The purpose of this paper is multi-fold. First, there will be a brief examination of the celebratory role food plays in these works. Second, there will be an exploration of the significance of food as a cultural symbol. In Hispanic society, as in others, food is a vital element to the culture. Third there will be a scrutiny of the interrelationship forged between aliment and memories. In each of these texts, the aromas and the act of gastronomic preparation cause the characters to reminisce fondly of past episodes in their life. These memories serve to reinforce the character's concept of self. Next there will be a study of the link that is established between food and sexuality. The care taken to prepare these meals constitutes an act of love and in these texts this vision is extended to include the act of lovemaking. Finally, there will be an inquiry into how the element of food influences the narrative structure.

Pero, señora, ¿qué podemos saber
las mujeres sino filosofías de cocinas?
(Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz)

Food, the nourishment that sustains the body, mind, and soul, is vital to life. Not only is it necessary for survival from a biological stand point, but it is of crucial significance to the understanding of society. In many cultures, food is celebrated for its association to family, community, belief systems, diversity, health and good fortune (Lim 10). Therefore, it is not unprecedented that aliments appear in artistic creations. Food can be represented in a text as the process of recollection, the preparation, the consumption, and/or the transmission of knowledge. There has recently been a resurgence of scholarship which scrutinizes the relationship between nourishment and the human experience, focusing on its role in social, religious and cultural experiences as well as its function in the identity of a person or a collective group.¹ It is not surprising then, since women's traditional roles have been cook and nurturer, that when women need to express themselves these culinary elements become intertwined in their literary production. Scaat finds that there is a natural link that binds women to this topic,

“Women write about food and eating. Why should this be so? Women's bodies have the capacity to manufacture food for their infants... and in western culture women have traditionally borne most of the burden of cooking for and nourishing others, with all that this implies of power and service. The caring, providing roles and their malign counterparts certainly contribute much mimetic content to women's writing. But women eat as well as cook, starve as well as serve and contemporary fiction is as much concerned with women's appetites as their nurturing capacities” (2).

Constanza Meyer has pointed out that since women started to leave their imprint in Latin American literature in the XIX century they have incorporated depictions of body, sex and food in their configurations (121). Ferré echoes a distinction found in women's writing, "Our literature very often finds itself determined by an immediate relationship to our bodies... This biological fate curtails our mobility and creates very serious problems for us as we attempt to reconcile our emotional needs with our professional needs.... That is why women's literature has, so much more so than men's literature, concerned itself with interior experiences, experiences that have little to do with the historical, the social, and the political. Women's literature is also more subversive than men's because it delves into forbidden zones..." (242). Ferré believes that women's writing varies from men's because it has to take into account the demands of a professional, familial and emotive nature.

The recent surge in literary production by female Latin American writers has enriched our canon. The tales woven by some of the writers, such as Isabel Allende, Laura Esquivel, and Rosario Ferré, bring to the forefront the elements of food, memories, sexuality, and identity. This paper proposes to explore the role of aliments in *Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel, *Maldito amor* by Rosario Ferré and *Daughter of Fortune* by Isabel Allende. In these works, food serves to celebrate important events, to identify cultural roles, to evoke memories of the past, to incite the sensual realm, as well as to structure the narrative.

The emphasis on food is not unexpected in these authors' works as two of the three have published other books with a culinary focus while the other has written essays on this topic. In *Aphrodite: A Memoir of the Senses*, Allende's text focuses on two concerns: the first, an intense study of aphrodisiacs comparing epicurian beliefs between world cultures, and linking them with stories; and the later, a set of recipes divided by the course in which to be served. *Intimas suculencias* by Esquivel is a collection of articles, conferences and prologues united by the central theme of food. *Aphrodite* and *Intimas suculencias*, both written partially or entirely in the United States, could be considered a cookbook memoir as Bardenstein defines it, "The cookbook-memoir written from within the experience of exile is a particularly rich site for exploring relationships between food and memory, constructions of collective memory and cultural identity, the experience of exile, and the ways that nostalgia mediates between the past and the present, shaping and reshaping both in the process" (358). This experience of exile makes the link between food and memory more acute. The cookbook memoir embodies the recollection and transmission of memories intertwined with food knowledge of the motherland (Bardenstein 370). Although Ferré has not written a cookbook per se, she has written essays on cooking. Interesting is "La cocina como escritura" in which Ferré equates the process of writing to the fundamental ingredients needed to complete a recipe. Just as cooking is a skill learned from our maternal figures she believes writing is as well, "Lo importante es aplicar esa lección fundamental que aprendimos de nuestras madres, las primeras, después de todo, en enseñarnos a bregar con fuego: el secreto de la

escritura, como el de la Buena cocina, no tiene absolutamente nada que ver con la que se combinan los ingredientes.” [It is important to apply to that fundamental lesson which we learned from our mothers, the first, after all, who taught us to work with fire: the secret of writing, like that of good cooking, has nothing to do with gender, but with the knowledge of how to combine the ingredients.]² This link between writing and cooking is also echoed by Goldman when she views the art of story telling as a recipe, “...yet reproducing a recipe, like re-telling a story, may be at once cultural practice and autobiographical assertion. If it provides an apt metaphor for the reproduction of culture from generation to generation, the act of passing down recipes from mother to daughter works as well to figure a familial space within which self articulation can take place” (172). These books and essay emphasize the importance that this topic holds for these writers and how this element infiltrates their artistic endeavor.

Celebratory Function

In Hispanic society, as in most, food is a central element of the culture. It is ever present in all aspects of the culture. It has a celebratory function in which a family can join together with sumptuous meals and mark important events in people’s lives. Barthes assigns food a function that is “commemorative [since] food permits a person ... to partake each day of the national past. In this case, the historical quality is obviously linked to food techniques.... They are...the repository of a whole experience, of the accumulated wisdom of our ancestors”

(170). The preparation of food in the Hispanic culture is propelled by love. In the three texts chosen, the detail and care with which the meals are prepared are an extension of the love that the character feels and is the noted emotion in these texts.

Food permeates *Like Water for Chocolate* since many of the chapters detail the painstaking work of preparing dishes for meals and celebrations. The most memorable among these is the banquet to celebrate Pedro and Rosaura's wedding. Forced by her mother to forsake the love of Pedro in fulfillment of her obligation as maternal caretaker, Tita is relegated to the kitchen to prepare the dishes for the wedding celebration. Tita's inner despair at losing her soul mate is transmitted to the batter of the wedding cake. Her tears affect the batter of the cake, altering its consistency and causing communal vomiting after ingestion. It is established that Tita's emotive states are transmitted to her creative culinary dishes, and that the epicurean concoctions will serve as her "voice" to combat her mother's repression. The fact that food can sum up and transmit information leads Barthes to assert, "Substances, techniques of preparation, habits, all become part of a system of differences in signification; and as soon as this happens, we have communication by way of food. For the fact that there is communication is proven, not by the more or less vague consciousness that its users may have it, but by the ease with which all the facts concerning food for a structure analogous to other systems of communication" (168). Many of the weddings of the De la Valle family, owners of the sugar plantation of the Central Justicia, are celebrated in *Maldito amor*. It is after a majestic meal that don

Augusto proposes to Adriana and their wedding is celebrated at a lavish banquet described in great detail. The meal preparation becomes an expression of Eliza's love for Tao in *Daughter of Fortune*. It is a time that they reserve for each other and Eliza, "made a ceremony of the one meal she and Tao shared each day; she set a beautiful table and blushed with satisfaction when Tao applauded her efforts" (375). Also important to mention is the fact that these meals mark a turning point in the character's lives. Tita's wedding cake, so adversely effecting to the guests, marks the frustration of her love as her soul mate marries another. Adriana's proposal dinner and wedding banquet guarantee her financial security to pursue her musical aspirations. Eliza's fulfillment of her domestic role symbolizes her acceptance of a feminine role, and foreshadows her subsequent romantic relationship with Tao.

Cultural Identity

As well as a cultural celebratory function these dishes serve to identify the character's ethnicity. Food provides testimony to the cultural rites and rituals as well as the experienced realities of the people. Food reveals an ethnic group's culture as Levi-Strauss states, "we can hope to discover for each special case how the cooking of a society is a language in which it unconsciously translates its structure or else resigns itself to revealing its contradictions" (595). If food is a "language," then women are writing the cultural history. Ramos Escandón believes that culinary discourse suggests a "female language" (45). The woman's sphere has always been concentrated in the home, and more

concretely in the kitchen. Women's sole access to the domestic space denoted as the kitchen allowed them to convert it into an area of creative culinary production. In the kitchen, the natural process of passing on food tradition from mother to daughter is done by sharing the recipes, the knowledge of how to prepare the dish, and family secrets. The kitchen fosters a sense of community as the women speak of their daily experiences, reminiscences and feelings. Although relegated to the kitchen, women take this space and convert it into a place of authority where they perpetuate cultural stability in a safe haven. Mehta believes the kitchen becomes a sanctuary of female self-affirmation by guaranteeing the sanctity of women-centered experiences and relationships (156). Food preparation for women is a chance to nurture and to be creative in two realms. The first is in the combinations of the ingredients to form a savory dish. The second is the passing of stories from one generation to the next. This oral tradition serves to chronicle the details of events, as well as form a bond solidifying a "female community". In those shared moments, mothers also teach cultural identity through the recounting of family history. Oral tradition allows women to pass down more than accounts of family members, as it shapes moral social conduct, stimulates self-definition, as well as analyzes the construct of one's life.³

All of the recipes, which Tita prepares in *Like Water for Chocolate*, have been passed down from generation to generation and denote her cultural heritage. The novel portrays the rituals and foods associated with different holidays such as Christmas cakes, wedding cakes, baptismal celebrations, the

Epiphany ring shaped roll, and funeral rites. The ingredients for these recipes are identifiably Hispanic as well as the traditional elaborations of chorizo, torrijas, chiles rellenos, champandongo and mole de guajolote. Tita learns how to cook all of these in Nacha's kitchen without realizing their meaning to her. It is only when Tita goes to stay at Dr. Brown's house that she solidifies her cultural identity. There, she is unable to eat the foreign food prepared for her because it is something that she can not identify with, "A veces Tita ni siquiera probaba la comida, era una comida insípida que le desagradaba." (109). ["Sometimes Tita wouldn't even try the food, it was a tasteless food which she disliked".] Separated from her own culture, Tita begins to resolve her identity with the help of Dr. Brown as he shares with her his own search. His ability to cook and use herbal remedies reveals his mestizo background, since his kikapú grandmother taught him about the medicinal qualities of the plants, fomenting in him a desire to help others and become a doctor.⁴

The cultural duality of Puerto Rico first becomes patent as Adriana prepares a Hispanic dish in *Maldito amor*. When her father speaks to her in English, Adriana, "se sintió mortificada, al escuchar que le hablaba en inglés. Era una de aquellas costumbres que sus padres habían adoptado al llegar a la isla, a las que ella jamás había logrado acostumbrarse" (174). ["she felt mortified hearing that he spoke to her in English. It was one of those customs that her parents had adopted when they arrived on the island, one to which she had never been able to become accustomed."] Adriana's reaction leads her to a series of historical digressions on the arrival of the Americans to Puerto Rico and

the tensions which followed as both cultures tried to coexist. Adriana's rejection of the Anglo culture is manifested as she cooks Hispanic dishes, prefers to speak in Spanish, and chooses to sing Noche de Ronda. Food becomes for Adriana a symbol of negotiating the duality of the Puerto Rican identity. Through it, she is demonstrating her unwillingness to submit to domination and the subsequent acculturation which follows. This places her in cultural opposition to her parents who adhere to the Anglo traditions. The father and the daughter each reflect one view of the dichotomy tradition/modernity, Spanish/American. Oddly though, it is the child who clings to the traditional linguistic and cultural aspects while the parent is enticed by the foreign and the financial success the association can bring. The tension in the scene however is dissipated as Adriana returns to her meal preparation, "comenzó a sofreír la cebolla y el aroma de las pieles doraditas del ángel de la cocina criolla los envolvió en su nube de benevolencia. Comenzó a cantar nuevamente, esta vez en voz baja y con una brizna de ironía incrustada al fondo de la voz.<<¡La tierra de Boriquen, donde he nacido yo...!>>"(180). ["she began to fry the onion and the smell of the golden skins of the creole cooking surrounded them in its cloud of benevolence. She began to sing again, this time in a low voice and with a thread of irony encrusted in her voice, "The land of the Boricua where I was born".] The tension between the two cultures rebuilds and culminates at the wedding reception. The reaction to the dishes and beverages served as well as the desire to dance marks the cultural differences. When Mr. Campbell, the North American banker, intercepts the newly married couple in order to claim the first dance with Adriana, he usurps

don Augusto's power (210). This act is reminiscent of the feudal tradition of *prima nocte*, where the lord had the right to claim the bride before her groom. This dance is followed by Adrianna's disrobing and symbolizes her vision of Puerto Rico being stripped of power by the United States. By bringing to the forefront Puerto Rico's national pluralism, the tension of the dynamic national discourse are revealed. Of this struggle for power and authority, Castillo believes, "Evidently, too, Ferré's concern is as much with empowerment (of men as well as women) as with denunciation. It is in this respect that the author of these stories asks women to look at themselves...to see their own complicity in and responsibility for their subjugation" (168). There is also another chapter when the cultural duality of Puerto Rico is portrayed by food. In the chapter entitled, "The Gift," Carlota gives a mango to Mercedes the only girl who befriends her in the staunchly conservative convent school. The mango is originally given to Carlota as a prize for being named the first creole queen of the city's carnival. The mango which is meant to symbolize Columbus' kidney, has another meaning associated with it. In reality it stands for the *criollo* population who is rejected by the wealthy white families and has no place in the convent. When Madre Artigas, the mother superior, finds the mango in Mercedes' desk she makes her keep it until it rots and the smell invades everyone's senses. The smell, which haunts Mercedes, forces her to finally act and defend her friend. By utilizing the mango, the dichotomy of *criollo*/white, poor/rich, *mestiza*/pure-blooded is made patent.

In *Daughter of Fortune*, the two cultures co-existing in Chile are present in the text through food. Eliza learns to master both of these epicurean domains while growing up in the Sommer's house, "Soon Mama Fresia's complicated Chilean dishes and Miss Rose's delicate pastries lost all their mysteries for her. She has a rare culinary gift..." (12). This culinary duality of Eliza's upbringing, mirrors her own *mestizaje*. The house where she lives is divided into markedly distinct realms: Mama Fresia's kitchen and Miss Rose's drawing room soirees. Eliza, a member of the two worlds, is able to easily participate in both. Claudia André notes that Eliza's upbringing in dual cultures extends beyond the kitchen,

"Western and non-Western traditions are combined in the heroine's process of growth as Eliza learns from her aunt, Miss Rose, not only the hardships of becoming a lady, but also 'the arts of dissembling, manipulation, and cunning,' which, as the English spinster believes, 'are more useful than candor' (51). Along with studying piano and French, the girl picks up the Mapuche language and lore from Mama Fresia, an Indian servant who also trains her in the art of reading signs of the animals and the sea, recognizing the habits of the spirits as well as interpreting messages in dreams" (77).

It is not until many years have passed and Eliza is living in California that she comes to terms with her dual cultural upbringing.

Memories

Food, besides eliciting collective identifications, evokes strong memories. The spices that flavor the food and provide the aroma cause the memories to flow. In each of these works, there is a clear link established between food and memories. The dishes with their aromas cause the characters to recall fond memories of their past.

The ability of food to resuscitate memories seems to be linked to the senses it stimulates. Gilroy asserts, "The senses have a more direct link with the soul's depth than the rational faculties. Memories are preserved in our bodily senses long after the intelligence has lost sight of them. Ironically, it is our most delicate and seemingly fragile senses, those of taste and smell, which are the most persevering and zealous keepers of our past experiences" (101). These senses, of course, are the ones most directly involved with the enjoyment of food.

In *Like Water for Chocolate*, Tita often evokes the memory of Nacha and of learned knowledge in the kitchen. The tradition of cooking and sharing food establishes a sense of belonging for humans. The bonds forged between women is reflective of what Goldman finds, "The culinary metaphor is distinctively feminine...the reproductive model of cultural development and identify is specifically maternal. Such a recuperation of a female legacy enables self-assertion at the same time it celebrates the lives of women family members as role models" (191). These memories help Tita survive the difficult times in her life. When Tita loses her sanity due to the death of her nephew, it is these memories, brought on by the aroma of food, which save her from the abyss. She slowly starts to reincorporate into the world of the living when she smells, "una fumarola desperdigaba por el ambiente un olor tan agradable y a la vez tan familiar que la hizo abrir la ventana para poder inhalarlo profundamente. Con sus ojos cerrados se vio sentada junto a Nacha en el piso de la cocina mientras hacían tortillas de maíz: vio la olla donde se cocinaba un puchero de lo más aromático..." (110). [a pot scattered in the air such a pleasant smell and at the same time familiar smell that it made her open the window in order to deeply inhale it. With her eyes closed she saw herself sitting

next to Nacha on the kitchen floor while they made corn tortillas: she saw the kettle where a most aromatic stew cooked...”] The tea offered to her begins to heal the internal wounds, but it is not until Tita drinks the broth prepared by Chenchu that her insanity is cured (123). The broth provides not only alimentary sustenance, but the aroma provokes memories of Tita’s childhood allowing her to reconstruct her life.

The smell of the creole dishes reinforces both Adriana’s Puerto Rican as well as her personal identity in *Maldito Amor*. The intoxicating aromas of the frying green peppers and garlic transport Adriana back to the memories of her childhood in her first home in Bajura Honda and the subsequent houses on air force bases where she heard, “-You must learn to speak English without an accent!- había sido la consigna de su niñez, desde su salida del arrabal” (179). [“...had been the watchword of her childhood since she left the slums.”] These memories only serve to further exacerbate her rejection of the Anglo culture. This need to assimilate into the new culture, as not to draw attention, is the only way she can succeed in her precarious financial situation.

In *Daughter of Fortune*, Eliza uses the recipes she remembers from Mama Fresia to cook empanadas or traditional breakfasts to earn money in America. She is comforted by the memories it brings back of the Chilean kitchen. The flavors and the aromas recreate for Eliza and the expatriates who come to her breakfasts an “imagined” Chile which comforts them by evoking, at least to their senses, their absent world. This prepared food comes to embody the things for which they are homesick. The emigrants use the food from their past to articulate their longing for a land from which they are absent (Bardenstein 353). Yet these memories of their native homeland are a place which is “idealized” and to which they will never be able to return.

Sexuality

By extension, these memories and culinary experiences become linked to the protagonist's sexuality. The most obvious example of this link, in which sexuality and food become intertwined is in *Like Water for Chocolate*. When Tita prepares Cornish hens in rose petal sauce, the meal affects all of the family members. For Pedro and Tita the food metamorphosizes into the sensuality they feel,

“...en un extaño fenómeno de alquimia su ser se había disuelto en la salsa de las rosas, en el cuerpo de las codornices, en el vino y en cada uno de los olores de la comida. De esta manera penetraba en el cuerpo de Pedro, voluptuosa, aromática, calurosa, completamente sensual.

Parecía que habían descubierto un código Nuevo de comunicación en el que Tita era la emisora, Pedro del receptor y Gertrudis la afortunada en quien se sintetizaba esta singular relación sexual, a través de la comida” (51).

[“in a strange alchemic phenomenon her being had dissolved into the rose sauce, into the body of the Cornish hens, into the wine and in each of the smells of the food. In that manner she penetrated Pedro's body voluptuously, aromatically, heartily, completely sensual.

They seemed to have discovered a new way of communicating in which Tita was the transmitter, Pedro the receiver and lucky Gertrudis was the one who synthesized this unique sexual relationship, through the food.]

By preparing the dish, Tita initiates sexual foreplay with Pedro and will be the one to “penetrate” him, culminating with the ingested meal and sexual ecstasy. Food becomes the catalyst for this sexual act controlled by Tita. Unfortunately, Gertrudis is not immune to their communication and becomes sexually aroused. She becomes so inflamed with passion that her body sets the shower on fire, and her smell attracts the revolutionary who tries to sate her sexual appetite which is only placated after time spent in a brothel.

In *Maldito amore*, as Adriana begins to assemble the ingredients needed to prepare the evening meal, her thoughts take flight to her intimate moments with her boyfriend. The asphyxiating sensation she feels caused by the constraints of societal duties lifts as the food she is about to prepare conveys her to a previous sexual encounter with her boyfriend. Adriana, "...se sintió de pronto inundada, absolutamente arrasada por el recuerdo de Gabriel, y por un momento sintió vertigo. La relación con Gabriel había sido siempre así, Cuando estaba a su lado, la intensidad del deseo le derretía literalmente las entrañas" (174). ["...she suddenly felt overwhelmed, carried away by the memory of Gabriel, and for a moment she had vertigo. The relationship with Gabriel had always been like that. When she was at his side, the intensity of desire literally melted her to her core."] Even though Adrianna outwardly fulfills a traditional duty by preparing the dinner, her mind transports her to the forbidden interlude. The juxtaposition of these two worlds, the domestic familial and the forbidden sensual, constitutes a subversive act by the protagonist as she defies patriarchal authority by engaging in a secret passion. The daughter's preparation of a creole dish can be seen as a culinary transgression that mirrors her sexual transgression. Adriana will outwardly adhere to the role she is assigned but internally rejects this role. The kitchen is the traditional private domain for women and therefore it is in this space where Adriana feels safe enough to give free reign to her dreams and fantasy.

Eliza, in *Daughter of Fortune*, experiences her sexual awakening through food. Smitten by Joaquin at first sight, she uses the offering of some honey-

sweetened orange juice in order to, “move as close to him as she could, calculating the direction of breeze so it would carry the scent of this man who, she was sure, was hers. With her eyes half closed, she inhaled the aromas of damp clothing, common soap, and fresh sweat. A river of flowing lava swept through her, melting her bones; and in an instant of panic she believed that she was actually dying” (81). The spilling of the drink onto Eliza’s dress breaks this all-consuming encounter, and serves to metaphorically “cool off” Eliza. The offering of the drink to Joaquin can be symbolically viewed as Eliza’s future yielding. Later when Eliza finds herself in California trying to regain a concept of self, she evokes memories of, “fragile afternoons of her childhood, for five o’clock tea in cups Miss Rose had inherited from her mother...Mama Fresia...grumbling in the kitchen, fat and warm, smelling of sweet basil, always with a wooden spoon in her hand and a pot boiling on the stove” (388). The comfort of these childhood memories cause Eliza to further understand who she is by wishing, “to see herself naked” (388). During this extensive exploration of her body, she realizes that the man who fuels her sexual fantasies is Tao Chi’en, her faithful friend and companion.⁵

Narrative Structure

In these works, the element of food influences the narrative structure of the texts. The culinary content guides the progression of the narrative as is seen in *Intimas succulencias*, *Aphrodite* and even *Like Water for Chocolate*. In the cookbook memoirs, as is to be expected, the structure relies upon the recipes.⁶

In *Like Water for Chocolate*, the recipes serve to frame the structure of the text.⁷ Ibsen states that in this novel, “Food functions as a narrative device in the novel: like a cinematic montage, bridging both temporal and spatial displacements, it transports both the characters and the reader into a sensual dimension of reality” (138). The narration is divided in twelve chapters with each chapter corresponding to a month of the year, and each chapter is subtitled with a recipe. The contents of each chapter are shaped by an initial listing of the ingredients needed to assemble the anticipated dish proceeded with brief instructions leading to a narrative digression. The dishes prepared with the recipes are incorporated into the chapters unifying the “cookbook” with the narration. Each of the chapters is concluded with the formula “Continuará. Siguiete receta,” which serves to indicate the following recipe provided. All of the recipes pertain to food with the exception of the month of June, located in the middle of the text when a recipe to prepare matches is inserted. This recipe takes on particular importance in the conclusion of the novel.

The importance food will have on the structure of *Maldito amor* is perceived in the initial chapter where all the food products produced in Puerto Rico are inventoried for two pages. The enumeration crystallizes all of the elements studied in this paper. The fruits are presented with their native names and are later translated to demonstrate the struggle and the fragile understanding between cultures. Others are presented as alluring and captivating as the “*buñuelos de viento*,” which links them with sensuality. While yet others are have their celebratory function explained or are mentioned as evoking the history and

the memories of the people. Although this novel appears to be a story of three generations of the de la Valle family, it is truly centered on the land which provides the family's fortune and happiness. Thus the importance of the sugar, or "diamond dust," production to Puerto Rican culture is underscored.⁸ In *Daughter of Fortune* food does not guide the structure of the novel as strongly as it does in the other two works, though it does play an important role. Food reappears in the text at crucial moments to create an underlying thread of unity to the work.

Conclusion

Allende, Esquivel, and Ferré have forged an innovative conceptualization of food in their texts. For these contemporary women writers, food is no longer relegated to a simple element of setting in the text. It is incorporated into their writing as: a unifying element, a structural component and a symbolic vehicle. Food in their works brings to a forefront topics such as cultural identity, memories, and sexuality. Thus, food has emerged as a vital focal element in women's writing. Women's negotiation of identity through food discourse has involved them in a journey of self affirmation characterized by successful fruition (Mehta 180).

¹ Notable among these is *Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Criticism*. In it, Castillo proposes a new form of criticism which functions as a recipe including dialogue, community and resourcefulness.

² All translations are mine, and I beg your understanding for any errors.

³ Unfortunately in the process of creating the "modern liberal woman," traditional roles such as being a mother and a housekeeper have been devalued due to the

lack of economic remuneration. Thus, many women reject this role believing it sexist that women are stuck in the kitchen performing these roles. Yet it is in the kitchen where the majority of the female bonding and identity formation occur. Esquivel echoes these sentiments as she says in *Intima succulencias*, “...el retorno a la cocina no me fue tan fácil, Yo quería que mi hija conociera su pasado, comiendo lo mismo que yo había comido en mi niñez...Y encontré mientras preparaba la comida era realmente placentero contarle a mi hija las mismas historias que yo había escuchado frente al fuego. Y que era más seguro curarla con té de mi mamá que con medicinas Poco a poco mi integración a la cocina y a mi pasado se fue consolidando...No importa el tiempo que uno se tarde, pues en la cocina no hay tiempo perdido, más bien se recupera el tiempo perdido” (20). [“...my return to the kitchen was not so easy. I wanted my daughter to know her past, eating the same things I had as child...And I found that it was really enjoyable while I cooked to tell my daughter the same stories that I had heard in front of the fire. And that is was better to cure her with my mother’s teas than with medicine. Little by little my integration to the kitchen and my past consolidated... It doesn’t matter how much time it takes, because in the kitchen there is no lost time, better yet one can recuperate lost time.”]

⁴ Even in *Intimas succulencias*, when the narrator becomes home sick and feels culturally alienated the cooking of ethnic dishes helps her overcome these feelings.

⁵ In *Aphrodite* the link between food and sexuality is never lost as the subtitle of each section underlie the desired effects, “Sauces, the Saucy Way to Foreplay,” “Hors d’Oeuvres: First Tickles and Nibbles,” “Appetizers: Amorous Games, Leaf by Leaf, Kiss by Kiss,” “Main Courses: Kama Sutra...Well, More or Less!” etc... These sections then highlight the interaction between food and the sexual act as the progression between courses stimulates the sexual repartee.

⁶ In *Intimas succulencias*, the articles written for *Vogue* by Esquivel, follow a similar formulation. The ingredients proceed the instructions for preparation of the dish which eventually leads to the digression of a story. In *Aphrodite: A Memoir of the Senses*, the text is divided into two parts. The first is centered on the description of aphrodisiac qualities of different ingredients with a dash of digressions and a splash of anecdotes. The second half of the book contains a series of recipes divided by subject.

⁷ Ramos Escandón notes that the structure of *Like Water for Chocolate* is similar to the “calendarios para señoritas,” a type of XIX century magazine, which included recipes, home remedies and monthly installments of sentimental novels (45)

⁸ It is interesting to note that when this novel was translated into English Ferré chose a new title, *Sweet Diamond Dust*, emphasizing the importance sugar held in the novel.

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