

Chocolat

The story begins in a small French town that believes in “tranquility”. People in this town are expected to follow strict religious rules and be faithful to god. Abstinence and penitence are their principles of life. They refuse their desires and see their yearnings as “temptation” that will drive them away from the right path. Under such circumstances, Vianne arrives at this town and opens her chocolate shop across the street facing the church in the beginning of lent. When they arrive, she and her daughter stand out wearing their red coats when the whole tone of this town is only black, gray, and white. A huge storm comes with their arrivals and bursts the door of the church open, which symbolizes the coming of Vianne and her future impact on this town is irresistible like this storm. The mayor, Reynaud, stands up angrily to close the door, which is representative of his and this religious town’s attitude towards this upheaval coming with Vianne.



Based on this movie, chocolate is originally from the civilization of Maya and Mayan people believe that chocolate could “unlock one’s desires and reveal destinies” (*Chocolat*). The clips of Mayan cultures are shown in the movie: the chocolate store is named *Maya*, decorations have paintings of drinking chocolate for ceremonies back in the ancient time, and the night story that Vianne’s daughter loves the most about the origin of chocolate and, also, the origin of Vianne. Vianne has this specialty that she can always guess people’s favorite type of chocolate and she is always right. She has a spinning plate with Mayan painting on it: she will ask her customers what is the first thing that comes into their mind when seeing this plate spinning, and offer them the chocolate that they will like the most based on their answers. For example, for the woman who answers: I see a woman on a riding horse, Vianne gives her pepper triangle chocolate and tells her: “tiny chili pepper against the sweetness - tangy, adventurous”.



Being different from others can be tough in this town, Vianne is described as “radical”, “atheist”, “shameless”, “immoral”, and “satan’s helper” since she does not believe in religion, opens a chocolate store in the beginning of lent, refuses to go to Mass on Sunday, and raises her daughter as an unmarried single mother. Most of the town refuses to coexist with Vianne to show their faiths to God. However, apparently, people in this town are not as desireless as they think: the widow lady’s husband has been dead for more than 20 years, but she is afraid to build a relationship with a man that she’s fond of; the mayor of the town loves food, all types of food, and can’t stop looking at them during lent, but keeps convincing himself to resist to his yearnings since he is the mayor of the town; a wife who wants to run from her husband, but is afraid to do so since she is told marriage is sacred; the little boy always listens to his mother and is forbidden to see his grandmother since his grandmother curses, eats sugar even though she has diabetes, and reads books that describe dark sides of humanity. The coming of Vianne’s chocolate store unlocks hidden yearnings of these villagers.

There are many usages and scenes of chocolate in *Chocolat*: a girl is treated with dried cocoa tree leaves for her stomachache; chocolate is molded into many shapes for a party, and there is a scene of passing chocolate one by one at a dinner. This scene reminds me of the passing fire by lighting up candles in Mass. Rather than everyone enters the light of God, everyone is now bonded by this bowl of chocolate.



Along with the infection of the sweetness of chocolate, here arises the breaking of taboos in this town. The widow lady finally is together with the old gentleman she admires and holds his hand while sitting in the church listening to the prayer. The desperate wife leaves her husband, learns how to make chocolate from Vianne, and uses her own skills to find her position in the chocolate shop. Vianne stops her life of constantly moving around and finally decides to stay in this town with her lover. The boy stays with his grandmother until she reaches her end of life under the help of Vianne. And mayor, the most religious and stubborn person in this movie, also satisfies his desire for food by behaving gluttony in the end of the movie and devouring Vianne's chocolate at her store before the end of lent. Let's say he is devoured by his own long lived suppressed desires and finally gets to release them when he breaks the rules of not eating sweets during lent. I would like to say that he is the most suppressed character in this movie since he has the biggest desire and also the most self control. This is a movie that will bring you with hope and also reminds you of living as a free soul. All the transformations seem fast in a 2 hour movie, but it is a representation or a warning sign of what the world we want it to be even under rules that other people set for us.

This movie introduces to us the conflict between paganism and Christianity by symbolizing them as Vianne's chocolate shop and this very religious French town. The paganist is certainly Vianne and it is exactly her and her chocolate store that liberates the villagers and brings them with a more flavorful life. Thus, I would say that chocolate in this movie symbolizes: liveliness, the key of finding one's true self out of restrictions in their mind, and also the key of finding the balance between religion and their true self. I want to borrow a sentence from my favorite book *Demian*:

"The bird fights its way out of the egg. The egg is the world. Who would be born must first destroy a world. The bird flies to God. That God's name is Abraxas."

Abraxas is a god that is seen as a combination of good and evil. Connecting with this movie, the villagers are the birds, eggs are the restraints that they set for themselves, and Vianne and her chocolate store is the hammer that helps the villagers break their eggs and, no matter the world

outside the eggs is good or evil, they still get to see the world's true liveliness when they are not locked by their mind. Overall, I believe that religion is only a guide, the real doctrine is not in the book, but in people's mind.

APA

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