Like Water for Chocolate

In literature, countless authors have artfully incorporated magical realism into their works. Laura Esquivel expertly utilizes magical realism in her novel, “Like Water for Chocolate,” to further express theme. Magical realism combines the ordinary and supernatural. It is preferable for this story and strengthens “Like Water for Chocolate.” However, magical realism also weakens the story.

Magical realism is a style or genre of writing often associated with Latin America in which fantastic or mythical images or scenes are depicted in an otherwise realistic fiction. Magical elements blend with the real world to create magical realism. The images and events are sharply detailed in a realistic manner and setting. For example, Tita, the protagonist, would “cry and cry” when she was in the womb of the narrator’s great-grandmother, and “her sobs were so loud that even Nacha, the cook, who was half-deaf, could hear them easily.” It is absolutely inconceivable; there is no way an infant would be able to cry inside their mother’s “belly.” However, despite the exaggeration and impossibility, this is overlooked and seen as normal and acceptable. According to the narrator, “Once her wailing got so violent that it brought on an early labor.” Even significant events such as the birth of the main character can be enveloped in an element of magical realism. With magical realism, anything can happen and will not be considered out of the ordinary.

Esquivel wisely chose to use magical realism in “Like Water for Chocolate.” It strengthens the story and makes things more interesting and creative. There are endless possibilities where an author can embellish a literary work with magical realism. During Pedro and Rosaura’s wedding, the guests experienced “an acute attack of pain and frustration—that seized the guests and scattered them across the patio and the grounds in the bathroom, all of them wailing over lost love. Everyone there, every last person, fell under this spell, and not very many of them made it to the bathroom in time—those who didn’t joined the collective vomiting that was going on all over the patio.” This strange reaction to the cake was caused by Tita’s tears entering the cake batter. The fact that her tears acted as a poison to the guests illustrates the extent of her bitterness and grief regarding the tragic situation with Pedro, Rosaura, and Mama Elena. Magical realism provides a magical and fantastic element to invite vivid visual imagery.

Because magical realism is an unreal image or event in a realistic setting and manner, it can be difficult to follow. Events can surprise, shock, and or stun the reader. For example, when the shower catches on fire with Gertrudis in it and there are “flames shooting out of the bathroom,” people have to read twice to understand what exactly happened. Although this sort of confusion can weaken the story, the benefits of magical realism outweigh the costs. After Tita prepares her quail in rose petal sauce, Gertrudis has an odd reaction. She “began to feel an intense heat pulsing through her limbs…she began to sweat, imagining herself on horseback with her arms clasped around one of Pancho Villa’s men…her sweat was pink, and it smelled like roses, a lovely strong smell…” Food usually cannot produce this phenomenal effect on people. Magical realism allows this, however, and lets the reader to delve deeper into the emotions and feelings of characters. Gertrudis feels an uncanny and sudden passion and is aroused by the dish that Tita has made. When Gertrudis remarkably runs away on a horse with a soldier, readers see her strength, courage, and independence that it took to finally run away from Mama Elena and her oppression.

Magical realism may not be for all, but it is a strikingly powerful style of writing. Through magical realism, “Like Water for Chocolate” is filled with potent sensory imagery, important parts of a story are emphasized, readers experience a sense of heightened natural elements, and authors encourage readers to explore the characters more completely. Magical realism creates beautiful scenes and deeper understanding of “Like Water for Chocolate.”