

# Foods and Emotions in Joanne Harris's *Chocolat*

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## Abstract

Joanne Harris is one of the famous English French author, well known for her novel *Chocolat*. The present article is a brief study of the happenings in the life of a female protagonist Vianne Rocher who moves into a small village along with her daughter and decides to open a chocolate shop. Vianne is characterized to be person of young, strong-willed and free-spirited who constantly wanders from place to place and the reason behind it is a “Black Man” an imaginary character found out of her fear from whom she runs away all her life. The main objective of this article by Joanne Harris is to portray the protagonist's quest in serving people, with a mixture of chocolate and magic. The author has expressed it in the novel using techniques like magical realism.

**Key Words** : *Freedom, Magical Realism, Religion, Wandering.*

## Introduction

Joanne Harris was born to an English father and a French mother in Barnsley in Yorkshire. Both of her parents were teachers of Modern Languages and Literature at a local grammar school. Her writing career was begun at an early age. Grimm's Fairy Tales and Charles Perrault's work are the two works which strongly influenced her, added to the local folklore and Norse Mythology has also influenced her to a great extent in her writing career. She was educated at Wakefield Girls High School, Barnsley Sixth Form College and St Catherine's College, Cambridge, where she studied Modern and Medieval languages. She served one year as an unsuccessful accountant, which she felt like being trapped in a Terry Gilliam movie. She trained as a teacher at Sheffield University and for fifteen years she taught modern languages, mostly at Leeds Grammar school, during the time she worked several book projects.

The Evil Seed was her first novel and it was published in 1989 and it did not reach estimated amount of success. Her second novel Sleep, Pale Sister (2004) shows her switching of style from horror-pastiche to literary ghost story. Her third novel Chocolat (2015), which is a darkly magical modern folk tale, which is thematically based on food and set in the Gers region of France, reached a great success.

The book has won the Creative Freedom Award in 1999 and was shortlisted for the 1999 Whitebread Novel of the Year Award. In 2012, she was one of the four members of "Millionaires Club" the elite group of authors who have achieved a million sales of a single book in the UK since records began. Issues of identity, mother and child relationships, the emotional resonance of food, the magic and horror of everyday things, the outsider in the community, faith, superstition, and the joy of small pleasures are some of the recurrent themes of Joanne Harris.

### **Foods and Emotions**

Foods and Emotions deals with the association of emotions with food and the role food play in the genre of culinary literature. The theme of food and emotion is the core of subjective culinary literature works. The theme of food and emotion can also be used to analyse how a character or several characters use food and its exquisite creation to overcome the trauma that they might have endured.

Food and various forms of eating have been brought into literature because of their elementary place in human life and culture. English and French literature has many times portrayed surplus supply of food as a symbol of good health and festivity, while scarcity and hunger is used to symbolize wretchedness. Representation of food in literature works best as it involves two of the greatest pleasures of life – eating and reading.

The novel *Chocolat* is a magic modern folk tale in which magic realism is beautifully portrayed and mainly focuses on the chocolate shop owner, Vianne Rocher. Vianne is a mysterious woman who with her arresting good looks and air of mysticism, arrives in a French village with her six year old fatherless daughter and rents an old bakery which she converts to a chocolate shop. “We came on the wind of the carnival. A

warm wind for February, laden with the hot greasy scents of frying pancakes and sausages and powdery – sweet waffles cooked on hotplate right there by the road side” (Harris 11)

She considers chocolatier as her soul, and she takes interest to invite more guests to her shop and people in turn get attached to “unsurpassed fragrance wafting from the chocolatier. She finds a lot of friends, knows their problems, secrets and their characters. Its good value, easy to share, doesn’t melt in your pockets and you can get it”(Harris 67). She is more amiable and understanding to an extent she doesn’t even react, even with the ones who does wrong to her, instead she finds reasons for their ill- mannered behaviour and tries to find a solution of their inner peace to which her chocolatier forms a major platform.

There are a lot of diverse characters through the novel, each with their own personal story to tell. The narrative is told from both Vianne and Reynaud’s opposing views, which gives an insight into each side of their story. Monsieur Reynaud is a man of the church, but his actions are anything but holy. He comes across as this bitter, resentful man, stuck in a time warp and not allowing the village to move with times.

The book is captivating and unique which draws right into the heart of the story and into the tiny French village with its vivid scenery, colours, smells and even the taste of chocolate that Vianne makes. Vianne's story is an exploration of the two opposing states of human life, transience and permanence. It portrays how Vianne finds comfort in food and its cooking and uses its expertise to reach new heights in life. The novel is very thought provoking and the author has also created a tension between Christianity and Paganism. The novel tries to be profound about life and death, but the pleasure comes from the food, that is delicious enough to satisfy any sweet tooth.

The author’s commentary on religion, its confying nature along with it’s unifying power has been well captured. Joanne Harris's style of writing is unique and her descriptive powers are fantastic which brings the food, characters and the setting to life. There’s a fair amount of magic used in this novel, but it’s subtle, magic of the heart and soul.

## Conclusion

In every genre of literature, a particular symbol acts as a catalyst for emotional expression or catharsis. In culinary literature the creative aspect of food and cooking acts as a catalyst for emotional expression and at times, a talisman for overcoming trauma. The novel *Chocolat*, food fills the emptiness of the soul and helps the characters get over the trauma. In the novel *Chocolat* by Joanne Harris, food is associated with emotions and expressions are evident wherever food is mentioned. Joanne Harris also lays emphasis on balanced way of life. The usage of food in the novel gives out a motive that balance should exist in the way of life and in an individual's behaviour.

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