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1. Introduction

Food is an essential part of everyday life. It nourishes and enables life and as such represents a basic need of all beings. On the one hand, eating can be seen as a mundane habit which anyone can relate to and people do not necessarily pay much attention to symbolical meanings it may carry. On the other hand, by being so crucial, food has a great priority in people's lives and has a vital role in them. In this respect, food equals power as „there is no more absolute sign of powerlessness, than hunger”, according to Counihan (7).

Therefore, not only is food necessary for survival, but the context in which it appears can give important insights about society and culture. Food communicates information. Sceats argues that the choices people make about food – “what they eat, how and with whom” are “of crucial significance to an understanding of human society” (1). Furthermore, she explains that eating practices carry layers of meaning, as “encoded in appetite, taste, ritual and ingestive etiquettes are unwritten rules and meanings, through which people communicate and are categorised within particular cultural contexts” (Sceats, 1). Warde adds that food is “a significant means of cultural expression and is often used as a general means of commentary on contemporary culture” (22). Counihan metaphorically defines food as a “prism that absorbs and reflects a host of cultural phenomena” (6). This symbolical meaning of food in literature is the prime concern of this thesis. The influence certain food has – both directly and indirectly – on the characters is the pathway to answering intended research questions.

Undoubtedly, food is important. Yet, it does not get as much acknowledgement as an academic topic in literature. Food in the context of literature is usually connected to cookery books and recipes and rarely with the cultural context encompassing it. Bode points out that cookery books are only concerned with the “practical preparation and presentation of food“, whereas other gastronomic features such as “historic, social, cultural, aesthetic, as well as the delightful [and] pleasurable features” are often not considered in detail (IX). In addition to the apparent lack of academic interest in non-culinary aspects of food and eating, Norfolk points out that although there are descriptions of elaborate banquets in literature, no one actually eats the prepared food (Norfolk). Even if an author decides to make comprehensive descriptions of food,

there are not many pieces of fiction where there are details on how the food is consumed and what effects the consumption has on the characters.

In my thesis, I intend to examine the relatively unexplored field of food in literature, focusing on the consumption and consequences of eating chocolate. Chocolate has a powerful influence on the characters of the three contemporary British novels: *Chocolat* by Joanne Harris, *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding, and *The Chocolate Lovers' Club* by Carole Matthews. Chocolate can be considered “pleasure” food and as such plays an important role in the three novels, not only for the protagonists, but also for other characters. Cultural and social aspects in the analyses of the novels can be paralleled to current trends and mindsets concerning food in ‘real life’. Doing this is possible, having in mind the contemporary timeframe the novels are set in.

In *Chocolat*, chocolate is the central topic in the story around which all other relationships revolve. A newcomer to a small French village, Vianne Rocher, opens a chocolate shop during Easter lent, which immediately divides the religious community in those who embrace her and her chocolate and those who see her as a threat. Vianne is an extrovert who is very pleasant and quickly gains the affection of the majority of the village residents. She uses the chocolate and her shop to develop friendships and indulges in curing people's problems by offering them the right chocolate ‘remedies’. She quickly befriends Armande and Joséphine, and makes significant changes for the better in their lives. Even Armande's grandson, Luc, does not remain unaffected by Vianne's chocolate and her charming ways. Contrastingly, the antagonist Reynaud, a priest, is repelled both by Vianne and chocolate as a sinful food during lent. However, chocolate has an immense impact on him, as well. This novel is essential to the analysis because the healing aspect of chocolate is exemplified through the stories of several characters.

The second novel, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, deals with Bridget, a woman in her thirties who is trying to find her place in the world on several levels: as a daughter, a lover, and a career woman. Her main goals are to find the right man to settle with, and lose weight in order to do so. Bridget has an ambiguous relationship with chocolate, as she reaches for it both for pleasure and for comfort, but at the same time tries to avoid it as a part of her weight loss plan. In the form of

a diary, Bridget meticulously notes down her daily calories intake, focusing on Milk Trays as her weakness. She always counts them and promises to decrease the consumption, but whenever she feels sad she succumbs to the pleasure. Chocolate is clearly used for the purpose of healing, in a sense of improving the mood, while at the same time being destructive for Bridget. She tries to keep her chocolate intake within boundaries, but this determination rarely lasts long and is followed by over-eating. A parallel between Bridget and the priest Reynaud from *Chocolat* can be drawn, as chocolate has a detrimental effect on him, as well. Reynaud rejects chocolate throughout the entire story, only to devour it uncontrollably after destroying Vianne's window display. Both Bridget and Reynaud face a similar situation – the more they abstain from chocolate, the more they gorge in it afterwards. In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, as in *Chocolat*, food is pivotal to character development and plot.

The Chocolate Lovers' Club is the third novel. Four women, Lucy, Autumn, Nadia and Chantal, become friends over eating chocolate in a café called 'Chocolate Heaven', which becomes their refuge and meeting point. The protagonist is Lucy and the narrative is told from her point of view, but other characters are equally important, especially when it comes to their relationship with chocolate. In this novel the social aspect of food is the most evident, as chocolate is at the heart of their friendship. Similarly to *Bridget Jones's Diary*, the women consume chocolate both for celebration and comfort, but the protagonist Lucy makes an additional contribution to worshipping chocolate by developing the idea of chocolate 'personalities', according to which she characterises herself and others. This commitment to chocolate in the narrative gives a substantial amount of research material for the topic. Chocolate has a considerable impact on characters and this is central to the novel.

My hypothesis is that chocolate has a healing power on characters of the above mentioned novels, as its consumption is directly connected to subsequent feelings of pleasure and guilt. In order to confirm this assumption, I will explore and describe character traits and their state before eating chocolate and compare it to the state they are in after the consumption. The characters transform by eating chocolate, both on a physical and a psychological level. This will be explored by three theoretical approaches: the psychoanalytic approach, gender studies, and abjection; where psychoanalysis will be used to investigate psychological traits which show

a healing power of chocolate, gender studies and abjection will exemplify physical manifestations of the same consumption processes.

The first methodology is psychoanalysis. According to Webster Comprehensive Dictionary, it is:

The doctrine that mental life and all forms of behaviour may be interpreted in terms of reciprocally acting forces largely governed by the dynamic interplay of conflicting drives and processes originating in the unconscious. A system of psychotherapy originated and developed by Freud which seeks to alleviate mental and nervous disorders by the technical analysis of controlling factors persistently repressed in, and manifested through, the unconscious. (Markwardt et al., 1018)

Psychoanalysis was founded by Freud and has since undergone various appropriations by other thinkers and thus influenced not only Marxist and postcolonial schools, but also feminist and postmodernist criticism (Longhurst, 5). Aside from Freud, another important psychoanalytic figure is Jaques Lacan. In the second part of the twentieth century, with the emergence of structuralism and poststructuralism, literary critics found a way of adapting Freud's and Lacan's theories to explore literary texts (Parker, 101). Nevertheless, Tyson argues that Freud's original ideas are still prominent and applied in literary analysis (82).

Firstly, I will reach back to the origins of psychoanalysis and disambiguate basic concepts of Freud and later Lacan. Crucial ideas such as the interpretation of dreams, the theory of the mind, as well as a theory of sexuality will be explored in more detail (Longhurst, 5). Additionally, Lacan's cultural approach to Freud's unconscious and its relevance for contemporary critics will be outlined. Subsequently, I will focus on recent feminists such as Kristeva and Butler, whose interpretations of Freud's theory of sexuality and Lacan's explanation of the Oedipus complex have contributed to the framework I have in mind for analysing the novels. The reader can easily observe the way the characters behave – which problems and issues they have and how they react to them. By analysing these actions, one can connect them with psychological issues explored and explained by Freud's concepts of core issues, repression, and the defenses connected to them (Tyson 83-84). The psychoanalytic approach helps in identifying dysfunctional features in the lives of characters; the lack of which, after the consumption of chocolate, suggests the influence chocolate has on transformations that

occurred. In this manner, I will show that chocolate is used in a healing capacity and for helping the characters to cope with their problems more easily.

The second theoretical part deals with gender, in order to show the cultural background of the character transformation. Gender “divides humans into two categories: male and female”, as Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos and Kirkby simply put it (1). According to Ott and Mack, gender “refers to the culturally constructed differences between men and women: tastes, roles, activities, etc. It is a biological fact that only women can give birth to children, but the tendency to view women as nurturing and mothering is a gendered quality” (178). Clearly, there are certain power relations at work concerning gender, especially when it comes to women. There has been a long tendency towards patriarchy in the Western world, where women are considered subordinate to men in many spheres of life (Ott, Mack, 179). Although this seems to be less so in the modern world, there are still certain stereotypes that persist. “[B]y simplifying, by reducing classes of people to a few characteristics by which they are generally said to be identifiable”, stereotypes set up symbolic boundaries which affect both the inside and the outside groups, according to Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos and Kirkby (140).

Whelehan observes that women are ‘expected’ to find a man, get married, or be in a relationship, since being single might be seen as problematic: “[t]he freedom that single life offers is seen to be compromised by popular wisdoms about the naturalness of coupledness; there is also the association of singleness with loneliness – or worse, social ineptitude or downright unattractiveness” (26). Apparently, whoever chooses to be single could be socially rejected by those accepting the mainstream tendencies. That is precisely what the protagonists of the three novels are facing. Vianne is a charming appearance in *Chocolat*, but the fact that she has a child outside marriage and does not seem to be bothered by the conventions is frowned upon by the majority of the village residents. Moreover, she rejects tradition by disregarding Christian customs which are clearly important in Lansquenet-sous-Tannes. Even her bright clothing is seen as a rebellion against them. In a similar manner, Bridget is in her thirties and unmarried, which inspires other characters (her own parents, among others) to consider her a spinster. Whelehan points out that Bridget and her friends believe “there is a greater stigma attached to being female and single after a certain age”, and that “spinsters have always been cast in a less attractive light than bachelors” (27). Accordingly, the singles in Bridget Jones’s Diary “are excessively anxious

to get themselves paired off”, claims Whelehan (26). *The Chocolate Lovers’ Club* offers even four characters who struggle with traditional expectations: Lucy longs for love, but goes from one unhappy relationship to another; Nadia marries against her family’s wishes, which breaks all connections between them (she is a disobedient daughter); Autumn has intimacy issues and does not want commitment, and Chantal breaks her vows by cheating on her husband and does not want to have children.

In the foreground, all mentioned characters are questioning traditional values – marriage, children and domestic life. However, it is interesting to investigate to what extent this is true and whether there are indications to show that underneath, all those women long for a happy relationship with husband and children. Additionally, the role of chocolate is also important in this respect. With its argued healing power, is chocolate enabling the repressed longing for traditional love to resurface, or is it simply reassuring them that they are making the right choices? Observing the degree of transformation will help answer this question.

Finally, the concept of abjection of Julia Kristeva is the conclusive theory employed to argue for chocolate’s healing power. Together with the perception of the body in Western culture, this theoretical approach is intended to show how the body’s perception of food mirrors character transformation already mentioned in the previous analyses. According to Sceats, contemporary attitudes towards the body “are complex and contradictory”, as is shown in the following account: “We are simultaneously exhorted to be thin and to consume, to be hedonistic and virtuous, to worship the body and punish the body; the difficulty of achieving a homeostasis in this culture is reflected in anxiety, guilt, anger and obsession” (Sceats, 61-66).

As an introduction to food as a literary topic, chapter two is devoted to the function of food in literature. Following a short overview of the present state of literature on food, an anthropological and etymological standpoint can explain the importance of its presence in the literary field. Closely connected is the social aspect of food in general, which is discussed in the third chapter. With the hypothesis of chocolate’s healing power, food will be argued to be proven as deeply established in the community. Foremost, food brings people together, which can be seen in the novels. Thereupon lies its potential of healing, partly as social, and partly as individual healing. In chapters four, five and six, the three novels are analysed extensively

according to the above mentioned theoretical approaches: the psychoanalytic approach, gender analysis, and abjection. The influence of chocolate is to be proven on those three levels. Chocolate and food in general have not been explored as extensively as other topics in the academic world, and my intention is to make a contribution in this respect and hopefully trigger more research in the field.

2. Food in Literature

As suggested in the introduction, food holds an essential place in people's lives, but has not been treated extensively as an academic topic worth exploring outside the framework of anthropology. Additionally, this extends somewhat to fiction, as there are not many novels which deal with food closely. As a starting point, it is useful to give a brief overview of literature on food in order to establish a background for food in novels. This chapter presents food as a topic in ethnographies, since eating is an everyday habit and thus culturally relevant. Correspondingly, philosophers such as Freud have talked about its importance to human psyche, which leads to the final point of food being the carrier of "powerful connotations" and "a rich symbol in written and oral literature" (Counihan, 21). This introduction to food as a symbol in literature demonstrates the reason behind my decision to deal with the topic academically.

From an ethnographic point of view, Mintz and Du Bois argue that there are typical fields of literature on food, such as works exploring "single commodities and substances; food and social change; food insecurity; eating and ritual; eating and identities; and instructional materials" (99). Ordinarily, one assumes that the majority of food literature constitute cookbooks and recipe magazines, along with specialized nutritionist works. Mintz and Du Bois quote Epstein, saying that even in the late 1970s food has emerged as a prime topic in the media and had made its way to being the most prominent issue in everyday conversation, which has continued to be the case in contemporary culture, as well (99). They add that:

[F]ood systems have been used to illuminate broad societal processes such as political-economic value-creation (Mintz 1985), symbolic value creation (Munn 1986), and the social construction of memory (Sutton 2001). Food studies have been a vital arena in which to debate the relative merits of cultural materialism vs. structuralist or symbolic explanations for human behaviour. (Mintz, 100)

Among the classic food ethnographies, Mintz and Du Bois list various works dealing with specific ethnical or geographical settings – food and foodways in Nigeria, Thailand, Equador, United Arab Emirates, Peru, The United States, and many more (102). In this case, the food is explored according to a certain country and its cultural customs. Additionally, there is an extensive body of work concerning particular substances, such as R.N. Salaman’s “History and Social Influence of the Potato” written in 1949, or other works dealing with tomato, saffron, bananas, salt, maize, rice, and even chocolate (Mintz, Du Bois, 103). Food and social change are studied through researching the connection of food and mass production, war, biotechnology, migration, interclass imitation, or industrialisation (Mintz, Du Bois, 103). Also, topics such as world hunger, eating rituals, as well as food and identity, have been explored extensively by the anthropologists (Mintz, Du Bois, 106-109).

This account serves to exemplify the cultural importance of food. According to Bode, people spend around six or seven years of their lives eating and therefore, there is no other activity which is granted so much time, effort, or development of skill as eating and drinking (IX). Foodways have entered all life spheres and are exponentially influential in “the shaping of community, personality and family”, and understanding them contributes “to the understanding of personhood across cultures and historical periods” (Counihan, 6). It reveals deeper insights into people and their culture, aside from mere meal preference. Counihan argues that food can even be considered a language on its own, carrying meaning and communicating certain messages (19). Moreover, foodways are a system which has its own hierarchy, where one’s class, gender and race are conditioned by the access and distribution of food, by determining “what, how much, and with whom one eats” (Counihan, 8). It is not uncommon for a particular food to be considered “male” or “female”. A suitable example would be chocolate, which is considered comfort food for women in contemporary Western culture. Similarly, the majority of foodstuffs in the realm of sweets – cakes, cookies, ice-cream, chocolate bars – are mostly connected to women, being complimentary to their conventionally ‘expected’ sweet and delicate nature.

Cain recalls one of Freud’s observations that humans eat both vegetables and animals, but when given the opportunity everyone is specific and choosy in deciding what to ingest – what becomes a part of one’s body and what does not (3). Aside from the particular taste and momentary craving, by doing this one assumes power. This is conditioned by the cultural

perception, as well as present cultural values. As Counihan adds, the current trend in the Western world concerning women is being thin: “The dominant culture – manifest in advertising, fashion and most especially the media – projects a belief that thinness connotes control, power, competence, and success. [...] Furthermore, obesity for women varies directly with class status and ethnicity” (9). Power play directly influences food consumption of women. Starting with religious fasting to the current trends of conforming to beauty ideals, which often lead to anorexia, food is used as a path to power (Counihan, 12). This is evident in the behaviour of several characters in the novels. Bridget, the protagonist of *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, is in a constant pursuit of the ideal body. She has a journal in which she documents everything she has eaten, trying relentlessly to lose weight. The power of food is obvious here, as it organises her life and actions entirely. The girls of *The Chocolate Lovers’ Club* are similarly affected by the ideal body expectations: “She who eats chocolate must work out – it’s one of the first rules of the universe. So, on Tuesday evenings I go to a yoga class”, says the protagonist Lucy (*The Chocolate Lovers’ Club*, 24).

Food “adopts powerful connotations and is a rich symbol in written and oral literature”, notes Counihan (21). As such, it is an intriguing topic both in the academic world and in fictional literature. It enables the readers to connect to the characters on a very personal level while at the same time reveals indirect information on various cultural contexts. As mentioned, food was explored in many non-academic fields – from cuisine, food rules and etiquette, to taboos and symbolism, yet there is still much to be analysed academically. By coupling the mentioned areas of food research with literary methodologies, much can be revealed in works of fiction. In this particular case, with the help of psychoanalysis, gender studies, and abjection, I intend to bring to the foreground this argued influence of food on characters. Chocolate is essential to the three novels and has a vast influence in the story both on the characters and on the plot. The cultural importance of chocolate and food in general is a necessary introduction to the following analysis.

3. Social Aspect of Food

As mentioned in the introduction, food has a vast social significance. Evidencing this claim are various food habits and routines, which are present regardless of class, ethnicity, or gender. As

Cain points out, people cling to certain patterns of behaviour, and this results in routines such as “the daily fresh baguette in France, the turkey at Thanksgiving, the Seder meal of Passover, meatless Lenten Fridays for faithful Catholics, ceremonial tea in Japan”, or the usual coffee when visiting friends (5). Cain attributes this recurrence to nostalgia and a sense of security (5). This also enabled the emergence of group stereotypes, which will be dealt with in more detail in the chapter on gender. Stereotypes assume membership to a certain group, and sharing food with friends indicates food affiliations, among other things. It is also a display of trust, according to Sceats (2). She explains that “eating is an act of absolute trust, for how can we know what is in the food we are given?” (Sceats, 2). This trust notion also strengthens the social aspect of food.

Aside from the apparent kinship potential present in food sharing, food works as a social signifier, as well (Sceats, 125). It carries layers of meaning which can reveal underlying qualities of a certain group:

It is, and has been, constructed as symbolic in all sorts of ways, either intentionally (Passover, the Eucharist), through custom (harvest suppers and hot cross buns) or by commerce (the ‘ploughman’s lunch’); the resonances are, initially at least, culture-specific. [...] Both the acceptability of particular foods and what they signify are part of cultural identity. (Sceats, 125)

Although it might seem that foodways of a certain group are not as relevant for characterising their individual and group identities since eating is a mundane everyday habit, Sceats points out that eating and food choice are influenced by an array of factors which in turn bear cultural significance: environment exploitation, social structures behind food gathering, and food ideology (125). Particularly interesting is a group’s food ideology. Sceats gives an example of pork and alcohol prohibition in Islamic societies and this extends to other more wide-spread ideologies such as vegetarianism (125). Vegetarians do not eat meat and vegans do not even eat animal products such as dairy and eggs, additionally. Some groups tend to favour specific vegetables or fruit, which on the one hand could be environmentally conditioned, but on the other hand makes a strong connection between the group and the food in question. One could argue that many modern diet tendencies can also be called food ‘ideologies’. For example, scientific studies which have condemned carbon hydrates as the enhancers of body fat have caused the trend that dieters avoid foods which consist of them altogether (followers of the Atkins diet, based almost entirely on meat, are an example).

However, Foucault stresses that although food carries meaning, it is not pre-conditioned - “it becomes impregnated with meanings from the many and various frameworks within which it figures” (qt. in Sceats, 126). Rather, food is *given* meaning “within specific discourses and discursive practices” (Sceats, 126). Hence, it is a prolific direction to follow when analysing works of fiction. In the three novels, chocolate is the most prominent theme, but only its implications and particular connections to discourses in the plot reveal the symbolic meanings it conveys. The meaning chocolate communicates in the novels depends as much on the contemporary Western view of it as ‘comfort’ food, as it depends on the characters and how they perceive it.

Before I delve into the novels and the accompanying theories, I will shed some light on what food is usually connected to and what its symbolic implications are. When thinking about the possible meanings food can have in literature, it is useful to survey its most usual associations. In the following sub-chapters, food will be discussed from three standpoints: food in a nourishing context, food in connection to religion, and food as a social cohesive.

3.1. Food as Nourishment

Food and nourishment are tightly connected to motherhood and mother-child relationships, but nourishment can also be explored from a religious point of view – the sacred Communion. As Sceats points out, “women’s bodies have the capacity to manufacture food for their infants which categorises them as feeders” and this is one of the primary associations one has connected to motherhood (2). For centuries mother’s milk has been the only source of sustenance for the newborn and even today, when there is a great market of milk substitutes, mother’s milk is still preferred as the healthiest option for the baby. Health reasons aside, mothers claim that breastfeeding strengthens the connection between them and the child. This is a subjective feeling and Freud claimed early eating experiences were essential for the development of a child’s identity (Counihan, 17).

Motherhood plays an important role in the life of a mother, as well as for the child. Sceats even claims that “[m]aternity provides a figure of limitless, irresistible authority” for the child, as mother has the ability to “give or withhold everything that sustains, nourishes, fulfils, completes”

(11). Even after early childhood, it is mainly mothers who are responsible for teaching table manners and cooking the food (Sceats, 11).

Being able to feed by breastfeeding or cooking gives a certain amount of power to the subject. The child depends on the mother as a caregiver. Nevertheless, this position is ambiguous in contemporary Western society, as “mothers are overwhelmingly powerful but at the same time are socially and domestically disempowered by their nurturing, serving role”, adds Sceats (11). This is a problem women have been facing for a long time: how to establish a balanced amount of self-fulfilment on the one hand, and family obligations on the other hand (Patterson, 88). French feminist Simone de Beauvoir has devoted an extensive amount of time to the motherhood issue, assimilating married life with children to slavery for women (Patterson, 87). According to Patterson, in her works Beauvoir strongly advocated against having children and questioned the maternal instinct (88). Traditionally maternal instinct is ‘expected’ of every woman and considered to be innate. As Beauvoir argues (qt. in Patterson), “[f]or more than sixty years of the twentieth century, Western society conditioned women to become wives and mothers and made those who rejected those roles feel somehow inadequate and incomplete” (Patterson, 88). The power potential of motherhood makes it desirable, but simultaneously puts pressure on women who question it.

A clear example is Chantal from *The Chocolate Lovers’ Club*. Chantal is a successful woman who marries a wealthy husband and even moves from the U.S. to London for him. She has a fulfilling job and enough money to obtain whichever luxury she dreams of. In addition, she has loyal friends who love and support her. One could argue that Chantal is a happy woman who has achieved everything in life. Nevertheless, from a traditionally patriarchal point of view, whichever successes she has accomplished are unworthy if she does not play the mother-role eventually. To support this claim, her husband rejects her sexually because of her unwillingness to have children. This problem of expectation that all women must become mothers was criticised by feminists, especially Beauvoir. Patterson quotes Badinter in claiming that “it is societal expectations rather than maternal instinct which determine the degree of responsibility a woman is willing to assume for the children she produces” (88). Beauvoir “felt an obligation to warn other women about the entrapment [motherhood] represented”, and she relentlessly argued for the rejection of motherhood as a choice no woman should feel shy about (Patterson, 90).

Still, the power which is gained through motherhood can be obtained in a different manner. A mother-figure does not necessarily have to be the birth mother, but rather the person who cares for the child. Such a mother-figure is clearly Vianne from *Chocolat*. Vianne has a nurturing nature and tries to express her maternal drives literally, by feeding others. She is very protective of her daughter Anouk, but additionally, she feels the need to embrace other villagers and take them under her wing, which she eventually does:

I cannot help myself. The window is inviting enough, but I cannot resist the temptation to gild a little, closing my eyes, to light the whole with a golden glow of welcome. An imaginary sign which flashes like a beacon – COME TO ME. I want to give, to make people happy; surely that can do no harm. (*Chocolat*, 133)

Here Vianne expresses her mothering affection in her desire to feed others, to make them happy. “Come to me” is an invitation for the villagers to accept Vianne as a nurturer (*Chocolat*, 133). She even helps Joséphine after she decides to leave her abusing husband and Vianne offers her lodging and food, as well as work as a helper in the kitchen. She acts as Joséphine’s guardian, like a mother who would protect her own child. When Paul-Marie yells in front of her house in the middle of the night for Joséphine to come out, Vianne feels protective of her: “Automatically I forked his ill-wishing back at him with a quick flick of the fingers. *Avert. Evil spirit, get thee hence*. Another one of Mother’s ingrained reflexes. And yet, it is surprising how much more secure I feel now” (*Chocolat*, 224). She feels it is her responsibility to protect Joséphine.

Feeding others and taking care of them are the most typical attributes of mother-figures. As explained, a mother does not only nourish a child by breastfeeding, she also extends her motherly love by nourishing children and others even later in life. Nonetheless, nourishment is not necessarily strictly connected to motherhood. Bridget Jones cooks for her friends in an attempt to impress them and bring them closer to her. Although the dinner goes wrong as a result of Bridget’s poor cooking skills, the intention to gather and feed your loved ones connects Bridget to Vianne, even if Bridget’s primary goal is to flaunt her culinary capability. Another example is the priest Reynaud in *Chocolat*. Vianne feeds her community in the chocolate shop, while Reynaud does the same thing in the village church during communion. There is a clear parallel between their actions. Although taking bread after mass has more symbolic than nutritive intent, the priest nevertheless feeds his ‘herd’ and is thus seen as a protector and

provider by his community, the same way Vianne is seen as a mother-figure by the rest of the people.

3.2. Food and Religion

Food has a primary use, that is to nourish and thus enable life. Nourishing properties aside, another powerful connection is the one between food and religion. As seen from the example from *Chocolat*, Reynaud provides spiritual guidance – he ‘nourishes the mind’, which is symbolically displayed by taking bread and wine in the communion. By taking part in the mass, the villagers accept his spiritual nurturing, an act which is symbolically sealed by the actual presence of food.

Counihan claims that it is almost impossible to find a religious ceremony which does not include food (14). Food is instrumental in the connection to deities, as well as the deceased – offerings are made to please the gods and to seal certain rituals and dedicating food to the deceased on certain holidays ensures good relations to them (Counihan, 14-19). Hindus adorn their deities with food and drink along with the festive flowers. Christians take part in the communion, whereby bread and wine symbolise the body and blood of Christ. Moreover, Orthodox Christians practice cooking favourite meals of the deceased on their death anniversaries and taking the food to the cemetery. Food in religion brings the believers closer to the unknown world of gods and the dead, but at the same time strengthens the sense of community. Komori gives the following account on the biblical connection to food:

Meals are at the heart of many biblical stories emphasizing community, from the Passover (Exodus 12) to the feeding of the five thousand (Matthew 14:13-21) and the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11), as well as Jesus’ appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, where they only recognise him when they invite him to eat with them and he breaks the bread (Luke 24:30-31). (Komori, 31)

Religion connects food to the offerings to gods, but also has restricted rules to certain foodstuffs. According to Komori, Islam and Judaism have prohibitions concerning food: Halal and Kosher cooking exclude and restrict pork respectively, whereas devoted Muslims do not consume alcohol altogether (31). Furthermore, Christianity has temporary restrictions of meat and dairy

products during lent, or on Fridays (Komori, 32). Komori reminds one of the fact that fasting in Christianity has developed to be less strict over the centuries, but it has still retained some of the rigour, which, in case of Vianne Rocher, still characterises her as a temptress (32). Virtually every religion has an important bond to food, as food is one of the most important factors in constituting a cultural identity.

Lelwica introduces an interesting perspective on food and religion, making a clear distinction between fasting and dieting, which she names “Religion of Thinness”:

Although women who are devoted to losing weight do not constitute a “religious” group in the traditional sense of the word, the symbols, rituals, and beliefs surrounding their pursuit of thinness have come to function much like a religion. Driving on women’s narratives about their struggles with food and body image, as well as a variety of popular cultural images, rituals and beliefs, I analyse this secular religion, [...] highlighting how it serves as a vehicle through which women seek the kind of power and visibility that has historically been the prerogative to men. (Lelwica, 1)

She stresses the importance of the contemporary tendency toward a slimmer body shape for women, which has become crucial in identity formation. The validity of the term religion in Lelwica’s theory can be explained by drawing clear parallels between common religious doctrines and the philosophy of thinness. She explains it in the following manner: religions instruct people in cognizance of their identity and place in the world – the same way women tend to identify with their thin ideals (Lelwica, 10). Sacred religious images represent ideals of perfection, the same way magazine pictures of models are being used as exemplary (ibid.). Furthermore, religious communities support the believers and help them when in need, exactly as virtual communities, forums and blogs share advice and support their like-minded members (ibid.). Here, successful weight-loss stories and “before-and-after” pictures serve as religious salvation stories (Lelwica, 10). Although Lelwica discusses the distinction between proper religious and secular communities, it is beyond question that thinness is a contemporary ideal which all women of the Western world strive for (4).

This theory is shown to be applicable to some of the characters which this thesis revolves around. Bridget Jones is a definite example of obsession with the perfect body. She constantly gives accounts on her weight and on her body size: “9st 5 (state of emergency now as if fat has been stored in capsule from over Christmas and is being slowly released under skin), alcohol

units 5 (better), cigarettes 20, calories 700 (v.g.)” (*Bridget Jones’s Diary*, 19). Tirelessly counting the calories, Bridget starts every day in the same way by weighing herself and writing down the remarks in her diary. This routine can be considered a ritual – the same way a devoted Catholic would do a morning prayer. The passion with which Bridget approaches her body state in an attempt to become thin is immense. The following passage demonstrates her frustration and devotion:

How can I have put on 3lb since the middle of the night? I was 9st 4 when I went to bed, 9st 2 at 4 a.m. and 9st 5 when I got up. I can understand weight coming *off* – it could have evaporated or passed out of the body into the toilet – but how could it be put *on*? Could food react chemically with other food, double its density and volume, and solidify into every heavier and denser hard fat? (*Bridget Jones’s Diary*, 74)

Bridget is convinced in her reverence, but she does not seem to comply to the ‘rules’ which would get her closer to her goal. She has the desire to lose weight, but she constantly cheats by doing the exact opposite of what she is supposed to. Lelwica stresses that the crucial message is “thinner is better”, which is why Bridget constantly strives for losing weight (13). This devotion, in turn, should prove she has control and power over her body, according to Whelehan (47). Control is another point Lelwica makes in comparing losing weight to religion, whereby control over one’s body symbolises compliance to the socially and culturally imposed rules, but at the same time redefines the norms of womanhood (24). Bridget is problematic in this respect, because she does not really have the control of her body, regardless of how much she attempts to acquire it.

Religions of all kinds, whether sacred or secular, have an important connection to food. Food is used to bring one closer to the desired state of mind and body, by symbolising important cultural and religious features. Food communicates and represents a connection, either to a deity, to the deceased ancestors, or to ideas and beliefs.

3.3. Food as a Social Cohesive

Another important aspect of food is its social significance. As explained before, food influences people in several aspects. It can nourish physically and spiritually, but also enforce a sense of connection to others who share the same food choices. In this respect, food works as a social

cohesive, as it is a common interest of people within a social or cultural group and it brings them together.

Piatti-Farnell stresses the root of socio-cultural importance of food by explaining Levi-Strauss' triangle model of cooking methods, which includes the raw, the cooked, and the rotted (12). Here, culture and nature are juxtaposed, as the cooked can be considered "a cultural transformation of the raw" (Piatti-Farnell, 12). By cooking, people adapt the raw food to their needs and, in doing so, reflect the underlying characteristics of the community they belong to. Group identity can be intensified through food, as the choice community members make acknowledges their belonging to the group (Piatti-Farnell, 12). Scholliers reminds one that "identities are constructed through differences with others", therefore by choosing one food over the other, one can clearly be established as a member of a certain group (5). Furthermore, Douglas (qt. in Piatti-Farnell) sees a meal as "a microcosm of wider social structures and definitions":

Meals rely on a culturally established structure, creating order within any social system. This type of anthropological analysis discloses how food categories construct social boundaries, dictating rules of consumption that expose markers of class, gender and race. (Piatti-Farnell, 13)

In other words, eating can never exist outside a certain cultural context and community. Feasts within a community ensure the group's survival and social and material prosperity (Counihan, 13). According to Freud, "[t]o eat and drink with someone was at the same time a symbol and a confirmation of social community and of the assumption of mutual obligations" (qt. in Counihan, 13). Eating with someone assumes mutual trust and friendship, and the word companion is a translation of 'the one you eat bread with', according to Counihan (13). Group membership is based on shared interests and trust. Eating is an immensely important part of life and therefore directly reflects various group affiliations. Those affiliations can be defined as 'taste'. According to Piatti-Farnell, taste is a socially communicable ideal and it serves as a tool for social distinction (13). The favourite foods – the taste – of larger social groups such as nations, can express "a collective cultural memory", as social narratives are embedded in food and foodways (Piatti-Farnell, 14). Humanity's need to belong to a group enables common tastes in food to develop. Cain argues that the act of eating is so socially charged, that even eating without company assumes the notion of being fed by someone (who prepared the food) (3). Additionally,

however self-centred eating at a restaurant might appear (as each member at the table eats their individually chosen dish), the idea of communal food sharing is pervasive (Cain, 4).

As mentioned, sharing food enhances the bonds between group members and simultaneously separates them from other communities which have different customs and tastes. In *Chocolat*, Komori argues, the community division is manifested both physically and psychologically (33). The opening of ‘La Celeste Praline’ marks the division between devoted Catholics who are fasting during Easter lent and those who enjoy chocolate regardless of religion. On the one hand there is the church, represented by curé Reynaud, on the other hand there is the chocolaterie under Vianne’s authority. Komori notes that “Vianne’s business as a chocolatière sets her up in direct opposition to Reynaud and his fasting community” (33). She adds that Vianne’s community is ‘othered’ by the majority of the villagers (Komori, 34). The reason for this is because Vianne dresses and acts differently than the rest of them and yet succeeds in charming some community members. ‘Othering’ someone, explains Hall, is a form of stereotyping which helps people make sense of the world around them, whereby “it facilitates the ‘binding’ or bonding together of all of Us who are ‘normal’ into one ‘imagined community’; and it sends into symbolic exile all of Them – ‘the Others’ – who are in some way different” (Hall, 258). Vianne, Armande and Joséphine are in this respect identified by the community as the ‘other’. Vianne herself realises her status:

It is always the case when a new shop opens in such a small village; there is a strict code of behaviour governing such situations and people are reserved, pretending indifference though inwardly they burn with curiosity. [...] Behind the studied unconcern, however, I sensed a kind of seething, a whispering of speculation, a twitching of curtains, gathering of resolve. When at last they came, it was together; seven or eight women [...]. (*Chocolat*, 30-31)

In the beginning of the novel, Armande is an old grumpy lady who frowns at her fellow villagers and is estranged from her daughter and grandson. She is seen as an outsider by the church going community, to which her daughter belongs. It is not surprising that she quickly befriends Vianne, an obvious ‘other’ herself. When Joséphine comes to the shop for the second time, she informs Vianne of Armande’s status: “And you were talking to Armande the other day. No-one talks to Armande. Except me.” (*Chocolat*, 80). When asked why, she replies: “Because she’s mad that’s why! [...] Mad, mad, *mad*”, making a clear gap between them and other people in Lansquenetsous-Tannes (*Chocolat*, 80). Joséphine, on the other hand, is married to a café-owner and a

kleptomaniac everyone looks down on. She, too, is being excluded from the mainstream social group: “Oh, she isn’t with us [...] That’s Joséphine Muscat”, replies one of the first visitors to the chocolaterie with a “pitying contempt in her voice” (*Chocolat*, 31).

Vianne attracts customers to her shop with her simple nature and open-heartedness. Being a compassionate listener, Vianne tries to remedy the problems of her customers with chocolate and by doing so she gains friends, which together form their little community. Komori proposes that chocolate becomes “a totem-food” of Vianne’s community, as it is a symbol which brings the members together and aids them in strengthening their individual identities, as well (33). According to Markwardt et al, a totem is “an animal, plant, or other natural object believed to be ancestrally related to a tribe, clan, or family group or to be its tutelal spirit” (1326). On that point, chocolate could be considered a totem-food for the communities both in *Chocolat* and in *The Chocolate Lovers’ Club*. One would not necessarily classify it as a totem in its original sense, but it was chocolate that actually attracted the people to come together and form a community, therefore it is the very essence, the spirit of the group. Komori’s proposition can be supported by the fact that chocolate is an entity which all the members adore. ‘La Celeste Praline’ becomes a safe haven for its community members. It is a place of gathering, a place where arrangements for Armande’s party are made and a place where grandmother and grandson are brought back together, over delicious chocolate confectioneries. 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. If chocolate attracts people into groups and overwhelms them with its taste and smell, it is only reasonable to assume chocolate has a healing character, as well.

In *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, buffets and luncheons are organised purely for socialisation. “Una and Geoffrey Alconbury’s New Year’s Day Turkey Curry Buffet” is one of the gatherings Bridget is invited to, with her mother’s plan to bring her together with a divorced lawyer called Mark Darcy (8). Upon arrival, everyone starts asking Bridget about her love life, expressing worries that she is still not married and only cares about her career. Yet, however unpleasant dinner parties hosted by her family friends are, Bridget herself organises a dinner at which she plans to honour her friends by cooking for them. Aside from her friends, Bridget wants to woo Mark Darcy with her cooking:

People will flock to my dinner parties, enthusing, ‘It’s really great going to Bridget’s for dinner, one gets Michelin star-style food in a bohemian setting.’ Mark Darcy will be v. impressed and will realize I am not common or incompetent. (*Bridget Jones’s Diary*, 256)

However, Bridget’s intended luxurious dinner does not go as planned, since she is not as experienced in cooking. She concludes desperately that after all the effort and drama, she has served the guests bright blue soup, omelette and marmalade for desert (*Bridget Jones’s Diary*, 271). Despite the food fiasco, the guests are supportive of her and comfort her for failing, which proves that the dinner was indeed a social occasion, although Bridget had different intentions and aspirations.

The Chocolate Lovers’ Club indicates a sense of community in the title. ‘Chocolate Heaven’ can be paralleled to Vianne’s ‘La Celeste Praline’, as it is the main gathering place for the group members. Lucy Lombard is the founding member of the club, who discovered the chocolate shop. She says:

I’m part of a small but perfectly-formed sect that we’ve christened The Chocolate Lovers’ Club. We have just four members in our guilty gang and we meet here at Chocolate Heaven as often as we can. This place is an addict’s paradise – the equivalent of the opium den for the chocoholic. (*The Chocolate Lovers’ Club*, 14)

The owners of the shop, a gay couple, are also part of the chocolate community, because they actively partake in giving love advice and even participate in Lucy’s deception act, by dosing the chocolates with sedatives for the thief who deceived Chantal. As mentioned with ‘La Celeste Praline’, chocolate has a ‘totem’ status in this novel, as well. The girls meet through consuming chocolate and they refer to their community as ‘the club’ and “a small but perfectly-formed sect” (*The Chocolate Lovers’ Club*, 14). In contrast to the other two novels, the protagonist Lucy clearly characterises the group as a community held together by chocolate, comparing the meetings to those of substance abuse addicts – chocoholics.

As discussed earlier, community taste influences the members and the other way around – the individual preferences of chocolate participate in the creation of the club’s taste. In this novel, the characterisation of members concerning their taste is explicit. The narrator, Lucy, makes ‘profiles’ of her chocolate-loving friends and herself respectively. Thus, the reader learns that “Autumn is a dark-chocolate person” who consumes the chocolate slowly and in little bites, which Lucy attributes to Autumn’s sense of guilt about poor people (*The Chocolate Lovers’ Club*,

17). Nadia, in contrast, eats chocolate quickly and for comfort, and does not have a preference (*The Chocolate Lovers' Club*, 19). Chantal, “despite her good breeding and high-class image [...] is also an indiscriminate chocolate-eater who refuses to admit that she is an addict” (*The Chocolate Lovers' Club*, 21). Finally, Lucy describes her taste as wide, since she eats chocolate in every form, but admits the recent addiction for “couture chocolates made with the selected beans from single plantations from all over the world” (*The Chocolate Lovers' Club*, 32).

Chocolate brings the four women together and they are honouring its influence by establishing a chocolate club of their own. In *Chocolat* and *Bridget Jones's Diary*, as well, food glues people together and fortifies the sense of mutual belonging. Along with its nourishing and religious implication, food in literature influences the characters and reveals aspects of their identities. By analysing food habits, or chocolate eating habits in this case, attributes of the characters' personalities are displayed which help in explaining the characters' behaviours.

4. The Psychoanalytic Approach

The first theoretical approach to the novels is psychoanalysis. In order to display the healing power of chocolate in the three novels, one must show why the characters need to be healed. The characters eat chocolate to feel better and my hypothesis is that chocolate indeed has that healing power. Psychoanalysis helps to explore and describe character traits and their state before eating chocolate and compare it to the state they are in after the consumption.

According to Sigmund Freud, the founder of Psychoanalysis, “an individual's entity, far from being inherent and preordained, was actually the result of outside forces encountered early in life”, and Freud particularly focused on “psychosis and the ways that sexual experiences and drives direct human action” (Ott, Mack, 153). I will implement several Freudian concepts, as well as comment on their appropriation by later literary and cultural critics, such as Jacques Lacan. These concepts are repression, defenses and core issues, observes Tyson, and those will be used in analysing the characters of *Chocolat*, *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Chocolate Lovers' Club* (81).

Before reaching back to the origins of psychoanalysis and disambiguating basic concepts of Freud and his successor, Lacan, it is important to assess the application of psychoanalysis on literary texts. The most important question is: if psychoanalysis deals with human psyche, could it be applied to fictional characters in novels properly? My argument is that fictional characters can never be entirely disconnected from reality, and whatever behaviour a character in a novel exhibits, it is, to a certain extent, based on ‘real’ life. This assertion is shared by contemporary critics, but psychoanalysis was not seen as adequate for literary criticism in the middle of the twentieth century and has undergone harsh criticism.

One example would be Frederick Hoffmann, an American scholar, who vigorously opposed the psychoanalytic approach to literature. In his contribution to the *American Quarterly* in 1950, Hoffman argues:

There are three specific places in which psychoanalysis impinges upon literary criticism, and those ought to be explained, their abuses noted, and their limits described as accurately as possible. These are *the problem of language and style, the question of biographical explanation of intent, and the matter of esoteric allusion and myth* [emphasis added]. In each case, psychoanalysis has something of value to say, but it is not always relevant and critical alliance upon it has often been erratic and mistaken. (144-145)

As far as language and style are concerned, Hoffman states that critics must be well versed in psychoanalytic terminology – “the language, the syntax, the logic” – in order to use psychoanalysis in literature successfully (145). The lack of proficiency in the field causes misuse and inadequate interpretations, he claims (Hoffman, 145). He strongly criticises the increasing trend in the 1950’s literary criticism of blindly embracing Freud’s ideas on the unconscious and pleasure, and adds that any attempt of analysing would be paraphrasing, which – in itself – reduces the original meaning (Hoffmann, 46).

Another problem posed by Hoffman is the questionable connection of authors’ biographical events to plot and characters, which he defines as “literary intent” (147). Acknowledging there are certain cases where the psychic condition of an author preceding the creation influences the work itself, Hoffman concludes that authors’ true intentions are nearly impossible to determine with certainty: “[i]t would seem to me that the relationship of an artist with his father or his mother, however interesting that might be, is of far less importance to the critical analysis of a poem or a work of fiction or a drama” (Hoffman, 147).

In the 1960's, critics such as David Shores still retained detachment to using psychoanalysis on analysing the author, claiming that this practice is responsible for the questionable state of the psychological approach to literature (Shores, 295). He argues that the pertinence of using psychoanalysis in the study of literature is no issue, but rather its manner of application. Authorial connections to plots aside, Shores also points out that it is essential for critics to be proficient in psychoanalysis itself, as Hoffman also argued (296). He observes that psychoanalysis can be used in literature for two purposes: to explain the relationship of an artist to his work, and to investigate deeper meaning of a work by analysing characters and drawing patterns to parallel human experiences (Shores, 296). Shores concludes that:

Freud's description and analysis of the psychic economy – from which came such familiar terms as id, ego, superego; the unconscious, preconscious, conscious; the pleasure and reality principles – are applicable to an analysis of the basic constituents of literature and can illuminate form, texture, metaphor, and symbol – all primary concerns of the critic. (Shores, 296-297)

As far as the object of analysis is concerned, aside from the author and the characters, which were main topics in the mid twentieth century, in the 1980's Brooks indicates that there is a third possible object of analysis – the reader (334). This field is emerging, according to Brooks, as reader-response theory is becoming increasingly popular (Brooks, 335). As this thesis focuses on the psychoanalytic assessment of the characters, I will conclude with Brooks' statement which approves using psychoanalysis for analysing fictional characters:

Psychoanalysis is not an arbitrarily chosen intertext for literary analysis, but rather a particularly insistent and demanding intertext, in that crossing the boundaries from one territory to the other both confirms and complicates our understanding of how mind reformulates the real, how it constructs the necessary fictions by which we dream, desire, interpret, indeed by which we constitute ourselves as human subjects. (Brooks, 348)

Although psychoanalysis has undergone criticism in its application on literary texts, most of the critics agree that the connection between the author and the work is the most problematic approach. In contemporary literary criticism this approach is now almost entirely discredited, while the focus shifted on analysing the characters, as well as the readers themselves (Brooks, 334). Be that as it may, the characters in *Chocolat*, *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Chocolate Lovers' Club* may not have been inspired by their author's actual experiences, but they certainly resemble reliable variations of probable human behaviour. Beyond any doubt, "the study of

human fiction-making and the study of psychic process are convergent activities and superimposable forms of analysis”, concludes Brooks (341).

4.1. Freud and the Origin of Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis is “a clinical practice”, as its founder, Sigmund Freud, developed the ideas while observing and treating patients (Parker, 102). Although these early beginnings are not entirely reflective of the later uses and purposes of psychoanalytic practice, it is important to mention this clinical background in order to establish an adequate mindset, suggests Parker (102).

The first remark concerns the disambiguation of the three quite similar fields: psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis. Parker explains that psychology is the umbrella term, which encompasses psychiatry and psychoanalysis, among other areas (102). Whereas psychiatry is tightly connected to medicine, practicing psychiatrists have an M.D. and are able to write prescriptions; psychologists, on the other hand, are counsellors who do not have this right (Parker, 103). Psychoanalysis “is the branch of psychology that works on the tradition founded by Sigmund Freud”, and it is practiced at specialised psychoanalytic institutes (Parker, 103). Another clarification concerning what psychoanalysts actually do is offered by Parker: the process of psychoanalysis includes the analyst and the analysand, who meet frequently, usually over the course of many years (Parker, 103). Becoming a psychoanalyst takes years of studying and preparation, even after the accomplished doctorate, as “to become a psychoanalyst, you also have to be psychoanalysed” (Parker, 102). Psychoanalytic critics are not to be equated with proper psychoanalysts, unless they have undergone the training, stresses Parker (102).

In a series of lectures in 1909, Freud himself gave a historical account on psychoanalytic origins. He admits that it was Dr. Joseph Breuer who sparked his interest in developing the idea of psychoanalysis, as Breuer was the very first to apply this method to a ‘hysterical’ girl in the late nineteenth century (Freud, 181). He gives a following account on the ‘hysteria’ case: the patient was a young and highly intelligent girl of 21, who had developed a combination of various ailments, both physical and psychological: extremity paralysis, eye-movement disturbances, head balance difficulty, nausea when eating, and even inability to drink (Freud, 182). Taking all the symptoms into consideration, joined with no apparent problem with vital

organ functions, the doctors of the time would classify such an enigmatic state of health as ‘hysteria’ (Freud, 182). Freud points out that the ability to diagnose this state properly as hysteria is not of much significance for the patient herself, but influences the attitude of the doctor, especially if he uses methods which would later become known as psychoanalysis, as was the case with Dr. Breuer (183).

Another detail made the girl’s situation perplexing. It appeared that she had periods of time when she would be ‘absent’ and had no recollection of her surroundings. During those episodes she would mumble several unrelated words, which quickly drew the attention of Dr. Breuer (Freud, 184). Breuer decided to put her in a hypnotic state and tried to use those words for possible associations, and, remarkably, she was able to formulate the psychic creations which were bothering her, disguised in a number of words she repeated in her “absence” (Freud, 184). Freud calls these psychic creations “day dreams”, and explains that after being able to connect the day dreams to the words she mumbled, she was ‘freed’ of the torments (184). Only when she was able to relate to the true origin of her problems, they would disappear without bothering her again. This is what Freud refers to as “the talking cure”, as she was restored to her normal state by talking (184). Freud stresses that “[n]o one had ever cured an hysterical symptom by such means before, or had come so near understanding its cause” (185).

Freud concludes that ‘hysterical’ patients, such as Dr. Breuer’s young patient, “suffer from reminiscences” and that “their symptoms are the remnants and the memory symbols of certain (traumatic) experiences” (187). He asserts that ‘hysterical’ and neurotic patients:

[R]emember the painful experiences of the distant past [...] because they are still strongly affected by them. They cannot escape from the past and neglect present reality in its favour. This fixation of the pathogenic traumata is an essential, and practically a most significant characteristic of the neurosis. (Freud, 187)

Therefore, Freud claims a conclusion must be drawn that neurotic patients fall ill “because the emotion developed in the pathogenic situation was prevented from escaping normally”, adding that these “imprisoned emotions” are at the heart of the sickness (188). The forgotten pathogenic scenes – memories – are the ones causing issues and Freud shows that they are not lost, but rather ‘trapped’:

[Memories] were in the possession of the patient, ready to emerge and form associations with his other mental content, but hindered from becoming conscious, and forced to remain in the unconscious by some sort of a force. The existence of this force could be assumed with certainty, for in attempting to drag up the unconscious memories into the consciousness of the patient, in opposition to this force, one got the sensation of his own personal effort striving to overcome it. (Freud, 192)

This force can be explained as ‘resistance’, a force which opposes the resurfacing of the pathogenic ideas into consciousness and Freud introduces it as “repression” (193). He explains that the process of repression happens whenever an ambiguous wish appears; it is strongly desired on the one hand, but also in discrepancy with other personal wishes, on the other hand. This conflict is ‘resolved’ by pushing (repressing) the wish from consciousness to the unconsciousness in order to forget it (Freud, 193). Freud remarks that this mechanism is clearly our mind’s “device for the protection of the personality” (193).

In order to explain this (arguably) inaccessible part of our mind – ‘unconsciousness’ – Freud offers an illustration: a person is holding a lecture in a lecture hall, when suddenly someone in the audience starts creating clamour by talking and laughing, distracting the lecturer. The lecturer asks security to remove the usurper from the hall, so he would stop bothering him. In order to ensure this man does not come back, the lecturer asks security to barricade the doors, as a resistance to continue the repression. In this case, the lecture hall is consciousness, whereas the outside of it is the unconsciousness, and repression is the process of expulsion and barricading the undesired wish or feeling (Freud, 194). Freud stresses that the mere act of repression does not necessarily develop neurosis, as such psychotic conflicts are very common: “an attempt of the ego to defend itself from painful memories can be observed everywhere, and yet the result is not a mental fission”, and that other factors are necessary for the problem to escalate (194). From repression to actual symptoms of neurosis, another move is needed and Freud returns to his lecture hall example. The rude man is expelled from the hall and everyone in it is free from his presence, but if he were to make clutter from the outside deliberately, the noise would disturb the lecturer even more than before (Freud, 195). Only through a mediator, who would be the peacemaker between the noisy man and the lecturer who expelled him, could peace be established again (Freud, 195). Freud infers that “in the unconscious the suppressed wish still exists, only waiting for its chance to become active”, which can clearly be seen from the example he offers (196). The mediator would be the psychoanalyst, in this case.

Another significant term concerning repression which Freud coined, is the repressed “complex” (199). He explains the repressed complex as a mechanism that finds its own way out of the unconscious: the psychoanalyst lets the patient talk freely on any desired topic. As often is the case, after a while a patient would stop, thinking there was nothing else to say on the matter. Freud reveals that this situation only happens when someone represses a certain topic, of which the pause in speaking is clear evidence: “[t]hese irruptive ideas, which the patient himself values little, [...] are for the psychologist like the ore, which by simple methods of interpretation he reduces from its crude state to valuable metal” (Freud, 199).

Repression and the unconscious aside, another critical topic for Freud, as well as his followers, was the interpretation of dreams. Freud considers the interpretation of dreams as “the *via regia* to the interpretation of the unconscious” and “the surest ground of psychoanalysis” (201). Usually, in the waking state no one gives dreams much thought, the same way a patient would give little thought about the mentioned irruptive ideas (Freud, 201). However, Freud suggests, when dreams seem foreign or senseless, that is when they attract our attention (ibid.). Dreams of infants and children are simple and usually embody the unfulfilled wishes from the day before, which is not as easily open to interpretation in the dreams of adults (ibid.). Here, many different factors interfere and one would have to analyse the dreams thoroughly in order to clarify their meaning (Freud, 201).

Freud argues that a clear distinction between the ‘manifest dream-content’ and the ‘latent dream-thoughts’ should be made: the former is the content remembered in the morning upon waking, whereas the latter represents the unconscious source of the dream (Freud, 201). As Freud implies, the manifest dream-content “is the disguised surrogate for the unconscious dream thoughts”, which is a display “of the defensive forces of the ego” (202). In this respect, the manifest-dream can be described “as a *disguised* fulfilment of *repressed* wishes”, a process which Freud calls “the dream-work” (Freud, 202). Parker suggests that this process is possible, because “sleep relaxes the defenses, allowing the impulses in the unconscious to try making their way out of the unconscious and into the dream” (117).

After concluding that the interpretation of dreams leads “to a knowledge of the patient’s concealed and repressed wishes”, Freud turns to identifying everyday mental phenomena which serve as a technical support for psychoanalysis: the bungling of acts, the forgetting of things,

mistakes in speaking, mistakes in writing and reading, and the execution of acts in wrong situations (203-204). Usually considered as trifles and attributed to absent-mindedness, the bungling of acts:

Either express impulses and purposes which are repressed, hidden if possible from the consciousness of the individual, or that they spring from exactly the same sort of repressed wishes and complexes which we have learned to know already as the creators of symptoms and dreams. (Freud, 204)

Freud stresses that no symptom is inconsequential and it is precisely those bits and pieces such as bungling of acts, which betray the most intimate secrets, as they “prove the existence of repression and surrogate creations” (204).

Childhood is also a very prominent topic in Freud’s work on psychoanalysis. In order to explain thoroughly the cause of a patient’s disease, asserts Freud, the relevant experience of the patient is not only set around the time when the disease started manifesting, but further back to the early childhood, as childhood experiences can be responsible for traumas later in life (Freud, 207). Freud gives an enormous amount of importance to childhood, as he believes that “the child has his sexual impulses and activities from the beginning”, according to which “the so-called normal sexuality of adults emerges” (207). He formulates this claim as ‘infantile sexuality’, an idea which was not entirely accepted by his successors (Freud, 208). Infantile sexuality has an entirely different ‘purpose’ than adult sexuality, Freud implies, as its purpose is not reproduction but pleasure (209). This childhood phase is called “auto-erotism”, when the child explores the ‘erogenous zones’ of the body (Freud, 209). According to Parker, the child moves through several stages in the process of establishing a sexual identity: the oral, the anal, and the phallic (108). The oral stage is characterised by the infants’ experiences of the world through their mouth – they get fed, and they want to taste every object in order to identify it (Parker, 108). Following is the anal stage, when toddlers learn how to control their bowel movements (Parker, 108). Finally, the phallic stage determines whether the child will develop as a heterosexual or queer.¹

The final Freudian ideas I would like to address are the Oedipus complex and oedipal fixation. According to Ott and Mack, the Oedipus complex is named after the mythic Greek king,

¹ ‘Queer’ is “a widely accepted term to describe and analyse alternate sexual identity” (Bennett, Grossberg and Morris, 287). Anything different from heterosexuality can be put under the umbrella term of queer.

Oedipus, who killed his father to marry his mother, and in it “the child undergoes a mental structuring that takes the raw libidinal materials of the oral, anal, and phallic stages and splits them into conscious and unconscious desires” (154). In this stage, the child is sexually attached to a parent of the opposite sex, which gets outgrown after the childhood (Tyson, 85). Tyson claims that everyone goes through this stage, however, if the bond is not outgrown it becomes a dysfunctional relation, called oedipal fixation (85).

Freud notes that fathers prefer daughters and mothers prefer sons, which in turn causes the child to develop erotic wishes toward one parent (usually of the opposite sex) (212). He gives the following account:

[A baby boy] begins to investigate the question of where children come from and guesses more than adults imagine of the true relations by deduction from the signs which he sees. [...] Under the influence of the partial impulses [...] he arrives at a number of “infantile sexual theories”, as that the same male genitals belong to both sexes, that children are conceived by eating and born through the opening of the intestine, and that sexual intercourse is to be regarded as an inimical act, a sort of overpowering. (Freud, 213)

Moreover, it seems unavoidable to Freud that children take parents as their object-choice, only to lose the fixation naturally and use the desired object as a reference for future partners (213). Ott and Mack criticise this approach as sexually reductionist, as Freud proposes the girl’s oedipal stage is “unstable, forever shifting between maternal and paternal identifications, and thereby [is] always incomplete” (154-155).

To provide a contemporary perspective on Freud’s ideas, I considered their current perception and application. According to Parker, although Freud’s model has changed over the years, the key principles of psychoanalytic understanding of the human mind are: the unconscious, repression, the drives, the defenses, and ‘the talking cure’ (104). In his view, the “[u]n- suggests something more radical, something not just underneath awareness, but utterly without awareness” (Parker, 104). Similarly to Freud’s explanation of repression, Parker suggests that “when we feel threatened by our drives, we often defend against them and repress them” and this process “generates the unconscious, which consists of repressed drives” (104). The clinical method of psychoanalysis, or ‘the talking cure’, is here associated to Freud’s repressed complex, where the patient speaks freely whatever comes to mind (Parker, 104).

Tyson also lists repression and the unconscious as the key concepts of psychoanalysis, adding also the family, the defenses, and the core issues (Tyson, 83). It is precisely this choice of key concepts that I will be using in analysing the novels, as it resembles Freud's essential ideas, adapted to a more contemporary timeframe, in which the novels are set. Tyson emphasises the importance of family in psychoanalytic theory, as "our adult personality is the result of the emotional experiences we had while growing up", where the family is the core of the early emotional experiences (83). Likewise, he acknowledges that the unconscious is not something lay people often think about:

We might not know the specific source of our emotional problems – we might not even know we have such problems – because we tend to repress our most distressing experiences, push them in the unconscious, which is the psychological storehouse of painful experiences we don't want to remember. (Tyson, 83)

One of the key arguments for demonstrating how repression and defenses are portrayed in characters' behaviours is based on Tyson's claim that a repressed emotional problem is reflected in "the repetition of the self-destructive behaviour, such as choosing the unhealthy friends or romantic partners, [...] engaging in substance abuse, and the like" (83). This can be applied without difficulty to the characters' chocolate consumption, especially to Bridget Jones. The possible defense mechanisms Tyson proposes are: denial, avoidance, displacement and projection (84). Additionally, the causes of the mentioned self-destructive behaviours are the underlying core issues, such as: low self-esteem, insecure sense of self, fear of abandonment, of betrayal, fear of intimacy (Tyson, 84).

To summarise the introduction to psychoanalysis, I will outline Freud's main ideas: after presenting the experiment of Dr. Breuer, which was the inspiration for Freud to explore the methods more closely, I have focused on prominent Freudian ideas: repression, the unconscious, 'the talking cure', the interpretation of dreams, the bungling of acts, childhood and infant sexuality, the Oedipus complex, and the defenses and core issues. Before applying them in my analysis, it is compelling to add another perspective to the theory of psychoanalysis, the one of Freud's successor, Jacques Lacan. His appropriations of Freud's ideas have strongly influenced gender studies and the abjection – methodologies which will serve alongside psychoanalysis in the demonstration of the healing power of chocolate in the novels.

4.2. Lacan and his Adaptation of Classical Psychoanalysis

Freud's influence was immense during his career, which caused the subsequent critics to branch into those who followed Freud's idea closely – the advocates of classical psychoanalysis, and those who adapted his ideas in different directions, observes Parker (126). Among the most prominent representatives of classical psychoanalysis were Carl Jung and Jacques Lacan (Parker, 126).

Parker admits that reading Lacan is as notoriously difficult as reading Freud, because both psychoanalysts have changed and shifted their ideas throughout their careers (127). Nevertheless, the impact that psychoanalysis had made on other fields is monumental. Nobus states:

Since the 1980's, Lacanian ideas have stealthily yet steadily penetrated the social sciences, the arts and the humanities. The works of Lacan are currently a standard reference within cultural, gender and women's studies, and they also inspire many authors working within the realms of philosophy and political theory. (Nobus, IX)

The impact of Lacanian psychoanalysis is beyond question, which is additionally evidenced in its significance for gender and feminist studies. Lacan's fresh approach to psychoanalysis was welcomed wholeheartedly in the academic community, as psychoanalytic criticism after Freud "had degenerated into the reductive practice of identifying Oedipal scenarios within texts and spotting phallic symbolism", claims Homer (2). He adds that Lacan "is arguably the most important psychoanalyst since Sigmund Freud" and that his work "has transformed psychoanalysis, both as a theory of the unconscious mind and as a clinical practice" (1). Lacan shifted the object of psychoanalytic criticism from phallic symbols to analysing "the way unconscious desires manifest themselves in the text, through language" (Homer, 2). Yet, according to Nobus, Lacan's work is also characterised as exceedingly complex and abstract, partially due to the incomplete publication and translation of his work (IX).

The first key Lacanian idea is the unconscious. Lacan considered psychoanalysis a science of the unconscious subject (Homer, 66). Homer claims that Lacan strived to make a clear difference between his and Freud's concepts of the unconscious, whereby in contrast to Freud's assimilation of the unconscious to representation (of childhood memories), Lacan proposed the

unconscious should be seen as threefold: as a gap, as language, and as the discourse of the other (Homer, 65-66). As Ott and Mack explain, the unconscious is guided by the sense of Lack:

[T]he unconscious in Lacanian psychoanalysis is not a personal quality we as individuals carry with us, but a shared sense of the unnameable (and therefore lost) desires of the Imaginary we desperately desire to experience again. This yearning for absent pleasures becomes a sense of Lack, and Lacanian psychoanalysts claim that the lack dominates the ways we understand life and the decisions we make. (156)

Another influential Lacanian idea is the mirror stage. This is Lacan's invention whereby an infant, between the age of six to eighteen months, "before developing a sense of its own subjectivity, sees its reflected image and identifies with the reflection" (Parker, 127). Ott and Mack suggest that "[b]y identifying with the reflected image, the child begins to conceive of its own distinctiveness as a complete entity and takes the first steps toward ego formation" (155). Likewise, Parker concludes that the seen mirror image "makes the seemingly fragmented bits and pieces of the infant's body seem to cohere for the first time, impelling the coherent image of I", in other words, the mirror stage triggers the development of ego (127).

The mirror stage influences the infants to develop a sense of the imaginary, implies Parker (127). Ott and Mack connect the Lacanian imaginary with Freudian pre-Oedipal stage, where infants have a feeling of wholeness and connection to everything around them (155). Yet, Parker argues that the imaginary is a temporary stage, as the sense of completion cannot last long (128). It becomes disrupted by the Oedipus complex through the threat of castration and the child is thrown into the symbolic (Parker, 128). In place of "fullness and immediacy of the imaginary, in the symbolic there is incompleteness and distance", explains Parker (128). Inversely, Ott and Mack explore the implications of the symbolic in a different manner: in the child's transition from the imaginary to the symbolic, consciousness can only be established "when the subject acquires the use of language and enters [...] the cultural plane of social meanings and relationships" (156). They continue by further explaining that the child is 'forced' to establish personal identity through language, because the language itself, as well as social norms, disrupt the connection to the imaginary (Ott, Mack, 156). Finally, Lacan adds another concept, by far more complicated than the imaginary and the symbolic – the real. The real is not to be confused with reality, warns Parker: "we can represent reality with signifiers, but we cannot represent the

real”, as “[t]he language we would use to represent the real evokes our distance from the real” (Parker, 129).

To summarise Lacan’s contribution to classical psychoanalysis, Ott and Mack illustrate similarities and differences between Freudian and Lacanian concepts in a table, which I here adapt – Table 1: Comparison of Freud and Lacan (157):

	Freud	Lacan
Pre-Oedipal stage	The pleasure principle: <i>oral, anal, and phallic</i> stages	<i>The imaginary; Mirror stage</i>
Post-Oedipal stage	Subjectivity based on constant curbing of pleasure principle according to reality principle	<i>The symbolic</i> : linguistic order; Subjectivity rises from attempts
Desire explained according to ...	<i>Repression</i> : socially unacceptable desires suppressed from consciousness but retain influence	<i>Lack</i> : desires are unknown to our conscious self because they remain beyond linguistic expression
The unconscious	Personal psychic reservoir that retains repressed desires and attempts to make them known	Shared sense of loss between linguistically constructed individuals in relation to Imaginary pleasures
The phallus	Actual: the father’s penis that represents sexual power and masculine presence to the child	Symbolic: the “Law of the Father”, social convention and norms that represent patriarchal power to child

Table 1: Comparison of Freud and Lacan (adapted f. Ott and Mack, 157)

In my analysis of *Chocolat*, *The Bridget Jones’s Diary* and *The Chocolate Lovers’ Club*, I will mainly focus on Freud’s interpretation of the unconscious and desire. Additionally, I will employ concepts of repression and defenses, using Tyson’s classification of defenses, as well as core issues. As far as Lacan’s approach to psychoanalysis is concerned, I will use his concept of lack to support the presence of repression in characters. As the desires remain beyond linguistic expression (in the unconscious), I argue that the characters fulfil their repressed desires by eating

chocolate, as they are unable to come to terms with them otherwise. These theoretical guidelines are intended to help in demonstrating how chocolate affects the characters and that it, indeed, has a healing power over those who consume it. The following analysis is arranged according to novels, whereby I will investigate all the relevant characters from *Chocolat*, followed by Bridget Jones, and finally the four girls in *The Chocolate Lovers' Club*.

4.3. “Chocolat”

Chocolat is set in a fictional French village, Lansquenet-sous-Tannes, in the middle of the 1990's. The conservative and rather monotonous everyday life in the village is stirred by the arrival of an exotic stranger, Vianne Rocher, and her little daughter, Anouk. She opens a chocolate shop, called ‘La Celeste Praline’, at the beginning of Easter Lent, which immediately divides the mostly pious community to those who accept her and frequent her shop regularly, and to those who are appalled by her outrageous ‘blasphemy’. Enchanting as she is, Vianne quickly befriends Guillaume, Armande, and later Joséphine, as well as the arriving gypsies who come to the village. Simultaneously, the animosity towards her grows primarily with the priest Reynaud, Armande’s daughter Caroline, as well as the rest of the church-going community.

‘La Celeste Praline’, the chocolaterie, becomes a place of enormous interest for the villagers and a safe haven for some of those who come regularly. As an exotic type of food, Vianne’s chocolate evokes powerful reactions in anyone who tries it, even in those people who reject it in the beginning. The regular customers: Armande, Guillaume, Joséphine, and later Luc, gradually transform in their behaviour for the better. Armande, a grumpy old lady in the beginning, becomes friendly and lighthearted, and even reconnects with her grandson, Luc. Guillaume, a retired school master, steadily starts confiding in Vianne and Armande about his ailing dog, and his “shrunk, diminished look” is quickly substituted with “a jointy step”, full of life (*Chocolat*, 226). Joséphine undergoes the most astonishing character change. From a miserable and unhappy outcast, she transforms to a self-confident and self-sufficient joyful woman, who finally leaves her abusing husband and becomes free. Likewise, Armande’s grandson Luc changes from a shy stuttering teenager, to a confident and independent individual who takes care of his old grandmother. Vianne’s friends aside, the power her chocolate has over

people does not even bypass her nemesis, Reynaud. The stiff and overly righteous priest disapproves of Vianne's very arrival, let alone her tempting chocolaterie. His negativity and repulsion towards chocolate grow continually, until his restraint abruptly breaks and the delights of chocolate consume him. After the experience, Reynaud becomes more open-minded and his hatred toward Vianne diminishes.

I will explain how the delights of momentary joy and continuous consumption of chocolate influence the mentioned characters. The argued healing power of chocolate, as will be revealed, lays not only in the act of eating, but also in the surrounding context of eating chocolate: the ambience and the community aspect. Chocolate itself has an interesting history. Originating in South America and being introduced to the Europeans sometimes in the sixteenth century, it has always been considered an exotic treat. Pech claims that until the 1820's chocolate was consumed exclusively as a drink (12). It was only afterwards that chocolate was made in bars and trays, its predominant forms in the 21st century consumption (ibid.). Its healing powers were known for a long time and Pech gives a following account on the benefits of eating chocolate:

[M]any people are wondering how chocolate, a food on the "diet don't" list for years, can be healthy. Yet surprisingly, chocolate has a variety of benefits for the body, such as mood-lifting neurotransmitters and powerful antioxidants. Chocolate also contains a healthy supply of vitamins and minerals and even stimulates the brain into releasing endorphins. (Pech, 2)

Having this in mind, it is not surprising that characters in the three novels have been 'healed' by chocolate and its effects. Yet, this is to be determined by employing the psychoanalytic approach, as well as gender theory and abjection in further sections.

4.3.1. Joséphine

The most apt figure for transformation in *Chocolat* is certainly Joséphine. Firstly, I want to focus on the core issues. Still unaffected by Vianne's presence and chocolate, Joséphine exhibits seriously low levels of self-esteem. The first time she appears at the shop is when Caroline and her friends are inside buying chocolate. When Vianne asks them if the woman outside is their friend, they categorically say she has nothing to do with them:

As if she had heard, I saw Joséphine redden slightly, lowering her head against the breast of her coat. One hand was drawn up against her stomach in an odd, protective gesture. I could see her mouth, perpetually downturned, moving slightly, in the rhythms of prayer or cursing. (*Chocolat*, 31)

As Vianne describes it, one of Joséphine's core issues is low self-esteem. People with a low self-esteem behave like outcasts, thinking they are less worthy and undeserving of attention and love, according to Tyson (84). The mumbling and avoidance of conversation with others point to the argument that Joséphine feels unworthy of any civilised human contact. In addition, her described hand gestures point to the same problem of low self-esteem: "[she] rocked and dug her large ungainly fists into her stomach" (*Chocolat*, 33). This self-loathing body language reveals that Joséphine is miserable in her skin, hating herself for acting the way she does. The root of her misery seems to be her husband, Paul-Marie Muscat. Throughout the novel, he constantly humiliates her by cursing at her, beating her, and controlling her movements. She is not allowed to have friends, or to go wherever she pleases. His offences are not restricted to their home, but he also undermines her in front of others, even complete strangers. When the travelling Gypsies come into the village and try to get into Muscat's café for a drink mentioning that Joséphine told them they were welcome to do so, Paul-Marie bursts with anger: "Screw my wife! [...] My wife couldn't find her arse with both hands and a pocket torch" (*Chocolat*, 119).

The amount of disrespect Paul-Marie harbours for his wife is so extensive, that his negativity transfers to Joséphine and her view of herself. By maltreating her, Muscat completely destroys her self-respect. This explains another core issue she is struggling with: not only does she have no self-esteem, she also has an insecure, or unstable sense of self. As Tyson explains, this core issue makes one "very vulnerable to the influence – for good or ill, of other people" (84). Her husband's influence affects her behaviour so gravely, that she loses the concept of identity and becomes susceptible to change, according to the influence of others. Because her husband undermines her, she wears unshapely clothes and muffles her voice when she talks.

Tyson notes that the core issues can be manifested through various forms of self-destructive behaviour. The actions are repetitive and indicate that the person is repressing certain wishes and feelings (Tyson, 83). Joséphine's self-destructive behaviour is kleptomania. When she first comes to the chocolaterie, she takes advantage of Vianne being busy with other customers and slips a package of chocolate into her pocket:

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 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. (*Chocolat*, 32)

Vianne senses that Joséphine is troubled and her problem is much more complex than stealing, so she pretends nothing happened and even gives her a free gift. Encouraged by the unexpected friendly gesture, Joséphine returns to 'La Celeste Praline' in order to apologise to Vianne. On that second visit, she reveals that other village residents are also aware of her stealing problem, but denies it is her own fault: "I never took it on purpose. They'll have spoken about me, I know. But I don't steal. It's *them*" (*Chocolat*, 79).

There are other behavioural patterns which indicate repressed feelings – the defenses. According to Tyson, "the defenses are the means by which we keep ourselves from becoming conscious of the experiences we've repressed", and Joséphine performs several of them (83). The most prominent defense Joséphine displays is denial. As seen in the previous paragraph, she denies having a problem with impulsive stealing and even transfers the guilt to others. She also seems to be in denial that there is no other option but to endure the life in an unhappy and abusive marriage. In addition to denial, Joséphine shows signs of avoidance and fear of intimacy. She is deliberately avoiding contact with others, as she believes she has no right to be friends with anyone. Even before truly befriending Vianne, she feels the urge to run away, fearing she would get hurt by letting someone too close to her. Joséphine comes to the chocolaterie quite a few times, but always leaves abruptly concluding that the friendship would never last, as Paul-Marie would never allow it. Likewise, the sense of Lack is indicated in Joséphine's yearning for companionship. In Ott and Mack's interpretation of Lacan, certain repressed desires cannot be expressed verbally, so the person in question is overwhelmed by a sense of lack which dominates their behaviour (156). Joséphine is restlessly walking the village streets, which can be interpreted as looking for a compassionate soul to confide in. Vianne and the chocolaterie are a logical choice for her, where she gets pleasure in delicious chocolate and companionship.

After some time, Vianne manages to win her over with encouragement and, most importantly, delicious chocolate: "Joséphine looked at me for a second, suspiciously, then sensing no malice, relaxed a little. 'This is good,' sipping the chocolate, 'Really good'." (*Chocolat*, 79). Gradually, Joséphine relaxes in Vianne's presence and starts trusting her. The

welcoming air of the chocolaterie and the friendly hostess encourage Joséphine to make a change in her life. When Vianne suggests she should leave Paul-Marie; being susceptible to the opinion of others, Joséphine finds the courage to do so. The beginning of her healing process is best described in the scene when she comes to the shop to boast about leaving Paul-Marie:

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 sparked with the wind. Then the illusion dispersed and she was herself once more, hands digging fiercely into her pockets and head lowered as if to headbutt some unknown aggressor. [...] ‘I’ve done it,’ she declared recklessly. [...] ‘I’ve left Paul,’ she said. ‘I’ve done it at last’. (*Chocolat*, 210-211)

Afterwards, she moves in with Vianne and Anouk and starts working in the chocolaterie with them. Sharing chocolate and food in this new surrogate family reassures Joséphine to gain more self-confidence. When Paul appears drunk at the door that night, the usually self-conscious Joséphine assertively sends him away, enhancing her recovery by doing so:

I look at her. She is calmer, her eyes clear. I nod. ‘OK.’ I step aside and Joséphine goes to the door. Muscat begins to talk but she cuts him short, her voice surprisingly sharp and even. ‘Paul, just listen to me.’ Her tone slices through his blustering, silencing him mid-phrase. ‘Go away. I’ve nothing more to say to you.’ (*Chocolat*, 223)

Compared to the poor, mumbling creature she was in the beginning, Joséphine clearly becomes a confident woman, surrounded by friends. With Vianne, Armande, Guillaume, and Roux by her side, the little chocolate-eating community provides an anchor for her:

In only a few days she has changed; the look of vapid hostility has gone, as have the defensive mannerisms. She seems taller, sleeker, abandoning her permanently hunched posture and the multiple layers of clothing which gave her such a dumpy look. (*Chocolat*, 240)

Chocolate in ‘La Celeste Praline’ has a tremendous influence on Joséphine. In the foreground, eating the delicious chocolate and doing it in a friendly and supportive setting, transforms her and heals her mind. Yet, although I am arguing that the chocolate has the ultimate healing power for the characters, it is certainly not the only factor that influences Joséphine’s transformation. Even before she consumes chocolate, Joséphine herself makes small changes which eventually lead her to the conversion. The decision to come to the shop and later to come back and pay for the stolen chocolate is induced by her will to change something in her life. She decides to start trusting people more and allows Vianne to charm her. By befriending other people such as

Armande and Roux, Joséphine feels more support for getting her self-confidence back. However, as it is the chocolate that brings the little community together in the first place, it can be considered an initiator of the change. The healing power is not solely in the chocolate, but rather in the chocolate-eating community.

4.3.2. Armande Voizin

Similarly to Joséphine, Armande makes a noticeable alteration in her life with the influence of chocolate. In the beginning of the story, she is characterised as an old grumpy woman who frowns at her fellow villagers and is estranged from her only daughter and grandson. It comes as no surprise that she quickly befriends a stranger like Vianne, and also becomes a part of the chocolate-eating community in ‘La Celeste Praline’.

Armande’s core issue is the fear of abandonment. According to Tyson, the fear of abandonment is the belief “our friends and loved ones are going to desert us (physical abandonment) or don’t really care about us (emotional abandonment)” (84). Armande is not in good relations with her daughter and had not seen her grandson in several years. Yet, she seems open enough to become friends with the enchanting Vianne, as well as Guillaume, Joséphine, and Roux. The first time she and Vianne meet, her appearance characterises her as a pessimistic old soul, with no apparent joy in life, aside from deliberately annoying her daughter and the priest Reynaud:

I bent down and saw a tiny old woman watching me curiously from the angle of the house. Black skirt, black coat, grey hair coiled and plaited into a neat, complex bun. Her eyes were black and sharp as a bird’s. I nodded to her. [...] Then, with a smile which worked her apple-doll face into a million wrinkles, she said, ‘I’ve seen your shop. Pretty enough, I’ll grant you that, but no good for folks like us. Much too fancy.’ There was no disapproval in her voice as she spoke, but a half-laughing fatalism. ‘I hear our m’sieur le curé already has it in for you’, she added maliciously. (*Chocolat*, 43)

She is in conflict with her daughter because she feels Caroline is being over-protective, and unduly imposes a healthier diet on her, appropriate for her diabetic condition. At the same time, Armande believes that Caroline worries about her for the wrong reasons – not because she cares about her mother, but because the community expects people to take care of their elderly. As a result, Armande develops several defense mechanisms to cope with the situation. In the first

place, she is in denial about her condition and visits 'La Celeste Praline' regularly for hot chocolate and cakes. In Lacanian terms, Armande's repressed desire is chocolate. It being a forbidden fruit for a diabetic makes it all the more desirable, so that it governs her decisions and behaviour. She dismisses any help from her daughter and the doctor, claiming they are over-reacting about her condition:

'Oh, I'm not allowed *chocolate*. Caro and that idiot doctor won't allow it. Or anything else I might enjoy,' she added wryly. 'First smoking, then alcohol, now this ... God knows, if I gave up breathing perhaps I might live for ever.' [...] 'It's just their way. Protection – from everything. From life. From death.' (*Chocolat*, 45-45)

At the same time, when Vianne finds out about the diabetes, Armande insists on getting the hot chocolate with the proper amount of sugar nevertheless. She does not accept the fact that she has to adjust her diet if she wants to live, rationalising her behaviour by explaining that she is too old anyway, and should not be denied the pleasures that make her happy.

Another of Armande's defenses is avoidance. Clearly, she avoids Caroline as much as possible, fearing she would be lectured and treated like a helpless child. Unfortunately, this avoidance results in Caroline forbidding her son, Luc, to see his grandmother, as she fears Armande would be a bad influence on the teenage boy. This is something Armande is not pleased about, but she is uncompromising concerning her daughter. Her family aside, Armande also avoids the rest of the village, especially the pious church-goers. This information surfaces in Joséphine's first visit to the chocolaterie, when she tells Vianne that no one in the village, besides herself, even talks to Armande, because they all think she is completely mad.

As anticipated, chocolate makes the difference for Armande, as well. She experiences a sensation of delightful taste mixed with childhood memories, when she first tries the hot chocolate:

Armande plumped into the chair and took her glass in both hands. She looked eager as a child, her eyes shining, her expression rapt. 'Mmmm.' It was more than appreciation. It was almost reverence. 'Mmmmmm.' She had closed her eyes as she tasted the drink. Her pleasure was almost frightening. (*Chocolat*, 91)

Moreover, Armande gradually starts changing her behaviour. As Vianne arranges for her grandson, Luc, and her to meet in the chocolaterie, Armande becomes livelier. It is even obvious in her changed clothing: "Armande was in excellent form, having exchanged her black straw hat

for a water-silk headscarf. Her cheeks were rosy-apple red – though I suspected that this, like the unusual brightness of her lips, was due to artifice rather than mere high spirits” (*Chocolat*, 186). Her fear of abandonment disappears and she is perfectly happy with being able to reconnect with Luc, even if that means seeing him only occasionally, in the chocolate shop. With the newly acquired friends, she is even cheerful enough to throw a lavish birthday party, as a treat for everyone. The once solitary old woman becomes an enthusiastic host and a beloved friend:

She spent Friday in high spirits, supposedly overseeing things but mostly getting underfoot. Like a mischievous child she had her fingers in sauces, peeped under dish covers and the lids of hot pans until finally I begged Guillaume to take her to the hairdresser to Agen for a couple of hours, if only to get her out of the way. When she returned she was transformed: hair smartly cropped and set under a rakish new hat, new gloves, new shoes. Shoes, gloves and hat were all the same shade of cherry-red, Armande’s favourite colour. (*Chocolat*, 334)

Had it not been for Vianne’s ‘La Celeste Praline’, it is safe to assume that Armande would have remained alone and forgotten. Chocolate and, more importantly, the chocolate community heal and rejuvenate her and she dies a happy and satisfied woman.

4.3.3. Guillaume Duplessis

One of Vianne’s first customers is Guillaume with his dog Charly. He is a retired schoolmaster, with a very polite and measured manner. Charly is his ill dog, which suffers from cancer and is getting worse day by day. Therefore, Guillaume’s appearance leaves a sad and withdrawn impression, as Vianne herself observes:

An elderly small-featured man, wearing a felt hat rather than the round beret more common to the region, picks up the sad brown dog from between my legs with a look of polite apology. I see his graceful fingers moving in the dog’s fur; the dog whines; the master’s expression becomes complex with love, concern, guilt. (*Chocolat*, 13)

It can be argued that Guillaume’s core issue is seclusion. His loyal companion is his main concern, and Guillaume rarely allows others to come close to him. A clear example for his shyness is the fact that Vianne cannot convince him to start calling her ‘Vianne’, instead of ‘Madame Rocher’. He comes to the chocolaterie regularly, almost every day, and shares his chocolates with Charly.

His defense mechanism is in holding the distance towards others. The repressed longing for companionship makes Guillaume exaggerate in good manners, which can be explained with the sense of lack. He suppresses the desire to show affection openly by posing as an overly-mannered gentleman. Yet, that changes over time. Gradually, he befriends Vianne, Joséphine, and Armande, as well as her grandson, Luc. At one occasion, he comes to ‘La Celeste Praline’ facing the fact that Charly is fading away and would have to be put to sleep. Vianne comforts him: “I put my arms around Guillaume. For a second he tenses, unused to female contact. Then he relaxes. I can feel the strength of his distress coming from him in waves” (*Chocolat*, 63). Chocolate, as well as the inviting surroundings in the chocolaterie have changed him profoundly. After a while, Guillaume, too, becomes family to the regular chocolate-lovers at the shop:

Guillaume turned up at lunchtime, with Anouk. In the excitement of the past couple of days I had only spoken to him a couple of times, but as he walked in I was struck by the abrupt change in him. 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. (*Chocolat*, 226)

He seems regenerated and full of life, the same way Armande is rejuvenated. Again, chocolate has been proven to be the right medicine for solitude and avoidance, making the people who consume it truly satisfied.

4.3.4. Luc Clairmont

Armande’s grandson, Luc, is an interesting character. Although he does not say much throughout the novel, his transformation is reflected in his deeds. In the beginning, Luc is introduced as a teenager, who is restrained by the wishes of his mother, Caroline. Vianne sees him as “a colourless boy, too correct in his pressed flannel trousers and tweed jacket, cool green-grey eyes beneath a lank fringe” (*Chocolat*, 92). He is completely obedient to his strict mother, who decides on his diet and his whereabouts: “‘My son doesn’t eat chocolate.’ Caroline’s voice was sharp. ‘He’s hyperactive. Sickly. He knows it’s bad for him.’” (*Chocolat*, 113).

Luc has an insecure sense of self, as his mother controls him completely. As a consequence, his self-esteem is low, almost non-existent, which is demonstrated in his stuttering, according to Armande:

‘That poor boy. He stutters, did you notice that?’ I nodded. ‘That’s his mother’s doing.’ Armande was scornful. ‘If she’d let him alone – but no. Always correcting him. Always carrying on. Making him worse. Making out there’s something wrong with him all the time.’ She made a sound of derision. [...] ‘Let him run awhile without worrying what would happen if he fell over. Let him loose. Let him *breathe*.’ (*Chocolat*, 115)

Yet, Vianne manages to charm him with the chocolate and arranges a rendezvous for him and Armande in the chocolaterie. The more the two of them meet, the more they overcome their personal problems. Luc starts sneaking out for his meetings with Armande regularly, whenever his mother is away. Chocolate agrees with him and he even develops enough confidence to make jokes with Armande and Vianne. Vianne observes: “I liked him better this way, his eyes flaring a brighter green, his impish smile oddly like grandmother’s” (*Chocolat*, 139). Luc also enjoys eating chocolate, although his mother forbids it. The sense of lack here is literal, as is the case with Armande. Luc longs for the chocolate and he finds a perfect way to satisfy his need. What starts as meetings over chocolate, grows into genuine affection between Luc and Armande. He starts visiting her at home, buying her flowers and helping out in the garden. The final breach from his mother’s grip is portrayed in his decision to move in with Armande for a few days, in order to help with her party preparations. Consequently, his stuttering is almost gone and he becomes a happy and confident young man.

Vianne notes how Joséphine, Armande, Guillaume, and Luc, have become friends due to their love for chocolate:

[Armande] calls everyday now, sometimes to talk, sometimes for a *cornet* of her favourite apricot truffles. Often she comes with Guillaume, who has become a regular visitor. Today Luc was here too, and the three of them sat together in the corner with a pot of chocolate and some *éclairs*. I could hear occasional laughter and exclamations from the small group. (*Chocolat*, 241)

‘La Celeste Praline’ becomes a safe haven for troubled souls, where cakes, truffles, *éclairs* and other delicacies heal and transform their consumers for the better. As argued for the previous characters, the chocolate itself, but also the community in which its consumption takes place contribute to the overall healing process of the characters. Other village residents also gladly indulge in the chocolate; only the priest Reynaud displays negative feelings for it, as well as for Vianne. However, even he is not immune to its influence.

4.3.5. Reynaud, the Priest

Reynaud is the main antagonist in the novel and his character is decidedly influential. In addition, the story is told from both Vianne's and Reynaud's perspectives. He is a priest in the only church in Lansquenet-sous-Tannes, which is situated in the main square, directly opposite 'La Celeste Praline'. Reynaud frequently visits the former priest in the hospital and gives him detailed accounts on the ongoing events in the village. The antagonism against Vianne emerges immediately. This is how Vianne sees their first encounter:

He is in his thirties, though from a distance his rigid stance makes him seem older. He turns towards me, and I see that he too is a stranger, with the high cheekbones and pale eyes of the North and long pianist's fingers resting on the silver cross which hangs from his neck. Perhaps this is what gives him the right to stare at me, this alienness; but I see no welcome in his cold, light eyes. Only the measuring, feline look of one who is uncertain of his territory. (*Chocolat*, 15)

After Vianne opens 'La Celeste Praline', Reynaud visits her several times to lecture her on blasphemy. The fact that the chocolaterie opens during Easter Lent and that many village residents break their fasting for it, seems like a personal insult to Reynaud. He considers Vianne his enemy and his hatred grows exponentially throughout the story. The more people like the chocolate shop, the more Reynaud feels animosity towards chocolate and Vianne.

Reynaud demonstrates several core issues in his acts. The most prominent one is narcissism, which borders with the God-complex. He is convinced that his agenda is to purify his 'flock', which gives him the 'right' to fight and annihilate anyone who comes in the way of his plan. Although he seems like a righteous priest, he does not think highly of the members of the church community, which he complains about to the older priest:

Oh, I'm not complaining. Not really. But you must know how heavy it is for one man to carry. Their petty concerns, their dissatisfactions, their foolishness, their thousand trivial problems... On Tuesday it was the carnival. Anyone might have taken them for savages, dancing and screaming. (*Chocolat*, 24)

Moreover, Reynaud is furious at the fact that they do not accept him as their spiritual leader. The God-complex is revealed when he says: "Yesterday they left the service with ash on their foreheads and a look of guilty relief. Left to their secret indulgences, their solitary vices. Don't they understand? The Lord sees everything. *I see everything.*" (*Chocolat*, 25). This delusional

way of thinking gradually becomes more serious and Reynaud starts preaching against the chocolaterie and Vianne in the mass. Initially, some people do consider he is right, and for some time business in ‘La Celeste Praline’ deteriorates. Yet, this does not last long and Vianne’s shop continues to thrive, which enrages him.

Reynaud is also in denial. He does not want to admit that the grudge against Vianne is exaggerated and unreasonable. He defends himself in front of the older priest:

Do not imagine, *mon père*, that I spend my day watching the bakery. It is simply that it stands almost immediately opposite my own house – the one which was yours, *Mon père*, before all this. Throughout the last day and a half there has been nothing but hammering and painting and whitewashing and scrubbing until in spite of myself I cannot help but be curious to see the result. (*Chocolat*, 27)

Justifying his actions with mere curiosity, Reynaud denies that he sees Vianne as an opponent, who seriously threatens to ‘take over’ his community. As he is aware that the residents do not like him very much, the fear of losing power becomes even more prominent. His denial is also obvious later in the novel, when he lectures Joséphine’s husband, Paul-Marie Muscat, for setting fire on one of the Gypsies’ boats. He stresses that “this is not the Middle Ages” and people should not “interpret God’s laws” according to their own needs, oblivious to the fact that it is him who interprets God’s laws for his agenda against Vianne (*Chocolat*, 237).

As a result of the mentioned core issues, Reynaud develops a serious self-destructive behaviour – he practices ascetic fasting. As a revolt against the emergence of ‘sinful’ gorging in chocolate in the village, he feels it is the only way of conquering his enemy. In his daily accounts to the older priest, Reynaud confesses to eating only bread and water and resisting everything else. It is not surprising that the smell of chocolate has an even more impending effect on him: “The scent of chocolate, like that of my anger, made me light-headed, almost euphoric with rage” (*Chocolat*, 234). Furthermore, he starts projecting his behaviour on Vianne, calling her a witch who wants to manipulate the people, whereas it is him who manipulates them by propagating against her.

As his attempts to push out Vianne are unsuccessful, the last resort for Reynaud is to physically destroy her chocolaterie. On the early Easter Morning, he sneaks through the back door to destroy the long-prepared shop window for the ‘Chocolate Festival’ that Vianne arranged.

He begins to smash the various chocolate figurines, which Vianne and Joséphine have been meticulously preparing for days. He describes his excitement: “[t]he pig inside me tips the flowers onto the table, grinning. I let him have his way. I need his ferocity for the task in hand,” showing clear signs of incontrollable anger (*Chocolat*, 353). When he reaches for the window, his feelings towards chocolate become ambiguous:

[F]or a moment I almost forget why I am here. It is an amazement of riches, *glacé* fruits and marzipan flowers and mountains of loose chocolates of all shapes and colours, and rabbits, ducks, hens, chicks, lambs gazing out at me with merry-grave chocolate eyes like the terracotta armies of ancient China, and above it all a statue of a woman [...]. The smell of chocolate is overwhelming, the rich fleshy scent of it which drags down the throat in an exquisite trail of sweetness. The wheatsheaf-woman smiles very slightly, as if contemplating mysteries. *Try me. Test me. Taste me.* (*Chocolat*, 354-355)

His determination is shattered at the sight and smell of chocolate and he eventually gives in to the urge. One by one, Reynaud tries various delicacies, enjoying them more than he would like to admit: “I take one from the top of the tray. I hold it beneath my nose; it smells of cream and vanilla. No-one will know.” (*Chocolat*, 356). After a couple of bites he completely loses control:

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 pig again, and though something at the top of my mind screams at me to stop I cannot help myself. (*Chocolat*, 357)

This passage is one of the best portrayals of the effect chocolate can have on someone, especially after a long time of abstinence, as is the case with Reynaud. Its power is overwhelming and beyond question. The once righteous, anti-chocolate propagating Reynaud ingests so many pieces in Vianne’s shop that he passes out right in the shop’s window, on display for the whole village. As if waking up from a nightmare, ashamed and exposed in the irony of his situation, Reynaud flees, missing the Easter mass, and is never seen in Lansquenet-sous-Tannes again.

His is the most impressive transformation induced by chocolate. The very resistance to it nearly drives Reynaud mad, and after he realises what he did, he is no longer the narcissistic, overly-righteous and spiteful man. The shame he brings on himself humbles him and he justly leaves the village he caused so much trouble in. It can be easily concluded that chocolate heals Reynaud’s conceitedness and his irrational ambition to be the malevolent dictator of the village. In his case, it is only chocolate and not the chocolate community, which causes the change.

4.4. “Bridget Jones’s Diary”

Bridget Jones is a Londoner in her thirties, who gives a comical daily account of her life in the form of a diary. She starts her story with the New-Year’s resolutions, which include losing weight, finding a man, changing her bad habits, and feeling better about herself, among other things. Every entry starts with an account on her daily calories intake, the number of cigarettes, and chocolate milk trays. As chocolate is her greatest weakness, she always focuses on the number of milk trays she eats, trying to keep it within boundaries, but her determination rarely lasts long and is followed by over-eating. Adorned with humour and irony, the diary depicts Bridget’s life as a collection of mishaps, unexpected situations, and wrong decisions.

Firstly, I will focus on her problems. Bridget struggles with expectations in several fields of life. On the one hand, the relation to her mother is tiresome to her, as her mother finds it fit to make decisions in Bridget’s stead. Additionally, in alliance with family friends, Una and Geoffrey, her mother constantly arranges dates with a recently divorced lawyer, Mark Darcy, for her, although Bridget despises him. Moreover, at family gatherings, Bridget is constantly asked about her love life, with compulsory remarks that her time is running out and that she should not be waiting forever with having children. This upsets Bridget, as her single status is not necessarily her own choice. Another family problem is the separation of her parents, followed by a complete transformation of her mother, who starts a relationship with the deceiving Julio and gets arrested for fraud because of him.

On the other hand, most of Bridget’s thinking is occupied with her love life, since she is desperately trying to settle with someone. She is in love with her boss, Daniel Cleaver, a flatterer who gives her false impressions of commitment and cheats on her, when they are in a relationship. As a further complication, her mother and aunt Una constantly push her into the arms of Mark Darcy, who does not seem interested in her at all. In addition to Daniel and Mark, Bridget also has a brief fling with a much younger man, an artist Gav, whom she dates only to impress her friends. After breaking up with her boss, Bridget feels obliged to change her career and tries her luck as a TV reporter, which is also one of her mother’s ideas. This brings problems of fitting into the new environment, something that the insecure Bridget is not too eager about. Her hilarious fiasco at the fire department is a clear example of her inability to adapt to new situations quickly.

Constant parental interfering and love problems aside, Bridget's biggest battle is with her weight. Self-conscious and insecure, the 'imperfect figure' she believes to have is the source of all other 'miseries' in her life. It can be argued that Bridget obsesses with her looks, changing her opinion on her body according to the reaction she gets from others. If she gets a compliment, she becomes ecstatic, and if she experiences something negative, she attributes it to her weight.

In the second part of the analysis I am focusing on her core issues and defenses. Core issues with Bridget are low self-esteem and unstable sense of self. The low self-esteem is visible in her attitude towards her body. She resents it, thinking it is too fat and ugly and is slowing her down in her ambitions:

Ugh. Cannot face thought of going to work. Only thing which makes it tolerable is thought of seeing Daniel again, but even that is inadvisable since I am fat, have pot on chin, and desire only to sit on cushion eating chocolate and watching Xmas specials. (BJD, 17)²

She constantly blames her figure for everything that happens: "Decided to have cappuccino and chocolate croissant on work to cheer self up. Do not care about figure. Is no point as no one loves or cares about me" (BJD, 50). Even later in the story, she does not cease accusing her 'fat' body for her weakness towards Daniel. When she catches him with Suki, her friends – especially Tom, urge her to forget him, but she has a breakdown: "[I] hate being alone in middle of night, smoking and snivelling like mad psychopath. Fear Dan downstairs might hear and ring loony bin. Oh God, what's wrong with me? Why does nothing ever work out? It is because I am too fat" (BJD, 181).

Bridget's low self-esteem is not only displayed in her complaints about her body and weight, but also in how she experiences parties where everyone insists on information about her love life, as was mentioned before:

'How's your love-life, anyway?' Oh *God*. Why can't married people understand that this is no longer a polite question to ask? We wouldn't rush to *them* and roar, 'How's your marriage life going? Still having sex?' Everyone knows that dating in your thirties is not the happy-go-lucky free-for-all it was when you were twenty-two ..." (BJD, 11)

Everyone, her best friends aside, seems to be urging Bridget to get married and have children. Una is also bold in her observations: "Bridget! What *are* we going to do with you! [...] You

² Henceforth, "Bridget Jones's Diary" is abbreviated as "BJD".

career girls! I don't know! Can't put it off forever, you know. Tick-tock-tick-tock" (*BJD*, 11). The pressure on Bridget is tremendous, so it is not surprising that she develops insecurities.

The unstable sense of self infers that opinions of others have great influence on her, which is probably the reason why she feels the need to constantly change and improve. She finds inspiration in self-help literature and magazines: "Determined, instead of fearing the scary party, panicking all the way through and going home pissed and depressed, am going to improve social skills, confidence and Make Parties Work for Me – as guided by the article have just read in magazine" (*BJD*, 86). Continually thinking of herself as incomplete or insufficiently good-looking, well-mannered, or simply mediocre in any respect, Bridget keeps making 'promises' to herself: "Right. Determined to be v. positive about everything. Am going to change life: become well informed re: current affairs, stop smoking entirely and form functional relationship with grown man" (*BJD*, 189). Yet, she always breaks her promises in the most ironic way, by doing the exact opposite.

Yet, the gravest influence have the remarks on her physical appearance. Being repeatedly told that her time is running out, Bridget panics about her age:

Find self constantly scanning face in mirror for wrinkles and frantically reading *Hello!*, checking out everyone's ages in desperate search for role models (Jayne Seymour is forty-two!), fighting long-impacted fear that one day in your thirties you will suddenly, without warning, grow a big fat crimplene dress, shopping bag, tight perm and face collapsing in manner of movie special-effect, and that will be it. (*BJD*, 78)

Later, when she finally loses weight and is proud of herself and momentarily bursting with confidence, others complain that she looks tired and worn out, which puts her back into desperation and discontent over her body. She expects compliments, but instead, Jude, Simon and Tom are worried for her health: "[t]here's nothing worse than people telling you look tired. They might as well have done with it and say you look like five kinds of shit" (*BJD*, 106). Furious with the outcome, Bridget falls into despair of having wasted years of dieting for no reason: "[m]illions of cheesecakes and tiramisus, tens millions of Emmenthal slices left uneaten. Eighteen years of struggle, sacrifice and endeavour – for what?" (*BJD*, 107).

In order to cope with the displeasure, Bridget acts self-destructively by constantly dieting and smoking. The very manner in which she writes the diary suggests her obsession with losing

weight. From a Lacanian point of view, one could argue that her self-destructive behaviour is the result of the ever-present yearning to fulfil her desires. However, in this case the underlying desire is ambiguous, as it is unclear whether the wish to lose weight prevails over her wish to eat whatever she wants and be free of any socio-cultural expectations. Weight is the first thing she writes about every day and is always a burning topic that requires updates and self-encouragement. Furthermore, smoking is another bad habit which worsens when Bridget is in stress. She exaggerates with cigarettes when her mother becomes wanted by the police for the fraud she made with Julio, or when she finds out her ex-boyfriend is getting married: “I have just smoked entire pack of Silk Cut as act of self-annihilating existential despair” (*BJD*, 190-191).

Finally, the mechanism Bridget uses for defense is denial. She admits it openly: “Actually, I’m all for denial. You can convince yourself of any scenario you choose and it keeps you as happy as a sandboy” (*BJD*, 91). The denial mainly concerns eating, but also spreads to issues unrelated to food, such as trust. After the ‘vicars and tarts’ party fiasco, Bridget rushes to Daniel for consolation, but he hesitates to let her into his apartment. Although there are clues pointing at his infidelity, Bridget is reluctant to see them clearly. Claiming that he is working, Daniel unconvincingly makes excuses not to invite her upstairs: “[t]here was silence. Did I hear a voice in the background? In denial, I told myself he was just laundering money or dealing in drugs. He was probably trying to hide polythene bags full of cocaine under the floorboards helped with some smooth South American men with ponytails” (*BJD*, 173-174). Needless to say, Bridget caught him with Suki and broke up with him.

The most obvious thing Bridget is in denial with is her diet. She wishes to lose weight, yet consciously sabotages the plan by over-eating. After measuring herself one day, she seems determined: “Everything’s fine. Am going to get down to 8st 7lb again and free tights entirely of cellulite. Certain everything will be alright then.” (*BJD*, 184). For Bridget, chocolate plays an ambiguous role, in the similar manner it does to the priest Reynaud, from *Chocolat*. Like Reynaud, Bridget has a love-hate relationship to it: she enjoys eating it, but is displeased with the effect it has on her body. Claiming that she needs it, most of the time after a stressful situation Bridget ends up eating chocolate alone in her home to make her feel better. On the other hand, whenever she weighs herself, there is a new wave of determination to lose weight, which

indirectly infers not eating chocolate. Be that as it may, chocolate does have a healing effect on her, since she is, at least momentarily, relieved of stress when eating it.

In comparison to the characters in *Chocolat*, Bridget is affected by chocolate in a slightly different manner. While Joséphine, Armande, Guillaume and Luc are ‘reborn’ after chocolate consumption, Bridget’s situation has an additional point of view – the body. She enjoys her milk trays, but her body-image notably influences the extent of chocolate’s healing power. Also, Bridget’s point of view is humorous and often ironic, which gives another dimension to the interpretation of chocolate’s effect on her.

4.5. “The Chocolate Lovers’ Club”

The final novel dealing with the healing power of chocolate is *The Chocolate Lovers’ Club*. The story is about four women: Lucy, Autumn, Nadia, and Chantal, who become friends over eating chocolate in a café called ‘Chocolate Heaven’, somewhere in London. The protagonist is Lucy, and the narrative is told from her point of view, but the other characters are equally important, especially when it comes to their love of chocolate. In this novel, the social aspect of food is the most evident, as chocolate is at the heart of their friendship. Similarly to the *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, the women consume chocolate both for celebration and comfort.

The story begins with one of their ‘emergency meetings’, which are arranged whenever someone has a problematic situation. Then, the reader is acquainted with the professions of the characters, as well as their main issues in life. ‘The club’ seems like a refuge place for the little group, and they gather there frequently. The owners of the café are Clive and Tristan, a gay couple, who are also friends with the girls. Separate accounts of characters’ lives are given in parallel: Lucy has no luck with men, and she constantly flirts with her boss, Autumn’s younger brother is a drug-addict, Nadia’s husband loses their entire family fortune to online gambling, and Chantal and her husband do not have sex, so she sleeps around to satisfy her urges. Although their lives are connected mainly by their visits to ‘Chocolate Heaven’, they do have situations which bring them together outside the chocolate world. It is the action they christen “Operation

Liberate Chantal's Jewellery" (*TCLC*, 187).³ After a minutely planned 'operation', they manage to get Chantal's possessions back, as well as her dignity.

The role of chocolate in this novel is central to the narrative, as is the case in *Chocolat*. It is a social cohesive, that brings the four women together and makes them become friends. Moreover, chocolate is their comfort, their treat, sometimes even their entire diet. It heals every character in *The Chocolate Lovers' Club*, with an addition of the incredible effect of joy.

4.5.1. Lucy Lombard

Lucy is the protagonist, and the self-proclaimed "founder member" of "the Chocolate Lovers' Club" (*TCLC*, 11). Lucy is not in touch with her parents, as they have re-married and live in other cities. She lives in a small place in Camden, above a hairdresser shop. She works at Targa, as a replacement for someone on a maternity leave. Although she is not too satisfied with her job, its closeness to 'Chocolate Heaven' makes it endurable for her.

In order to show the healing power of chocolate over Lucy, it makes sense to give an account of her problems in life. She has a long-term relationship with Marcus, who cannot be considered a trustworthy boyfriend. She reveals that he cheated on her numerous times over the years, but they would always make up. In the beginning of the story, Marcus cheats again with a certain Jo, "a petite and extraordinarily pretty brunette" (*TCLC*, 28). In an attempt to surprise him after her cancelled yoga class, Lucy comes unannounced to visit Marcus and discovers his infidelity. As an act of revenge, Lucy comes to his apartment the following day to destroy the dearest objects of affection – his clothes and furniture. She takes the leftover food and stuffs his suits and shoes with it. Moreover, she spills red wine on his immaculate white rug, and hides prawns in his mattress. After that experience, she immediately announces a 'chocolate emergency' to her friends, which means they should meet at 'Chocolate Heaven'. Another romantic interest is her boss Aiden, whom she calls 'Crush'. He is her supervisor at 'Targa' and he calls her 'Gorgeous'. They flirt and have an interesting connection, because Lucy always shares her stock of chocolates with him. The third boyfriend is Jacob, whom Lucy meets at

³ Henceforth, "The Chocolate Lovers' Club" is abbreviated as "TCLC".

‘Chocolate Heaven’, but the relationship does not last, because he works as a male escort and Lucy breaks up with him when she finds out.

Love life aside, Lucy seems unlucky concerning her career, as well. At first, she works at ‘Targa’, but is forced to leave when the previous worker comes back to the post. After that, Lucy briefly works in a bookshop called ‘Jesmond & Sons’. In an attempt to bring some freshness to the mildewed place, Lucy accidentally completely demolishes the bookshop. Tones of books get destroyed and the owner has a heart attack, as a result. After the bookshop, Lucy starts working as an assistant to a new fashion designer. After a couple of successful days, she has a traffic accident, in which all of the designer gowns get stolen and, naturally, she loses that job as well.

Taking her relationship experience into consideration, it can be concluded that Lucy’s core issues are credulousness and low self-esteem. She is too naïve when it comes to trusting men. Admitting that Marcus is constantly cheating on her, and that she still decides to forgive him every time, makes one realise that Lucy has little self-respect. She herself admits that Marcus is too good-looking for her. After her revenge in his apartment, her self-confidence collapses completely and she has a “solo eating orgy” afterwards, ravishing the contents of her fridge (*TCLC*, 43). She is advised by her friends never to speak to him again, but after some time she invites him to be her date at her firm’s party. Marcus seizes the opportunity and proposes to her, and they start making plans for the wedding. However, the next time Lucy comes to his flat unannounced he is with that girl again, proving that her faith in his conversion was in vain. By letting Marcus manipulate her after everything he put her through already, depicts Lucy’s self-esteem issue. A person who thinks that he or she is unworthy of love, would accept any relationship to avoid solitude, which she clearly does. Another issue Lucy has is ineptitude in the professional field. As mentioned, she is unable to do her work without embarrassing herself. Even in ‘Targa’, after the sleepless night caused by Marcus’s cheating, Lucy goes to work forgetting the nickers in her pants and during the meeting they get exposed in front of her colleagues.

In such situations, her defense mechanism is eating chocolate. According to Lacan, the sense of lack is experienced because the desired pleasures cannot be put into words, so they have to be fulfilled in a different manner (Ott, Mack, 156). Lucy, similarly to the previously mentioned characters, fulfils those inexplicable needs by eating chocolate. Whether it is for

comfort, celebration, or as a substitute for ‘real’ food, Lucy’s very existence relies on eating chocolate: ”In times of crisis, my drug of choice is single plantation Madagascar. There is nothing – absolutely nothing – that it fails to cure. This is the remedy for anything from a broken heart to a headache – and I’ve had plenty of both in my time” (*TCLC*, 10). She clearly considers chocolate her cure, which confirms the claim that chocolate has a healing power. She explains her preferences in a detailed manner:

I adore chocolate in all its many forms, but my current passion is couture chocolates made with the selected beans from single plantations all around the world – Trinidad, Tobago, Ecuador, Venezuela, New Guinea. Exotic locations, all of them. They are –in and out – the best type of chocolate. In my humble opinion. The Jimmy Choos of the chocolate world. Though truffles are a fierce competitor. (*TCLC*, 21)

The power chocolate has to comfort Lucy can be seen when she has the mentioned ‘eating orgy’: “sitting on the cold tiles with the fridge door open, I re-enact the scene from *9½ Weeks* all by myself” (*TCLC*, 31). The chocolate ice-cream, Snickers Bars, a Bounty bar, a box of Pure Plantation chocolates, along with many other delicacies are eaten in a matter of minutes, as Lucy notes: “All the time I’m eating, I hardly think of Marcus and how shabbily he has treated me – once more. For now, it’s just me and the comfort chocolate” (*TCLC*, 31). In this example, chocolate is used for consolation.

On the other hand, Lucy and the other members of the group frequently eat chocolate for boosting their confidence, as well: “Oh, I so need some chocolate to get me through the day. I open the box and enjoy the rush that the scent gives me. I’m going to make these last all day.” (*TCLC*, 163). The most confidence is definitely needed on the night when they plan to recover Chantal’s jewellery. Sitting in the car on the way to the rendezvous hotel, the atmosphere becomes gloomy, so Lucy decides to share some chocolate: “I pull a family-size packet of Maltesers out of my bag – they have been kept nicely chilled by Chantal’s air-conditioning – and hand them around. The mood in the car lifts instantly.” (*TCLC*, 215).

Lastly, Lucy uses chocolate for celebration. Her date with Jacob at the Savoy Hotel is a chocolate and champagne evening:

The waiter talks us through the selection of confectionery. There’s white chocolate mousse cake infused with fresh mint and topped with raspberry purée, organic truffles made with my favourite Madagascar beans flavoured with jasmine tea, passion fruit and

limes sundried on trees in Iran. Even the descriptions are sending me into an ecstatic trance. [...] Then we start on the chocolate and, quite frankly, I'm transported to paradise. Chocolate, champagne and a cool guy – what more could a woman want? (*TCLC*, 123)

In addition, when she announces her engagement to Marcus, Clive and Tristan bring out a chocolate fudge cake for all of them to celebrate.

Conclusively, it can be argued that chocolate is an essential part of Lucy's life. With her insecurities with men, with her job, chocolate infuses her with positive feelings and self-confidence. Whether eaten for comfort or pleasure, chocolate heals and helps her cope with the problems in life. In the end, she starts a relationship with Aiden and makes plans to go to Australia with him, but is hindered by breaking her leg. Aiden, the epitome of an ideal boyfriend for Lucy, and a chocolate-lover himself, brings enormous amounts of chocolate to her apartment in order to make her happy and satisfied while he is away. This token of affection, because it concerns Lucy's love for chocolate, makes her love for Aiden grow even more. Chocolate definitely governs Lucy Lombard's life.

4.5.2. Autumn Fielding

Autumn is a very interesting character. She is a free-spirited, sentimental soul, who dedicates her life to helping others. She works in a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts, teaching a class of "creative glass techniques". Her appearance and actions seem rather hippy, according to Lucy:

Autumn is the archetypal English Rose and she's a lovely, warm human being. Her only apparent flaw is that she thinks cheesecloth is a cool fabric. [...] Autumn is also the most principled among us. She recycles things (other than her clothing), and she rides a bike in preference to driving a car and not because she cannot afford one. (*TCLC*, 41)

Autumn comes from a wealthy family, but is not close to her parents. Although they have money, Autumn lives on her own, as does her younger brother, Richard. He is her main concern and she constantly tries to help him improve his life. Chocolate is her passion and she is the first one to join Lucy in 'Chocolate Heaven'. Lucy describes her as "a dark-chocolate person" (*TCLC*, 12). Moreover, aside from satisfaction, eating chocolate makes her feel guilty:

She suffers terrible guilt when she feeds her chocolate habit. The rest of us agonise about the number of calories we're consuming and how long they're going to sit on our hips.

Autumn agonises about the starving children who have to survive on a bowl of rice every day and can't have chocolate – not ever. (*TCLC*, 12)

Autumn's main problems in the story are those concerning her brother. One day he comes to her apartment to live, as he has lost his place and money to some suspicious people. Autumn suspects that he is dealing drugs, but wants to be there for him, nevertheless. Although Richard promises that he will abandon his bad habits, the apartment is full of questionable visitors, who are all clearly involved in drug-dealing. The turning point in their lives is when the girl Richard brings home nearly overdoses, and Autumn saves her life. A while after the incident, Autumn comes home to a ransacked apartment and there is no sign of her brother. When he does appear, he takes his things and goes to a rehab centre in the United States. In all this time, Autumn always puts her brother before herself. She even refuses a date with her colleague, in order to watch over Richard.

As a result, her love-life suffers tremendously. Her time is spread from Richard to the rehab centre she is working in. Addison finds her attractive and tries numerous times to persuade her to go out with him, but she always has an excuse. Finally, when Richard is gone, she accepts the offer and starts a relationship with her colleague.

Autumn's core issues are not as clear-cut as was the case with the characters I discussed previously. In her case, there is a mixture of credulousness, fear of abandonment and fear of intimacy. She trusts her brother blindly, although she realises that he is exploiting her good-heartedness. His life becomes more important than her own and she neglects her personal needs and wishes. Even when Richard disappears, although terrified that someone might have killed him, Autumn does not call the police. She would rather worry alone, than have him arrested. It can be argued that she fears Richard would disappear from her life completely, the way their parents have. The connection she has with her brother is extremely important to her. After he leaves for America, Autumn still misses him earnestly, despite the problems he had caused her while staying at her apartment.

Yet, her fear of intimacy is directed only to her love-interests. It is indisputable that Autumn is very open with her friends and always tries to be there for them. She even asks one of the kids from her rehab centre to teach her how to pick a lock, in order to help Chantal in recovering her jewellery. On the other hand, she is always at a distance with her handsome

colleague, Addison. When he asks her out, she gives an indistinguishable answer, like a shy little girl, which enrages her afterwards:

‘Bye,’ Autumn shouted after him. She sighed to herself and forced her attention back to her chores. ‘You idiot! You complete idiot!’ she muttered to herself as she put the glass back into the relevant boxes. ‘Why didn’t you just say, “Yes, dinner would be nice”?’ Why did she always have to be so ridiculously shy in his presence? This is why you don’t have a boyfriend, she thought. This is why you’re going to be a sad and lonely spinster when everyone else is happily married with children and all you’ll have is a box of bloody chocolates for company. (*TCLC*, 56)

Although it is not stated explicitly, Autumn fears that she will never get married and the pressure transports to her curious relationship to Addison. She fears to start a relationship with him, because she might get disappointed. Her defense in this situation is seclusion, but only towards her romantic interest – Addison.

Chocolate relaxes her and gives her positive energy: “We need hot chocolate to give us a lift”, suggests Autumn at Lucy’s emergency chocolate meeting (*TCLC*, 12). Furthermore, enraged and disappointed at her flirting skills with Addison, she looks forward to eating chocolate at home, for comfort and relaxation: “[w]hen Autumn got home from the rehabilitation centre she was exhausted. All she wanted to do was sink into a nice hot bath with a bar of her favourite dark chocolate and let the water and the sugar-hit sooth her cares away” (*TCLC*, 56). By eating chocolate she satisfies both the actual craving and the repressed desires she harbours. The feeling of lack, of something missing from her life, is substituted with fulfilment when consuming chocolate. However, after Richard leaves and she finds herself more at piece, Autumn finally accepts the long-expected date. Addison is charming and he brings expensive-looking chocolates and flowers for her and they start a relationship.

In the end, Autumn is transformed. Her life is calmer and she has a man in her life. The chocolate from ‘Chocolate Heaven’ helps her cope through difficult situations and it continues to be the best comfort food henceforth. The power of their chocolate community is also not to be neglected. Although chocolate has its beneficial influences, it must be said that it does not take all the merit for Autumn’s transformation. The sense of belonging and acceptance which everyone in the group experiences is another important factor in the healing process. This is also true for the following two characters, Nadia and Chantal.

4.5.3. Nadia Stone

Nadia is the only mother among the members. She has a three-year-old son Lewis and a husband, Toby. Her life before meeting the girls has an interesting path. Her family is of Asian background, which infers that Nadia is expected to have an arranged marriage. As she does not want to comply with her family's rules and marries Toby instead, her family stops all contact with her. Even when she gives birth to Lewis, her family remains alienated from her. At first, this is a necessary situation so she can be with the man of her dreams, but Toby develops a serious online-gambling addiction, which threatens to bankrupt them completely. Fearing for her son's future, Nadia confronts him and eventually leaves Toby until he changes. Her problems which I argue are healed with chocolate concern her family life, especially Toby's addiction. The girls are very supportive of her and they have a great appreciation for Nadia's commitment to seeing them in their club, although she has serious family problems.

Lucy observes that Nadia is not enjoying chocolate 'properly', like the rest of them, as she is merely eating it for comfort: "Nadia is not discerning in her choice of chocolate. She says it's her only respite, but she seems to wolf it down without tasting it. A sin in my book. [...] Nadia eats her chocolate for comfort – along with 99 per cent of the female population, I should imagine." (*TCLC*, 13). Nadia eats chocolates whenever she has the opportunity, even her son's milk trays.

Her core issue is credulousness. She has a seemingly blind fate in her husband's recovery from his addiction. Whenever she catches him gambling, he makes a scene and changes the subject, and Nadia comforts herself that he will change. After realising they could lose the house, she confronts him angrily and takes the matter into her own hands. She borrows the missing money from Chantal and turns off the internet connection. Again, believing Toby has come to his senses, she continues her life, happy for his recovery, only to find out that he secretly continues to gamble.

Eating chocolate is the only defense Nadia has. The desires she represses leave her with a sense of helplessness, which can only be improved with chocolate and friendly support. The ambience in the café and the presence of her friends keep her relaxed and help her in forgetting the problems temporarily:

These days Nadia comes to our regular get-togethers whenever possible to try to stop her brain from rotting. Her words, not ours, although we do agree with her. [...] Nadia is only my age, but she seems much older. Her responsibilities sometimes weigh heavily on her. She has a lovely home, a lovely husband and a lovely baby, but to be honest – as she is with us – sometimes she’s bored to tears with her life. (*TCLC*, 39)

Despite the fact that she has a husband and a baby – something other girls do not have – Nadia is not happy. Her life seems monotonous, aside from the fact that Toby is a gambler. Her deepest desire is to be happy again and have a fully functional family, but the only solution she finds is to share her problems with the girls and treat herself with chocolate for comfort. Although her financial situation does not allow her the luxury of expensive chocolate, Nadia still meets with them: “In her heart, she knew that she shouldn’t go along so regularly to meet the girls, but The Chocolate Lovers’ Club was proving to be her sanctuary”, (*TCLC*, 48).

Her loving friends, and the sense of security she has in the club, encourage her to make changes in life. With the group’s financial and moral support, Nadia leaves Toby, which makes him realise he has to fight his addiction seriously. In the end, their family is on the right path to living happily again. Nadia’s healing process is primarily induced by chocolate, as it immediately makes her feel satisfied. In addition, the social aspect of consuming chocolate contributes exponentially to her recovery, as the group encourages her and points to her core issue of credulousness, which she successfully alters.

4.5.4. Chantal Hamilton

The last member of the group is Chantal. Originally American, Chantal moves to London when she marries Ted, and they lead a luxurious life. She is the oldest in the group, but her appearance does not reveal her age:

She’s tall, slender, always immaculately groomed, ridiculously beautiful and talented. If she was a horse, she’d be a thoroughbred. Her hair is cut into a sleek, dark bob by one of the top stylists in London – one of those who’s on the telly all the time. There’s never a hair out of place. [...] Yes, Chantal Hamilton has everything in life. Everything but a husband who wants sex with her. (*TCLC*, 14)

Ted refuses her sexually, so she fulfils her needs by sleeping with other men. After being married for fourteen years, Ted has been avoiding her in bed for quite some time. They become strangers

who share the same house, which makes Chantal devastated. She is a freelance journalist, doing interviews with American celebrities and photographing their England homes. Usually, Chantal would seduce the photographers she works with. The girls know about her situation and they support her.

However, at one occasion the seduction of a young photographer goes unsuccessfully and she gets rejected. To restore her wounded pride, she goes to bed with a complete stranger that night. Unfortunately, in the morning she realises that he robbed her of her laptop, mobile phone, as well as her wallet and jewellery. The famous jewel-heist follows the incident, and Chantal manages to get her little fortune back.

However unlikely it seems, my argument is that Chantal's core issue is low self-esteem. Despite the fact that she works on her figure and can seduce almost anyone she wants, the fact that her own husband is refusing to have sex with her is her deepest problem. It is out of that rejection that she starts sleeping around. She yearns for the absent sexual life with her husband, but as he makes it impossible, she finds a different solution. Ted's withholding of intimacy shatters her confidence to the core and she sleeps around as a result of her wounded pride: "The less Ted wanted her, the more she needed him. And if she couldn't have him then she damn well needed to get to her quota of sexual pleasure elsewhere" (*TCLC*, 131). It can be argued that Chantal is constantly proving her sexuality by having sex outside marriage, but that fails to fulfil her true needs – having sex with her husband. Her insecurity is visible in the following passage:

What if she was getting to the age where she couldn't find strangers who wanted to sleep with her? What would happen then? Some women could dress up in a killer outfit, flirt all night with the hottest studs in the bar and still go home unlucky. Was she going to turn into one of those poor, unfortunate bitches? (*TCLC*, 73-74).

Her defenses are clearly sex and chocolate. Interestingly, Chantal cures the lack of sex with more sex – only with different partners. On the other hand, her chocolate addiction is a more complex matter. Chocolate both relaxes and excites her. In the following example, she is on the road with her young colleague, Jeremy. She plans on seducing him at the hotel, and boosts her confidence with chocolate:

All she had to do was bring herself and some chocolate along for the ride. She'd chosen a thick slab from Chocolate Heaven, studded with crushed coffee beans – one of Clive's

many specialties. It smelled divine and the coffee beans would certainly help to keep them both awake. (TCLC, 52)

Also, when she wakes up the following morning realising she is robbed, her first reaction is the need for chocolate to comfort her: “[o]nly chocolate croissants and strong, hot coffee were going to be enough to revive her today, and she hoped they were on the menu” (TCLC, 76). In the same manner as Lucy, Chantal also consumes chocolate for celebration. After spending the night with her hired escort, the sexually satisfied and relaxed Chantal goes straight to ‘Chocolate Heaven’ to treat herself: “After her lunch, she’d gone along to Chocolate Heaven and had indulged in some green tea and a bar of Clive’s wonderful Samana Peninsula chocolate made with rare cocoa beans from the Dominican Republic” (TCLC, 174).

Chocolate exhibits its healing capacity on Chantal, as well as the other girls. Regardless of the occasion, if they need comfort, their spirits lifted, or simply want to savour its exquisite taste, chocolate is always the first option for the girls in *The Chocolate Lovers’ Club*. Without it, their lives would never be the same. It’s mood-lifting capacities, but also the fact they all belong to the little community contribute to the healing process which each of the characters undergo.

5. Gender Analysis

After the psychoanalytic approach to the novels, the analysis can be conducted further in the field of gender studies. The transformations of the characters, which were thoroughly outlined in the previous chapter, are also dependent on how female characters are perceived in terms of gender and the social conventions connected to it. In particular, in all three novels women struggle with certain prescribed ideal ways of living, as there are ‘roles’ which they are expected to fulfil. In *Chocolat*, Vianne and Joséphine are ostracised by the rest of the society for their questionable morality. Bridget Jones is considered too choosy and unwilling to get married, which is the same for Lucy and Autumn in *The Chocolate Lovers’ Club*. Nadia and Chantal are married, but their marriages are rather unconventional.

It can be argued that those women challenge the ‘traditional’ values concerning gender. Before I shed more light on the problematic term ‘tradition’, it is important to give a brief overview of gender theory, in order to show how gender expectations influence the characters.

5.1. Theoretical Background

Gender is a rather complex concept. Although it is widely used in cultural and literary criticism, there are many definitions explaining it. According to Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos, and Kirkby, gender “divides humans into two categories: male and female” (1). Ott and Mack explain the commonly mistaken difference between sex and gender:

Sex refers to the innate, biological differentiation between men and women: anatomy, reproduction, hormones, etc. Gender, on the other hand, refers to the culturally constructed differences between men and women: tastes, roles, activities, etc. It is a biological fact that only women can give birth to children, but the tendency to view women as nurturing and mothering is a gendered quality. (Ott, Mack, 178)

Gender is performed virtually on every step, as is the case with public bathrooms, when people choose where to enter according to the door sign (Cranny-Francis, et al., 1). Aside from making the binary categorisation, the system “privileges the male over female”, they claim (1). Even in the classical antiquity there is evidence to support this inference. Aristotle developed a so-called “Pythagorean table of opposites”, in which he attributed certain characteristics to their corresponding gender. This resulted in his belief that “men were stronger, women weaker; men courageous, women cautious; men the outdoors type, women domestic; men educate children, women nurture them” (Cranny-Francis et al., 2). Furthermore, this kind of thinking was fuelled in the nineteenth century in the work of Paul Broca, add Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos, and Kirkby (2). They explain that Broca “weighed male brains against female ones, and came up with some rather dubious conclusions about male superiority based on his findings”, (ibid.).

Ott and Mack warn that “trouble arises when societies [...] confuse gendered qualities with sexual ones, understanding culturally constructed norms as innate biological traits”, which is called essentialism (179). However, essentialism is not to be confused with patriarchy:

Patriarchy is a system of power relations in which women’s interests are subordinated to those of men. Essentializing a group is one way of defining them and marking their worth, and patriarchy essentializes women in a way that devalues them while predominantly serving the interests of men. (Ott, Mack, 179)

Patriarchy favours men “by making constructed, gendered power imbalances seem natural and innate”, according to Ott and Mack (179). In a patriarchal way of thinking, it makes more sense for women to nurture their new-borns, than it does for men (ibid.). Similarly, when it comes to

marrying and starting a family, women's decision to remain unmarried is seen as a problem, whereas a man in that situation would be simply considered ambitious for his career. Precisely for these reasons, female characters in the three novels feel the pressure from the society. Although claiming that contemporary society is patriarchal in its whole would be inaccurate, there are certainly persistent elements which govern the 'proper' behaviour and decision-making. Regardless of the fact that the novels take place in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the women in them are all 'expected' to get married and have children, to a certain extent.

Another issue tightly connected to the morality of patriarchy is sexuality. It would appear that there are double standards when it comes to gender sexuality. As Cranny-Francis and others explain, "the hierarchy that privileges the male in dualist systems of gender, also gives the structure for how sexuality works in Western society" (7). Female sexuality is considered:

[N]aturally masochistic, narcissistic and passive; male sexuality is inscribed as naturally aggressive, sadistic and active. Traditional notions of women's sexuality make it virtually synonymous with her reproductive function. Motherhood is seen as the natural expression of female sexuality. (Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos, and Kirkby, 7)

Although this view can be considered obsolete, as women today are less scrutinised for choosing 'alternative' paths in life, there are still patriarchal elements that prevail. These convictions lead to gender stereotypes, which are main culprits of the unenviable female gender roles. Stereotypes "function by simplifying, by reducing classes of people to a few characteristics by which they are generally said to be identifiable", and set up symbolic boundaries which affect both the inside and the outside group, according to Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos and Kirkby (140). Although stereotypes are rough simplifications, "however inaccurate, [they] form mental shortcuts that allow us to quickly make snap judgements about individuals and move on", argue Ott and Mack (181). On the one hand, stereotypes lead to misrepresentation of the concepts they stand for, on the other hand, they are essential to human way of reasoning. According to Stuart Hall, stereotypes work as a filter for the enormous amount of information our brains process:

Stereotypes exclude or reject everything which falls out of its definitions, everything which is different. It sets up symbolic boundaries and then provides the mechanisms of cultural production for people to police those boundaries. People use stereotypes to determine who should naturally belong to one group or another. [...] It sets up a symbolic frontier between the 'normal', and the 'deviant', the 'normal' and the 'pathological', the

‘acceptable’ and the ‘unacceptable’, what ‘belongs’ and what does not or is ‘Other’. (Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos, Kirkby, 141)

Hall claims that this “strategy of splitting” is the key mechanism behind making sense of the world. However, Ott and Mack argue that stereotypes are damaging because they disregard “the complex characteristics that actually define a social group and reduce its members to a few (usually unfavourable) traits” (180). This is exactly how patriarchy undermines important features of the female gender. By disregarding the positive traits, patriarchy focuses on characterising women as passive, submissive, domestic, and nurturing. Although this might be true for some of the representatives, attributing those features to the whole group has a negative effect. As a result, stereotypes of masculinity and femininity can be summarised in the following passage:

In general, stereotypes of masculinity are defined by power, significance, agency, and social influence. Stereotypes of femininity are defined by powerlessness, insignificance, passiveness, and limited control. Although these trends construct narrow gender norms for individual members of both sexes, they reinforce patriarchal systems of power by supporting the domination of men over women. (Ott, Mack, 182)

One of the stereotypes is the traditional role of women. Getting married, having children, and having a virtuous domestic life, is something that is usually ‘expected’ of women, in a patriarchal context. How characters from *Chocolat*, *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, and *The Chocolate Lovers’ Club* are affected by these social norms, is discussed in the next section.

5.2. Traditional Values re-visited

According to Beauvoir (cf. Patterson), “for more than sixty years of the twentieth century, Western society conditioned women to become wives and mothers and made those who rejected those roles feel somehow inadequate and incomplete” (88). Whelehan agrees that women are ‘expected’ to find a man, get married, or be in a relationship, as being single might be seen as problematic: “[t]he freedom that single life offers is seen to be compromised by popular wisdoms about the naturalness of coupledness; there is also the association of singleness with loneliness – or worse, social ineptitude or downright unattractiveness” (26). Apparently, whoever chooses to be single risks being socially rejected by those accepting the mainstream tendencies. Vianne and Joséphine breach the norms of the village conventions, as far as marriage is concerned. Likewise,

Bridget is considered a spinster among the elderly generations, although that is not necessarily her choice.

Motherhood and marriage aside, other traditional patriarchal values which appear in the novels are fidelity and obedience. Women are ‘expected’ to be faithful to their boyfriends or husbands, and fulfil their wishes. Extra-marital affairs are considered a tremendous violation, as can be seen in both *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and *The Chocolate Lovers’ Club*. Bridget’s mother separates from her father and has an open relationship to several other men. Similarly, Chantal from *The Chocolate Lovers’ Club* has a habit of sleeping with other men, outside of her marriage. Chantal is never criticised by her friends for her marital infidelity, but the fact that Ted leaves her after finding out about it demonstrates what his expectations are.

In the foreground, the characters are questioning, and possibly rejecting traditional values of marriage, motherhood, fidelity, and domestic life. However, under closer inspection this inference is not necessarily true and there are indications showing that deep inside most of them long for a happy relationship with husband and children.

5.2.1. Vianne and Joséphine, “The Decadent Witch” and “The Bad Housewife”

In *Chocolat*, Vianne is the character who faces gendered stereotypes the most. Although she is a charming appearance and gains friends quickly, her behaviour bothers the church-going community. The story is set in the 1990’s, yet the conservative community of Lansquenet-sous-Tannes is unforgiving for single mothers. Having a child outside marriage raises too many questions with the residents, which all inevitably conclude that it must be Vianne’s questionable morality that has caused it. When Reynaud first comes to the chocolaterie, he inquires about her personal life: “I could hear the priest waiting for details on Monsieur Rocher. So much easier to have everything on a piece of paper, everything official, avoid this uncomfortable, messy conversation” (*Chocolat*, 21). He also seems to disapprove of her daughter: “Reynaud gave a tight, sour smile, as if his first glimpse of my daughter confirmed every one of his suspicions about me” (*Chocolat*, 23). Another thing Reynaud dislikes about Vianne is her alternative

spirituality. She rejects tradition by disregarding Christian customs which are clearly important in Lansquenet-sous-Tannes. She openly tells him that she does not attend the mass, which, combined with her chocolate-making practice, is a 'sign' for Reynaud that she is a witch. The fact that she opens her shop on a Sunday enrages him even more:

“‘On the first Sunday of Lent?’ He sounded amused, but beneath the amusement, there was disdain. ‘I shouldn’t think so. Lansquenet folk are simple folk, Madame Rocher,’ he told me. ‘Devout folk.’ He stressed the word gently, politely. ‘It’s *Mademoiselle* Rocher.’ Small victory, but enough to break his stride. (*Chocolat*, 54)

Her constant interfering in the lives of others seems to bother Reynaud, but also Paul-Marie Muscat. He blames Vianne for Joséphine leaving him and calls her a “bra-burning bitch”, alluding to the fact that Vianne fights for Joséphine’s freedom and converts her thinking, as well (*Chocolat*, 222).

Finally, Vianne’s morality is also being questioned. Reynaud admits to the old priest that Vianne’s appearance is too different from the other women’s in Lansquenet-sous-Tannes. He criticises her reluctance to blend in with the people: “Her hair, her clothes, perpetually wind-torn, wildflower colours, orange and yellow and polka-dotted and floral-patterned” (*Chocolat*, 238-239). Reynaud is convinced that there is something immoral about her, although he cannot verbalise what exactly: “She wears no make-up, and yet there is something slightly indecent about that face. Perhaps it is the directness of her look, the way her eyes linger appraisingly, that permanent crease of irony about the mouth.” (*Chocolat*, 75). Moreover, Reynaud believes that her chocolate is indirectly responsible for his shaken reverence. When a woman confesses to eating chocolate at ‘La Celeste Praline’ and breaking her lent, he sees her as temptation caused by Vianne: “I can smell her perfume, something flowery, too strong in this enclosed darkness. I wonder whether this is temptation. If so, I am stone” (*Chocolat*, 36). Aside from Reynaud, Caroline Clairmont declares Vianne is a decadent woman, who “flaunts that illegitimate child of hers” in a “disgusting” way (*Chocolat*, 60).

In this respect, Vianne clearly breaks with the village tradition. However, from a feminist point of view, Vianne shows remarkable independence. She manages to school and care for her daughter, although she does not have help from Anouk’s father. In addition, she is a successful business woman, since her chocolaterie is a very popular place. All the work around the house

(usually considered to be a man's responsibility) Vianne does herself without complaining or asking for help. She is independent and capable, and this is precisely why the patriarchal community sees her as the stranger.

The 'village etiquette' applies to Joséphine, as well. She, unlike Vianne, is completely aware of what is 'expected' of a woman, but has problems complying with the rules. She talks of a metaphorical line in the village, which, when crossed, puts you outside the mainstream community:

'[I]f you *don't* go to confession, if you *don't* respect your husband, if you *don't* cook three meals a day and sit by the fire thinking decent thoughts and waiting for him to come home, if you *don't* have *children* – and you don't bring flowers to your friends' funerals or vacuum the parlour, or –*dig –the – flowerbeads!*' She was red-faced with the effort of speaking. [...] '*Then you're crazy!*'. (*Chocolat*, 80-81)

In addition to the community, her own husband thinks of her as a disgrace. Mostly for her kleptomania problem, but also because he thinks she is not a good enough housewife for him. He belittles her even in front of complete strangers: "Screw my wife! [...] It's my name above the door and I say – we're *closed!*" (*Chocolat*, 119). He complains to Reynaud about her behaviour:

'I know my weaknesses. But tell me, *père*' – he spread his hands appealingly – 'didn't I have some reason? Waking up to her stupid face every morning? Catching her time and again with her pockets full of stolen stuff from the market, lipsticks and bottles of perfume and jewellery? Having everyone looking at me in the church and laughing?' (*Chocolat*, 235)

Paul justifies beating his wife with the fact that she is not good enough, and claims that he had solid reasons to do so. Joséphine is expected to be the 'perfect' obedient wife, who endures the physical violence and loves her husband in spite of everything, according to Paul. Furthermore, Paul has a role model in mind for his wife, Caroline Clairmont, and he constantly compares the two of them, urging Joséphine to be more like Caro:

'It's always Caro this, Caro that. I've seen the way he looks at her in church. "Why can't you be like Caro Clairmont?" [...] "She makes you look like a clumsy cow. She's got *style*. *Class*. She's got a fine *son* doing well at *school*. And what have you got, *hé?*" '

(*Chocolat*, 124)

The amount of disrespect Joséphine suffers from her husband is immense. Luckily, with the help of chocolate, and some encouragement from Vianne, she leaves the brute and starts a new life. She moves in with Vianne and starts working in the chocolaterie. Even then, however happy she finally is, she is not free from the village scrutiny. Reynaud considers himself adequate to be everyone's spiritual leader and comes to the shop in an attempt to convert Joséphine back into her old life. Ironically, although he knows that Joséphine suffers domestic violence, he still tries to persuade her to come back to Paul: "You have weakened. You have allowed others to lead you astray. The sanctity of the marriage vow..." (*Chocolat*, 231). The fact that Reynaud has the honour to lecture her on marriage vows shows how retrograde the community trends are in Lansquenet-sous-Tannes concerning gender equality.

5.2.2. **Bridget, "The Career Girl"**

Bridget seems to be in an ambiguous situation. On the one hand, she enjoys the advantages of the single life and is furious with people who ask her about her love-life; on the other hand, she longs for a relationship and admits having fantasies about being married.

Her parents, as well as their friends and other married people from her circle, tirelessly ask about her love-life and why she is not married yet. From her unclear reactions they conclude that she is a career girl, who only invests her time and effort in her work. They warn her about remaining a spinster, which becomes one of her nightmares. Whelehan notes that Bridget and her friends believe "there is a greater stigma attached to being female and single after a certain age", and that "spinsters have always been cast in a less attractive light than bachelors" (27). Accordingly, the singles in Bridget Jones's Diary "are excessively anxious to get themselves paired off", claims Whelehan (26). However, the effort appears counterproductive.

In many situations, she is against traditional values, especially the ones which concern the woman's body and pose high expectations:

Being a woman is worse than being a farmer – there is so much harvesting to be done: legs to be waxed, underarms shaved, eyebrows plucked, feet pumiced, skin exfoliated and moisturized, spots cleansed, roots dyed, eyelashes tinted, nails filed, cellulite massaged, stomach muscles exercised. The whole performance is so highly tuned you only need to

neglect it for a few days for the whole thing to go to seed. [...] Is it any wonder girls have no confidence? (*BJD*, 30)

Social norms concerning the ideal woman's body are pressuring women to be perfectly groomed at all times. The media, as well as magazines feature top models whose looks are nearly impossible to achieve. In addition, there is a tendency of remaining young-looking, which is another problem Bridget is upset about: "Feel need to do something to stop ageing process, but what? Cannot afford facelift. Caught in hideous cleft stick as both fatness and dieting are in themselves ageing. Why do I look old?" (*BJD*, 148). In light of all the expectations, Bridget feels helpless about achieving what social trends dictate as an ideal. Therefore, she and her friends believe that being single is a healthier option than being married. Her friend Shazzer makes a point in explaining why someone would willingly remain unmarried:

"I'm not married because I'm a *Singleton*, you smug, prematurely ageing, narrow-minded morons," Shazzer ranted. "And because there's more than one bloody way to live: one in four households are single, most of the royal family are single, the nation's young men have been proved by surveys to be completely unmarriageable, and as a result there's a whole generation of single girls like me with their own incomes and homes who have lots of fun and don't need to wash anyone's socks. (*BJD*, 42)

This furious monologue shows women's independence, proving that women are not to be considered the 'weaker' sex. Bridget and her friends are aware that being single in the end of the 1990's is not as bad as their parents would want them to think. The emancipation is in full swing and gender equality is not supposed to be questioned. Nevertheless, the novel offers strong evidence that the influence of patriarchy is not to be undermined yet.

Bridget shows that she is torn between the two ways of thinking. As argued, regardless of the confidence-boosting talks she has with her friends, she still wants to get married. In the beginning, when Bridget comes to her parents' house in order to attend "Una and Geoffrey Alconbury's New Year's Day Turkey Curry Buffet in Grafton Underwood", she is terrified at the thought that another year passes and she is still single: "Cannot quite believe I am once again starting the year in the single bed in my parents' house. It's too humiliating at my age." (*BJD*, 8-10). Another clue which reveals Bridget's dissatisfaction with her single life is her frequent fantasizing about the married life with Daniel. When she fears that she is pregnant, Bridget imagines what it would be like to have a family with Daniel: "Oh dear. Am starting to get carried away with idea of self as Calving Klein-style mother figure, poss. wearing crop-top or throwing

baby in the air, laughing fulfilledly in advert for designer gas cooker, feel-good movie, or similar” (BJD, 116). Later on, as their relationship is still wonderful, she imagines going on holidays together:

Head is full of moony fantasies about living in flats with him and running along beaches together with my offspring in manner of Calving Klein advert, being trendy Smug Married instead of sheepish Singleton. (BJD, 131)

Bridget’s opinion changes with the tide. When she is single she celebrates the single life, but when she is happy in a relationship she wants to *become* the smug married – the idea she hates when she is without boyfriend. This is an interesting discrepancy. Whelehan also points to that conclusion:

Bridget’s fight is against such conventional wisdoms, and she challenges them by exposing the dissatisfaction of the “smug marrieds” she knows; and yet Bridget’s ideal position would be to be partnered but not yet smug. Bridget, frustratingly, is forever identifying such injustices, dissecting them and then endorsing them. (Whelehan, 26-27)

In summary, Bridget questions the traditional values and rejects them only when she is unhappy and single. As soon as she is in a relationship, all the questioning is gone and she desires to become the very smug married she despised beforehand. In contrast, Vianne and Joséphine from *Chocolat* are firmly oriented at dismissing the patriarchal ideas of life. Although Bridget herself goes through a rather rough period while being single and is perfectly aware why it is wrong to boast about your relationship in front of your single friends, she still dismisses her system of belief which makes her awfully unstable.

5.2.3. Lucy and Chantal, “The Modern Women”

The Chocolate Lovers’ Club offers even four characters who struggle with the traditional expectations: Lucy longs for love, but goes from one unhappy relationship to another; Nadia marries against her family’s wishes, which breaks all connections between them (she is a disobedient daughter); Autumn has intimacy issues and does not want commitment, and Chantal breaks her vows by cheating on her husband and does not want to have children. Yet, only Lucy and Chantal are as resistant to the traditional expectations.

Lucy describes herself as Bridget would do: “I’m neither a sad single nor a smug married. I have a permanent boyfriend – sometimes.” (*TCLC*, 20). She also has an ambiguous attitude towards traditional values. She likes to portray herself as confident and self-sufficient in front of others, as she does with her boss Aiden: “‘You need someone to look after you.’ ‘I need no one’, I tell him. Especially not some smarty-pants, smoothly Sales Manager. ‘I can manage perfectly well alone.’” (*TCLC*, 62). Parallel to Bridget, Lucy utters those words after she catches her boyfriend cheating on her. Disappointed in love, she seems perfectly happy as the single girl. Furthermore, when Marcus cheats on her for the second time, Lucy is furious with the girl Jo, wondering what happened to the concept of sisterhood:

I stare at the woman in question and wonder what happened to the concept of sisterhood. If women stopped doing this kind of thing to other women, there would be a lot less pain in this world. Men, I’ll admit, are probably a lost cause, but we could stop cheating on other women with their husbands, boyfriends, fiancés. (*TCLC*, 350)

In contrast, new romantic opportunities change her opinion completely. When she meets Jacob at ‘Chocolate Heaven’, she is so smitten with his charming attitude, that she instantly imagines them at the altar, getting married: “[...] Do you come here often?’ ‘I do’, I say. Oh my word, how great does that sound? *Do you, Lucy Lombard, take this man as your lawful wedded husband? I do.*” (*TCLC*, 80). Obviously, Lucy does not refuse the traditional value of marriage. Moreover, she consciously fuels the gap between the genders with her thoughts about karting, as a team-bonding exercise at ‘Targa’:

I know we have spent years advancing the cause for our equality, but let me tell you this – girls don’t like doing things such as this. It is an indisputable truth that we like painting our toenails, we like doing our hair, we like having manicures. We do not like racing around in cars, and in that generic term, I include go-karts. It is not in our genetic make-up. (*TCLC*, 273-274)

Mentioning genetics, Lucy even becomes essentialist in this passage, which is in stark contrast to the opinion on gender equality she has as the single woman.

Chantal is the character in *The Chocolate Lovers’ Club*, who questions the traditional roles most obviously. In the first place, she repeatedly cheats on her husband, which is a rejection of fidelity. Since her husband loses interest in sleeping with her, Chantal decides to find an alternative solution to her problems. She justifies her infidelity with Ted’s lack of interest:

“[t]o her it was a fundamental part of being a woman, a wife. To be loved, desired. Could Ted truly love her if he never wanted to be intimate with her? She wasn’t sure when the rot had set in” (*TCLC*, 53). Her infidelity is somewhat enhanced by the fact that she is not secretive about her affairs. Though she does not want Ted to know, she more than happily boasts about her affairs to the girls. Clearly, she does not regret doing it. Yet, when she prepares to seduce her young colleague, Jeremy, there is a hint of shame in her behaviour – she chooses the revealing and sexy attire, but takes her engagement and wedding rings off:

The only jewellery that she did remove was her wedding and engagement ring; the latter was a sizeable rock, too. She slowly slipped them off and put them on the dressing table. Call her old-fashioned, but it didn’t seem right doing the dirty deed with her rings on her finger. Okay, so it was a token nod towards morality, but it was better than nothing, she reasoned. (*TCLC*, 70)

Further rejection of tradition is reflected in Chantal’s refusal to have children. It is her solid decision to be in a childless marriage, as she feels not everyone is adequate for having children. This is rooted in her own childhood, as her parents were only performing their duties towards her because it was ‘expected’ of married couples to have children. Her friends have an understanding for her decision, but apparently her husband does not. After he admits seeing no point in their love-making if they do not want children, the two of them separate.

Initially firm in her belief in the childless marriage, Chantal slowly changes her convictions. As she starts living with Nadia and Lewis, the little boy grows to her so much that she decides to re-visit her decision. This is also enhanced when she is faced with the single life, after more than a decade of living with Ted: “It was going to be strange living alone, after being with Ted for so many years and she choked back a tear as she thought about it” (*TCLC*, 277).

The initially “Modern Women” who easily dismiss the patriarchal traditional roles, both Lucy and Chantal come to a state where they abandon their ‘feminist’ beliefs. In the end, Lucy settles with Aiden and Chantal starts dating Ted again, with an open mind to the family life.

6. Abjection and the Body in Western Culture

This final theory approach is intended to offer another dimension to the psychoanalytic and gender approaches. The consumption of chocolate has its psychological effects, which were dealt with in the psychoanalytic approach, but also a physical effect. Eating chocolate causes bodily transformation, which is also a significant factor in the healing process.

The body in the context of contemporary Western culture, in which the three novels are set, has to be looked at from different perspectives. According to Falk, body can never be observed detached from its connection to culture and to self (10). It is through different senses that the body communicates: “close or contact senses (touch, smell, taste) and the distant ones (sight hearing)”, notes Falk. Further, he emphasizes that the senses are in a hierarchical position, whereby distant senses are considered more worthy than the close senses (10). This might pose as an explanation why taste – or eating, for that matter – is considered a less valuable information recipient to the body than sight, in literature. Falk argues that:

The sensory aspect of eating – the sense of taste (broadly understood) – is not transformed into a *mental* representation in the manner visual perception turns into mental ‘images’ (of memory and imagination), but nevertheless, both are still moulded by the *cultural* representations. The latter outline coordinates both to that which is eaten (and what it tastes like) and to that which is seen, and how. (Falk, 11)

It can be argued that this account shows why the act of eating is not as popular a topic in literary criticism, as much as the act of seeing. Perceiving through the sense of sight is more abstractly processed in the mind, therefore taste is considered too prosaic. This is a generalisation, yet, it is a fact that there is not much written on eating, both in the academic and fictional literary worlds. The body in its connection to consumption could inarguably be a prolific topic for cultural and literary criticism.

The body is an important issue in *Chocolat*, *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and *The Chocolate Lovers’ Club*, particularly in connection to the characters’ love (or hatred) for chocolate. Eating chocolate delicacies in greater amounts causes gaining weight, which is in direct opposition to the concept of ‘ideal’ figure in contemporary Western society. Bridget is obsessed with losing weight and she commences each day by giving an account on her body state – how much she

weighs and how that makes her feel. The girls in *The Chocolate Lovers' Club* are also self-conscious about retaining their lean bodies in spite of enjoying chocolate.

Sceats observes that contemporary attitudes towards the body “are complex and contradictory” (61). She explains that people – especially women – are put in confusing situations which causes many problems:

We are simultaneously exhorted to be thin and to consume, to be hedonistic and virtuous, to worship the body and punish the body; the difficulty of achieving a homeostasis in this culture is reflected in anxiety, guilt, anger and obsession. (Sceats, 66)

Reaching back to the origins of Christianity, the body was considered sacred, yet, many would punish their bodies in ascetic fasting in the name of religion: “western society has traditionally taken a punitive attitude towards the body, being ever ready to mortify or torment the flesh”, indicates Sceats (61). It is hardly surprising that Bridget is in constant pursuit of the ideal figure: “[w]ise people will say Daniel should like me just as I am, but I am a child of *Cosmopolitan* culture, have been traumatized by supermodels and too many quizzes and know that neither my personality nor my body is up to it if left to its own devices.” (*BJD*, 59). She is ‘compelled’ to lose weight in order to be socially acceptable as beautiful and feminine. Bridget mentions the ‘Cosmopolitan’ culture, where she refers to the “glossy magazines”, which “represent body maintenance as ‘pampering’ oneself” (Whelehan, 49). In her comparison of women to farmers, Bridget complains about all the harvesting and plucking a woman has to do to her body (*BJD*, 30). Sceats refers to this as the “commodification of the body”, whereby “[t]he female image that emerges here is lean, taut, smooth and hairless, something like a mobile, androgynous statue” (66).

Punishing the body is also visible in *The Chocolate Lovers' Club*, where Lucy emphasizes that “[s]he who eats chocolate must work out” (*TCLC*, 16). Therefore, she practices yoga every week, with a clear goal – to be able to eat her share of chocolate: “[b]ut if I come here to punish my body on a regular basis then it can just about keep pace with my calorie consumption” (*TCLC*, 19). Chantal, too, admits that at her age swimming regularly is a necessity if she wants to continue with her chocolate addiction.

According to Sceats, an overly harsh body discipline can cause eating disorders (65). She quotes Bardo in accusing the “culturally (and commercially) endorsed ideal slim (even thin)

female body” for the increase in eating disorders: “[they] are not anomalous but entirely in keeping with ordinary experience in western culture, resulting from hunger, desire, and fat being culturally saturated with negative associations.” (Sceats, 65). Lucy Lombard presents this problem:

The amount of chocolate I’ve consumed recently is beginning to settle on my hips and that is not a good look. This morning, the waistband on my skirt nearly garrotted me. Why is it that weight never settles on my boobs, where I could do with a little extra help? Why are calories pre-programmed to go straight to the lower half of your body? Even the regular throwing up in the bathroom routine has failed to keep my weight in check recently. (*TCLC*, 141)

By acknowledging her shocking ‘routine’ of over-eating followed by throwing up, Lucy portrays such behaviour as a necessity for the greater good – the ideal body. The social norm ‘expects’ of women to look thin and some women try to do that at all costs, even if it means losing their health.

According to Sceats, at the core of eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia, is the concept of abjection (68). She adds that the abject is “literally what is thrown away” and it “comprises of all that is grotesque, unspeakable, disgusting, yet which, being a part of the self, and specifically the body, cannot be fully rejected or obliterated” (Sceats, 68). Correspondingly, what can be abjected are bodily processes and substances (food, vomit, bodily fluids), as they cause disgust (Sceats, 69). According to McAfee, Kristeva connects abjection to Lacanian mirror stage, suggesting that “even before this stage, the infant begins to separate itself from others [...] by abjection, a process of jettisoning what seems to be part of oneself” (46). Moreover, Kristeva stresses that “what is abjected is radically excluded but never *banished altogether* [emphasis added]”, indicates McAfee (46). In this respect, the abject is not to be confused with Freudian repressed, as:

It hovers at the periphery of one’s existence, constantly challenging one’s tenuous border of selfhood, what makes something abject and not simply repressed is that it does not entirely disappear from consciousness. It remains as both an unconscious and a conscious threat to one’s own clean and proper self. The abject is what does not respect boundaries. (McAfee, 46)

The most common abject is food, as Kristeva proposes (McAfee, 46). In “Powers of Horror”, Kristeva explains that:

Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection. When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk – harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring – I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. (Kristeva, 3)

Abjecting food can easily be connected to eating disorders, especially anorexia. In the context of my thesis, Bridget Jones is in the situation where she gorges on food, but then abjects it temporarily, or throws it up. Her conflicting relation to food indicates that she is both attracted and repulsed by it.

Aside from food, abjection can be triggered by “the presence of a cadaver”, as “the border between life and death has been broken” (McAfee, 47). This instability of a clear boundary is already mentioned as the defining factor of the abject. McAfee adds that the corpse represents the ultimate abjection of something from which one should not part, being a “reminder that [one] will cease to be” it “violates [one’s] own borders” (47).

The most important abjection is that of the mother (McAfee, 47). The abjection of the mother is tightly connected to the Lacanian pre-symbolic stage, or the mirror phase. According to Kristeva (qt. in McAfee), “abjection first arises when the infant is still in an imaginary union with its mother, before it has recognized its image in a mirror, well before it begins to learn language” (47). In order to reach its subjectivity, the child’s first act is the abjection of its mother – realisation that the two of them are separate entities (McAfee, 48).

Abjection influences Bridget, which is supported by her instable attitude towards eating. In *Chocolat*, the only character who abjects chocolate is the priest, Reynaud. With his hatred towards the enchanting stranger who intrudes ‘his’ village, Reynaud abjects food, particularly chocolate. He considers having pleasure in food a sin, so he is repelled by the very idea of eating chocolate. On the other hand, he admits that the scent of chocolate gives him pleasurable feelings. It can be argued that eating chocolate is on the border between love and hatred with Reynaud. Initially, he despises the very idea of it, yet, when he breaks into the chocolaterie, he is overpowered with the smell and view of chocolate. In a shockingly contrasting manner, he starts devouring the very thing he abjected. This also proves Kristeva’s observation that the abject is not repressed, but always present to a certain extent. Reynaud’s transformation is shown to have a bodily aspect, as well.

In the third novel, *The Chocolate Lovers' Club*, the four women do not abject chocolate at the first glance. The protagonist is always clear in expressing her adoration of chocolate, as are the other three characters. However, admitting that she throws up occasionally, in order to maintain her figure, speaks against her claims. At a certain point, loving chocolate is juxtaposed to the Western body ideal of slimness, so Lucy is forced to choose. As she is involuntary to resist enjoying chocolate, she has to reject it in another manner – by abjecting it from her body. That way, she can still have the taste sensation and pleasure, while eliminating the cause of the ‘disfiguration’ of the body.

All three novels have shown some degree of chocolate abjection, although chocolate’s main purpose is to heal the characters from their repressed problems and self-destructive behaviours. My argument is that abjection does not disprove the healing power of chocolate. It merely offers another dimension to the effects that its consumption has. Consumption is, therefore, a rather complex topic which deserves further research based on the psychoanalytical criticism, as well as other approaches inspired by it.

7. Conclusion

The healing power of chocolate in *Chocolat*, *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Chocolate Lovers' Club* was proposed as a topic which is rarely featured in academic literature. Although food in literature is neither a new nor an *entirely* unexplored field in itself, after the extensive research it can be concluded that it is not explored as extensively as other common ‘life’ topics.

In the introduction, I indicated the importance of food in culture and society, in order to show its relevance in literature, as well. Food is shown to be one of the essential elements in people’s lives, as it is influential on many levels. Life would be impossible without eating; therefore, food has an indisputable nourishing quality. Moreover, aside from sustaining life, the context around food choices, preparations, and the manners of consumption, carries encoded meaning, which demonstrates the eating characteristics of individual consumers, or of the culture they belong to.

Chapter two deals with the presence of food in literature. The ethnographers Mintz and Du Bois have argued that literature on food has typical strands, which include specialised works on certain “commodities and substances; food and social change; food insecurity; eating and ritual; eating and identities; and instructional materials” (99). Usually, most of the literary works with the topic of food deal with the mentioned fields. Thus, one can get acquainted with the eating habits of different cultures, follow the historical account of a particular food or meal, or explore the connection of food to social tendencies and practices (Mintz, Du Bois, 102). This general introduction was intended for exposing the symbolic potential of food as a literary topic.

In addition to its obvious nourishing quality, the symbolic meaning in the context of food is explored in chapter three. The social aspect of food encompasses the contextual meaning and its implication in cultural perception of food. Firstly, I pointed out the nourishing quality of food, drawing mainly on the concept of motherhood. Secondly, food in a religious context gives valuable background for the perception of eating in all three novels. Aside from religions such as Christianity or Judaism, I also comment on the “Religion of Thinness”, proposed by LeWica (1). Whereas food used in the Christian communion is used as a reference for *Chocolat*, the ‘religion of thinness’ gives substantial background to the socially imposed ideals of the perfect body, which was discussed in the chapter on abjection in more detail. Finally, the third social aspect of food is its ability to bring people together into communities, which was shown to be the case in all three novels.

After the more generalised introductory chapters, the proper analysis starts with the first theoretical approach – psychoanalysis. The psychoanalytic approach to fiction has been disputed over the years, for its questionable adequacy in the analysis of fictional characters. According to Brooks, psychoanalysis can be employed in literature in three ways: to analyse the connection between author’s life and his or her work, to analyse the characters as if they were real people, or to analyse the reader as the recipient of the intended authors’ agenda (334). The healing power of chocolate is explored by investigating the characters’ issues.

The theory of psychoanalysis is outlined in two subchapters, whereby the first one is devoted to Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, and the second subchapter deals with Lacan, Freud’s successor who is credited as the most influential psychoanalyst after him, according to Homer (1). In the former account, I explained the origins of psychoanalysis by taking a look at

Freud's lectures in the early 1900's. In his own words, Freud shows how the idea of psychoanalysis came to being, which I also supported by his example of Dr. Breuer and his 'hysteria' patient. This clinical origin paves the way for the better understanding of Freud's theories of the mind. Basic concepts of psychoanalysis are explained in detail: repression, the unconscious, the defense mechanisms, the dreamwork, childhood and infant sexuality, as well as gender and the Oedipus complex.

With the disambiguation of the basic psychoanalytic concepts, I moved onto Lacan and his appropriation of the ideas his predecessor Freud proposed. Lacan's view of the unconscious, the mirror stage, as well as his own concepts of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real, are defined and juxtaposed to their Freudian counterparts. For better illustration, a table from Ott and Mack is adapted and used, to show an overview of the two most important psychoanalytic thinkers, as well as the chronological tendencies in psychoanalysis in general.

The theory is then applied to each of the novels individually, focusing on the characters that have undergone the transformation induced by consuming chocolate. For each novel, the importance and role of chocolate are determined before dealing with specific character healing stories. In *Chocolat*, Joséphine changes from a poor and insecure creature to a confident, self-sufficient woman. Armande, the frowning old lady, transforms into a happier and livelier, satisfied person, who eventually dies in peace, having achieved everything she wanted in life. Guillaume's shrunken and diminished look and solitude give way to sociability and zeal. Luc, Armande's grandson, grows out the insecure phase of a stuttering teenager, to a confident young man. Finally, even Reynaud changes his animosity and grumpiness for hedonism. It is proven that chocolate is the right 'remedy' for these characters, as they have repressed issues which disappear after eating chocolate in the friendly ambience of 'La Celeste Praline'.

In comparison, Bridget Jones is closer to Reynaud, than to other characters in *Chocolat*, with her attitude towards chocolate. Its consumption is conflicting for her. Chocolate heals her by removing the stress instantaneously, but also makes her miserable, because it causes her weight gain. Contrastingly, in *The Chocolate Lovers' Club*, Lucy, Autumn, Nadia, and Chantal all adore chocolate and consume it for several purposes: for comfort, for boosting the confidence, and for celebration. Their weekly meetings in 'Chocolate Heaven' are clear evidence that

whenever one of them has problems, they meet there, eat exquisite chocolate, and the problems are gone afterwards.

Chapter five is gender analysis, the second theoretical approach. Explaining the gender issues, such as the distinction between sex and gender, essentialism and patriarchy, as well as the mechanism behind stereotyping, prepared the ground for the analysis of traditional values. In the three novels, traditional patriarchal values cast women in unenviable positions. Women are ‘expected’ to get married, have children, and be dutiful and loving wives, according to Patterson (88). The women in the three novels are allegedly challenging the traditional roles, but with all of them there is evidence that they would accept those social conventions for the right man. Applying the common traditional stereotypes, Vianne is considered the decadent witch who enjoys swimming against the tide, and Joséphine is consciously rejecting her unsuccessful marriage, instead of staying unhappy for the sake of being married. Bridget Jones is here conflicting, as well, since she both rejects and wishes to be a smug married. Lucy and Chantal are similar to Bridget, since they like freedom, but they would be willing give it up for the right man. The questioning of traditional values shows how the characters have issues which govern their behaviour and that enhances the validity of claims made in the psychoanalytic approach.

The last chapter deals with abjection and the body in Western culture, showing that abjecting is the relevant physical counterpart of the psychoanalytical approach to characters’ problems. The contemporary ‘ideal’ of slimness imposes rules and ways of behaviour which are in stark contrast to chocolate consumption. Chocolate ensures weight gain, whereas women are ‘compelled’ by the social norms to be as slim as possible. As a solution, the characters are performing “the commodification of the body”, explains Sceats (66). This “punishing” of the body, as Sceats describes it, can lead to eating disorders, due to the underlying abjection.

Bridget’s issues stem from the complex relation she has to her body. She is constantly on diets. Although she only manages at one point to gain her ideal weight and in the meanwhile is utterly unsuccessful, her devoutness clearly exemplifies this contemporary trend. The daily calories intake accounts and weight charting is almost everything she thinks about during the day. She adores chocolate and she eats it every day, but she also abjects it in her mind every time she sees herself in the mirror.

The girls in *The Chocolate Lovers' Club* are also under the pressure of having thin bodies. Enjoying the chocolate is something Lucy and Chantal do not want to refuse, yet, they are compelled to make certain adjustments to their lives for their addiction to remain intact. Chantal goes swimming and Lucy goes to yoga classes. Moreover, Lucy abjects the food from the body literally, by throwing up on purpose, on a regular basis.

In summary, the healing power of chocolate is determined in all three novels. Whereas chocolate can 'operate' purely on its mood-boosting quality, as in *Bridget Jones's Diary* where milk trays are Bridget's comfort; in *Chocolat* and *The Chocolate Lovers' Club*, part of its healing power is credited to the surrounding context in which the chocolate is consumed. A psychoanalytic approach has shown to be an adequate methodology in the analysis of food in literature. Coupled with Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, as a lens to the physical point of view of eating, as well as the body issue, many further research possibilities emerge.

This thesis can serve as an inspiration for further research of this rather uncharted territory of food in fiction.

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Abstract

Food is one of the most essential elements in people's lives, as it is influential on many levels. Life would be impossible without eating; therefore, food has an indisputable nourishing quality. Moreover, the context around food choices, preparations, and the manners of consumption, carries encoded meaning, which can reveal cultural symbolism.

The healing power of chocolate is investigated in three contemporary British novels: *Chocolat* by Joanne Harris, *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding, and *The Chocolate Lovers' Club* by Carole Matthews. There are three theoretical approaches employed to demonstrate the character transformations, which occur after chocolate consumption: psychoanalysis, gender studies, and abjection. Chocolate's healing power is demonstrated in all three novels. Its power lays in its savoury taste, but also in the ambience in which it is consumed. 'La Celeste Praline' and 'Chocolate Heaven' are the examples to demonstrate the importance of its social implications. The characters are healed, which is thoroughly explained by psychoanalytic, gender, and the body analyses of their transformation. Before eating chocolate they show certain issues, and after the consumption those issues resolve.

Zusammenfassung

Die Nahrung ist eine der wichtigsten Elemente des menschlichen Lebens, die den Einfluss auf vielen Ebenen hat. Das Leben ohne die Nahrung wäre unmöglich, daher hat sie eine existenzielle Bedeutung. Des Weiteren, die Auswahl, die Vorbereitung und der Kontext des Essens haben symbolische Assoziationen, die sehr hilfreich kulturellen Tendenzen aussagen.

Die heilende Kraft der Schokolade wird in drei zeitgenössischen britischen Romanen untersucht: in *Chocolat* von Joanne Harris, *Bridget Jones's Diary* von Helen Fielding und *The Chocolate Lovers' Club* von Carole Matthews. Drei theoretische Ansätze wurden eigestellt um die Schokoladen-verursachte Transformationen der Figuren zu erläutern: die Psychoanalyse, die Genderforschung, sowie Abjection. Der Heilkraft der Schokolade ist für alle drei Romane bestätigt. Seine Macht liegt in ihrem herzhaften Geschmack und in dem Kontext, in dem sie gegessen wird. „La Celeste Praline“ und „Chocolate Heaven“ zeigen die Bedeutung ihrer sozialen Auswirkungen. Die Figuren sind geheilt, bestätigt von den oben genannten Theorien. Vor dem Essen hatten sie bestimmte Probleme, die nach dem Verzehr gehoben werden.

Curriculum Vitae

PERSONAL INFORMATION

First Name / Surname

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EDUCATION

- | | |
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PERSONAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

MOTHER TONGUE(S)
OTHER LANGUAGES

Serbian, Croatian
English (Fluent)
German (Fluent)
Italian (Moderate)
Slovenian (Basic)
Spanish (Basic)

SOCIAL SKILLS AND
COMPETENCIES

Team-oriented, reliable, tolerant and patient, eager to learn and improve myself, extrovert

ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS AND
COMPETENCIES

Excellent time-planning, ambition, initiative, independent way of working

VIENNA, 20.09.2013

Zeljana Blagojevic

