

# Chocolate to terrorism in gathering of the literate

Catherine Keenan  
Literary Editor

FOR THE millions of readers who loved *Chocolat*, it's shocking news. In the recently released sequel, the woman whose "nipples of Venus" reinvigorated a small French village has given up making chocolate. She is a single mother of two, living quietly in Paris, slightly cowed by life.

It took the author Joanne Harris a few years to work out what had happened to Vianne, memorably played by Juliette Binoche in the film of the book, but the key was Vianne's daughter, Anouk. "I needed to wait for my own daughter to grow, to become more like Anouk, so I could base the character on her," Harris says.

"I think as your children grow, you think you are going to be less afraid for them, because they're not as young, they're not as vulnerable. But actually, I think the truth is you become more afraid for them." And so she imagined Vianne settling into a ho-hum life in Paris, without magic (or Johnny Depp), because she wants to provide security for her young girls.

"I think you sense as a reader instinctively that it's wrong, and it has to change, but you're not sure how that's going to happen."

Harris is coming to Sydney to discuss this and other aspects of *The Lollipop Shoes* at the Sydney Writers' Festival, which begins on Monday. She is one of 270 writers participating in more than 300 sessions.

Highlights of the program include the opening night address by the Scottish author Andrew O'Hagan, who will talk about the power of literature in the contem-



porary world. At the Big Reading, now an annual fixture, the *Sydney Morning Herald* Best Young Novelists for 2007 will be announced, then writers including Richard Ford, Lionel Shriver, Rachel Seiffert and Andre  Makine will read from their work.

The evolutionary biologist – and scourge of the faithful around the world – Richard Dawkins will speak via satellite about his controversial bestseller, *The God Delusion*, and his hopes for the spread of atheism. And the *Herald's* Christopher Kremmer will talk with noted travel writer and historian William Dalrymple about his controversial take on Indian colonial history.

Many sessions will address terrorism, and reactions to it. Australia's Richard Flanagan, author of *The Unknown Terrorist*, will join Mohsin Hamid, the Pakistani/American author of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and others to discuss writing in an age of terror. The outspoken former Dutch politician and fierce critic of Islam Ayaan Hirsi Ali will deliver the closing address on Sunday, June 3.

A list of *Herald* writers at the festival is in today's books pages in *Spectrum*. Festival details are at [www.swf.org.au](http://www.swf.org.au).

# Some lives are too raw, even for the stage



Keeping it real ... director James Winter with Michelle Wright during rehearsals for a play she wrote with other students from Key College. Photo: Stephen Baccon

**Emily Dunn**  
IN BAGGY tracksuit pants and T-shirt, Michelle Wright is no pushover.

After running away from home at 13, Wright became addicted to ice, or methamphetamines, lived in refuges, and was in a violent relationship.

Now 17, standing hand on hip in a sunny Chippendale warehouse, Wright is confident and articulate as she debates the finer points of a theatre script she wrote with five other students from Youth Off The Streets' Key College, based on their experiences of living rough.

"Someone changed 'dickhead' to 'idiot'. No one would use that ... What about f--ing bitch?" she suggests to director James Winter.

"With the script I am trying to explain from my character's point of view why we are swearing, why we jump trains," she tells the *Herald*.

"James said he wanted real-life experience. Some of it had to be toned down a lot."

On Monday, in a free, one-off performance at the Belvoir Street Theatre, the students will tell their stories as part of Company B's youth engagement program.

Winter, their teacher and director, is the co-founder of Queen Street Studio, a non-profit rehearsal space in

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MICHELLE WRIGHT

Chippendale, where the students attend weekly drama classes.

Winter opened the studio in 2005 with a bequest from his grandfather, Jack Winter, who

was once a tap dancer with the Tivoli vaudeville circuit. "Often these kids have never even stepped inside a theatre but they have the most potent stories, it is stuff we just don't hear about," Winter said.

"The saddest stories are the young people, 15 years and under, who are carers for substance-addicted parents. The parent takes their money or a trust fund is broken into and denies that young person an opportunity to break the mould.

"So you have these kids who end up walking the street, break into cars and roll people."

Wright has attended Winter's classes for the past two years but will perform for the first time on Monday. "It is about confidence building, we want people to understand us," she said.

"Things like taking drugs ... are like a mask for other problems."

Last year Wright completed her school certificate. This year she is working towards her HSC and wants to be a youth worker when her daughter, due in October, is old enough to go to school.

"I have been clean for a year now, cold turkey by myself," she said. "I have come a long way since I was 13."

# Climate change is food for thought

Bellinda Kontominas  
Medical Reporter

AUSTRALIA'S dietary guidelines may need to be modified in response to climate change, says one of the country's leading health experts.

Professor Tony McMichael, director of the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University, said that as the world continued to experience land degradation, water shortages and other environmental pressures, the availability of some foods may be affected.

"If we did have to reconsider, for example, the amounts of meat we can consume on the basis of environmental and climactic concerns, it may well be in competition with the current views of practising dietitians with respect to the desirable daily intake," said Professor McMichael, who will address a national conference of the Dietitians Association of Australia in Hobart today.

Professor McMichael said dietary guidelines should take into account the levels of nutrients needed for optimal health while maintaining the natural environmental systems required to produce our food.

The recent findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that in the next 20 years, crop yields could decrease by up to 30 per cent in some parts of Asia.

"We can't just assume that the world is going to continue to produce the types of food that are the preferred sources of nutrients for practising dietitians," Professor McMichael said.

He said there was a growing global interest in finding ways to achieve nutritionally sound diets, based on locally-produced food.

"We have been kidding ourselves for a long time that the costs of carting food around the world are negligible when in fact ... that is a true environmental cost that the world cannot afford," he said.