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TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HOMEMADE WINE IN JOANNE HARRIS'S *BLACKBERRY WINE*

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Abstract

Traditional knowledge is the sum of knowledge, practices and cultural experiences passed down from generation to generation. *Blackberry Wine* (2000) by Joan Harris is a novel about the cultural and emotional importance of homemade wine, in the form of Jackapple Joe Cox, an old man who lives in the garden and is an amateur winemaker who has a profound impact on the life of Jay Mackintosh. The novel is not only about the drink itself, but also about the cultural memory as well as the traditional craftsmanship, friendship and human relations. Joe's expertise in gardening, seasonal fruits and winemaking emphasizes the value of learning from hands-on experience and observing the natural world. His self-made wines turn into repositories of personal recollections, tying together the young with the grown-up life of Jay. This paper will explore the connection between traditional knowledge, food culture and cultural identity in the novel. It discusses the transferal of traditional practices, the importance of nature and the emotional attachment to homemade products, from a cultural study and a memory studies perspective. It asserts that Harris embodies the art of winemaking as a form of cultural transmission and as a way of fostering inter-generational bonds.

Joanne Harris is an acclaimed British novelist who is famous for her creative stories. Joanne was born on the 3rd July 1964 in Barnsley, England. Joanne attended university to study Modern and Medieval Languages at St Catharine's College, Cambridge. She became a teacher before becoming a full time author. Joanne's work often consists of elements of magical realism, folklore, mythology and psychology. She became internationally renowned through her bestselling book *Chocolat* (1999) which is about food, tradition and differences in culture. Some of her other well-known books are *Blackberry Wine* (2000), *Five Quarters of the Orange* (2001), *Coastliners* (2002)

and *Holy Fools* (2003). Many themes in Joanne's work involve food and cultural identity. Cooking and traditions are seen as ways to express memories, a sense of belonging and personal experiences. In *Blackberry Wine* Joanne illustrates the importance of making wine in the novel with the character Jackapple Joe Cox. He uses his traditional knowledge of gardening and winemaking to influence Jay Mackintosh. This novel offers a meaningful look into how nature, traditional skills, cultural memories and knowledge can be passed down through ages.

Traditional knowledge is a key part of cultural identity and cultural heritage. It involves the skills, beliefs and practices acquired over many generations from living in harmony with nature and society. Traditional knowledge is passed on via everyday practices such as gardening, cooking, processing food, making fermented products and storing agricultural products. This idea is reflected in the expression, “The magic of everyday things” (Harris 9). The phrase highlights the cultural significance of ordinary practices such as gardening, fruit preservation and fermentation. Through Joe's winemaking, Harris demonstrates that traditional knowledge is not merely a technical skill but an expression of creativity and cultural continuity. These practices are not only practical but also a sign of cultural identity, family connections, and heritage. These activities are the subject of much literature to illustrate how mundane and everyday practices of the home hold on to collective memory and culture.

In *Blackberry Wine* (2000), author Joanne Harris examines the link between traditional knowledge, nature and cultural memory as she learns how to make homemade wine. The story is about Jay Mackintosh, a writer whose creativity has become dull. When he stumbles upon six bottles of home-brewed wine made by the man he grew up with, Jackapple Joe Cox, he is reunited with his past. Through his memories of Joe, Jay rediscovers the importance of friendship, creativity and a meaningful relationship with nature.

The narrator explains Jay's relationship with wine through the following lines: “He drank, for the same reason he wrote second-rate science fiction. Not to forget but to remember, to open the past and find himself there again” (Harris 13). This passage establishes wine as a medium of remembrance rather than mere consumption. Each bottle becomes a symbolic container of personal history, emotional experiences and forgotten relationships. Through the sensory experience of drinking wine, Jay revisits his past and rediscovers his connection with Joe. Thus, homemade wine functions as a cultural archive that preserves memories across time.

Joe Cox is a man who embodies old-fashioned wisdom, gained from real-world experience. Joe is a retired coal miner, gardener and amateur winemaker who has a deep knowledge of fruits, plants, seasons and fermentation. His garden becomes a space of learning and Jay learns the importance of cultivation and preservation. Joe learns things without formal education; he learns by observing, experimenting, and experiencing nature with repetition. The way he makes wine reflects the building of tradition through experience and by sharing personal knowledge with others.

The statement, "Wine talks; ask anyone" (Harris, ch. 1), introduces the significance of wine. A way of personifying wine, and making it a vehicle for communication and memory. Wine is so much

more than just a product: it's the experiences of the people who make it and use it. The bottles hold memories of past connections and lost memories. In this storytelling method, Harris turns homemade wine into a symbolic collective and personal memory of past and future events.

The magic of the wine-making is further highlighted in the words "Everyday magic" which Joe employed (Harris, ch. 1). It is a very common everyday task that is linked to the extraordinary process of transformation. Fruits being turned into wine is one of the examples of the interaction of human creativity with natural processes. Joe's knowledge of wine making shows his appreciation for nature and that he sees potential in working with natural resources. In Harris' formulation, traditional knowledge is a mix of experiential hands-on skill, imagination and environmental consciousness.

The garden plays a significant role in the novel's cultural setting. It is somewhere where people are directly connected with nature, and learn by doing. Joe is aware of the seasonal and natural cycle that is reflected in his cultivation of fruits and vegetables. His garden turns into an alternative learning space for Jay, who learns the value of patience, observation and creativity. The garden is the antithesis to the artificial pattern of the urban life, it's a space of emotional security and personal fulfilment.

Another important theme of the novel is the connection between homemade wine and cultural memory. Joe's childhood experiences have stuck with Jay. Even as an adult, he is still touched by the memories of Joe's garden and homemade wine. The bottles bring back some emotional stability and creativity to him. Wine taste and smell become memory triggers to the past and present.

In her article A Taste of Nostalgia: Memory, Culture and the Senses in Joanne Harris's *Blackberry Wine* (2000) Lorna Piatti-Farnell examines the link between food, drink, sense and memory and cultural memory. Her research shows the importance of taste and smell in relation to the building of personal identity and remembrance of the past. This is especially pertinent to Harris's depiction of homemade wine as a conduit of emotion and nostalgia.

The friendship between Joe and Jay is another example of the need to pass on knowledge between generations. Joe is a mentor and teaches Jay some practical skills, imagination and independence. Although they are only friends, Joe offers emotional support in a challenging time in Jay's childhood. He provides Jay with acceptance and belonging by gardening, telling stories, and making wine. Traditional knowledge lives on through the remembrance and traditions of those who are passed it on, as can be seen in Jay's own adult life.

Another aspect of the novel's cultural identity is its geographical setting, as the production of homemade wine is connected to the landscape. Jay visits various local communities in England and France as he travels between Kirby Monckton and Lansquenet. Moving to France symbolizes his journey to break free from the disillusionment of the city and re-establish his connection with nature. The French village offers a place where local traditions, food ways and community interactions become a part of everyday life.

The collective identity is expressed in the statement: "Everything belongs to everybody. Everyone belongs to everyone else. Even a single

person can make a difference" (Harris,76). The statement emphasises the importance of mutual relationships in preserving cultural traditions.

Homemade wine is also a source of alternative consumerism. Joe's wine is personal, crafted and experimental; unlike mass-produced wine. It is not just monetary as it has emotional and cultural significance. He urges the reader to understand the significance of traditional domestic activity in a society that has become more commercial in its production and consumption.

The story-line also enhances the symbolic value of wine. Harris assigns an ordinary object with an extraordinary narrative function by letting the bottle of wine tell the story. The wine becomes a witness to the passage of time and human relations in it. It keeps the memories of its maker alive and it affects the life of its consumer. This method provides a visualisation of how ordinary objects can be the bearers of cultural and emotional histories.

Another parallelism in the novel is drawn between the process of creating wine and literary creativity. The novel connects traditional practices with artistic creativity. Jay's experiences with Joe influence his development as a writer. His understanding of creativity is reflected in the statement: "You don't write because someone sets assignments! You write because you need to write, or because you hope someone will listen or because writing will mend something broken inside you or bring something back to life" (Harris 65). This quotation establishes writing as an emotionally restorative process. Just as Joe transforms fruits into wine through patience and experience, Jay transforms memories and personal experiences into literature. Both activities involve creativity, transformation and the preservation of meaningful experiences.

Wine is a product of transformation of natural ingredients, literature is a product of the transformation of memory and experience into narrative. Joe's old habits evoke Jay's imagination and help him discover again his own powers of literary creativity. His travels reveal a process of artistic expression that starts with personal memory, cultural experiences and a connection with nature.

To conclude, Joanne Harris's *Blackberry Wine* is a novel about homemade wine that is a manifestation of traditional knowledge, cultural memory and intergenerational relationships. Harris shows how values are passed down through generations and accumulated wisdom is kept alive through the everyday activities of Joe's gardening and winemaking. With the rediscovery of the wine, Jay is able to reconnect with his childhood, to re-think his identity and to regain his creativity. The novel makes it clear that cultural heritage is just as alive in gardens, recipes, stories, objects and personal relationships. The traditional knowledge and emotional experiences are made symbolic in homemade wine. HARRIS ultimately celebrates the ongoing importance of traditional practices in maintaining a sense of cultural identity and human connection.

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