

MYSTICAL SYMBOLS IN THE CULINARY DISCOURSE OF JOAN HARRIS'S NOVEL "CHOCOLAT"

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Summary

The article deals with analyzing the nature of Joan Harris's novel "Chocolat" mystical symbolism. The authors state that the culinary discourse is a mixed, personal-oriented type of communication, which is manifested in the everyday communication sphere which has an institutional character. Foreign language Culinary discourse is represented by precedent texts of culinary recipes that reflect the specifics of national culture, which has social and gender characteristics and is a special type of communication that uses certain professional-oriented signs – terminology, stable turns of phrase, characteristic morphosyntactic structures. It is noted that signs are characterized by a symbolic nature, structuredness, the presence of cultural interpreters, individually authored nature of coding, communicative orientation. Certain features of the image indicate that it acts as a special connecting link between the life world of a person and the linguistic representation of this world. This is done through the process of encoding spiritual and cultural values with the help of linguistic means (signs). The magic in the plot of the novel is connected, first of all, with mystical seniority. The novel, written as a diary of the heroine and her daughter, alternating with the letters of Vianne's antagonist, Curé Raynaud, to his father, intimates the story from the beginning, emphasizing the specific symbolism of the characters' world. All this makes it possible to imagine chocolate as a mystical substance that evokes a whole range of sensations described in detail in the novel.

Key words: culinary novel, symbol, mysticism, culinary culture.

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1. Introduction

The discourse analysis takes one of the leading positions in the modern linguistic research. The close scientists' attention to the language functional implementation sphere is determined, firstly, by the ambiguity and variability of the term discourse interpretation, and secondly, by the unresolved issue of the discursive semiosis mechanism. Understanding the nature of discourse as a special communicative event, as a complex unity of linguistic form, knowledge and action uniting a number of components into a single syncretic whole, puts

forward the segments of this semiotic unity detailing and ranking task as well as that of the each component functional significance establishment.

Interest in gastronomic culture, as well as the study of culinary discourse, arose in the 1960s and 1970s. It is reflected in the works of researchers such as K. Lévi-Strauss, R. Barth, and M. Douglas. Today, there are several names for this discourse: gastronomic discourse, gluttonous discourse, or culinary discourse. So, gluttonic discourse (derived from the Latin *gluttonare* – to eat, devour, overeat) is a personal-oriented type of communication of an institutional nature, which is directly associated with the sphere of food. In other words, it is a type of communication related to the state of food resources and the processes of their processing and consumption (*Palchevska, 2019*).

A distinctive feature of the discourse semiotic nature is a property defined by linguists as a communicative event of the consciousness interaction (*Mancini, & Buckingham Shum, 2006*).

An integral property, which justifies its definition as a complex unity of form and content that correlates with extralinguistic variables are determined by the polyphonic and dialogic discourse nature.

In this regard, the nature of discourse as a language functional implementation process that is not localized within the text-centric space is discussed. It is quite justified that the opinion is expressed that the dichotomies dynamic/static, actual/virtual do not lead to a sharp delimitation of the text and discourse concepts, since the procedural nature of the discourse implementation is impossible without a main sign substrate – the text (*Audrey, 2021*).

2. Interpretation of the symbolic images

For current studies of language, discourse, literacy, new media, and sociocultural activity, the key terms are semiotic, remediation, and discourse practice. Semiotic was chosen rather than multimodal because semiotic signals our broad interest in signs across modes whereas multimodal depends on a definition of mode, which has not yet been clarified in the literature and seems to suggest exclusions (mode, for example, as opposed to medium). Remediation points to ways that activity is (re)mediated – not mediated anew in each act – through taking up the materials at hand, putting them to present use, and thereby producing altered conditions for future action (*Prior & Hengst, 2010*).

It was reasonably established that the linguosemiotic approach to the linguistic phenomena analysis provides a study of the speech activity in poetic discourse symbolic nature in general, and the analysis of poetic images, in particular. The effectiveness of applying this approach to image analysis consists in establishing linguistic means that provide their linguistic embodiment for encoding the personages' world (*Babeluk, Koliassa & Smaglii, 2021*).

The main features of the image that determine its role as a sign are: symbolic nature, structuredness, the presence of cultural interpretation, individually authored nature of coding, communicative orientation. Certain features of the image indicate that it acts as a special connecting link between the life world of a person and the linguistic representation of this world. This is done through the process of encoding spiritual and cultural values with the help of linguistic means (signs). The linguosemiotic approach can provide the interpretation of the image in the poetic discourse (*Andreychuk & Bondaruk, 2015*).

Questions about the multidimensionality of the artistic word and the possibilities of its interpretation by the reader remain important in modern philological knowledge (*Babelyuk & Galaidin, 2019*). A wide field for thinking and searching for new ways of analyzing literary creativity opens up the interaction mechanisms study between a work of art and

a myth based on the psychological world perception regularities (*Tyshchenko, Korolov & Palchevska, 2021*). The question of the relationship between a myth and an artistic text genetically goes back to the theory of archetypes of the Swiss psychologist and philosopher K. G. Jung, who introduced the concept of “collective unconscious” mental processes into the scientific community, which are based on stable formal structures, archetypes that manifest themselves in folklore and mythology (*Kejriwal & Nandagopal, 2015*). According to the researcher, these archetypes were formed in the psyche of people in “time immemorial” and are passed down from generation to generation almost unchanged. This is “the most ancient and most universal humanity representation form” (*Jung, Adler & Hull, 1977*). Jung used the term archetype to denote any reality phenomenon formal side, since an archetype is defined substantively only when it is recognized and therefore filled with the material of conscious experience (*Quirós-García, 2020*). According to K. Jung, archetypes are transmitted from generation to generation on an unconscious level. Unconscious processes of the psyche are very important, because they like instincts preform and influence thinking, feelings and actions. He notes that “the soul contains all the images from which myths originate. Modern researchers, who have studied the theory of K. G. Jung, propose to use the term of social inheritance to explain the archetypes’ transmission process from generation to generation. The concept of archetypes failed to interest behavioral scientists, but has long fired the imagination of artists and literary writers. Jung’s theory is a powerful narrative. It might be correct in the way that a poem or a literary novel is correct; that is, as a whole coherent unto itself, all its elements in perfect relation to each other. A poetic gestalt-image impacts upon us aesthetically and emotionally irrespective of the factual veracity of its content. Whereas science seeks to establish objective truths about the world (and human nature) by narrowing down rival interpretations, the poetic process creates subjective truths through the multiplicity of overlain images and subjective connotations which gives us the possibility to look at the life experience transmission similar to that of ancestors as a partially conscious process (*Jones, 2013*). Archetypes-dyads (right/left, own/alien, now/then) determine the behavior of an individual in any situation, when following any custom, observing any ritual, performing any ceremony. Archetypes-images are not only recognized, but are also defined as basic elements of fantasy, acting, in particular, in the role of the “building material” in the process of creating myths, fables and fairy tales. One of Jung’s greatest contributions to psychology is his study on archetypes and symbols. According to Jung, every person has, in addition to their unique immediate consciousness, a collective unconscious comprised of inherited collective, universal, and impersonal preexistent forms and archetypes. This is to say that every person unconsciously understands the same systems of symbols. Jung wrote about symbols that apply to all walks of life, including symbols of Christian theology. In his book *Aion*, Jung explains how Christ’s resurrection is symbolic for men’s struggle to overcome psychological failure and achieve individuation, or the highest state of being (*Sheridan, 2017*). Thus, it is possible to talk about both the unconscious and the conscious archetypes’ perception, and consequently – the mythological images that contain them. Many archetypes “can be identified only through associations, since they do not have an exit into the sphere of consciousness by themselves, but only together with something else” (*Van Dijk, Kerkhofs, van Rooij, & Haselager, 2008*). For example, fire is associated, on the one hand, with light, comfort, dynamism, and on the other hand, with evil, uncontrollable force and fear.

3. The mystical symbolism of Joan Harris's novel "Chocolate"

The plot of Joan Harris's novel "Chocolate" belongs to magical realism, where elements of the magical merge with the imagined real world, forming a two-dimensional artistic reality, it is often called a mystical romance. Its plot revolves around the efforts of a young woman, Vianne Roche, who, together with her six-year-old daughter, opens a pastry shop during Lent in a small French town. The heroine tries to change the musty atmosphere of a town stuck with Catholic traditions, revealing to its inhabitants the taste and power of handmade chocolate as a symbol of enjoying life, where not only physical laws but also a kind of magic and alchemy operate:

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 (Harris, 1999).

The magic in the plot is connected, first of all, with sensoryty – with Vianne's ability to influence people, enchanting them not only with the taste and aroma of hot chocolate, but also with her own charms, inherited from her mother, an Indian sorceress, and with Anuk's fantasies, along with whom, as it seems to her, lives a cute imaginary creature named Pantuffle – a rabbit. The novel, written as a diary of the heroine and her daughter, alternating with the letters of Vianne's antagonist, Curé Raynaud, to his father, intimates the story from the beginning, emphasizing the individuality of the characters' perception of the world.

All this makes it possible to imagine chocolate as a mystical substance that evokes a whole range of sensations described in detail in the novel. It is interesting that this was exactly the intention of the author: in one of her interviews, Joan Harris spoke in favor of the fact that the vertical context of the work, i.e. extratextual information, is necessary to its full understanding and is included in the artistic text itself. This also applies to the description of the chocolate's mystical properties and symbolism (from the Aztec word "chocolatl", literally "bitter water"), a drink from the chocolate tree, to which the American Indians attributed magical power, along with an aphrodisiac effect: ... *Aztecs did in their sacred rituals*. The cacao tree was cultivated more than 3,000 years ago by the Maya, Toltec, and Aztec peoples, who prepared a beverage from its fruit, the cocoa bean (sometimes using it as a ceremonial drink) and also used the bean as a currency. The Maya considered chocolate to be the food of the gods, held the cacao tree to be sacred, and even buried dignitaries with bowls of the substance (along with other items deemed useful in the afterlife). In fact, the identification of the (Olmec-originated) word ka-ka-w ("cacao") inscribed on those containers was key to deciphering the Maya's phonetic manner of writing (Encyclopedia Britannica).

The process of cooking in the novel is associated with magic, and each ingredient symbolizes a magical element: *Anouk reads a book of nursery rhymes behind the counter and keeps an eye on the door for me as I prepare a batch of mendicants 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. Anouk likes the white ones, though I prefer the dark, made with the finest 70 per cent couverture... Bitter-smooth on the tongue with the taste of the secret tropics. My mother would have despised this, too. And yet this is also a kind of magic (Harris, 1999).*

Products may acquire mystical symbolism, such as an apple used for divination:

I could have peeled an apple at midnight and thrown the rind over my shoulder to know his initial, but I never cared enough to do it.

Sensory symbolism in the novel is also associated with magic. For example, smells drive away evil forces or cause visions: *...the sachets of cedar and lavender to repel bad influences (Harris, 1999).*

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 (Harris, 1999).

The very process of cooking is imagined as a culinary art, which is similar to divination and casting spells:

There is a kind of sorcery in all cooking: in the choosing of ingredients, the, process of mixing, grating, melting, infusing and flavouring, the recipes taken from ancient books, the traditional utensils – the pestle and mortar with which my mother made her incense turned to a more homely purpose, her spices and aromatics, giving up their subtleties to a baser, more sensual magic. And it is partly the transience of it that delights me; so much loving preparation, so much art and experience put into a pleasure which can last only a moment, and which only a few will ever fully appreciate (Harris, 1999).

The process of making chocolate is compared to the mysterious alchemical processes, with the help of which they tried to create extraordinary objects, substances, such as “fool's gold”.

Chocolate is the food of the gods, the life elixir and acquires a metaphysical meaning. In it you can feel the smells of distant countries, the centuries of history aromas, sacred rituals. In the process of chocolate making, kitchen utensils are transformed into ritual bowls. In this way, it acquires a higher mystical meaning and ritual symbolism:

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. Mexico, Venezuela, -Colombia. The court of Montezuma. Cortez and Columbus. The food of the gods, bubbling and frothing in ceremonial goblets. The bitter elixir of life (Harris, 1999).

On the other hand, chocolate in the novel becomes a symbol of opposition to conservatism, backwardness, religious dogmas, and obscurantism. He becomes the embodiment of something barbaric, savage, the embodiment of pre-Christian period magical practices:

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. Is this what he fears? Corruption by pleasure, the subtle transubstantiation of the flesh into a vessel for debauch? Not for him the orgies of the Aztec priesthood. And yet, in the vapours of the melting chocolate something begins to coalesce – a vision, my mother would have said – a smoky finger of perception which points (Harris, 1999).

As already mentioned, in the novel “Chocolat” you can feel the echoes of magical realism. Chocolate becomes a means of divination: *Scrying with chocolate is a difficult business.*

The pastry shop turns into an unearthly place, the boudoir is filled with unattainable promises and forbidden temptations, symbols of which are the smells of exotic spices and candied petals of intimate flowers: *The place is transformed; the air perfumed with bewildering scents of ginger and spices. I tried not to look at the shelves of sweets: boxes, ribbons, bows in*

pastel colours, sugared almonds in gold-silver drifts, sugared violets and chocolate rose leaves. There is more than a suspicion of the boudoir about the place, an intimate look, a scent of rose and vanilla. My mother's room had just such a look; all crepe and gauze and cut-glass twinkling in the muted light, the ranks of bottles and jars on her dressing-table an army of genies awaiting release. There is something unwholesome about such a concentration of sweetness. A promise, half-fulfilled, of the forbidden. I try not to look, not to smell (Harris, 1999).

The antagonist of the main character, the curate, sees in the smell a reflection of the confrontation between good and evil. Hell stinks with fried fat, the bakery with fragrant pastries that tempt. Bread, soup, salad help to cleanse the spiritually: *The sight of the butcher's window appals; scents are heightened to a point of intensity that makes my head reel. Suddenly the morning odour of baking from Poitou 's is more than I can bear; the smell of hot fat from the rotisserie in the Place des Beaux-Arts a shaft from hell. I myself have touched neither meat nor fish nor eggs for over a week, subsisting on bread, soups, salads and a single glass of wine on Sunday, and I am cleansed, pere, cleansed (Harris, 1999).*

In the eyes of the curate, pancakes burned in brandy turn into a secret sacrifice, devil worship, burning alive as a gift to some cruel ancient god, causing him panic fear: *Mother of God!' My knees almost gave way beneath me with the intensity of my reaction. "Pancakes. Flambeed pancakes. That was all". I was half-laughing now, breathless with hysteria. My stomach ached and I dug my fists into my guts to stop the laughter spilling out. As I watched she lit another mountain of pancakes and served them deftly from the frying pan, liquid flame running from plate to plate like St Elmo's fire (Harris, 1999).*

The consumption of food and drink is presented as a temptation:

Walk out from my hiding place and join them. Eat, drink – suddenly the thought of food was a delirious imperative, my mouth filling enviously. To gorge myself on pancakes, to warm myself by the brazier and the light from her golden skin (Harris, 1999).

Tasting chocolate is a symbol of bliss, chocolate is considered to be a forbidden fruit, a symbol of something obscene, sinful. The author draws parallels with biblical stories: *She had closed her eyes as she tasted the drink. Her pleasure was almost frightening.*

"What's forbidden always tastes better anyway," declared Armande, wiping froth from her mouth in satisfaction. "But this" – she sipped again, greedily – "is better than anything I remember, even from childhood. I bet there are ten thousand calories in here. More." (Harris, 1999).

Sodom and Gomorrah through a straw. Mmmm. I think I just died and went to heaven. Close as I'm going to get, anyway (Harris, 1999).

Dishes symbolize fasting, a holy life: *For now water and coffee will be the only accompaniment to my meals, the coffee to be taken black and sugarless to enhance the bitter taste. Today I had a carrot salad with olives – roots and berries in the wilderness (Harris, 1999).*

Sweets are a symbol of Easter: *No, really.' He insists. 'You ought to make something for Easter. You know. Eggs and stuff: Chocolate hens, rabbits, things like that. Like the shops in Agen. (Harris, 1999).*

The chocolate festival and its symbols contrast with gray everyday life: *"A Grand Festival du Chocolat".*

I consider the thought. In a month's time the lilacs will be out. I always make a nest for Anouk, with an egg and her name on it in silver icing. It could be our own carnival, a celebration of our acceptance in this place. The idea is not new to me, but to hear it from this child is almost to touch its reality.

- ‘And a chocolate Jesus on the cross with-’
- ‘The Pope in white chocolate-’
- ‘Chocolate lambs-’
- ‘Egg-rolling competitions, treasure hunts-’ (Harris, 1999).

4. Conclusions

The study of the narrative nature of Joan Harris’ culinary novel “Chocolat”, the goals and rules of its construction as a whole is oriented towards solving the fundamental problem of the symbolic and the everyday.

In this work, the cultural layer modeling of the narrative is based on the identification of its general and specific symbolic characteristics and codes.

The novel by Joan Harris is characterized by mystical symbolism. The magic in the plot is connected, first of all, with sensory world perception, that is with Vianne’s ability to influence people. All this makes it possible to imagine chocolate as a mystical substance that evokes a whole range of sensations described in detail in the novel.

A reflection of the subjective assessment in the novel of culinary prose is the distinction between the attitudes of the main character and her antagonists towards culinary realities, chocolate. A multifaceted evaluative semantics that manifests itself in the eternal, but unsuccessful desire of the writing subject to acquire, in the process of writing a diary (the main character) or a letter (antagonist-curate), his own subjectivity and its separation from the subjectivity of the “other”.

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