



Exploring the Role of Gastronomy and Transculturalism in *Chocolat* and *The Hundred-Foot Journey*

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Abstract

*This paper aims to explore how gastronomy serves as a foundation for transculturalism and facilitates cross-cultural exchange and understanding in the novels *Chocolat* by Joanne Harris and *The Hundred-Foot Journey* by Richard C. Morais. This study will analyse Gastronomy as a tool of cultural change, understanding, and exchange because it acts as the essence of fostering transculturalism. It demonstrates that the sharing of traditional foods during various events and gatherings can create a common ground for interaction, uniting people and breaking down cultural barriers within communities. Additionally, the paper examines the concept of "culinary transculturalism," which views food as a universal language that enables individuals from diverse backgrounds to communicate and connect. This study contributes to the blossoming field of gastronomic literature and food studies by highlighting the significance of gastronomy in facilitating cross-cultural exchange and understanding. This study has significant implications for understanding the complex relationships between gastronomy, culture, and identity by promoting cultural diversity and social cohesion.*

Keywords: Transculturalism, Gastronomy, Cross-cultural Exchange, Cultural Understanding, *Food, Chocolat, The Hundred-Foot Journey.*

Introduction

Food plays a crucial role in every person's life. It serves as a universal language that transcends cultural and societal boundaries. It helps us connect, breaking down barriers and celebrating the rich diversity of human experience. Despite the differences in cultures among the people, food acts as a bridge that connects them. From culture to culture around the world, food represents love, nostalgia, emotion, and kindness. Being a means for cultural exchange and reflecting a country's history, values, and creativity, international cuisines help unite people with different cultures, ages, and backgrounds. Food has a unique way of uniting us, reminding us that despite our differences, we all share a love for flavours and the joy of tasting. While food is essential to our lives, gastronomy transforms it into a true art form. It breaks the boundary beyond the mundane conception of food as nourishment; instead, it deconstructs and analyses the subtle interaction between culture, society, emotion, and personal experience which transforms feeding into a multi-dimensional and profoundly significant element of human life.

Taste of Literary Excellence

In the realm of culinary literature, only a handful of writers have successfully blended the intricate, complex flavours of culture, community, and identity. Of those, two very gifted writers who shine through at the top of this list are Joanne Harris and Richard C. Morais, as they excel in weaving together all these elements seamlessly into their writing. Through their



novels *Chocolat* and *The Hundred-Foot Journey* respectively, they have represented a delicious fusion of literature and cuisine, celebrating the diversity of cultures and human experience and the universal language of food.

Joanne Michèle Sylvie Harris is a British author who was greatly influenced by Norse mythology. Harris was a teacher and taught modern languages and French literature at the University of Sheffield. While she was a teacher she published two gothic novels *The Evil Sleep* and *Sleep, Pale Sister*. She is well known for her novel *Chocolat*, which was published in the year 1999. Harris was shortlisted for the Whitebread Novel of the Year award for this novel in the same year. This book was a great success and it was adapted into a movie of the same name. Harris wrote three more novels in the series: *The Lollipop Shoes*, *Peaches for Father Francis*, and *The Strawberry Thief*. Harris also co-authored three French cookbooks along with Fran Warde. She has also published a few more novels such as *Blackberry Wine* (2000), *Five Quarters of the Orange* (2001), *Coastliners* (2002), and *Holy Fools* (2003). In 2007, she published a fantasy novel *Runemarks* based on Norse mythology. The sequels of this novel include *Runelight*, *The Gospel of Loki*, and *The Testament of Loki*. These sequels were written between the years 2011 and 2017. Harris also published a psychological thriller *Gentlemen and Players* in 2006. She has published three novellas, *A Pocketful of Crows*, *The Blue Salt Road*, and *Orfeia*. She wrote her fantasy novels and novellas under the pen name Joanne M. Harris. A few other works of hers include *Different Class*, *A Narrow Door*, *Blueyedboy*, and *Broken Light*. Apart from these, she has also written two collections of short stories. In 2021, *Honeycomb*, a series of fairytales, was published by her. Her works have been published in more than fifty languages. The various genres explored in Joanne Harris's writings showcase her remarkable versatility, limitless creativity, innovative approach, and exceptional writing skills.

Richard C. Morais is a Canadian-American journalist and novelist. He has written many cover stories for Forbes from 1986 to 2009. Morais has written three novels including his famous work *The Hundred-Foot Journey*, which is a New York Times and International bestseller. The book has also been adapted as a movie of the same name. His other novels include *Buddhaland Brooklyn* (2013) and *The Man with No Borders* (2019). He also authored the biography *Pierre Cardin: The Man Who Became a Label*. Morais has won three awards and has been nominated six times for the Business Journalist of the Year award. Morais is currently the editor at Barron's Penta Magazine and he was awarded the Citizen Diplomat of the Year award in 2015 by Global Ties U.S, a private-public organisation. Although Richard C. Morais has published only a handful of works, his influence on contemporary literature is significant, leaving a lasting impression on both readers and writers through his evocative narrative style.

This study offers a critical examination of the themes of gastronomy and transculturalism in Joanne Harris's *Chocolat* and Richard C. Morais's *The Hundred-Foot Journey*. It highlights a detailed analysis of the culinary narratives and gastronomic experiences depicted by the characters, which promote cross-cultural exchange and understanding.

Food as a Universal Language

The main protagonist of the novel *Chocolat* is a chocolatier named Vianne Rocher, facing the challenge of traditional values and customs in the quaint French village of Lansquenet-sous-Tannes. Vianne's chocolate shop symbolises temptation and indulgence, but also serves as a gathering place for various kinds of people. Vianne spreads joy and comfort among the villagers through her rich chocolates and creates an ambiguous border that



temporarily transcends cultural and social lines. "Chocolate has a way of making even the most sceptical of souls feel optimistic," Vianne observes (Harris 54). Her chocolates, then, become a meeting point for the villagers who gather at her shop and share their stories and experiences. The character of Armande, an old woman who takes a personal interest in Vianne and serves as her friend and confidante, serves as an example of how food can unite people. Armande's love for chocolate, as well as her willingness to share her stories and cultural heritage with Vianne, helps break down cultural barriers and create a sense of community. Similarly, food is a huge part of *The Hundred-Foot Journey*, acting as a bridge between several cultural divides. The story revolves around the life of Hassan Haji, a young Indian chef who moves with his entire family to France. He opens a restaurant right across the street from a Michelin-starred French restaurant, which is run by Madame Mallory, a famous French chef. Although their cultures differ and much hostility simmers initially, the two bond over their common love of food.

Hassan opines that "a delicious meal has the power to bring people together, no matter their differences" (Morais 216). This manifests itself in the way Hassan's Indian cuisine forms a community amongst the people who congregate around it, with not a single qualm about the differences among them. Initially, Madame Mallory mocks Hassan's cooking skills; however, she soon appreciates the beauty and diversity of Indian cuisine. Based on their love for food, a mutual connection is built between Hassan and Madame Mallory. In each of the two novels, food and gastronomy act as a universal language through which people find common ground transcending cultures; and get brought closer together through the process. Through the discovery of their love of food, the main characters of *Chocolat* and *The Hundred-Foot Journey* go on to have meaningful relationships, though cultures are vastly different. As Vianne claims, "Food is a way of connecting with others, of sharing love and hospitality" (Harris 201). *The Hundred-Foot Journey* balances this view when Hassan observes, "Food knows no border, religion, or culture. It only speaks the language of love." (Morais 234). Through invoking the universal language of food, the characters in both novels constructed meaningful relations and did find connections, notwithstanding their cultural differences. It is food indeed that can break the cultural barricades and unite people of diverse backgrounds.

Gastronomy and Transcultural Exchange

In *Chocolat* and *The Hundred-Foot Journey*, food connects characters outside conventional cultural barriers and engenders moments of cross-cultural understanding. Food connects characters in *Chocolat* and *The Hundred-Foot Journey* across cultures. In *Chocolat*, Vianne opens her chocolate shop as a social, cultural gathering hub for people from all walks of life. Similarly, Hassan's restaurant in *The Hundred-Foot Journey* comes to symbolize cultural interaction as it brings people from different backgrounds together, bound by the culture of food. The novels highlight that food is the language of every person who transcends backgrounds and cultures. These novels thus create a celebration of the human spirit in their understanding of food, and their language of communication, allowing for human connection and understanding. Both novels include events and happenings where characters come together around food. In *Chocolat*, the village festival becomes one of the important occasions where the community joins hands to share and indulge in food. Vianne becomes the heart of a community celebration during the festival through sweet delights and chocolates that come to symbolize great joy. In *The Hundred-Foot Journey*, Hassan's restaurant and cooking classes serve as the key events for this coming together of people from different backgrounds, sharing the joy of exploring food and cooking Indian cuisine.



Traditional foods play a significant role in both novels, serving as expressions of culture and identity. *Chocolat* features French delicacies like *crêpes*, *crème brûlée*, candied rose petals, florentines, croissants, ganaches, *mille-feuille*, truffles, macarons, and *madeleines*, as well as Armande's traditional Provencal dishes like *ratatouille*, *tapenade*, and *tarte tatin*. *The Hundred-Foot Journey* features Indian chicken tikka masala, samosa, naan bread, gulab jamun, and biryani; in addition, French cuisines like *escargots*, *bouillabaisse*, and *coq au vin* are featured prominently. These food items bring cultural expression and identity that connect characters with their French, Indian, and cultural heritage. Thus the recurring theme running through both novels is the ability of food to bring people together. Because of their love for food, the characters entwine close relationships and find some common ground with each other, even though they come from different cultural backgrounds in *Chocolat*, and *The Hundred-Foot Journey*. Both novels pay tribute to food as a universal language, a powerful celebration of the human spirit and the innate ability to connect, socially integrate, and understand people of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

This paper has managed to undertake a critical analysis of gastronomy and transculturalism in Joanne Harris's *Chocolat* and Richard C. Morais's *The Hundred-Foot Journey*. According to the study, gastronomy functions as an important facilitator in the process of cross-cultural exchange. The analysis shows that food serves as the universal language that can bridge the gap between different people and foster more connection and mutual understanding. The common shared interest among the characters which is food stands out in that it is something that goes beyond the fact that they came from diverse cultures that makes them create meaningful relationships and similarities. Vianne's Chocolate Shop in *Chocolat* and Hassan's Restaurant in *The Hundred-Foot Journey* are places where different ethnic groups gather and come together to enjoy the pleasure of food. Equally important, the study emphasizes the significance of conventional foods in the construction of cultural identity and expression. The idea of culinary transculturalism is the central focus of this study in which food becomes the mainstream medium that allows various individuals of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds to connect. This concept is reified throughout the novels by the fact that food is a way in which people unite and therefore community is built. In short, by joining the discipline of gastronomic literature and food studies, the paper gives way to cuisine and its importance in the course of cross-cultural interchange and understanding. To conclude, this study shows that gastronomy acts as a glue that binds people of diverse cultural backgrounds, and has the potential to transcend cultural boundaries, promoting transculturalism among individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

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