

**Food as an Example of Individuality in the Novel *Chocolate* by
Joanne Harris**

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Food has a central place in human life. It also has a incredible impact, both directly and indirectly, on emotional and intellectual wellbeing. Food can be a concrete symbol of love and concern for others. It is a source of reassurance and consolation. It is also the oldest and best form of medicine known to mankind. There is a two-way relationship between food and emotion.

Traditionally, food has always had an cherished association with women's lives and the work that women do. As wives, mothers and primary caregivers, it has been the duty of women to prepare food for the family. In patriarchal societies where they have been excluded from power and their roles have been limited to the domestic sphere, women have found a creative outlet through the preparation of food. Food has given them opportunities to make decisions and exercise some degree of power.

The objectives of this paper is to study the significance of food and the relationship between food and emotions and to analyze the influence of food on emotions and behavior and to analyze the mental states of women who are deprived of their rights and liberty, whose roles are limited and whose space is restricted and also to analyze the turnaround of women's roles and the creation of female power by means of food. The paper is a study of Food as an Example of Individuality in the novel *Chocolate* by Joanne Harris which made successful motion picture.

It tells the riveting story of protagonist Vianne Rocher helping a strict, alienated village of people let down their guard and embraces the sensual pleasures of life, with her delicate chocolate shop. Yet her input to this village is more than a healthy dose of sensuality. Vianne aims to awaken a brighter, more fulfilling viewpoint on life that empowers the village people to shed their dull ways.

The battle lines between church and chocolate are drawn by this British author in her appealing debut about a bewitching confectioner who settles in a sleepy French village and arouses the appetites of the pleasure-starved parishioners. Young widow Vianne Roche's mouthwatering bonbons; steaming mugs of liqueur-laced cocoa and flaky cream-filled patisserie don't earn her a warm welcome from the stern prelate of Lansquenet-sous-Tannes. In Francis Reynaud's zeal to enforce strict Lenten vows of self-denial, he regards his sybaritic neighbor with suspicion and disdain. Undaunted, Vianne garners support from the town's eccentrics, chiefly Armande Voizin, the oldest living resident, a self-professed sorceress who senses in Vianne a kindred spirit. A fun-loving band of river gypsies arrives, and a colorful pageant unfurls. The novel's diary form--counting down the days of Lent until Easter--is

suspenseful, and Harris takes her time unreeling the skein of evil that will prove to be Reynaud's undoing. As a witch's daughter who inherited her mother's profound distrust of the clergy, Vianne never quite comes to life, but her child, Anouk, is an adorable sprite, a spunky six-year-old already wise to the ways of an often inhospitable world. Gourmand Harris's tale of sin and guilt embodies a fond familiarity with things French that will doubtless prove irresistible to many readers.

The story takes place in a small town named Lansquenet-sous-Tannes. It is told by the two protagonists: Vianne Roche and Francis Reynaud. The first one is a woman who stopped in the town with her daughter Anouk. They travel all around the world, not staying anywhere for a long time. The second protagonist is a cure in the local cathedral.

On the surface of the novel, the battle between Vianne Rocherand Francis Reynaud can be easily summed up as a war between the church and chocolate; however, a closer look lets you know that Joanne Harris never intended to demonize organized religion; instead, Harris aims for a narrative that bursts more with heart than criticism. Vianne and Reynaud are perfect foils of each other; for one, Vianne is a witch, though she does not use the term, and Reynaud, a priest. Vianne, having come to the town at the Lent, starts to set up a chocolate café there. This, and the fact that she doesn't go to the church, brings on the hostility of the fanatically devotional cure. But the woman doesn't pay attention to him. She has in mind to stay here for as much time, as she wants.

Vianne decided to open a chocolaterie on the first day of Lent is not openly discussed nor questioned by anyone except for the Cure, Reynaud. He even asks her what she attempts to accomplish, setting in motion the idea that a showdown is imminent, with him quipping to himself that Vianne would be out of business by Easter. In his private thoughts, we see his rage against Vianne and his obsession with her Grand Festival du Chocolat bloom the more the novel progresses; at one point in the story, he even hears a woman eating chocolates during her confessional, angering him to the point of screaming at her through the latticed opening, only to realize that he had imagined the whole thing. He knows that he has until the Easter Festival to undo her, to remove her influence from the town, to preach virulently against her and her chocolates, and becomes consumed with the idea that she is his mortal enemy, bent to undermine the Catholic church, and by extension, himself.

Vianne herself makes note of Reynaud, marking him as her enemy by relating him to 'The Black Man', a recurring motif in her mother's folklore, a symbol of fear and darkness. Throughout the novel, she invokes her mother, Jeanne, with fragile grace and love, inviting us into memories of her and Vianne during their mad dash across Europe; we learn through Vianne's thoughts that her mother was a witch, who taught her daughter all the magic she knew, while at the same time running from her own version of 'The Black Man'. In her thoughts, Vianne, though kind, with great powers of empathy and charm, struggles with her own personal fears, typified by this incarnation of The Black Man, Reynaud. She thinks often of her daughter, Anouk, whom she loves and adores, but fears that she may be leading her down a path she may not deserve, with lack of permeance, old friends, and a horizon to call home. She attributes their nomadic, vagabond lifestyle to following the wind, something her mother taught her, 'the gypsy wanderlust that took us all over Europe and farther,' and desperately

hopes, for her daughter's sake, to finally be able to call a place home. For this reason, even with Reynaud's bullying and sabotage, she remains rooted like a weed in his church garden, refusing to be blown away by the changing wind this time. For her daughter's sake, she decides to finally stand up to The Black Man.

The cure is angry. He isn't used to that fact that somebody may contradict him. So, preaching at the church, he indoctrinates the citizens against Vianne. So, at first the woman doesn't have clients at her shop. But the people are attracted to the unsurpassed fragrance wafting from the shop, and in some time, they start coming to the shop to drink some hot chocolate or eat dainty chocolate sweet. Vianne is a friendly, kind and sincere woman, so she finds a lot of friends among the citizens. She knows them: their problems, secrets, their characters.

Her daughter, like her mother, is also affable and cheerful girl, so she quickly finds new friends among the town's children. But she has got used to be lonely for most of her time and she has her imaginary friend a rabbit Pantoufle.

Once Vianne sees among her clients an odd woman, "she seems to hide behind others, creeps to one of the showcases and steals one of the sweets, hand over fist" (35). Later Vianne gets to know that it's Josephine Muscat, her husband, Paul-Marie, runs the café in the town. Everybody knows her as a thief, but Vianne sees in her only a scared, ill-fated woman. She becomes her friend, and Josephine tells her that her husband is cruel and merciless man, that he beats and abuses her. Vianne says that the woman mustn't suffer such treatment. Josephine listens to her, and in some time she comes to Vianne's shop and says that she has got away from her husband and she is going to run to another town and start the new life. Vianne convinces her to stay in the town, live with her and help her in the shop. The town, the cure, Paul-Marie is awfully angry: the wife must live with her husband. But the woman doesn't want to change her mind. In some time Josephine completely changes: she turns into a beautiful, uninhibited, confident woman.

Also there is an old woman, who often visits Vianne's shop, Armande Voizin. She also doesn't visit the church, mocks at the cure and the citizens, and doesn't follow the Lent. She becomes friends with Vianne, they talk a lot, and so, Vianne gets to know that the woman has a daughter and a grandson. The daughter is a pompous woman, who wants her mother to live at the Home for the Elderly. As for the grandson, Armande dreams to spend time with him, but her daughter don't allow this. Vianne helps Armande and Luke (the grandson) here: they spend time in the café, while his mother is at the hairdresser's or somewhere else.

The town is situated at the bank of the river, so once the gypsies come there on the rafts. The town doesn't treat them well, except for Armande, Vianne and some other citizens. They spend much time together with them. Among the gypsies Vianne notices a man, who is, probably, one of the leading ones among the gypsies. His name is Roux. He often comes to the woman's shop and Vianne notices that he and Josephine have some liking to each other. Once, when the women and the gypsies had some kind of a party on the rafts, the Roux's one started to burn. Roux couldn't extinguish the fire.

After that the gypsies went out of the bank and only Roux stayed to get to know who had burnt his home.

Once Armande's daughter comes to Vianne and having a talk with her, tells that her mother has the serious problems with her health, and her mother must follow the special diet, where the sweets are not allowed. Vianne talks about it with Armande, but she is a willful woman and says that she'll do what she wants to do, and eat what she wants to eat. Once the old woman says that there will be her birthday soon and she wants to celebrate it well: to make a party with a lot of guests: she invites not only the citizens, but some of the gypsies as well. The party was a success: the atmosphere was fun and pleasant. Armande is happy to spend her birthday in this company. At the end Vianne and Roux stay alone to clean everything after the party. They spend a night together. The next day Armande dies.

As for Josephine, her husband's character is unmasked for the citizens, when they see, how he beats her, when she comes to the bar to take her clothes. He is ordered to go away from the town. Josephine becomes the host of the bar, she renews it, Roux helps her there. Then they start to live together.

At the end of the story the cure wants to revenge Vianne for her "impropriety", he decides to spoil all her chocolate goods. It's worth saying, that he followed the Lent, he was eating only some lean food, and of course, he didn't eat chocolate. So, he creeps to the shop at late night, but when he comes there, the flavour of the chocolate attracts him and he starts eating all that he sees there, and then he falls asleep in that heaps of spoiled chocolate, where he is found by Vianne in the morning.

In some time Vianne feels that a new life arises in her. She decides that her and her daughter time to go further, to leave the town, has come. During the whole story Vianne is full of predictions, she inherited the magic skills from her mother, she sees things that are the deep secrets of other people, for example, the cure has the father, who is in coma for a long time, and Vianne sees Reynaud by the bed of his father, etc. Unselfish kindness is highlighted in the image of Vianne Roche. She shows the reader, how the true kindness should look like. The town greets her with hostility; she is not a desirable guest there. But no matter how they treat her, the woman is always kind to them. She smiles to everybody, she is eager to help, to support, to give shelter. And she doesn't hope to be thanked for it. And her unselfishness rewards her with good friends and good treatment at the end of the story.

Chocolat, the title of the novel, not only refers to mouth-watering, luscious chocolate but also connotes a celebration of pleasure, of indulgence, of love, and of all the sweeter things in life. The chocolate is symbolically a rich delicious feast for the body as well as for the soul; it satisfies sensual craving and brings about spiritual delight.

The main theme of the novel is the tremendous impact of chocolate upon the townsfolk. Ansen states: "The novel makes a plea for passion and pleasure as opposed to repression and denial" (Ansen 77).

Vianne's luscious chocolate pits the forces of liberation and renewal against those of repression and rigid tradition. Her aphrodisiac sweets awaken the hearts of the self-denying villagers to life's abundance and ecstasy. The novel also explores the ideas of community, morality, loneliness, belonging, tradition and innovation, all presented through the imagery of confections. Joanne Harris unfolds a tale of life, love, death, and bereavement, of fear and violence, and – most importantly – of happiness through the imagery of confections. At her chocolate boutique, La Céleste Praline: Chocolaterie Artisanale, Vianne lavishly decorates the display window with a variety of multicolored chocolates and sweets.

Food is evidently central to the novel. The chocolate boutique has been the talk of the town. Its presence in Lansquenet-sous Tannes, a rigid, tranquil town, is deeply felt by each member of the community, with some being lured by and giving in to its dazzling sights and tantalizing smells. The chocolate parlor looms large in their minds, "Curé Reynaud preached such a virulent sermon on the topic of abstinence that the opening of La Céleste Praline ... had seemed a direct affront against the Church" (*Chocolate* 55).

Harris draws similarities between cooking and alchemy in *Chocolat* when she writes "There is a kind of alchemy in the transformation of base chocolate into this wise food's gold, a layman's magic" (64).

In *Chocolat*, cooking becomes a sacred ritual which turns food into ambrosia. "The food of the gods, bubbling and frothing in ceremonial goblets. The bitter elixir of life" (64). Again in the same manner as Esquivel, Harris makes clear the connection between food, cooking and the human emotion and spirit, "The mingled scents of chocolate, vanilla, powerfully suggestive;" (64).

Food has an influence on the emotions and behaviors of the characters. Armande, the village's oldest resident, sipping a tall glass of mocha with a splash of kahlua feels awestruck by its exquisite taste. "It was more than an appreciation. It was almost reverence ... Her pleasure was almost frightening" (82). The drink gives energy to her voice and forcefulness to her slow movements. Another time Armande tastes one of Vianne's chocolate specials. Denying the drink is a stimulant, Armande exclaims in delight, "An aphrodisiac" (119). Armande is among one of the villagers who visits time and again La Céleste Praline not only to satisfy her physical pleasures but also to fulfill her spiritual needs. Finally, she becomes a regular customer of the chocolate parlor and turns out to be a true friend and steadfast supporter of Vianne. All those chocolate specials enhance her physical strength, sharpen her strong individualism, and intensify her defiance to the community's inflexibility.

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