

## 'A dark (and occasionally funny) psychological thriller...'

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*Writer for The Skye Magazine, Katie Macleod - now based in New York and author of [storiesmysuitcasecouldtell.com](http://storiesmysuitcasecouldtell.com) - interviews top-selling author Joanne Harris before her visit to the [Skye Book Festival](#) on September 3.*

A disquieting tension rises, slowly but steadily, throughout the pages of Joanne Harris' latest novel, *Different Class*.

From the first, it's clear that something is going to go wrong - or indeed, has already gone wrong - at St Oswald's Grammar School for Boys, set in the fictional English village of Malbry.

Joanne describes *Different Class*, which she will be discussing at the [Skye Book Festival](#) on September 3rd, as "a dark (and occasionally funny) psychological thriller set in a boys' grammar school... about the uneasy relationship between teachers and pupils, about how the past makes us what we are, and about how little we really know the people we count as friends." Although it's the sequel to her 2010 book, *Gentlemen and Players*, it can also be read as a standalone novel.

"I think that inevitably some of it is drawn from my 15 years in teaching," admits Joanne, "though even my ex-colleagues might be hard put to guess which parts were drawn from experience." The author taught French – her first language – at a grammar school in Leeds before leaving for a full-time writing career in 2000, after the success of her third novel, *Chocolat*.

*Chocolat* was shortlisted for a Whitbread Book Award in 1999, and was made into an Oscar-nominated film starring Juliette Binoche and Johnny Depp the following year. "I don't think anyone really expects that level of success," she says of *Chocolat*'s global popularity. "It took me completely by surprise. On some days, it still does..."

Since then she has written 15 novels, two collections of short stories, and three cookbooks, not to mention contributed to countless collections of writing. Her creative inspiration appears to be as eclectic as the subjects of her books, which cover everything from magical realism to historical fiction. Joanne says she finds inspiration "everywhere: on my travels; in newspapers; in conversations overheard on public transport; in memories; in dreams."

"I don't generally need to do much research, as I usually already have a reasonable amount of knowledge about the things I choose as material," she explains. "As for my process, it differs depending on the book: sometimes I write in a linear way; sometimes in tandem with one or more other projects. Most of the time I write from my shed in the garden; but I can also write in hotel rooms, on trains and in transit..."

It's too early to tell whether her journey to the [Aros Centre](#) in Portree, [for the fifth Skye Book Festival](#), will provide fictional inspiration. Either way, it won't be her first foray to Skye; Joanne visited the island in her twenties, and remembers it well. "I drove all the way there in my decrepit old car, and camped out in the mountains. I particularly remember the midges - we had to drink a lot of Talisker to fend them off! But that was a long time ago, and I'm really looking forward to seeing it again."

