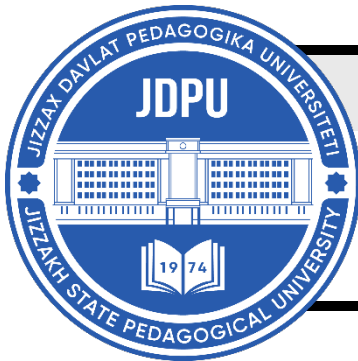


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METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL<http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index>MAGIC REALISM AND ITS APPLICATION IN JOANNE  
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## ABOUT ARTICLE

**Key words:** Magic Realism, Joanne Harris, "Chocolat", Contemporary English Literature, Gender, Social Commentary, Food Symbolism.

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the intricate application of Magic Realism in Joanne Harris's novel "Chocolat", critically examining how Harris merges the fantastical with the mundane to create a narrative that challenges societal norms while enchanting readers. Harris's novel, set in a small French village, utilizes the motif of magic intertwined with daily life, symbolized through food—particularly chocolate—to explore deeper themes such as gender roles, religious conservatism, and the dynamics of social conformity. The analysis delves into how Harris's depiction of magic serves not only as a narrative device but also as a medium for social commentary, questioning the rigid structures of tradition and the potential for transformation within communities. By placing "Chocolat" within the broader context of Magic Realism, this paper highlights the significance of Harris's contribution to contemporary English literature and the enduring relevance of her themes.

## INTRODUCTION

Joanne Harris is a prominent figure in contemporary English literature, renowned for her distinctive narrative style that blends the ordinary with the extraordinary. Her novel "Chocolat" (1999), which gained international acclaim and was subsequently adapted into an Oscar-nominated film, serves as a quintessential example of Magic Realism. This literary genre, which

originated in Latin America and was popularized by authors such as Gabriel García Márquez<sup>1</sup>, merges magical elements with the real world, treating the extraordinary as an integral part of the everyday.

*“Chocolat”* is set in the quaint and conservative French village of Lansquenet-sous-Tannes, where the arrival of the protagonist, Vianne Rocher, disrupts the community’s rigid social order. Vianne, with her mysterious past and magical ability to influence the lives of those around her through the medium of chocolate, becomes a catalyst for change within the village. The novel’s exploration of themes such as religious conservatism, the tension between tradition and modernity, and the role of women in society, all framed through the lens of Magic Realism, makes it a rich subject for analysis.

This paper aims to provide a detailed examination of how Harris employs Magic Realism in *“Chocolat”* to address these themes. It will explore how Harris’s use of magical elements not only enhances the narrative but also serves as a critique of societal norms, particularly those related to gender and religion. Additionally, the paper will situate *“Chocolat”* within the broader context of Magic Realism as a genre, comparing Harris’s approach to that of other key authors in the field.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The analysis presented in this paper is grounded in a qualitative research approach, focusing on a close reading of Joanne Harris’s *“Chocolat”*. The methodology involves a detailed examination of key passages in the novel where elements of Magic Realism are most prominent. These passages are analyzed to uncover how Harris integrates magical elements into the narrative and how these elements contribute to the broader themes of the novel.

In addition to the primary text, secondary sources are utilized to provide a theoretical framework for the analysis. Scholarly articles on Magic Realism, as well as critical essays on *“Chocolat”* and Harris’s other works, are referenced to situate the novel within the broader literary tradition.

Joanne Harris has frequently been referred to as a writer of magic realist fiction due to her penchant for magic, old-fashioned fairy tales, and the occult. However, this term is often disputed by the author, who has questioned the validity and meaning of "magic realism" altogether. Speaking at the Birmingham Book Festival in 2003, Harris expressed uncertainty about the concept of magic realism, particularly when it is applied to her own work. She explained that her writing style was more reflective of a quaint upbringing rather than a

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<sup>1</sup> Bowers, Maggie Ann. "Magic(al) Realism". London: Routledge, 2004.pg.14

deliberate pastiche of the magic realist narrative mode. In transcribing Harris's speech, Serena Trowbridge noted:

*Asked if she believed in [magic realism], [Harris] said that her upbringing was by a superstitious family well versed in folklore, and that and living in a haunted house has brought her to an understanding, if not quite a belief, in magic and the occult.<sup>1</sup>*

Comparative analysis is also employed, drawing parallels between Harris's use of Magic Realism and that of other authors, such as Gabriel García Márquez and Isabel Allende<sup>2</sup>, to highlight the unique aspects of Harris's approach.

The research further includes an exploration of the historical and cultural context in which "Chocolat" was written and received, examining how the themes of the novel resonate with contemporary social issues. This contextual analysis helps to illuminate the ways in which Harris's use of Magic Realism reflects and critiques the societal norms of the late 20th century, particularly in relation to gender roles and religious conservatism.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. *The Intersection of Magic and Reality in "Chocolat"*

One of the most striking aspects of "Chocolat" is how Harris weaves magical elements into the fabric of everyday life. The novel's protagonist, Vianne Rocher,<sup>3</sup> is introduced as a character with an almost supernatural ability to understand and influence the desires of those around her. Her chocolate shop, which opens during Lent, a period of austerity in the Christian calendar, serves as a symbol of temptation and indulgence, directly challenging the town's conservative values.

Harris's use of magic is subtle yet pervasive. Unlike the overtly fantastical elements found in traditional fantasy literature, the magic in "Chocolat" is integrated into the ordinary, making it seem almost natural. For instance, Vianne's chocolates are not just confections; they possess an almost mystical ability to reveal the deepest desires and emotions of those who consume them. This blending of the magical with the mundane is a hallmark of Magic Realism, a genre that seeks to explore the complexities of reality by infusing it with the extraordinary.

Through Vianne's character, Harris critiques the rigidity of societal norms, particularly those related to gender and religion. Vianne's magical abilities allow her to challenge the status quo, offering an alternative vision of community and spirituality that is inclusive and liberating. The novel suggests that magic, rather than being a force of disruption, can be a source of healing and transformation, capable of breaking down the barriers that divide people.

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<sup>1</sup> Trowbridge, Serena. "Transcription of Joanne Harris's Speech at the Birmingham Book Festival". Birmingham, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Bowers, Maggie Ann. "Magic(al) Realism". London: Routledge, 2004. pg.74

<sup>3</sup> Harris, Joanne. "Chocolat". Black Swan Books, 1999. pg 53.

They embody an acceptance of magical occurrences as integral components of ordinary existence, echoing the definitions of magic realist fiction put forth by scholars such as Zamora and Faris:

*In [magic realist texts], the supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter, but it is an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence - admitted, accepted and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism. Magic is no longer quixotic madness, but normative and normalising. It is a simple matter of the most complicated sort.<sup>1</sup>*

### *2. Food as a Symbol of Magic and Transformation*

Central to the novel's exploration of Magic Realism is the motif of food, particularly chocolate. Harris imbues chocolate with a symbolic power that goes beyond mere sustenance. In "Chocolat", chocolate becomes a medium through which Vianne exerts her influence, subtly altering the course of the lives of the villagers. The preparation and consumption of chocolate are depicted as acts of creation and transformation, echoing the alchemical processes that are often associated with magic.

Harris's depiction of food as a magical element serves multiple purposes. On one level, it highlights the sensual pleasures of life, contrasting with the asceticism promoted by the town's religious leaders. On another level, it acts as a metaphor for the broader themes of the novel, such as the tension between indulgence and restraint, freedom and control. Vianne's chocolates, with their ability to unlock hidden desires, symbolize the potential for personal and social transformation, suggesting that true change can only occur when individuals embrace their authentic selves.

The connection between food and magic in "Chocolat" also reflects Harris's broader commentary on the role of women in society. In many cultures, women have traditionally been associated with the domestic sphere, particularly with the preparation of food. By elevating this domestic act to the level of magic, Harris subverts traditional gender roles, presenting food preparation as an act of empowerment rather than a duty. Vianne's ability to create magical confections becomes a symbol of her autonomy and her resistance to the oppressive forces in the village.<sup>2</sup>

### *3. The Role of Religion and Social Conformity*

Religion plays a central role in "Chocolat", particularly in the character of Father Reynaud, the village priest, who represents the rigid moral authority of the church. Reynaud views Vianne and her chocolate shop as a threat to the social order, particularly during Lent, a time of self-

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<sup>1</sup> Zamora, Lois Parkinson, and Wendy B. Faris, eds. "Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community". Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.pg. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Harris, Joanne. "Chocolat". Black Swan Books, 1999.pg 64.

denial and repentance. The novel sets up a clear opposition between Vianne's liberating influence and Reynaud's repressive control, using this conflict to explore broader themes of social conformity and individual freedom.

Harris uses Magic Realism to critique the role of religion in reinforcing societal norms. The magical elements in "Chocolat" serve as a counterpoint to the rigid dogma espoused by Reynaud, suggesting that there is more to life than the strict adherence to rules and traditions. Vianne's magic, which is tied to the natural world and to human emotions, offers an alternative form of spirituality that is more in tune with the rhythms of life and the needs of the individual.

The novel's portrayal of religion is complex and nuanced. While Reynaud's character embodies the negative aspects of religious authority—control, repression, and hypocrisy—there is also a recognition of the potential for religion to offer comfort and community. However, Harris ultimately suggests that when religion becomes too rigid, it loses its ability to connect with the deeper truths of human existence. In "Chocolat," for example, Vianne's mother, acknowledged as a witch, also adheres to superstitions like forking fingers to divert bad luck and believing in the luck of spiders at specific times. This juxtaposition aligns with Mauss's definition of magic as practices and beliefs outside of religion and science.<sup>1</sup> In this context, Vianne's magic becomes a form of resistance against the homogenizing forces of religious and social conformity, offering a vision of a more inclusive and compassionate society. As Lane notes in an interview, "Chocolat was a dark, dreamy fairy-tale stuffed with loving descriptions of truffles and marzipan birds, upon which bikini dieters could safely binge".<sup>2</sup>

#### *4. The Feminist Implications of Magic in "Chocolat"*

Harris's use of Magic Realism in "Chocolat" is closely tied to feminist themes, particularly in the way it empowers her female characters. Vianne, as the central figure of the novel, is a strong, independent woman who challenges the patriarchal structures of the village. Her magical abilities, which are rooted in traditionally feminine domains such as food and nurturing, become a source of power that allows her to disrupt the status quo.

The novel's depiction of magic as a feminine force is significant in the context of Magic Realism, a genre that often explores the intersections of gender, power, and identity. In "Chocolat", magic is not just a tool for change; it is also a means of asserting female autonomy and challenging the limitations imposed by a patriarchal society. Harris's portrayal of Vianne as a 'magic woman' subverts traditional gender roles, presenting her as a figure who embodies both the nurturing and the rebellious aspects of femininity.

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<sup>1</sup> Mauss, A General Theory of Magic, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972, pg 13.

<sup>2</sup> Lane, Christine. "Book-To-Film Review: Chocolat." \*Anime June\*, 2012.

Harris acknowledges that being labeled as a witch inherently confers a deviant social status. While some of her characters embrace the label, the negative connotations of the term persist. Diane Purkiss contends that an accusation of witchcraft strips individuals of their identity, replacing it with one imposed upon them: "Being accused of witchcraft is thought to remove your identity and replace it with one that is not of your choosing...Having a reputation for witchcraft is seen as something which is done to women, not something they do"<sup>1</sup>.

### CONCLUSION

Joanne Harris's *Chocolat* stands as a remarkable example of Magic Realism in contemporary English literature. Through her skillful integration of magical elements into a seemingly ordinary setting, Harris offers a narrative that is both enchanting and deeply critical of societal norms. The novel's exploration of themes such as gender, religion, and social conformity through the lens of Magic Realism underscores the genre's potential to challenge readers' perceptions of reality. *Chocolat* not only entertains but also provokes thought, making it a significant contribution to modern literature and a compelling study in the application of Magic Realism.

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<sup>1</sup> Purkiss, Dianne *The witch history: Early Modern and Twenties-Century Representations*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996, pg 145.