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Magical Realism as a Narrative Device in Joanne Harris' *Chocolat*

Kézirat lezárása: 2025. 01. 12.

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Introduction

This paper examines the role of magical realism as a narrative device in Joanne Harris' novel *Chocolat*. It aims to argue that the elements of magical realism serve a three-fold role in the novel: they not only foster connections between characters and act as an active agent in their storylines, but enrich the narrative by providing additional information about characters' motivations, past events and foreshadow future ones, while simultaneously creating the novel's distinctive ambiance. Hence, magical realism is essential for both creating and understanding the nuances of Harris' storytelling.

The novel, published in 1999, tells the story of Vianne Rocher and her daughter, who arrive in a small, conservative French village and open a chocolaterie. Both Vianne and her creations seem to possess a magical ability to awaken the villagers' suppressed desires. As the events unfold and Vianne bonds with more of the townsfolk, an unexpected conflict sparks between her and the local priest, who views her as a threat to his moral authority in the community.

To provide understanding of what it is and how it is implemented in Harris' novel, Chapter 1 is concerned with the brief history, definition and the characteristics of magical realism. Additionally, the author's implementation of the literary mode is examined, in order to highlight how Harris creates her own blend of magical realism, resulting in a narrative that adheres to the fundamental characteristics of the mode while simultaneously containing elements that distinguish *Chocolat* as a unique piece from other magical realist works.

Chapter 2 delves into the topic of magical elements and rituals in the novel. Firstly, it explores how the scenes involving magic differ from the ones lacking of it, and how this influences the atmosphere of the respective segments. Going forward, it focuses on magical objects in the narrative, with a particular focus on tarot and the archetype of the Black Man.

Chapter 3 focuses on the role of chocolate in the novel and explains how it is used to set the atmosphere in the story. Additionally, it explores the connection between the characters and their attitude toward chocolate and addresses the dual role of chocolate as both a means of bonding with customers and a magical tool for the protagonist.

Through exploring the above-mentioned points, magical realism in *Chocolat* proves to be a fundamental part of Harris' storytelling, leading to a more in-depth understanding of the characters and their behaviours by revealing past and forthcoming events, while being equally important as a narrative device which creates the novel's distinct atmosphere.

Chapter 1: Magical Realism

1.1 Brief History and Definition

Magical realist writing has seen a rise in the past decades, gaining widespread recognition internationally. To understand why a diverse range of authors employ this literary mode in their works and how it functions within a text, it is essential to start by recognizing the historical and cultural contexts from which magical realism emerged, as well as the specific narrative techniques that define it.

Maggie Ann Bowers explains in her book *Magic(al) Realism* that the term was first “coined in Germany in the 1920s in relation to the painting of the Weimar Republic that tried to capture the mystery of life behind the surface reality” (Bowers 2). Rooted in European modernism and post-modernism, magical realism as a term was used to describe paintings, which, according to Bowers, differed from the then-popular expressionist tradition in their “attention to accurate detail, a smooth photograph-like quality of picture and the representation of the mystical non-material aspects of reality” (8). This characteristic of magical realist paintings to represent reality with a mystical, non-tangible aspect became a key feature of magical realist literature in the following decades.

Then, in the 1940s, the term appeared in Latin America in connection with art and literature that attempted to express a mixture of realist and fantastic perspective (Bowers 2). The emergence of magical realism in Latin America is further established by Lainck and Rodrigues-Moura, who note that in 1948, Uslar-Pietri wrote about a short story that contained both realist and fantastical elements (137). This period is marked by influential figures of magical realism, such as Alejo Carpentier, who played a key role in the development of magical realism, particularly with his 1949 essay "On the Marvelous Real in America". Lainck explains, that “For Carpentier Latin America is a cultural realm where mythologies are still alive; in order to do the region justice, any “realistic” depiction of it must necessarily seem rather wondrous for European eyes and take the fantastic into account as something natural and commonplace” (137). This idea is reflected in magical realist narratives through the integration of the fantastical into the quotidian, reflecting a worldview where myth, folklore, and the supernatural are part of the norm.

According to Bowers, the term magical realism is introduced in the 1950s, once again in Latin America, this time in relation to “all narrative fiction that includes magical happenings in

a realist matter-of-fact narrative” (2). The 1950s prove to be a pivotal decade in the history of magical realism, as it marks the period when the genre begins to gain significance and recognition as a distinct literary mode. Several publications contributed to its establishment, such as *Pedro Páramo* by Mexican writer Juan Rulfo or Angel Flores’ essay, “Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction” and this period laid the groundwork for key authors of the mode, including Gabriel García Márquez or Julio Cortázar. By the 50s, therefore, magical realism is born and is slowly conquering all parts of the world.

Zamora and Faris, in the introduction of their collection that displays essays on magical realism during different time periods and geographical areas, state that despite Latin American writers’ unquestionable position as developers of the magical realist concept, the literary mode is “an international commodity” (2). Bowers supports this idea by stating that “[m]agical realist writers have become recognized in India, Canada, Africa, the United States and across the world” (17).

Through this brief overview, it is apparent that its rich and multicultural history has influenced magical realism’s current presence in the literary world. Both its roots in European artistic movements and its history in Latin America have influenced the mode, allowing authors to capture diverse and unique realities across the globe.

Defining what makes a text magical realist is a delicate matter. The obscurity regarding the term lays, as Salenius states, in the problem that “magical realism has been referred to amongst other things as a genre, a mode or literary movement, trend or form” (4). Bowers uses the term literary mode (34), just like Zamora and Faris, when arguing about the difference between realism and magical realism (3). Furthermore, Lainck and Rodrigues-Moura consider magical realism as “an emancipatory literary mode” (144). For this reason, going forward, this paper refers to magical realism as a mode. The importance of the appellation lies in the definition of the term. According to Alastair Fowler, who discusses the concepts in *Kinds of literature: an introduction to the theory of genres and modes*, a mode refers to a manner or approach used in literature that affects how content is presented. Rather than defining a specific form or structure, modes are about the way a work engages with the subject matter. They reflect a thematic and stylistic approach, rather than formal characteristics (Fowler 107) Hence, it is essential to look at the approach magical realist authors take when writing, paying attention to the recurring themes of these works and the stylistics choices writers take.

The term consists of two opposing parts: magical and realism. Bényei dissolves this clash by treating the term as if it had been created “as a properly impossible name for its own impossible modality of naming the world, of reconstructing the world in and through language and narrative” (158). In his understanding, instead of reflecting a conflict, the term encapsulates the genre’s unique approach to seamlessly blend elements that at first glance might seem incompatible. This is further explored by Zamora and Faris, who highlight that the difference between realism and magical realism lies in their respective approaches to representing reality.

An essential difference, then, between realism and magical realism involves the intentionality implicit in the conventions of the two modes. Several essays in our collection suggest that realism intends its version of the world as a singular version, as an objective (hence universal) representation of natural and social realities—in short, that realism functions ideologically and hegemonically. Magical realism also functions ideologically but, according to these essays, less hegemonically, for its program is not centralizing but eccentric: it creates space for interactions of diversity. (3)

Magical realism, therefore, is a more “eccentric” mode, suggesting that it creates space for a variety of perspectives. It incorporates elements of the fantastical, allowing for a multiplicity of experiences and viewpoints. By leaving behind the restraints of traditional realism, which enforces a single, ultimate truth and worldview, as described by Eugene L. Arva in his essay “Writing the Vanishing Real: Hyperreality and Magical Realism”, “magical realism does not seek a logical representation of reality because its founding premise is that reality cannot be explained – or at least not only in one way. The multiplicity of fictional worlds is, after all, an implicit recognition of the variety of reality itself” (78).

While maintaining an otherwise realist setting, magical realists approach reality in a way that allows for the coexistence of not only the supernatural and the ordinary but also a variety of different perspectives with equal truth values.

Despite the disregard for rules of logic that characterises magical realist narratives, these works do not require the readers to suspend their disbelief in order to immerse themselves in the narrative. As Arva explains, “One must understand the magical realist universe not as a flight from reality but as a flight simulator, an artificial world within the real world, meant to prepare us for a better grasp of it” (78). Thus, the artificial worlds of the magical realist writers need to contain magical aspects that are fully accepted throughout the reality of the whole of the text (Bowers 25), so that these magical aspects do not become a means of escaping from

the ordinary. Instead, they have to operate as a fundamental part of the world the author has created. This idea is supported by Zamora and Faris, who explain that “[f]or the characters who inhabit the fictional world, and for the author who creates it, magic may be real, reality magical; there is no need to label them as such” (3). Thus, magical realism differs from fantasies in its treatment of the magical, by its lack of distinction between the everyday and the supernatural elements. All of them are treated with the same level of indifference reserved for the ordinary.

Building on this discussion, magical realism is defined in this study as a literary mode that integrates elements of the fantastical or magical into a realist setting without fantasy writing’s treatment of the magical as extraordinary elements. Unlike traditional realism, which seeks to present a universal truth or an objective version of the world, magical realism takes on an approach that embraces the coexistence of multiple perspectives and realities.

1.2 Characteristics of Magical Realism

In his study “Magic Realism in English Literature and Its Significant Contribution”, Thamarana reflects on magical realist authors Marquez and Allende, explaining how their works “re-depicted the parameters of what is possible by invoking legends and myths that have been passed from one generation to other” (265). This technique of incorporating cultural myths and legends into the narrative is not exclusive to Marquez and Allende but is also a hallmark of other prominent magical realist writers.

Myths and cultural narratives magical realist novels tend to draw inspiration from include Greek, Celtic and Eastern mythologies, various religious texts, beliefs and oral traditions. Tindle completes the list in her study “The Magic of Everyday Things: Magic Realism in the Works of Joanne Harris” by stating that

Fantasies, fairy tales, myths and folklore narratives have all been aligned with magic realism to varying degrees, emphasising both the broad spectrum of styles that the concept encompasses and demonstrating the difficulty of assigning a specific definition to the use of magic realism as a literary mode. (4)

As Tindle points out, the great variety of cultural narratives magical realist writers use in their novels result in works that are diverse in their tone and atmosphere. Charles Stewart, in his study “Syncretism and Its Synonym: Reflections on Cultural Mixture” explains that

“[c]ultures, if we still wish to retain this term (and I do), are porous; they are open to intermixture with other, different cultures and they are subject to historical change precisely on account of these influences” (41). This mixture of cultures is reflected in magical realist texts by a blend of different cultural, religious, and mythological elements. The authors take inspiration from existing cultural practices which enhance the realist qualities and sensation of the final product.

When not referencing a range of cultural narratives, magical realist texts often reference themselves. Their self-reflexive nature is explored by Bényei, as he contends that “[m]agic realist novels are self-reflexive texts, often obsessively so. Their self-reflexive nature, however, is [...] the outcome of a broader curiosity concerning narrative understanding and the narrative transaction in general” (170). Therefore, self-reflexivity in magical realist novels is about curiosity regarding how narratives work and how storytelling interacts with reality. In practice this means that magical realist narration might include scenes where characters engage with narrating the story (Bényei 170).

Magical realist narratives also employ multiplicity in perspectives. Bowers notes that “by breaking down the notion of an absolute truth, and a singular version of reality, magical realism allows for the possibility of many truth existing simultaneously” (67). By having several narrators and various viewpoints appear in the narration, magical realist writers provide different interpretations for a singular event, creating the illusion of several equally plausible and coexisting truths. This idea is supported by Arva, who states that magical realism’s “founding premise is that reality cannot be explained – or at least not only in one way” (78).

The coexistence of multiple truths creates a framework for the social and political commentary that is also often present in magical realist narratives. Waham writes that magical realism is “used to critique or challenge established political and social systems” (347). Writers who use the mode often focus on the experiences of marginalized groups. The incorporation of magical elements allows these authors to challenge dominant cultural narratives by disrupting the accepted norms and expectations of reality. Just like supernatural elements challenge the reader’s sense of normality, focusing on previously marginalized perspectives can offer an alternative truth.

In the following subchapter, Harris’ use of magical realism is examined in order to explore how it conforms to these characteristics and how she diverges from them in her novels.

1.3 Harris' Take on Magical Realism

The topic of exploring Harris' version of magical realism should to be prefaced by stating that the author has dismissed the term regarding her works on several occasions. Possibly her aversion to the term is what makes *Chocolat* stand out from other works of magical realism. In an interview with Rebecca Davies, when asked if she would categorize her works as magical realist, Harris responded:

Most of my stories have some kind of base in fact, but fundamentally I try for emotional realism; the details may be invented, but if the feelings are true (be they rage, love, or the desire for revenge), then the characters will come to life and the plot, however unlikely, will seem more convincing to the reader. (Davies)

Harris hence explains that core of her narratives is “emotional realism,” meaning that while the plot or its details might be fictional or on occasions improbable, the emotions and feelings of the characters appear genuine. The first and foremost quality of a magical realist text, as discussed in the previous subchapter, is the realist setting that is enriched with magical elements, all of which are treated with the same sense of ordinariness. Even though the setting is indeed realistic and the supernatural elements are certainly present, the characters' emotional state is another important factor in *Chocolat*, as it influences how they relate to magic. For instance, at one point in the novel, Armande tells Vianne that she knows she is a witch:

‘It’s true, isn’t it? What I said? What you are?’ That word again. She laughed delightedly and took my hand. Her skin was cool, foliage, not flesh. She turned my hand over to see the palm. ‘I knew it!’ Her finger traced lifeline, heartline. ‘I knew it the minute I saw you!’ (Harris 60)

The conversation continues like so: “‘Does Reynaud know?’ ‘I’m not sure.’ It was true; I had no idea what she was talking about” (60). Apprehensive, Vianne deflects Armande’s open remarks about her powers, making the reader also question the existence of magic. At other times, in a different emotional state, Vianne makes it clear that she indeed possesses supernatural powers, describing the type of magic she does and how her mother would mock her for practicing simple witchcraft: “[a] tame alchemist, she would have called me with kindly contempt, working domestic magic when I could have wielded marvels” (Harris 39).

In other magical realist narratives, the supernatural elements are seamlessly integrated into the realist setting. However, as the example above illustrates, in Harris' *Chocolat*, the

approach to magical realism is more nuanced. The characters who interact with the magical elements do not consistently accept them as a natural part of their world. At times, they question or deny the existence of these elements, while at other moments, they embrace them or treat them as ordinary, based on their feelings. This fluctuation in their response to magic distinguishes Harris' approach to magical realism, adding a layer of complexity to how the magical is perceived within the realist setting.

As Tindle puts it, Harris "encourages her reader to challenge the narratives of her characters and exposes their extravagant tales as fictions created to fuel the exotic connotations attributed to them" (11). The shifting view of Vianne's magical abilities results in unsteady governing rules when it comes to the magical elements in the narrative. This prompts the reader to question which pieces of information are subject to change based on Vianne's momentary storytelling and emotions and to differentiate between the magical elements which are actually treated as ordinary parts of the novel's reality and those which are rather embellishments of her storytelling, shaped by her own desires and fears.

Vianne's ongoing questioning and re-establishing of the reality and the supernatural elements is made possible by her position as an outsider or stranger. She embodies the opposition to the established reality and life of the community. The status quo of the village gets disrupted by her arrival, introducing her unique reality and perspective. Rué's analysis further supports this interpretation.

"The Other" is an acknowledged rival without which a community cannot shape its identity, be it seventeenth-century New England or twentieth-century Lansquenet-sous-Tannes, and both protagonists are thus marked as "other", either by means of a scarlet letter or by a campaign against chocolate in church sermons. (Rué 11)

According to Rué, communities often define themselves in opposition to an Other, a concept that is evident in *Chocolat*. Vianne is marked as the outsider through her unconventional beliefs which clash with the conservative values upheld by Reynaud and the church. Reynaud's thoughts show clearly how radical Vianne's decisions are, such as not going to church or organising a chocolate festival at Easter.

Is this what she intends? A gathering of these people, a celebration of excess? How we fought to eradicate those remaining pagan traditions, *père*, how we preached and cajoled. The egg, the hare, still-living symbols of the tenacious root of paganism, exposed for what they are. For a time we were pure. But with her the purge must begin anew. This is a

stronger strain, defying us once again. And my flock, my stupid, trustful flock, turning to her, listening to her... (Harris 97)

Through Reynaud's reaction to Vianne and her actions, Harris comments on society and illuminates the ways in which societal norms can be used to exclude and marginalize those who do not conform to them.

In *Chocolat*, the realist setting is juxtaposed with the magical reality of Vianne, with extraordinary elements that originate from several different belief systems, folklore, fairy tales and pagan practices. In this regard, Harris follows in the steps of other magical realist writers, who implement the idea of cultural mixture in their novels. She highlights the many cultural influences of the characters, and therefore the novel itself, when Vianne is describing her mother.

And I her daughter, listening wide-eyed to her charming apocrypha, with tales of Mithras and Baldur the Beautiful and Osiris and Quetzalcoatl all interwoven with stories of flying chocolates and flying carpets and the Triple Goddess and Aladdin's crystal cave of wonders and the cave from which Jesus rose after three days, amen, abracadabra, amen." (Harris 80)

These beliefs and stories underscore the novel's rich cultural blend. Vianne's mother's fascination with such diverse myths not only reflects this cultural mixture but also illuminates how these influences shape the characters' perceptions and personalities throughout the narrative.

Other elements taken from different cultures include the references to fairy tales in the novel. Vianne herself can be interpreted as the embodiment of the witch from the tales of the Grimm brothers. From Reynaud's perspective, who believes Vianne to be a disruptive influence, this is exactly what is going on in the village.

Evil lives with us. Evil wears a winning smile and bright colours. When I was a child, I used to listen in terror to the story of the gingerbread house, of the witch who tempted little children in and ate them. I look at her shop, all wrapped in shining papers like a present waiting to be unwrapped, and I wonder how many people, how many souls, she has already tempted beyond redemption. (Harris 213)

The analogy is made clear through his thoughts: Vianne, the witch, lures the foolish children – the townsfolk – into her gingerbread house, represented by the chocolaterie. In

Reynaud's eyes, Vianne morally corrupts them, the real-life equivalent of the witch eating the children.

The reader's knowledge of Reynaud's perception is made possible by the alternating chapters between him and Vianne. This highlights the presence of multiple perspectives in the novel. By presenting events from both Vianne and Reynaud's perspectives, Harris shows how each character interprets the same event differently and how reality and truth are not ultimate and straightforward.

As another magical realist characteristic discussed in the previous section, self-reflexivity is also present in *Chocolat* in the form of storytelling inside the main storyline. Vianne slowly opens up about her past in a series of flashbacks throughout the novel, and in her case, self-reflexivity becomes important whenever she reminisces about these stories regarding her mother and how she grew up. She often tells the story about their travels and his mother's beliefs just to then comment on how unlikely her stories are: "My mother was a witch. At least, that's what she called herself, falling so many times into the game of believing herself that at the end there was no telling fake from fact." (Harris 31) Vianne's recounting of her past reveals a self-reflexive approach. She narrates her own story and then critically reflects on it. By expressing doubt about her mother's claim, Vianne highlights the subjective nature of personal beliefs, storytelling and memory.

Ultimately, Harris' unique take on magical realism in *Chocolat* diverges from traditional framework of the mode by emphasizing the emotional authenticity of her characters over a seamless integration of the magical elements into the quotidian, creating a world which operates with unsteady governing rules. While Harris distances herself from the label of magical realism, her novel undeniably adheres to the genre's fundamental characteristics by its blending of diverse cultural influences, folklore, and mythical elements, the presence of multiple perspectives and the social commentary embedded in the narrative.

Chapter 2: Magic

Magical realism entails the integration of extraordinary elements as ordinary ones into the narrative. In the case of *Chocolat*, these can be divided into ones that are explicitly and traditionally magical, such as tarot or the concept of the Black Man, while others, namely the chocolate itself in the narrative, are elements that are more subtle and act as a transformative force. In this chapter, the former are examined, exploring how Harris employs overt magical elements to establish the novel's magical realist framework.

2.1 Magical Scenes vs Non-magical Ones

As soon as Vianne and Anouk arrive in their new home in Lansquenet-sous-Tannes, they are confronted with its shabby, unfriendly appearance. To calm Anouk and make the house feel more like a home, they turn to ordinary tools that serve supernatural purposes: by lighting candles, rattling spoons and going around the house singing, they get rid of the house's ghosts and eventually feel more relaxed in the space.

We lit a candle for every room, gold and red and white and orange. I prefer to make my own incense, but in a crisis the bought sticks are good enough for our purposes, lavender and cedar and lemongrass. We each held a candle, Anouk blowing her toy trumpet and I rattling a metal spoon in an old saucepan, and for ten minutes we stamped around every room, shouting and singing at the top of our voices – Out! Out! Out! – until the walls shook and the outraged ghosts fled, leaving in their wake a faint scent of scorching and a good deal of fallen plaster. Look behind the cracked and blackened paintwork, behind the sadness of things abandoned, and begin to see faint outlines, like the after-image of a sparkler held in the hand – here a wall adazzle with golden paint, there an armchair, a little shabby, but coloured a triumphant orange, the old awning suddenly glowing as half-hidden colours slide out from beneath the layers of grime. Out! Out! Out! Anouk and Pantoufle stamped and sang and the faint images seemed to grow brighter – a red stool beside the vinyl counter, a string of bells against the front door. (Harris 11)

By using magic to make the “outraged ghosts flee”, the house that was described as “so dark”, “sour and rancid” and which “echoes like a cave”, with “dead geraniums” (Harris 11), becomes brighter and more comforting. Harris then uses terms like “golden”, “triumphant orange”, “glowing”, “red” and “brighter”. (11)

Scenes set in the chocolate shop, or those where Vianne or Anouk use their powers, are typically infused with vibrant energy; they feature brighter, bolder colours. Whenever the two of them use magic to visualize the villagers entering the shop, they consistently describe the scene with words like "welcome," "light," and "warm" (Harris 34), emphasizing the warmth and connection they hope to foster. This is captured in the following moment that Vianne narrates:

We close our eyes in the fragrant steam and see them coming – two, three, a dozen at a time, their faces lighting up, sitting beside us, their hard, indifferent faces melting into expressions of welcome and delight. I open my eyes quickly and Anouk is standing by the door. For a second I can see Pantoufle perched on her shoulder, whiskers twitching. The light behind her seems warmer somehow; altered. Alluring. (Harris 34)

Descriptions such as this underscore the transformation they wish to bring to the village, turning cold indifference into warmth and joy, just as they turned the unwelcoming house into their home. Whenever there is magic present in the narrative, Harris creates an atmosphere that is cozy, warm, and inviting. These descriptions not only reflect the transformative power of Vianne and Anouk's magic but also emphasize the enchanting environment they create in the chocolate shop, making it a place of comfort and connection.

The scenes involving magic stand in clear opposition in their colours and in their ambiance with scenes related to Reynaud or the church. In his words,

[...] the church seems so empty. I feel foolish at the foot of the altar, looking up at Our Lord in his guilt and agony – the gilding has tarnished with the smoke from the candles and the dark staining gives Him a sly and secretive look – and prayer, which came as such a blessing, such a source of joy in the early days, is a burden, a cry on the side of a bleak mountain which might at any time unleash the avalanche upon me. (Harris 63)

In contrast to the brightness and the golden highlights of the supernatural scenes, Reynaud uses expressions such as "empty", "dark", "burden" and "bleak". His descriptions lack the lively, warm and inviting energy of the magical scenes. He highlights how once the place of worship used to be welcoming, "a source of joy", just like Vianne's shop.

Reynaud employs terminology typically reserved for the novel's magical scenes in relation to Vianne, underscoring her transcendental nature and highlighting the contrast between them.

And yet she looks so innocent. Her face is open, delighted. The sound of her voice across the water – her laughter mingling with that of the others – is alluring, vibrant with humour and affection. I find myself wondering what my own voice would sound like amongst those others, my own laughter meshed with hers, and the night is suddenly very lonely, very cold, very empty. (Harris 121)

He feels “empty”, “cold” and “lonely” (121), in contrast to Vianne and her shop. The chocolaterie is for Vianne what the church could be for Reynaud, a place where they can bond with people. His church, though, lacks the warmth and magic that could lure in the townsfolk:

The church is thick with incense, funereal with purple and black, not a single piece of silver, a single wreath of flowers. I should be there. Today is my greatest day, père, the solemnity, the piety, the organ ringing like a giant underwater bell – the bells themselves silent, of course, in mourning for the crucified Christ. Myself in black and purple, my voice the middle note of the organ intoning the words. They watch me with wide, dark eyes. (Harris 201)

In the church, the dominating colours are black and purple, creating a “funereal” ambiance in opposition to the liveliness of the chocolaterie. Instead of the joy and laughter that Vianne brings into the community, Reynaud highlights how the day is solemn and dignified.

This contrast not only emphasizes the power of Vianne’s magic but also reinforces the novel’s magical realism as a means to create atmosphere. The magical scenes act as sanctuaries of warmth and connection in the otherwise cold and indifferent village. Harris assigns colours, such as red and gold, the role of creating a magical atmosphere, suggesting to the reader that the supernatural is something alluring and welcoming, while the scenes without them are ordinary and uninviting.

Harris’ colour symbolism is equally important when it comes to characters, not only the scenes themselves. Almost every character that is somehow in connection with magic is at one point described as wearing the colour red or having some affiliation to it. Reynaud points this out clearly when talking about evil influences: “Evil lives with us. Evil wears a winning smile and bright colours” (Harris 213). In this quotation, it becomes clear that bright colours are to act as a cue for the reader to identify characters that are linked to magic – or those have been touched by the evil’s influence, in Reynaud’s perception.

Anouk is “wearing her red woollen coat and hat, racing along the stones and shouting to Pantoufle scampering in her wake” (Harris 27). Roux is described by Reynaud as “The redhaired man on the deck of the black boat.” (65) Furthermore, Vianne also talks about the changes in Guillaume, who starts wearing red after he gets in contact with her: “Gone was his shrunken, diminished look. Now he walked with a jaunty step, and he was wearing a bright red scarf around his neck which gave him an almost dashing air.” (137) Joséphine also starts to appear in red after she moves to the chocolaterie.

Joséphine was wearing her coat buttoned to the neck, her red beret and a new red scarf which fluttered wildly in her face. She walked into the shop with a defiant look of assurance, and for a moment she was a radiant, striking woman, cheeks flushed and eyes sparkling with the wind. (128)

The colour red is also significant to Armande’s character, who is also described as having supernatural powers. She lets Vianne in on her secret, namely, that she likes to wear red underwear under her mourning clothes: “Carefully she smoothed her skirts back over the shimmer of scarlet petticoat. ‘Red silk undies,’ she grinned, seeing my look.” (83)

Finally, Reynaud describes Vianne wearing red as her having a pagan appearance: “I could see her on the jetty below Armande Voizin’s house, her long red coat and loose hair giving her an oddly pagan look among the flames” (128).

The colour red, therefore, acts a significant symbol of magic in the novel. The recurring use of red is not only a stylistic choice. It is reserved for the characters who are open to magic or destined to form a bond with Vianne; it connects these characters to the novel's magical elements. Red acts as both foreshadowing connections, in the case of Roux for instance, and a visual cue, such as for Armande, signalling her openness to the mystical. It is also Harris’ way to show a character’s potential to be transformed through magic, such as in the storylines of Guillaume or Joséphine. This deliberate use of red within the narrative supports the magical realist framework, where everyday elements, such as colours, are assigned a deeper, symbolic meaning.

2.2 Magical Objects

Throughout the narrative, Harris depicts Vianne and Anouk having occult practices and rituals, which they often perform when they are met with negativity or danger. Bremmer, in his

preface to *The Materiality of Magic*, explains how throughout history, magic has not only been an intangible force, such as words and practices, but also a tangible presence, expressed through various material objects.

Finally, magic, as we already noted, is not limited to words and actions, but is also expressed via medial forms, such as amulets, books, curse tablets, or gems, amongst other forms of mediality. The material presence of these media shaped the life world of the people that used, carried or buried them. (12)

In *Chocolat*, these material objects include Vianne's sachets, candles, food and cards. While most of these elements seem to be mere decorative details in the narrative, without playing a central role in the plot, they are essential in creating the magical ambiance. They subtly underscore Vianne and Anouk's pagan beliefs, enriching the environment with a mystical ambiance, and enhancing the overall magical undertone of the story.

At the beginning of the novel, as highlighted in the discussion related to the meaning of colours, Vianne and Anouk light "[...] a candle for every room, gold and red and white and orange" (Harris 11). By doing so, they get rid of the ominous sensation pervading the house. Later in the novel, when Joséphine leaves her husband and takes refuge in the chocolaterie, Vianne describes how she uses a candle to get rid of negative energies: "I put a white candle on the table to clear bad influences, and its scent is nostalgic, comforting" (132). Finally, she lights "a candle and took it into Joséphine's empty bedroom" (199) when she decides to read cards and continues to do so at every other occurrence of tarot in the novel.

The usage of candles plays a role in enhancing the novel's magical ambiance. Their light create a visual that is both mysterious and mystical, as opposed to the scenes that are set in daylight or by a lamp. Furthermore, the candles cast a warm and inviting glow, aligning with the colour symbolism of the magical scenes. The presence of orange, red, and other warm tones, just like the flame of a candle, becomes a visual cue for the reader, marking moments where the supernatural enters the scene.

Candles oftentimes appear next to food-related magical practices, casting their light on ordinary items and infusing them with the magical. For instance, Vianne describes how she revisits an old ritual she and her mother used to practice: "The habit of ritual, so long abandoned, returns with unexpected ease. Casting the circle – water in a glass, a dish of salt and a lit candle on the floor – is almost a comfort, a return to days when everything had a simple explanation." (Harris 119) In the scene, the otherwise ordinary items of water and salt become part of the

mystical. Moreover, after driving out the ghosts from the house by lighting candles and chanting, Vianne places “rock salt and bread by the doorstep to placate any resident gods” (11).

In these scenes, Harris takes ordinary items and assigns them a supernatural role by using them in Vianne’s rituals, reinforcing the magical realism that defines the novel’s world. Even if they do not have a direct influence on it, infusing the narrative with the descriptions of these practices continues to build a sense of magic and wonder throughout the novel.

Another instance of such small details that contribute to the overall mysticism of the narrative is Vianne’s sachets. Even though it is never directly revealed what is inside them, Reynaud talks about them on several occasions. “A red sachet suspended from the door-jamb brushes my face – more of her superstition – and I cannot shake off the absurd impression that the ridiculous thing is responsible for my malaise; herbs and bones sewn together and hung there to trouble my mind” (Harris 96).

The colour of the sachets’ is once again cue for the reader to recognize their magical nature and the idea is reinforced by Reynaud, who believes they are capable of making him nauseous. While talking to Vianne in the chocolaterie, he feels worse and worse and blames it on the sachets that she hung.

But the sacrament of marriage . . .’ he looked agitated now, leaning forward against the counter with his face twisted in distress. His hands clutched at the padded surface as if for support. Another surreptitious glance at the bright sachet at the door. (Harris 141)

Even though Vianne never suggests that the little bags contain anything magical, Reynaud’s thoughts presented to the reader, together with the cue words of “red” and “bright” help the reader to grasp the sachets’ supernatural character. Their subtle presence in the chocolaterie and the narrative is another way for Harris to create the magical atmosphere.

Reynaud thinks that both Anouk and Vianne are affecting the village’s moral in a negative way, openly disregarding his Christian teachings and showcasing their pagan ideas, such as by hanging the sachets. Him tearing them down at the end of the novel is a symbolic way to show his fight against the anti-religious beliefs Vianne and Anouk foster in the community. When he breaks into the chocolaterie, one of his first moves is to get rid of the little bags: “Another of her red sachets swings above the doorway; I pull it down and drop it contemptuously onto the floor” (Harris 216).

The sachets are therefore not just decorative elements, but a symbol of the broader struggle between Vianne's belief system and Reynaud's rigid adherence to Christianity. When Reynaud tears down the sachets in an attempt to cleanse the village of what he perceives as corrupting influences, it is more than just an act of destruction—it represents his fight to reassert his authority and suppress the magical, pagan practices that challenge his beliefs. By imbuing these seemingly ordinary sachets with a sense of the supernatural and a symbolic meaning, Harris further establishes the mystical atmosphere of the novel.

2.3 Tarot and The Black Man

Tarot, otherwise mentioned as card reading in the novel, is another prevalent magical practice of Vianne. On several occasions, Vianne takes out her cards in order to try and understand the future and what her intuitions about other characters mean.

Tarot is inherently connected to Vianne's mother. She explains how her mother believed in card reading religiously and how it was a nightly ritual for her during their travels to lay out the cards.

We were moving almost every day now, Mother reading the cards at night when she thought I was asleep. Every night the cards, slippery to the touch with age and respectful handling, were laid out on the bunk beside her. She whispered their names to herself, sinking deeper every day into the mazy confusion which would eventually claim her altogether. Ten of Swords, death. Three of Swords, death. Two of Swords, death. The Chariot. Death. The Chariot turned out to be a New York cab one summer evening as we shopped for groceries in the busy Chinatown streets. (Harris 31)

Through this flashback, Harris draws an ominous connection between reading cards and Vianne's mother's death. She is said to have sunk "deeper every day into the mazy confusion which would eventually claim her altogether" (32). The threatening atmosphere of the scene, which describes Vianne's mother slowly losing her grasp on reality, is further emphasised by Vianne suggesting that her mother foretold her own death through the cards.

Scenes about Vianne's card reading contain the same alarming sensation throughout the novel, contributing to the mystical atmosphere. Even Vianne seems to be scared to practice this particular magic, alluding to the fact that divination through the cards might be a type of magic that is even more powerful than her. In contrast to her calm and ritualistic approach to telling

the future through crafting bonbons, scenes of her laying cards are consistently in secret, during the night: “A glance backwards to ensure Anouk is still asleep. I do not want her to sense my unease. Then I shuffle, cut, shuffle, cut until I have four cards” (Harris 61).

Her uneasiness and secretive behaviour regarding card reading is contrasted with her own type of magic, through the means of food and chocolate. This is highlighted when she recounts her life with her mother. “And while she read her cards and muttered to herself, I would leaf through my collection of cookery cards, incanting the names of never-tasted dishes like mantras, like the secret formulae of eternal life” (206). Harris further deepens the gap between Vianne and her mother’s attitude toward tarot when she writes: “Mother with her cards, her divinations directed our mad course across Europe. Cookery cards anchored us, placed landmarks on the bleak borders” (44) While her mother muttered over the tarot, Vianne would immerse herself in cookery cards. Vianne’s uneasiness around the tarot cards, which she associates with her mother’s instability, sets tarot apart from the comforting rituals she performs with food and chocolate. This juxtaposition not only emphasizes the unsettling nature of the cards, suggesting that tarot holds a dangerous and unpredictable power, but also contributes to the novel’s magical realism by presenting everyday activities, like cooking, as Vianne’s preferred form of magic.

As a result of her aversion, Vianne distances herself from her mother’s magic. She vows to lock away her mother’s cards and turns to other sources. She explains: “As an antidote I read Jung and Herman Hesse, and learned about the collective unconscious. [...] There are no demons but a collection of archetypes every civilization has in common” (Harris 62). The idea of the archetypes becomes important in connection with the “Black Man.” She describes how they have met several embodiments of him, as “the Black Man has many faces, all of them unforgiving, hard and strangely envious” (43).

Jung writes, in connection with the collective unconscious and archetypes that “as far the collective unconscious contents are concerned we are dealing with archaic or—I would say are primordial types, that is, with universal images that have existed since the remotest times” (Jung 22). An archetype is, following Jung’s words, is a universal symbol and image that appears across different cultures and societies. It represents fundamental human experiences and emotions, shaping the way we perceive the world. The Black Man in the novel functions as such an archetype, standing in opposition to the values of Vianne and her mother and embodying their fear of the societal judgement and personal guilt.

The Black Man is swiftly tied to Reynaud's character in the novel. Vianne explains how they fled with her mother from the Black Man, just to find him again – in a different physical form, but embodying the same archetype – in Reynaud.

For years we ran from the priest, the Black Man, and when his face returned time and again in the cards it would be time to run once more, time to hide from the darkness he had opened in her heart. And here he is again, just as I thought we had found our place at last, Anouk and I. Standing at the door like the angel at the gate. (Harris 37)

By introducing this archetype early in the novel and drawing a connection between him and Reynaud, Harris foreshadows his and Vianne's conflict.

The Black Man can be considered as a second layer to Reynaud's character, or as a secondary role that he plays in the narrative, without even being aware of it. His character therefore splits into the part of the ordinary priest, who stands firmly against Vianne's influence and promotes Christian values, and that of the Black Man, a mystical and spiritual being. This secondary role of his becomes even more embedded in the supernatural when Vianne herself doubts his existence, just to then receive a vision of Reynaud at the sick bed of the other priest he visits regularly.

The Black Man is a fiction, I tell myself firmly. An embodiment of fears underneath a carnival head. A tale for dark nights. Shadows in a strange room. In lieu of an answer I see that picture again, bright as a transparency: Reynaud at an old man's bedside, waiting, his lips moving as if in prayer, fire at his back like sunlight through stained glass. It is not a comforting picture. There is something predatory in the priest's stance, a likeness between the two reddened faces, the glow of flame between them darkly menacing. I try to apply my studies in psychology. It is an image of the Black Man as Death, an archetype which reflects my fear of the unknown. (Harris 173)

The vision of Reynaud at the sickbed under the ominous light reinforces this supernatural connection between him and the archetype. Vianne begins to see Reynaud not just as an adversary but as the embodiment of the Black Man, which results in her actions and decisions being influenced by this perception.

This is also the reason why she decides to turn to tarot once again, despite her promise to leave her mother's magic alone. In the scene, the Reynaud – and therefore the Black Man – is equated to the card of the Hermit in tarot.

The Lovers. The Tower. The Hermit. Death. Sitting cross-legged on the bare floor I shuffled them with something more than mere idleness. The Tower with its falling people, its walls crumbling, I could understand. It is my constant fear of displacement, the fear of the road, of loss. The Hermit with his hood and lantern looks very like Reynaud, his sly pale face half-hidden in shadows. (Harris 199)

The connection between the Hermit and Reynaud is significant and is emphasised by repetition throughout the novel. According to Dean, who explains the traditional meanings of tarot cards in her book *An Ultimate Guide to Tarot*, the Hermit is “a man all alone, old and bearded, with just his staff and lantern as his companions in a snowy wilderness. Inside his lantern is a glowing star, a symbol of guidance that lights his way ahead. The Hermit needs privacy, time for silence and discretion, so he can think and plan” (122).

Reynaud’s character is in line with this description, especially in chapters that he narrates. Just like the Hermit in tarot, Reynaud wants to lead his community and be their spiritual guide. He yearns to have a bigger meaning in his life and finds joy in martyrdom.

Armande called it a crusade. She meant it as an insult, I know, but even so . . . I feel a surge of excitement at the thought of this conflict. Could this be the task for which God has chosen me? This is why I came to Lansquenet, *mon père*. To fight for my people. To save them from temptation. (Harris 68)

Dean continues to describe the Hermit’s meaning as follows:

This card can show you enjoying solitude, as you need space to process your thoughts and feelings. The Hermit can show a physical journey, but more commonly he represents a state of mind in which you wisely withdraw and keep your own counsel. It can show breaking with tradition and finding a unique approach to a challenge. (Dean 123)

For Reynaud, the challenge is Vianne’s presence and influence. The physical journey can be equated to the period of Lent, which is the time for him to adhere from certain types of food, in order to reach a “state of mind”, which is the spiritual journey that Christians follow as a preparation of the upcoming celebration. His “unique approach to a challenge” can be interpreted as the way he finally decides to stop Vianne’s chocolate festival: by breaking into the chocolaterie to destroy the chocolate.

The interpretation of linking the card and its meaning with Reynaud's character is also supported by Estes, author of *The Book of Tarot*, who describes the signification of the Hermit's illustration on tarot cards as the following.

Cloaks symbolize alienation and withdrawal from society and the world. They also symbolize an advanced state of mind. The hood refers to personal thoughts that are unknown to others. [...] The hermit represents one who is intent on perfecting his soul and developing his awareness to attain a higher level of consciousness than that which he has. He has abandoned the material comforts and security of people which at one time seemed so necessary to him. (35)

Considering Vianne's inability to see through Reynaud like she does with others and Reynaud's wish to be the spiritual leader of the community, Estes description seems to match Reynaud's character as someone who has "personal thoughts that are unknown to others" and as one who yearns to "attain a higher level of consciousness" (35). Through these descriptions, it becomes clear that Harris uses the Hermit's card to suggest additional information about Reynaud's character and foreshadow his importance and role in the novel.

The connection between Reynaud and the Hermit is further illustrated by Vianne burning the Hermit's card after reading the cards.

I shuffled the cards again, but I do not have my mother's deft touch and they slipped out of my hands onto the wood. The Hermit fell face-up. He looked more like Reynaud than ever in the flickering candlelight. His face seemed to grin viciously in the shadows. I'll find a way, he promised slyly. You think you've won, but I'll still find a way. I could feel his malevolence at my fingertips. Mother would have called it a sign. Suddenly, on an impulse I only half understood, I picked up the Hermit and held him up to the candle flame. For a moment the flame flirted with the stiff card, then the surface began to bubble. The pallid face grimaced and blackened. (Harris 200)

Burning the card becomes a supernatural driving force of the plot, setting the climax of the novel into motion. Soon after, Reynaud wakes up in the middle of the night, ready to fight Vianne's festival. Instead of destroying the bonbons, however, he ends up giving in to the temptation.

It is like one of my dreams. I roll in chocolates. I imagine myself in a field of chocolates, on a beach of chocolates, basking-rooting-gorging. I have no time to read the labels; I

cram chocolates into my mouth at random. The pig loses his cleverness in the face of so much delight, becomes a pig again, and though something at the top of my mind screams at me to stop I cannot help myself. Once begun it cannot end. This has nothing to do with hunger; I force them down, mouth bulging, hands full. (Harris 219)

Reynaud's indulgence in the chocolates symbolizes his ultimate surrender in the battle between him and Vianne. Throughout the novel, Reynaud has positioned himself as the guardian of moral purity, opposing Vianne's influence and what he perceives as her pagan and hedonistic ways. However, in the moment when he gives in to the temptation of the chocolates, he betrays his own principles.

An important element of the scene is when Vianne appears and finds Reynaud in the shop.

She is waiting for me, watching from behind the bead curtain. I have no way of knowing how long she has watched me. A tiny smile curves her lips. Very gently she takes the cudgel from my hand. Between her fingers she is holding something which looks like a charred piece of coloured paper. A card, maybe. (Harris 219)

The detail of Vianne holding the card of the Hermit that she had previously burnt suggests that it was not simple, ordinary temptation that pushed Reynaud into his fall. Instead, it seems that by burning the card, Vianne exercised a supernatural influence over Reynaud him.

Based on this exploration, Harris' implementation of the concept of archetypes and card reading appear as deliberate magical realist elements that foreshadow the central conflict between Vianne and Reynaud, while simultaneously creating a mystical and frequently ominous atmosphere. The tarot, deeply connected to Vianne's past and her mother's death, serves as more than just a magical tool for divination, creating a transcendent setting – it becomes a means to suggest more to the reader about Reynaud's character and motivations through his connection to the Hermit. Similarly, the Black Man, as an archetype, embodies the fears and societal judgments that haunt Vianne through Reynaud's character. By recounting stories about Vianne's travels with her mother, and their past encounters with previous embodiments of the Black Man, Harris provides further information regarding Vianne's fears, motivations and past. Ultimately, by incorporating spiritual and magical elements, Harris guides the reader's understanding of the characters and the trajectory of their storylines, and enhances the novel's rich, mystical ambiance.

Chapter 3: Chocolate

3.1 Chocolate as Ambiance

“The food of the gods, bubbling and frothing in ceremonial goblets. The bitter elixir of life” (Harris 45). This description of chocolate comes from Vianne herself. In the novel, chocolate rises above its role as a delicacy and takes on a profound, symbolic meaning, creating a mystical atmosphere and ensuring the magical realist setting of the novel.

Historically, cacao was held in high regard by ancient civilizations, such as the Mayans, who believed it was a sacred gift from the gods (Kiyokawa 10). Blagojevic, when explaining how chocolate becomes a type of totem in the novel, writes: “Chocolate is the main driving force in the community, pivotal to its existence. Accordingly, the suggested totem status of chocolate enhances its properties and power” (19). The divine, mystical and pagan properties of chocolate are highlighted in the novel by Vianne's ritualistic approach to chocolate-making, treating it as a sacred craft. As she explains it,

Perhaps this is what Reynaud senses in my little shop; a throwback to times when the world was a wider, wilder place. Before Christ – before Adonis was born in Bethlehem or Osiris sacrificed at Easter – the cocoa bean was revered. Magical properties were attributed to it. Its brew was sipped on the steps of sacrificial temples; its ecstasies were fierce and terrible. (Harris 45)

Descriptions such as this one establish the consumption of chocolate as a supernatural, sacred act. Everything related to it, such as the chocolate shop, acquires a mystical undertone, contributing greatly to the magical atmosphere of the novel.

The mystical nature of the chocolaterie is enhanced by the recurring imaginary of the cave of Ali baba: the shop is described as filled with riches and temptation, just like the cave from the tale.

The air is hot and rich with the scent of chocolate. Quite unlike the light powdery chocolate I knew as a boy, this has a throaty richness like the perfumed beans from the coffee-stall on the market, a redolence of amaretto and tiramisu, a smoky, burnt flavour which enters my mouth somehow and makes it water. (Harris 95)

This illusion is further emphasised when Reynaud talks about how the church cannot compete with the riches and promise Vianne's shop offers: "I try to infuse the sermon with our own seductions, but the dark glories of the Church cannot compare with her magic carpet rides." (Harris 202)

By incorporating mystical elements and tale-like descriptions into the segments featuring the chocolate shop and the craft itself, Harris elevates the significance of chocolate in the novel, depicting it as a source of the supernatural. Through the intricate and mystical descriptions, chocolate becomes important as a means of fabricating the magical atmosphere permeating the whole of the narrative.

3.2 Chocolate as a Magical and Active Agent

The seemingly insignificant choice between eating chocolate and abstaining from it plays a crucial role in the narrative as an aid for the reader to get a better understanding of the characters, where they stand in the community and their place within the novel's magical realist framework. This choice becomes a cornerstone for the community, dividing those loyal to Reynaud from those who are more welcoming of changes in the town.

Vianne and Anouk arrive in Lansquenet-sous-Tannes to find a close-knit community, strongly held together by Reynaud's figure and the church. There are clear rules and people know the role they play in the community. As they go on to open up the chocolaterie, they shake up the established hierarchy of the community. Komori explains that "[a]s new people come into contact with the community, the formation of the original community changes and new communities are formed" (33). The new community's central figure is Vianne and the means of connecting its members is chocolate itself.

There are people who are won over almost instantly, such as Guillaume or Armande, and there are those like Roux or Joséphine, who warm up to the chocolate shop slowly, but become important members of the group. Others, led by Caroline, Muscat and Reynaud, are quick to distance themselves from the shop.

Harris bestows the characters' choice with a deeper meaning than it would be in a realist novel. By refraining from consuming chocolate and adhering to religious rules, characters also choose to dismiss Vianne's magic and the temptation that her bonbons signify. Conversely,

those who embrace the changes that chocolate brings to their lives see it as a supernatural force and a means to bring the community together.

3.2.1 Joséphine Muscat

Joséphine Muscat is probably the character with the most significant transformation in her character arc. The novel introduces her as a kleptomaniac woman, who is an outsider in the community. She is the wife of the coffee house-owner, Paul-Marie Muscat, an aggressive man who is trying to control every aspect of Joséphine's life. Her transformation is not only foreshadowed by her interaction with chocolate, but it is, in equally part, induced by it. Chocolate acts as a connecting element between her and Vianne, and in later scenes, it also gives her strength when having to deal with difficult situations.

The very first scene she appears in shows her stealing from the chocolate shop.

The large hands are surprisingly nimble, rough quick hands reddened with housework. One stays lodged in the pit of the stomach, the other flutters briefly at her side like a gunslinger's swift draw, and the little silver packet with the rose – marked ten francs – has gone from the shelf and into the pocket of her coat. (Harris 20)

Joséphine stealing the chocolate is a metaphor for her yearning to break free from her marriage. The theft symbolizes her first step toward reclaiming her autonomy with the help of Vianne. Chocolate becomes an important element in her journey of self-liberation. As she continues to form a bond with Vianne and the chocolaterie, the chocolate empowers her, giving her the courage to ultimately leave her abusive husband. Komori reflects on the importance of the chocolate shop for Joséphine in her study:

Vianne's kitchen represents not only a shelter but also a space where Joséphine can grow and release herself from the autonomy of her husband. As she learns to make the pralines under Vianne's guidance, she also learns to construct her own identity free of her husband. Her more careful appearance and happier demeanour reflect her newfound confidence and an identity a world away from the passive, abused wife she used to be. (67)

Having left her husband, Joséphine starts to thrive. She becomes more independent and more openly defiant of Reynaud, who tries to convince her to go back to Muscat. She dismisses her religious and marital obligations to her husband and stays at the chocolaterie with Vianne.

She also starts wearing bolder colours and laughing more, a testament of her liberation from her oppressing marriage.

At first, Joséphine is content with her freedom, but soon she has to face the challenge of reclaiming her place in the community. What Salenius writes about Vianne's need to become part of the society is applicable for Joséphine's situation also.

It is not enough to wander around the outskirts of society or to isolate oneself within it in order to produce change in attitudes. One must work within a community and society, to make others see things from a different light, therein lies the potential for subversive action. (42)

For Joséphine, this means that she has to engage with the town again, now as an independent woman, and face both the critique and the praise, in order to compel the conservative community to accept her new status. Chocolate is assisting her to do so. As Vianne describes in the novel, chocolate has a magical effect on Joséphine, empowering and calming her, such as in the scene when she goes to the shop to announce that she has left Muscat.

Instead I went into the kitchen and very slowly prepared the *chocolat espresso*. By the time I'd poured it, added cognac and chocolate chips, put the cups onto a yellow tray with a wrapped sugar lump in each saucer, she was calm again. It's a small kind of magic, I know, but it sometimes works. 'Why did you change your mind?' I asked when the cup was half-finished. (Harris 131)

The cup being half-finished is an important element, as it highlights the soothing effects of chocolate. Later in the novel, when Joséphine wants to reintegrate into the community, she also uses chocolate to reach out to people. When Vianne convinces her to talk to Roux, Joséphine agrees to take him a cup of hot chocolate. She uses it as a way to bond with him and show that her intentions are friendly. Chocolate in this scene is also used to suggest that consuming it gives her courage, as if it was a magic potion.

I took a *rocher noir* from a pile at my side and popped it into her half-open mouth before she had time to speak. 'Give you courage,' I explained, turning to pour the chocolate into a large cup. 'Go on then. Chew.' I heard her make a tiny sound, half-laughter. I gave her the cup. 'Ready?' 'I suppose.' Voice thick with chocolate. 'I'll try.' (Harris 182)

When Vianne comes back to the shop later, she finds them sitting like friends and from this moment in the novel, Joséphine and Roux are no longer suspicious of each other. This

interaction marks Joséphine's first steps toward reintegration. Vianne describes the scene, mentioning that they drank a sizeable portion of chocolate while talking: "I found them in the shop together, a half-empty pot of chocolate on the counter between them. Joséphine looked pink-eyed but relieved, almost happy. Roux was laughing at some comment of hers, a strange, unfamiliar sound, exotic because it is so rarely heard." (Harris 183)

Joséphine's storyline is greatly shaped by her interactions with chocolate and the shop. Stealing the bonbons is the element that ultimately reveals more about her character and motivations, while living in the chocolaterie and learning to use chocolate as a way of empowerment and an aid to reconnecting with community is what solidifies chocolate as an active participant in the narrative. Through the magical realism lens, chocolate transcends its inanimate nature to become an active part of liberation for Joséphine and a tool for Harris to foreshadow her storyline through her interactions with it.

3.2.3 Roux

As quoted before, in Rué's words, "'The Other' is an acknowledged rival without which a community cannot shape its identity". (12) Although her work focuses on Vianne's outsider status in the village, there is another, probably even more marked group in the novel: the river-gypsies, who stand in opposition to Lansquenet-sous-Tannes' conservative community:

They are vagrants. They have no respect and no values. They are the river-gypsies, spreaders of disease, thieves, liars, murderers when they can get away with it. Let them stay and they will spoil everything we have worked for, père. All our education. Their children will run with ours until everything we have done for them is ruined. They will steal our children's minds away. Teach them hatred and disrespect for the Church. (Harris 65)

Through Reynaud's focalisation, they are depicted as the direct enemies of the church, having a negative influence on children and being a danger to the village's moral code. Considering Reynaud's similar views on Vianne, it is not accidental that even before Vianne and Roux's first meeting, she mentions her connection to the gypsies, foreshadowing their relationship. Firstly, she notes how she feels like they share the love for the nomad lifestyle, infused in her by her mother: "Most of all she gave me her love of new places, the gypsy wanderlust which took us all over Europe and further." (Harris 31) Later, Harris subtly hints at

the future connection between Roux and Vianne by highlighting her preparation of mendiants, a type of chocolate historically associated with beggars and gypsies:

I prepare a batch of mendiants in the kitchen. These are my own favourites – thus named because they were sold by beggars and gypsies years ago – biscuit-sized discs of dark, milk or white chocolate upon which have been scattered lemon-rind, almonds and plump Malaga raisins. (33)

Chocolate, as a recurring magical element in the narrative, serves as a barometer for the relationships Vianne forms. None other but her favourite chocolate's connection to the gypsies foreshadows the positive and meaningful relationship that will develop between her and Roux, emphasizing the role of chocolate as a bridge to deepen connections.

Despite Vianne's empathy and understanding of his situation, Roux is not instantly warmed up to her. During their first few encounters, Roux does not know about Vianne's outsider status in the community and believes she is trying to help them out of pity. Vianne is cautious about her words throughout the interaction and describes how suspicious she is in their eyes (Harris 75). Eventually, she convinces Roux to go see her at the chocolaterie. He arrives wearing "not quite a smile" (Harris 88), then Vianne describes him "taking in his surroundings with keen, if suspicious, interest" (88). At this point, Roux has not tasted Vianne's chocolate yet. Moments later, after she has poured him a cup of hot chocolate, and Roux "took a mouthful" (88), he becomes more talkative. Later in the scene he is described to have "relaxed a little and drank more chocolate. For the first time he seemed to register how good it was and gave me a smile of sudden and peculiar sweetness" (89).

This interaction underscores the recurring theme that chocolate is not merely a treat but a magical element in the narrative that fosters relationships and brings people together, allowing them to open up to Vianne and therefore provide insight into their character to the reader. Following this pattern, it is after this scene that Roux lets go some of his suspicion and the reader learns more about his past, how he earns his living and how he became a nomad.

The climax of their relationship is the night they spend together on Armande's birthday party – once again, marked by the presence of chocolate. Vianne describes the experience as related to the supernatural.

I kissed him. He smelt of paint and soap and chocolate. I tasted chocolate in his mouth and thought of Armande. I'd always thought he cared for Joséphine. Even as I kissed him

I knew it, but this was the only magic we had between us to combat the night. (Harris 210)

In the scene, Vianne and Roux share a kiss that tastes like chocolate, highlighting it as a catalyst and central element of their growing intimacy.

Roux's relationship with Vianne is deeply intertwined with the magical realism that permeates the novel with chocolate serving as the signal and the central element of their connection. From their initial interactions to their later relationship, chocolate is not only a delicacy but a symbol of magic, bridging the gap between them and fostering a deeper connection.

3.3 Customers' Favourites and Chocolate for Divination

Previously, the magical nature of chocolate was examined as a means to set the mystical atmosphere of the scenes. Then the liberating, bonding and calming effect of chocolate was discussed and illustrated through the examples of Joséphine Muscat and Roux. In this section, two additional uses of chocolate are examined, namely, how Vianne's supernatural powers serve to figure out people's favourites and how she uses her craft to see into people's lives and futures.

Both of these elements are important to support the magical realist framework of the novel, as they depict Vianne transforming the everyday act of interacting with customers and making bonbons into a transcendent experience. Analysed within the context of magical realism, the ritualistic descriptions of the chocolate making process create a mystical atmosphere, while Vianne's ability to feel which type of chocolate her customers will love and her visions during the preparation process serve to reveal important plot points and provide deeper insight into the characters. Thus, these elements are manifestations of magical realism as a narrative device in the novel, enriching the storytelling and deepening the reader's understanding of the characters.

3.3.1 Customers' Favourites

Throughout the novel, Vianne takes pride in her ability to figure out her customers' favourite type of delicacy even without them telling her about their tastes. Before examining instances of her doing so successfully, it is worth exploring the single character whose favourite Vianne cannot fathom: Lansquenet-sous-Tannes' priest, Reynaud.

In her study “Eating, Starving and the Body: The Presentation of Self”, Nikandam argues that

It is quite long time that the body depicts human’s affections, sensations and speculations. It considers as a manifestation of a person’s cultural sphere. In fact, the body was considered like a sign to fight against cultural, moral, and political burden. The people display their opinions and thought by their acts and appearance. (115)

In *Chocolat*, Reynaud’s character takes a firm stance against consuming chocolate and giving into the temptation that Vianne’s shop means in his eyes. This choice is strengthened by the fact that the chocolaterie opens during, Lent, which is sacred period of penance and reflection for all Christians, leading up to the commemoration of Jesus' crucifixion and death. (Black 100).

During this period, devoted Christians refrain from eating meat, and to varying degrees, fish, dairy products and sweets. Reynaud’s abstaining from eating is a religious choice, showing his devotion and his focus on his inner preparation to the upcoming holy period, but it is also to make his opposition to the chocolaterie and Vianne’s presence clear. He believes her to be the embodiment of moral corruption, promoting the worship of pagan deities and carrying out rituals which demoralize the community.

Reynaud’s abstinence can be therefore explained by religious and moral reasons, but Vianne’s inability to see what his favourite would be if he was to eat chocolate indicates a greater significance to his choice. She describes having no intuition about Reynaud:

‘I’m sure I know your favourites.’ I lapsed into my sales banter automatically, but it is untrue. I have no idea of this man’s tastes. He is a complete blank to me, a man-shaped darkness cut into the air. I feel no point of contact with him, and my smile broke on him like a wave on a rock. (Harris 35)

Her lack of insight into his character underscores how they have no point of connection. Through this early interaction, the reader can understand that they are fundamentally different, having opposing world-views about the purpose of life and what chocolate represents to them on an individual level. His rejection of chocolate signifies his aversion to anything blasphemous, in opposition to Vianne’s pagan beliefs and the supernatural.

Therefore, Vianne is unable to read Reynaud. Even though she cannot find his favourite, at one point she shares which chocolate reminds her of him. “They remind me so much of you.

A dozen of my best huîtres de Saint-Malo, those small flat pralines shaped to look like tightly closed oysters” (Harris 38). This also foreshadows how in the novel, they will keep trying to deduce each other’s motives and the true meaning of their words and actions. However, with their minds being closed off from each other like the oysters, without any common ground or shared values to open up the pathway to successful communication, their efforts prove to be in vain.

Most customers’ favourites allude to their individual personality traits in order to provide a more comprehensive identity for them. Vianne describes many of them in passing, explaining that even though she possess the ability to pry more into her customers’ lives, she consciously decides to only go so far.

I know all their favourites. It’s a knack, a professional secret like a fortuneteller reading palms. My mother would have laughed at this waste of my skills, but I have no desire to probe further into their lives than this. I do not want their secrets or their innermost thoughts. Nor do I want their fears or gratitude. (Harris 39)

This thought is also important to highlight that Vianne’s ability to know someone’s favourite at once is not ordinary talent or simple luck, but in fact a magical power. She goes on to talk about many of the townsfolk in detail.

I can read their eyes, their mouths, so easily: this one with its hint of bitterness will relish my zesty orange twists; this sweet-smiling one the soft-centred apricot hearts; this girl with the windblown hair will love the mendiants; this brisk, cheery woman the chocolate brazils. For Guillaume, the florentines, eaten neatly over a saucer in his tidy bachelor’s house. Narcisse’s appetite for double-chocolate truffles reveals the gentle heart beneath the gruff exterior. Caroline Clairmont will dream of cinder toffee tonight and wake hungry and irritable. (Harris 39)

Harris uses this magical power to stress the qualities of those characters who do not have many scenes in the novel. For instance, Narcisse’s “gentle heart beneath the gruff exterior” (39) is the only trait ever emphasised in the novel regarding him. Through Vianne’s magical way to perceive this, Harris charges the description with an air of mystique. It becomes a special and hidden truth that transcends ordinary knowledge.

Through Vianne's insights, Harris infuses everyday interactions with an air of magic, transforming the simple act of selecting chocolates into a revelation of character. This power

allows her to see beyond appearances and into the minds of the townsfolk. However, Vianne's inability to penetrate the inner world of Reynaud highlights the boundaries of her magical perception.

3.3.2 Chocolate as a Means to See into People

In closing this chapter, it is key to mention chocolate as a tool for Vianne to get more in touch with her powers. The process of making chocolate becomes a ritual through which she gains insight into people's innermost secrets, pasts, and potential futures. This unique ability is a powerful narrative device that allows Harris to reveal deeper layers of her characters and transmit crucial character information with a touch of mystique.

The ritualistic treatment of Vianne's craft creates a mystical atmosphere.

There is a kind of alchemy in the transformation of base chocolate into this wise fool's gold, a layman's magic which even my mother might have relished. As I work I clear my mind, breathing deeply. The windows are open, and the through draught would be cold if it were not for the heat of the stoves, the copper pans, the rising vapour from the melting couverture. The mingled scents of chocolate, vanilla, heated copper and cinnamon are intoxicating, powerfully suggestive; the raw and earthy tang of the Americas, the hot and resinous perfume of the rainforest. This is how I travel now, as the Aztecs did in their sacred rituals. (Harris 45)

By describing the chocolate-making process as "alchemy" and "a layman's magic," Harris suggests that it is transcendent in nature. The detailed description of Vianne's preparations - clearing her mind or breathing in deeply - heightens the sensory experience. Finally, the reference to the Aztecs and their sacred rituals further deepens the supernatural ambiance.

In the cases when she uses the chocolate-making process to foretell the future, the vocabulary is an additional aspect of the description that creates this supernatural ambiance. In of the scenes, she is trying to understand Reynaud's character by attempting to pry on his secrets through the chocolate.

There. For a second I almost had it. Across the glossy surface a vaporous ripple forms. Then another, filmy and pale, half-hiding, half-revealing. For a moment I almost saw the answer, the secret which he hides – even from himself – with such fearful calculation, the

key which will set all of us into motion. Scrying with chocolate is a difficult business. The visions are unclear, troubled by rising perfumes which cloud the mind. And I am not my mother, who retained until the day of her death a power of augury so great that the two of us ran before it in wild and growing disarray. But before the vision dissipates I am sure I see something – a room, a bed, an old man lying on the bed, his eyes raw holes in his white face . . . And fire. Fire. (Harris 45)

In this segment, Harris uses words and phrases such as “fearful calculation”, “troubled”, “death”, “growing disarray” and “eyes raw holes in his white face”. (45) The language Harris employs in the scene is ominous and gloomy, transforming the otherwise ordinary act of making chocolate into a depiction of a dangerous and mystical act. Normally, (as discussed in Chapter 3), scenes containing magic are quite bright, warm and welcoming. Conversely, this darker aspect of scrying with the chocolate highlights the darker side of Vianne’s magic.

It is also worth taking a look at the tool itself: chocolate as a starting material for Vianne. In his research about magic Gordon writes about the materiality of magic. He proposes moving away from the traditional divide between humans as active agents and passive objects to view objects as active agents also. Humans create objects to shape the world into what it is supposed to be like, but these objects also influence and limit humans themselves. (Gordon 136)

Vianne creating artisanal bonbons from the chocolate and using the process as a magical tool can be considered as an “activity that in turn helps to transform the world into how it ought to be” (136). Through crafting bonbons, Vianne gains valuable insights, uncovering information about Reynaud’s past and his connection to the fire, providing her with parts of the necessary knowledge to be prepared for their final confrontation.

Ultimately, Vianne’s ability to reveal secrets about people through manipulating chocolate enhances her magical abilities, while also serves as a narrative mechanism through which Harris delves into the complexities of her characters. By treating objects as agents, as Gordon suggests, Vianne’s art becomes a magical force that shapes reality, revealing hidden truths and guiding her actions.

Conclusion

Joanne Harris' novel *Chocolat* is a distinctive work of magical realist fiction. While the author herself prefers to refer to her novels as emotional realism, through the exploration provided in Chapter 1, it becomes apparent that her narrative is rather a unique take on magical realism, with a focus on the emotional experiences of the characters. This is reflected by how the perception of normality in relation to the supernatural elements is influenced by emotions, resulting in unsteady governing rules in the narrative. Still, the novel features the most common elements and characteristics of magical realism, such as a variety of cultural references, intertextuality and social commentary, resulting in its qualification as a magical realist text.

Chapter 2 highlighted the importance of colours and language in creating the magical atmosphere in the novel. Harris uses these to mark ordinary elements which will be later revealed as supernatural ones, such as candles or sachets. These magical details are a means to sustain the mystical atmosphere. Finally, a significant magical element, tarot was explored to highlight how Harris uses it as a device to reveal more about characters, especially in the case of Reynaud, who takes on the supernatural identity of the Black Man in Vianne's eyes.

Chapter 3 explored how chocolate, as a magical realist element, is used as a means to create and signal the presence of the supernatural. Moreover, it shows how chocolate as an active and supernatural element liberates characters and fosters connection. By identifying that the characters who are willing to go into the chocolaterie and enjoy the delicacies are the ones who will later form a bond with Vianne, Harris foreshadows relationships and plotlines. Furthermore, chocolate is used as a way to provide insight into the personalities and secrets of characters through their favourites and Vianne's power to scry with the ingredients while crafting her bonbons.

Thus, Chapter 1 solidifies the classification of *Chocolat* as a unique piece of magical realist writing, while Chapter 2 and 3 provides evidence to the claim that Harris uses magical realism as a device to create a distinct and mystical atmosphere throughout the narrative, to build relationships, and last but not least, to foreshadow future events or reveal past ones, resulting in the mode being a crucial element in both the construction and the comprehension of the narrative.

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