

An exploration of the ways in which illicit love deepens the discontent of Tita in Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* and Emma in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.

In the novels *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert and *Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel, the female protagonists, Emma Bovary and Tita De La Garza, are both deeply discontented. One is trapped by long-standing family tradition, the other by an unhappy marriage to a man whom she holds in contempt. Both Emma and Tita defy convention by embarking on affairs and, while these relationships are fundamentally different, both are made more discontent as a result.

Comment [KH1]: Clear concise intro – relatively sophisticated vocabulary with ‘protagonist’, ‘contempt’ and ‘embarking’ and a clear focus on the question

Though Emma and Tita live in different eras and have very different backgrounds, both are unhappy in their given roles. As the youngest daughter in her family, Tita is unable to marry or have any children of her own, condemned by deeply entrenched tradition to care for her cruel and domineering mother. Emma is also trapped by convention, confined to the role of housewife and bound to her husband, Charles Bovary. Before they discover illicit love, it is evident that both protagonists are already dissatisfied. Upon marrying Charles and finding that he will never live up to her dreams of a “handsome, witty, distinguished, attractive” husband, Emma becomes disillusioned “Why, dear God did I marry him?” she asks herself. She is unfulfilled and dissatisfied in her new life, and yearns for a chance to live out her romantic fantasies. Tita, too, is unhappy in her given role, even before meeting her lover. At the beginning of the novel we learn that Tita refuses to address her mother with the expected deference: “the only one who resisted was Tita, which had earned her plenty of slaps.” This suggests that Tita was already rebelling against her fate. The references to her escapades as a child, particularly the occasion on which she defied Mama Elena in order to skip school and spend time with boys from the village, also hint at unconventional disobedience. This, coupled with her belief that “she was not meant for the loser’s role,” reveals her desire for a more successful and fulfilling life. However, though both protagonists are already dissatisfied in their given roles, it is through forbidden love that they truly become discontent.

Comment [KH2]: Comparative opening sentence that outlines a clear similarity between the two texts

Comment [KH3]: The connection is further clarified here

Comment [KH4]: Sophisticated but not overly complex language – the candidate has managed to seem eloquent without trying too hard.

Comment [KH5]: Smooth quotations

Comment [KH6]: Clear comparisons between the two texts and a roughly equal amount of time spent on each

Comment [KH7]: Words like ‘reveals’ and ‘suggests’ indicate the moments at which the candidate begins analysing the effect of the text on the reader

Comment [KH8]: Another clear comparison used to finish the paragraph and introduce the link into the next section.

Comment [KH9]: Having explored a similarity in paragraph one the candidate now moves into exploring a difference

The illicit relationships in which Tita and Emma become involved are very different in nature. From the author’s portrayal of the union between Tita and Pedro Muzquiz, the reader knows that they are truly in love. Esquivel depicts their relationship with many powerful, sensual descriptions involving warmth and heat, which reveal the potency of their love and desire for one another. This contrasts sharply with the evocative images of cold and emptiness used to depict Tita’s intense grief when Pedro marries her sister, Rosaura. These images, coupled with the metaphor of the “enormous bedspread” which symbolises Tita’s heartache and unhappiness, show the pain which she feels at being apart from Pedro, and thus the strength of their love for one another. As Tita’s sister Gertrudis observes, “This love is one of the truest loves I’ve ever seen.” In stark contrast are Emma’s affairs with her lovers, Rodolphe Boulanger and Leon Dupuis. For all involved, the motivations behind these relationships is purely selfish. Emma yearns to find the type of epic love portrayed in the romantic novels on which her unrealistic expectations of life are based. Upon beginning her affair with Rodolphe,

Comment [KH10]: Lots of detailed analysis concisely squeezed into a short space – note the literary features and the key words which indicate that the student is analysing here

Comment [KH11]: Clear comparisons smoothly included throughout

“She summoned the heroines of the books she had read ... She merged into her own imaginings, playing a real part, realising the long dream of her youth, seeing herself as one of those great lovers she had so envied”

Comment [KH12]: Although it is usually better to smoothly include quotations this is how you set out extremely long quotations from the text

Rodolphe and Leon, on the other hand, merely see her as an object to be coveted and eventually won “Oh! I shall have her!” Rodolphe decides upon first meeting Emma, and Leon echoes these sentiments upon their chance encounter in Paris: “He must, he thought, set his mind this time on having her.” Despite these fundamental differences between Tita and Emma’s relationships, the effects upon each are similar.

Comment [KH13]: The candidate now moves on to make a more subtle point – the affairs seem dissimilar at first sight but, in some ways, there are similarities between them

Thanks to their forays into illicit love, both protagonists find themselves all the more dissatisfied and unhappy in their daily lives. Though already discontent in her role as Mama Elena's carer, it is not until Tita discovers that Pedro has consented to marry Rosaura that she feels the full force of the tradition.

Comment [KH14]: Again sophisticated and yet unpretentious language used throughout

"The realisation of her fate struck her as forcibly as her tears struck the table. From then on they knew, she and the table, that they could never have even the slightest say in the unknown forces that fated Tita to bow before her mother's absurd decision."

Comment [KH15]: Again while it is generally better to avoid quotations of this length, this one has still been correctly used

This shows that she does not realise exactly what her pre-ordained fate entails until she is deprived of a relationship with Pedro. Emma's discontent with her everyday life is also heightened when she first begins her affairs with Leon and Rodolphe. In particular, her contempt and loathing for Charles is intensified. Shortly after first meeting Leon she is struck by the differences between him and her husband, and sinks into deeper ennui "She bemoaned the velvet she didn't have, the happiness that might have been, her dreams that were too high, her house that was too cramped." In cleverly juxtaposing Emma's wish for happiness and her dreams of greater material wealth, Flaubert reveals the superficiality of Emma's desires, and shows that her yearning for Leon intensifies her dissatisfaction with both Charles and her material surroundings. Similarly, at the beginning of her affair with Rodolphe, Emma compares her lover to her husband and finds Charles wanting: "The more she gave herself to one, the more she loathed the other; never did Charles seem to her so unpleasant as when they sat together after her meetings with Rodolphe." In this way both Emma and Tita find themselves even more dissatisfied with their everyday lives, as illicit love makes them realise exactly how confined they are by their undesirable roles.

Comment [KH16]: The clear alternating structure continues throughout the essay ensuring that a roughly equal amount of time is spent on each text

Comment [KH17]: Lovely detailed exploration of the effect that this quotation has on the reader

Comment [KH18]: Comparisons are made not just between texts but also within them

However, it is when they are separated from their lovers that Emma and Tita become truly miserable. Tita and Pedro are forced apart by Pedro's marriage to Rosaura, which leaves Tita "broken in both heart and mind." She is "tormented by the thought that Pedro had lied to her on his wedding day," doubting his claim that he agreed to marry Rosaura merely in order to stay close to her. Trapped in the same house as Pedro and Rosaura, she is forced to watch as they have a son together and develop the façade of a functional relationship under the watchful eye of Mama Elena. When Pedro and Rosaura move with their son to San Antonio, Tita "lost all interest in life." Emma, too, suffers upon being separated from her lovers. After Rodolphe tires of her clingy neediness and discards her, she becomes listless and ill. Despite Charles's tender care, "everything she had once loved she now disliked." This is a sure sign of her increasing discontent: she no longer finds comfort in the material possessions that she had previously found so desirable. She reacts similarly in the period following the end of her relationship with Leon, during which she "experienced an incessant and universal lassitude." Unlike Tita she has no one to console her and, deep in debt, she is eventually driven to suicide. In contrast to Tita, her misery is not a result of true heart-break. Instead, Emma mourns the loss of the only form of escape from her mundane life with Charles. She felt that she could live out her romantic fantasies with Rodolphe and Leon, and Rodolphe even offered her a more literal escape, pledging to run away with her to Paris. Thus both protagonists feel more discontent as a result of being separated from their lovers. Tita because she is trapped in the role of powerless spectator to the relationship between her lover and his wife, and Emma because she must return to her banal life with Charles.

Comment [KH19]: Clear progression of ideas. Note there are four key comparisons made each of which occurs in one of four large paragraphs. The length of the paragraphs indicates that each idea is explored in depth and the structure follows a clear and logical train of thought:
1) Tita and Emma are unhappy
2) Both have affairs
3) These make them more miserable
4) But the end of these affairs is even worse

Comment [KH20]: Smooth, precise use of quotations throughout

Comment [KH21]: Again comparisons within Madame Bovary are made to reinforce the candidate's interpretation of Emma

In Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary and Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate, the female protagonists are trapped by convention and frustrated in their given roles. Tita is condemned by family tradition to care for her malicious and overbearing mother, while Emma feels stifled in her marriage to a man who will never live up to her romantic dreams and ideals. Both are involved in forbidden relationships and, while the reasons behind and the outcomes of these relationships are very different, both Emma and Tita become more discontent as a result.

Comment [KH22]: Again the candidate demonstrates their grasp of the subtlety of the text by pointing out that although there are superficial similarities in that both characters feel depressed after their affairs end, they are depressed for different reasons and in different ways

Comment [KH23]: Clear summary of the main points in the candidate's essay. Again, lovely vocabulary 'malicious', 'convention', etc

Marks Awarded:

Selection of Aspect	5	The comparison is a sound one – both texts centre around women who have affairs and so the choice of this as a topic makes good sense and provides the candidate with a lot of material for their essay. The essay itself remains firmly focused on the set question throughout.
Knowledge and Understanding	4	Good understanding of the text and some good interpretation at points, although there is some story-telling at times. It is a shame that the candidate did not make at least one or two explicit references to cultural setting
Presentation	4	Clear structure with the four main points worked through in order. Clear alternation between texts that enables comparisons to be easily made and a roughly equal amount of time spent on each text. Some key quotations are a little too long to be considered concise
Language	5	Great language – sophisticated and eloquent without being pretentious. Good sense of student voice
	18	Level 7