

Part 1a) The Mexican film, 'Like Water for Chocolate' follows the Latin American cinematographic tradition of magical realism, while interweaving the complex psychological constructs of gender and sexuality. From the movie, the tale unfolds of Tita, a young, nubile woman who is condemned to a lonely and passionless life by her family's cruel tradition that the youngest daughter must care for her mother until she dies. Denied her one true love and soulmate, Pedro (whom her mother arranges to marry Tita's older sister), and forced into servitude, she responds by pouring her emotions into the recipes she is forced to cook for the family, resulting in witches' brews that have a profound effect on all who partake. However, the movie extends beyond the realm of Tita alone, to the world of the strong-willed women and their weaker men, who surround, influence, inspire, impassion, and oppress. The main theme of the movie embraces the solidarity of three sisters and their mother, even amidst the various forms of emotional plight and suffering they endure. Each woman reacts to the simultaneous communion and betrayal differently, reflective of her role within the family at large and each of its respective members. Aside from the abundance of rich symbolisms throughout the film (e.g. roses and fire: passion, love, and the blossom and fragrance of youth; tears and water: renewal, baptism, purity of soul), there remain the very literal elements of the strength of the human spirit and the strong influence of family dynamics.

Mama Elena is depicted as an exceedingly intimidating matriarch and impersonal mother, who is especially cruel towards her youngest daughter, Tita. As the drama progresses, it is understood that she was deeply disappointed by a deep, forbidden and adulterous love for a 'mulatto' soldier, who impregnated her with her second daughter, Gertrudis. It becomes apparent that her frustration in having lost this taboo love is projected unto her unwelcome third child, by the husband she neither wants nor needs. Due to her environmental circumstances, Tita should in essence remain a prime candidate for the personality deficit of 'rejection sensitivity' (Downey and Feldman, 1996). Since her mother met her childhood needs with severe rejection, in all likelihood, she could have developed internal, deeply ingrained working models (that incorporated doubts about whether others would accept and support her). Such internalized psychological models are believed to remain the foundations of mistrustful and ambivalent orientations to adult relationships. However, it is clear that Tita remains normal and trusting in her decisions and assessments of relationships as

she journeys forth into her adulthood. Is this reflective of her cathartic kitchen antics, a place of solace, sanctuary, power and creativity? Possibly, however even more importantly, her supportive relationships (e.g., with her sisters, her primary caretaker and mentor Nacha, etc.) fundamentally altered her expectations and anxieties about rejection, thereby helping her to attribute less malevolent explanations for others' behaviors. Had Tita truly been 'rejection sensitive', she probably would have married Doctor John Brown or another man than Pedro, because unconsciously she would have viewed any intimate relationship as an opportunity for acceptance.

It is interesting, that in several sequences within this film of delicious meals juxtaposed against not so palatable familial bonds, the employment of nudity as a symbol of metamorphosis and freedom is evident. After Tita's 'nectar of the gods' concoction of quail and the rose petals Pedro presented, her sister Gertrudis begins to masturbate and achieve orgasm at the dinner table. Shortly thereafter, she showers and runs naked through the fields until a revolutionary is compelled beyond his will to scoop her up and carry her away. When Tita is found by Chancha in the attic of hay within her mother's house, she is naked and cradling back and forth like a baby, having lost touch with reality after her nephew's death and her confrontation with Mama Elena. These two instances of being 'inappropriately' naked share similarities in psychological constructs, yet remain dissimilar, as well. According to the theory surrounding the Separation-Individuation process, although the steps of differentiation, practicing, rapprochement, and libidinal object constancy are first witnessed in children from birth to the age of three, this intrapsychic process recurs throughout the life cycle (Mahler, 1972). In having shed her clothes within the attic and cradling back and forth during her breakdown, in a sense, Tita reclaimed her inner child. First by not responding, she entered a state of autism. Eventually, with the help of Dr. Brown, her inwardly directed attention focused more outwardly. In a sense, John Brown became Tita's new, surrogate mother. Her 'practicing' period commenced, when she waved and writhed her hands in wonderment before her, as if she had only discovered them for the first time. By the time her 'rapprochement' period ensued, it was clear that she was most comfortable when the mothering Dr. Brown, with whom she felt bonded, was nearby. While simultaneously distancing from and introjecting with her 'lost symbiotic mother', it was clear that she longed for her 'ideal state of self'. After having endured her breakdown (or severe adulthood

experience of Mahler's 'Separation-Individuation' process), she emerged a truly mature and confident woman, who no longer was afraid of standing up to her domineering mother.

The sequence of Gertrudis' nakedness could be explained from a more classically psychoanalytic perspective. Freud, for instance, would have opined that at some point in her childhood, Gertrudis developed an Electra complex (Freud, 1959). However, her fixation during this phallic stage was so severe, as to have produced a 'phallic character', reflective of one who is reckless, resolute, self-assured, narcissistic, vain, and proud (Stevenson, 1998). This 'masculinity complex of women' allowed development toward femininity. She was not able to relinquish either her desire to have a penis, or to bear the baby of her father (who was simply inaccessible, during her childhood). By the time her 'soldier' (i.e., her symbolic 'father', who was also a soldier) rescued her from in the fields, Freud would have said that her 'psychosis' had reached full bloom (i.e., after her having consumed rose buds). Having unconsciously refused the fad of castration (her desires having remained strongly cathected), she eventually gave in to her urges, by behaving as though she were a man. By the time several years had progressed, Gertrudis indeed returned in a more masculine mode, very in control of herself (AND her husband), donning men's revolutionary attire, casting out orders, and having acquired the status of 'General'.

Several of Chodorow's theories are relevant to the movie, as well. Chodorow asserted that the experience of mothering for a woman involves a double identification: with her own mother, and that of herself, when she was a child (Chodorow, 1989). Perhaps Mama Elena's ineptness as a parent remains the primary reason Rosaura could not properly care for her children shortly after they were born (e.g., she was unable to lactate, just as her mother had been unable to). From his findings, Fleiss noticed that disturbed mothers inflict their pathologies predominantly on daughters, not allowing them to perceive themselves as separate entities, but rather as extensions of themselves (Chodorow, 1989). This theory would explain why Mama Elena, who was the victim of unrequited love, saw herself in Tita and, therefore, chose for Tita's love to also remain unattached and unfulfilled (despite the 'family tradition' excuse). However, Tita still retained a sense of connection and embeddedness in her social life, which could partly explain her eventual sense of security amidst her mother's madness.

Part 2c) Timely issues of sexuality and gender, such as arousal, emotions, sexual abuse, sexual dysfunctions, and treatments geared towards the latter remain topics that Sigmund Freud would have approached from both psychoanalytic and biological perspectives. Even though Freud believed sexuality to remain empirically tied to the core of the human psyche, it must not be forgotten that his medical training and interaction with physical and evolutionary scientists influenced his convictions to a large degree, as well.

It remains a factual statement, that both sexual arousal and intercourse is experienced differently between males and females. For the male gender, arousal seems to occur more often than with the female gender, especially earlier in the life span. In addition, males not only experience orgasm more frequently than females, but also do not seem to become as emotionally attached with their sexual partners as do women. As concerns the latter, Freud did not have the access to information as do we, concerning androgen levels related to the desire to copulate, and the direct hormonal effects that testosterone has on aggression and sexuality.

Freud believed that within the constructs of childhood, the sexual evolution of boys and girls is diametrically opposed. Although Freud believed that little boys long for their mothers within the constructs of the Oedipus complex, by eventually witnessing that females were without penises, castration fears shortly ensue. Therefore, according to Freud, a little boy's desire to become his mother's primary object changes from a sexual one to one of identification with his father, by trying to emulate his strength, power, and position within the family. After the little boy's emotional component of sexual desire for his mother is completely shattered, it is thereby replaced by his super-ego, which incorporates guilt and self-reproach as its primary means of enforcement. According to Freud, during the later genital stage (after the latency stage), when he engages in sex, the young man still reflects his fear of castration through his lack of initial commitment and emotional detachment. For girls in childhood, the sight of the penis invokes the belief that she has already been castrated. Her desire to obtain a penis is replaced by her desire to have her father's child. Due to a lack of fear of castration, the girl's Electra complex is not shattered, but rather, repressed (Freud, 1959). Therefore, a girl's super-ego is not as independent of her emotional origins, as in men. She is not as apt to be unconsciously fearful of attaching emotion to a sexual experience as is her male counterpart.

As far as sexual abuse is concerned, it has been discerned that the highest rate of incest related rape occurs by fathers towards their daughters. Victims of incest experience more anxiety as adults, and the extent of their emotional unrest seems to be related to both the duration of the abuse and whether or not it occurred before or after puberty. Sexual desire disorders of adulthood often serve as one of the markers of the legacy of the survivor. Freud would have considered the latter a sign of the 'disease' of neurosis. The four terms of his etiological equation of a neurosis included the precondition, specific cause, concurrent cause, and precipitating (releasing) cause (Sulloway, 1979).

For a hypothetical victim of childhood sexual abuse, who had later been rendered impotent, for example, Freud would have considered his precondition either an innate or acquired 'disposition', that (in and of itself) would not actually trigger the psychopathology. The impotent sexual abuse victim's precondition, for instance, may remain having been born with epilepsy (i.e., it is estimated that children with disabilities are 4 to 10 times more vulnerable to sexual abuse than their non-disabled peers (National Survey, 1992)). The specific cause of the victim's adult-reflected impotency might be that as a child, he/she was forced to have intercourse with his/her parent, who often accompanied and nursed him back to health. Freud might have postulated that a concurrent cause (instrumental only in weakening the psychosexual make-up of the impotent patient) could remain the fatigue he is enduring at present, due to working long hours on his job. The precipitating cause (that which appears last before the neurosis ensues) might be that he could not establish an erection from the first night of his honeymoon to several years thereafter, which provoked his wife to send him to the doctor for examination.

Freud strongly believed in contraception for adults, who suffered a neurosis. The latter reflected his Lamarckian bent, that 'external influences must ultimately impress themselves upon the reproducing germplasm if they are to be passed on to future generations' (Sulloway, 1979). Even after the aforementioned, hypothetical 'impotent patient' had recovered his normal sexual erection and activity, Freud would probably adamantly discourage him from having children until his neurosis was completely cured and understood. It is well known that the majority of sex-offenders in prisons were victimized as children. In addition to attributing

environmental influences, Freud's Darwinian and biological based biases would have collectively deemed the latter fact a reflection of the acquired characteristics common within the scheme of heredity.

The fact that a child who is sexually abused at an earlier age is more likely to suffer serious emotional consequences later in life than a child who is abused after the onset of puberty is a statistical testament to Freud's 'Psychosexual Stages of Development' theories. By successfully traversing the oral, anal, phallic, and latency stages, by puberty, a child is able to successfully turn his interest towards heterosexual relationships. According to Freud, the less energy (libido) the child has left invested in unresolved psychosexual developments, the greater his capacity will be to develop normal relationships with the opposite sex. If he remains fixated, particularly on the phallic stage (common in the case of sexual abuse), his development will be troubled as he struggles with further repression and defenses (Stevenson, 1998). If a child is raped after he/she enters adolescence, in a sense, the act of violence would be less damaging to his/her psyche, as his/her personality would have been earlier formed via the successful passage through the earlier developmental stages.

As far as the treatments for sexual dysfunctions discussed in class are concerned, Freud would probably have postulated that psychotherapy and hypnosis (thereby uncovering the true culprit repressed from consciousness) would sooner permanently resolve any form of sexual dysfunction in a more healthy context, than mechanical or medicinal means (e.g., vacuum pumps, gels, Viagra, all of which Freud would have scoffed at, referring to them as temporary remedies).

## References

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