

# Chocolat

14 members enjoyed the comedy drama *Chocolat* on Wednesday 8th December. Joanne Harris's novel was adapted for the screen by Robert Nelson Jacob and directed by Lasse Hallstrom. It tells the story of Vianne Rocher, played by Juliette Binoche, who arrives in the fictional French village of Lansquenet-sous-Tannes at the beginning of Lent with her six-year-old daughter, Anouk. Opening a chocolaterie, she tempts the repressed villagers to try something new, making an enemy of the domineering mayor Comte de Reynaud (played by Alfred Molina). The story evolves with Vianne helping villagers overcome their inhibitions, address discrimination (the Romani "river rats" led by Johnny Depp), and ends with a somewhat convoluted (although welcome, as he clearly wasn't an evil man) redemption for the mayor. Along the way, Vianne helps an abused woman (Josephine, played by Lena Olin) and helps her elderly landlady Armande (the ever excellent Judi Dench) see her grandson (her estranged daughter Caroline, played as a pious devout by Carrie-Anne Moss, won't let her see him as she is a "bad influence").

Several of the attendees had seen the film when it was first released, some 21 years ago. Many commented that the lightweight comedy that they saw then had much more explicit undertones when viewed from today's more liberal (woke?) perspective. There was one slight commercial

concern about the film's content: how could Vianne make any money in a poor village, especially when she seemed to be forever handing out free samples?

Putting aside this minor plot issue, the members really enjoyed the film. The musical score by Rachel Portman was complementary rather than intrusive, the dialogue largely clear (despite some faux French accents) and the performances were very good (Binoche and Dench were both nominated for Academy awards, as was the film, screenplay and score).