**Joanne Harris Interview**

**Rebecca:** [00:00:00] Hello, and welcome to Shelf Healing, UCL's bibliotherapy podcast. I'm your host, Rebecca Markwick. Our guest today is Joanne Harris MBE. Joanne Harris was a teacher for 15 years during which time she published three novels, including *Chocolat* which was made into an Oscar nominated film. Since then she has written 18 more novels, plus novellas, short stories, game scripts, and libretto for two short operas, several screenplays, a musical and three cookbooks.

Her books are published in over 50 countries and have won a number of British and international awards. She's an honorary fellow of St. Catherine's College, Cambridge has honorary doctorates in literature from the universities of Sheffield and Huddersfield and has been a judge for the Whitbread prize, the Orange Prize, the Desmond Elliott Prize, the Betty Trask Award, the Prima Donna Prize and the Royal Society Winton Prize for Science as well as for the Fragrance Foundation awards for perfume and perfume journalism, for which she also received an award in 2017. She is currently the Chair of the society of authors and is a member of the Board of the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society. Joanne's latest book, *The Strawberry Thief* is available now, on June 3rd, *Honeycomb* will be released, and *A Narrow Door* will be published in August.

I can't believe you've got three books coming out this year. That's very impressive!

**Joanne:** [00:01:24] Yes, it was supposed to be a quiet year and, and it seems to have been kind of a noisy one in spite of all that. It's lovely to be here, Rebecca. Very nice to meet you.

**Rebecca:** [00:01:33] Lovely to meet you too. Our first question to get us started is nice and easy.

Do you feel that reading is therapeutic

**Joanne:** [00:01:40] I think it can be therapeutic? Um, it can also be harrowing, cathartic, educational. It can be all sorts of things. I think we get from our reading, what we put into it. Um, I think many people find readings therapeutic, and I think so many of the benefits that we get from reading, even though we may not be aware of them at the time, but definitely therapeutic and improving.

**Rebecca:** [00:02:02] Yeah. What kind of books do you reach for, if you maybe want to relax and improve your mental wellbeing or want to challenge yourself? Or sort of therapeutically read a harrowing story. What kind of, what kind of books do you reach for?

**Joanne:** [00:02:16] I think it depends very much on the mood. To me reading, reading fiction, particularly it's very much about human connection.

And I think it depends very much on the frame of mind, what we're going to get out of a piece of reading. So on a day like this, which is miserable and unpleasant, and doesn't want to really motivate me to get out of bed much. I will tend to probably reread something because I'm a. Uh, serial rereader of old favorites.

And I think that there is something uniquely pleasing about actually knowing where a book is going and being able to linger on a turn of phrase or an image rather than speed through it, to see how the ending is going to turn out.

**Rebecca:** [00:02:55] Definitely. Those books that you've returned to over and over again. Do you tend to go to those books where you've loved the plots or is it characters that sort of feel like old friends or, or is it just sort of the combination of everything that makes that book good that you go back to?

**Joanne:** [00:03:12] And, um, there are people that I go back to because I love their style and it's a little bit like playing music. It's, it's not really necessarily about following the plot it is about looking at the words and the phrasing, in some cases, the characters. I, I find that it's very difficult for me to be interested in a plot if I'm not interested in the characters.

Um, although, you know, there are times when I will reach for the latest Lee Child knowing perfectly well that there won't be any characterization, but that it will be a certain kind of experience, which, which isn't going to give me too many surprises and isn't going to challenge me too much intellectually.

And that too is I think a perfectly acceptable way of approaching reading. I, I like to read in lots of different ways and I like to push myself to read in areas that I'm not necessarily particularly fond of. For instance, I don't read a huge amount of nonfiction, but every time I do, I realize how invaluable nonfiction actually is to my process.

So I have to keep reminding myself to read the odd popular science book or book on psychology or something like that, because actually there are just as many ideas and interesting concepts in there as there are in the latest piece of fiction.

**Rebecca:** [00:04:25] Yeah. Do you have a particular favorite comfort book that you've returned to?

**Joanne:** [00:04:31] Not, not one, but I do have a shelf of battered Georgette Heyer novels, which I tend to read in the bath. Um, I find Georgette Heyer very therapeutic. She's extremely clever and funny, but she is also a person who writes spirited and jolly plots and has rather unbelievable heroines and, and who I rather enjoy too, so that there is that she has a kind of, um, upbeat version of Jane Austen with a lot more plot and a lot less walking around the shrubbery.

**Rebecca:** [00:05:03] Yes, Georgette Heyer is a popular, popular comfort read we found on the podcast. I'm not surprised. Yeah, we did a joint venture with UCL Press, uh, to celebrate the launch of a book of essays on Georgette Heyer that's open access and available for free download. Which was lovely. That was fantastic. Is there a specific time or place that you read,

**Joanne:** [00:05:25] Oh I all the time. Um, not particularly at the moment because I'm in lockdown I tend to get more chance to, to read at home um, I have a hammock, uh, in the, in the back of the garden, which I rather like, um, no chance of reading that today, but I do like that um, and, or under a tree, if it's, if it's nice and sunny. Or I read in bed.

And, and then in the bath, because actually the bath is the one place where it is unlikely that anyone's going to actually walk in and want me to do something.

**Rebecca:** [00:05:55] Do you not get worried that you might drop a book in the bath and get it all wet?

**Joanne:** [00:05:59] Well, yeah, but you know, my, my, my bathtime books tend to be quite battered and well used anyway, so it's not too much of a problem.

There are certain authors that I wouldn't think of reading in the bath because not only are they too grand, but then their books are, are much too, too nice for me to drop in the water. But otherwise I remember doing, um, going to a signing with the, the late and great Roger Zelazny, and, uh, taking my very battered paperback of, uh, *Nine Princes in Amber* for him to sign.

Um, and I dropped it in the bath and it was swollen up to the size of a phone directory. And he looked at me and he said, honey, you've been reading this in the bath, haven't you? And I had to admit that I did. And he said with a twinkle in his eye, the wet ones are the ones I prefer. Um, so, you know, it's, it's, I think sometimes if I, if I see a book that's been dropped in the bath, I know that it's been loved and, and enjoyed.

And as an author, that kind of gives me a kick.

**Rebecca:** [00:06:54] Yeah. As, as an author, do you find the act of writing to be therapeutic?

**Joanne:** [00:07:00] It can be, um, it can also be traumatic, cathartic, disturbing, um, very frustrating. It depends very much what it is and, and how, how you tend to approach it on any given day, because it's, it's different all the time.

It's, it's not. It is not a nine to five job and it's not a job which is ever the same two days in a row in my experience, which is one of the reasons I like it so much.

**Rebecca:** [00:07:26] Yeah. Do you find that it's when it is therapeutic, do you find that it's a similar type of therapy as reading, or is it a very different type of therapy to reading?

**Joanne:** [00:07:37] I think it depends. It, I think, cathartic writing can be therapeutic because you can get difficult and challenging and emotionally draining experiences out of you, um, I think reading about those things, there's a slightly different way of processing them, but certainly it expands the thinking around human experience in what we share. And actually, I think that's, that's pretty much at the bottom of why we read and why we write it is all about kind of shared human experience and the connection that we get from reading or communicating something for somebody else to read. Yeah.

**Rebecca:** [00:08:14] You've written in such a variety of mediums. Do you find that each affects you differently when you're

**Joanne:** [00:08:21] writing? Yes. I think it's slightly different. If you approach a story as a short story, it's just going to be different to the way you approach it, if you approach it as, as a novel or as a musical or as a game, but ultimately storytelling is still storytelling.

And it's about trying to find the language that your audience is most likely to assimilate and understand. So yes, there are, there are, there are abbreviated ways of writing for certain media and there are other media where you can really kind of talk in detail about certain things and expand multiple and storylines, but ultimately you are still looking at a communication with your audience.

Um, and you're looking at the way your audience is going to assimilate what you've said.

**Rebecca:** [00:09:07] Yeah. Do you have a favorite medium to write because it's such a wide variety. Do you prefer the long format of a novel or sort of the very short, tight form of writing for games or that wonderfully sort of well honed and well plotted short story, or even the musicals.

**Joanne:** [00:09:27] I think the story will determine the medium, uh, a short story is a very different frame of mind to a novel, um, and so it's not as if I have a favorite one. I think that the challenge is really selecting the form that works best for the story. To me, particularly the difference between novels and short stories is huge, um, a short story although it may take a lot of thinking out and, and actually I do write short stories very slowly, sometimes, sometimes they take me nearly as long as a novel. But it's a question of the kind of punch you want your story to deliver a short story tends to be a single punch. A novel tends to be a whole bout.

**Rebecca:** [00:10:09] Yeah. Are there any books in your life that have profoundly affected you?

**Joanne:** [00:10:15] Yes, I think, um, I think like everybody, there have been things that have affected me as I was growing up, um, I don't know if they had much of an effect on, on my eventual style, but I know that as a child, that I, because a lot of my books, because French was my first language and most of the books in our house were French books.

I did go through an awful lot of of classic French writers. And there were a lot of authors like Flaubert and Gide and Maupassant and Alexandre Dumas, um, that I was fed pretty much from the cradle, partly because they were there, um, and partly because I just gravitated to things that I happened to be interested in.

And there was nobody to tell me what not to read in French in English. My, my very practical French mother had very decided ideas on what I wasn't allowed to read in English. And so I made it my mission in life to go out and read as much of that stuff as possible. But I had to do it in secret in the library.

And so while I was reading Flaubert and Mauriac was also reading Stephen King and George RR Martin, and of course, people like Mervyn Peake who didn't quite, they didn't quite count as the sort of things my mother found unsuitable, but they were still in that kind of fantasy area that she felt was, uh, a suspect genre and one that I should beware of.

Um, and I found out later on that actually the thing that linked all those people to me was the fact that they use language in very particular ways. And they were excellent storytellers and they were able to create characters that I cared about and wanted to follow.

**Rebecca:** [00:11:52] Yeah. And you've very nicely led onto my next question, which is as someone fluent in both French and English, have you ever found that perhaps reading a book original in French and then perhaps reading the translation, do you ever find that you lose something in the translation?

Because obviously French has such a beautiful language to read in do you you find that there's loss?

**Joanne:** [00:12:17] I never read French books in English translation. Oh, It's too painful and too difficult to, to process. Um, all translations, lose huge amounts in terms of nails and language. And actually you need a very clever translator to, to rebuild the things that you know are going to be lost.

I have no particular reason to read French books in English and, and it wouldn't really occur to me to do it. Um, I did when I was a child read quite a lot of English books in French, but this was partly because I didn't realize they were translations. My grandfather, who was a great fan of detective novels, had a huge collection of detective novels by various people.

I'd never heard of including a whole collection, by Agatha Christie who I read in French and it took me years to realize that actually she wasn't a French author and they'd just been translated from English. I did wonder why a French author would want to write about so many occurrences in little English villages but I just assumed that she liked little in English villages.

It never, I think, you know, having been brought up bilingually, um, I didn't think much about translation. It was not something that permeated my consciousness at the time, even when I was asked to translate as a child, it didn't quite process because I just assumed that everybody spoke both languages and you know, what was the point?

Um, so yes, you do lose a lot in translation in all languages, um, because all languages have their own inherent music and algorithms and resonances and lots of those can't really be translated. And so a really competent translator has to find another way of giving resonance. It's a little bit like writing a piece of music and transposing it into a different key with different instruments and trying to give it a similar personality.

You can't do it exactly the same, but you can do something equivalent. Hmm.

**Rebecca:** [00:14:14] Is that something that you're very aware of? Because so many of your books are in so many different languages. Or, or, or you just, do you ever read the French translations of your own work? Yeah,

**Joanne:** [00:14:26] I read the French translations. I've worked on them in the past.

Sometimes the French translations of my books haven't been very good and I haven't agreed with the way the translator approached it and I've had to rework it. Um, for some years my mother did the translations, which was great. It meant that I could basically oversee how they worked and, and, and she had access to, to me.

And so I could tell her exactly how I envisaged it being done because in French, particularly you've even a choice of narrative tense can give a completely different impression of a novel. Um, and you've got to think these things through, um, with other languages, particularly when they're languages that I really don't know enough to be able to comment.

I might have to kind of lump it. If, if, if I'm not sure if the translator there's not much I can do. I mean, you know, I'm not going to come complain about a Hungarian translation or a Russian one or a Mandarin one, but I do look at the Italian ones, uh, the the German ones. Um, I've got quite a close relationship with my Italian publisher who asks me a lot of questions.

And I always encourage translators to get in touch with me and to, and to discuss what they're doing because you know, it can only be helpful to know what the author was thinking. And particularly if the author uses eccentric, vocabulary or slang or made up words, I do this all the time. It's a bit of a nightmare for a translator and they should be allowed to come and discuss that.

Although many foreign publishers don't encourage them to do this which is why there are so many different translations out there because translators are not paid enough. They're not given enough time. And if they're also forbidden to contact the author, they're pretty much on their own.

**Rebecca:** [00:16:04] Yeah. And as we mentioned earlier, so much of reading as what you bring to it, isn't it.

So it could be quite easy if you bring something to a work that you're reading to translate to slightly get the meaning wrong, or to slightly get sort of some certain aspect of character wrong.

**Joanne:** [00:16:22] I think, I think it's very easy to do that. And I mean, even, even when you're dealing with your own language, It can be quite difficult to get all the nuance of something.

If it's quite complicated, um, when you're dealing with a another language, then, then obviously it's even more difficult. And I do think that it helps if you've met the author. If you know what they're like, if you know how their mind works, this is why my Italian translator Laura Grandi, who I've been working with now for over 20 years is such a good translator.

I mean, she's a skilled translator anyway, and she's an author in her own right. But she also knows me very well. And so there were lots of things that she doesn't have to ask me anymore.

**Rebecca:** [00:17:03] Yeah. I'd love to move on to your work on Twitter, which I love you give daily updates on the Shed on Twitter with a miniature story, or just a beautifully crafted sentence about what the Shed is each day.

What drew you to start describing the Shed to your followers?

**Joanne:** [00:17:24] Well, um, many years ago, when, when my husband actually built the Shed, which was supposed to be a work room for me to, to work in, um, I was talking about it's general building. And I would, I would say what was, what was being done to it, and it was a work in progress and I posted photographs and this kind of thing.

And then I found that as a kind of mental exercise before actually going to work in the Shed, it was useful to me too, to write a little update about what it was. And I realized that the Shed had evolved a personality over my descriptions of it, that it changed location and aspect every day. And at first it started as a joke and then it started as a means of getting into the writing zone, stopping me from spending too much time on Twitter. And also getting me to think about phrasiology and word count. I found that, uh, the, the character limit of Twitter has been a really interesting journey of discovery into succinctness and how to craft a sentence in isolation and the Shef tweet was often something like that. And that I find of course, that I've got more, more fans than, you know, from the Shed than I do for anything else. And if I don't write about the Shed, then people will be anxious and they will go, well, why did you not tell us what the Shed was doing?

Are you not in the Shed? Are you somewhere else? Um, and, and people would get worried. And so now it happens every day and, uh, and people often comment, or sometimes if they're new followers, they, they ask me slightly plaintively what I'm talking about. And I have to explain.

**Rebecca:** [00:19:01] The shed is become sort of more a state of mind than just a physical place.

**Joanne:** [00:19:06] Well, yes, the Shed is a kind of combination of Brigadoon and Howl's Moving Castle in that it is never in the same place twice.

You can never find it unless, unless you already know where it is.

**Rebecca:** [00:19:16] Yeah. I love that. You've talked about the character restrictions. You have the fabulous hashtag story time on Twitter, where you share lovely little stories that fit into a tweet or a couple of tweets. Um, and you've also got the story time band.

It must be wonderful to have a live storytelling space like Twitter to create and engage in with the character restrictions do you find that fuels your creativity?

**Joanne:** [00:19:40] It's interesting because when I started to do story time, um, it was partly as a sort of experiment in storytelling and I would write the story live and it would take however long it took to, to write it.

And it would be 10 tweets, maybe 20, maybe 30, depending on what the story was. And I didn't in those days, I wouldn't thread them. And so, because they tended to be triggered by something that had happened in the news. So you would have a stream of tweets with some story time, but also with some little pieces of day-to-day synchronicity, suggesting where the story had come from, um, and I found that people liked them and that I had returning characters, um, that in fact, this process of writing stories on Twitter, wasn't writing stories at all, it was telling stories. There was something particularly spoken about the style of Twitter and from a purely stylistic point of view. It's interesting because you can't write a short story on Twitter live like that, the same way that you could write a short story paragraph by paragraph at a computer. It doesn't work that way with Twitter. You have to think about each individual sentence because each individual sentence has to stand alone.

Unless you want to sound like Donald Trump who just carries on halfway through a sentence and then breaks off when he runs out of characters and then goes onto somewhere else. Um, you have to actually make each tweet makes sense. And so I found myself learning a lot about short phrasing and highlighting phrases and making sure that they stood out to me.

It was a very different style of writing. It was one that I hadn't really used before. And now that some of these stories have been collected into my book, *Honeycomb*, I realized that the *Honeycomb* was written 90% of it was written on Twitter. And it was written in this, in this very particular style, which is why it doesn't quite sound like many of the other things that I've written, but it is a very nice space and people do enjoy being told stories on Twitter. And because it's, it feels more like a spoken medium than a written medium this, this is why when I was waiting for Charles Vesta finished the illustrations to the book, this is why I got the band together to do this, this live show, which is stories and songs and original music and movie projections, again, taking the storytelling into, into different media, which, which seems to me to be a very logical thing to do when you're dealing with this kind of story.

**Rebecca:** [00:22:17] Do you find, well, I don't know as you're writing them.

I, I find if I, if I happen upon your story time, as it's being written, as the tweets are coming, I find, I find that very satisfying to be sort of like you say, it gives you sort of a, almost an audio sense of, of reading where each section is coming. One tweet at a time for you to kind of read as it happens.

Do you. I don't know if you manage to ever find a place where you can be the reader in that kind of experience or, or whether that's a joy that you you have of, of putting the story time tweets out there.

**Joanne:** [00:22:56] It's interesting. Um, I get a lot of fun out of just finding out where these stories go myself, because I don't always have an end to them.

And so very often the, the, the process of being there and being under scrutiny and having a live audience waiting for the next tweet is, is what motivates me too, to find the end of the story and this, in a sense, it's that element of risk that I enjoy about Storytime, not quite knowing always where it's going to go or, or how people are going to respond or whether the phone is going to ring and I'm going to have to stop or something like that.

There's always this element of unpredictability, this, this idea of, of walking a tight rope. And I do like that I think, with the reading and the writing of stories, the idea that they are not always predictable, they're not always controllable, um, there is an element of risk, which I think, you know, I, I, the way I write and because I write the way I do, I tend to, to feel that if there isn't an element of risk or exploration, somehow, then there is no purpose to me doing it at all.

**Rebecca:** [00:24:01] That's lovely. I personally, I love your Storytime tweets.

**Joanne:** [00:24:04] That's great.

**Rebecca:** [00:24:06] I like it. I really love it when I come in halfway through and you're still tweeting. Cause it's so exciting, you know, where where's it going to go next? Um, which is, I guess

**Joanne:** [00:24:15] I love the responses.

**Rebecca:** [00:24:16] Yeah. I was gonna say it's it's

**Joanne:** [00:24:18] I think it's, it's really nice because on Twitter, Twitter is a very reactive, medium.

And so if I, if I get to a very harrowing bit, then I pause and I get dozens of people going, go on, go on, what, what happened next in this kind of Basil Brush way? It's rather nice. It because obviously when you've written and published a book, you don't get to see that process. You don't get to see it in action, or you can do is send the book out and maybe wait a year and then maybe somebody will write a review or something, but it's not quite the same thing.

I do enjoy the reactive nature of actual storytelling as opposed to the story writing and story publishing. And this is one of the reasons I like the, the live show too, because you get that immediate audience response. And my audiences do tend to be quite responsive. So you do get the gasps and the, the howls of outrage and the subs.

And because many of these stories are quite, quite wrenching in one way or another.

**Rebecca:** [00:25:17] Very much so, um, talking of heart-wrenching, you've recently been diagnosed with cancer, but you've, you've sort of turned it into a personification character, Mr. C. Do you feel, do you feel like that personifying of it has helped you sort of turning it almost into a character in one of your stories?

**Joanne:** [00:25:38] I think that like a lot of things that we fear, it's a good idea to investigate those things. And, and I mean, cancer is something that is going to affect one in four people. And it's, it's something that people still fear to talk about, and so I thought, you know, this is, this is my opportunity to share my experience, which is by no means is as bad as that of many.

And to simply make it, make it into a more mundane thing, and so I, I started to, to talk about it and I thought of, of Mr C as being a sort of little goblin to be exorcised, um, because actually what, what we tend to do with humor as, as writers and as storytellers is, um, we look at monsters and what makes the monstrous, and if you want to make a monster shrink, you laugh at it.

You make it funny.

**Rebecca:** [00:26:31] Definitely.

**Joanne:** [00:26:32] Although, you know, there there's, there's, there's all sorts of things that you can say about cancer which are not funny, but you know, it's, I wouldn't say it was a heart wrenching experience, exactly, it's it's I see it as an inconvenience, but it's not, it's not something that's going to stop me.

Yeah. Doing what I do. And I think it's important for all the other people who have been following this and who have journeys of their own and who have got in touch with me and said, oh gosh, you know, I'm going through exactly the same as you, but six months later, or I've just finished what you're doing.

Um, or I just had a mammogram because you said that you, you had a mammogram and that through up your cancer, and actually, you know, I'm so pleased that I did because I've been diagnosed and I would've missed it. You know, there's all sorts of things that we can learn from this. But I think, you know, it's, it's important for us not to not to allow these things that we've been taught to, to be silent about, to determine how we behave and how we live our lives.

**Rebecca:** [00:27:32] Very much, very much. I agree with you there. I think there's a lot to be said about talking about, and like you said, sort of making them characters that you can poke fun at to help with sort of a collective consciousness and removing that fare that sort of people have as a, as a collective group. Do you have any, I mean, you you've gone Georgette Heyer as, as a big comfort book fan.

Do you have any suggestions for potential comfort books for our listeners that you think might be particularly good?

**Joanne:** [00:28:11] I think every person has their own kind of comfort zone and it didn't mean, well, it depends what kind of books you enjoy. Um, I enjoy humor a lot of the time, um, and so I enjoy people like Georgette Heyer and PG Woodhouse and John Mortimer.

And Saki, I like short stories at the moment. I'm enjoying short stories very much because my attention span, isn't always marvelous. And with short stories, you can concentrate for a relatively short time on one thing, and then it. It comes naturally for you to then stop reading, think about the content of the story for a while before plunging into another one.

Um, but actually I think people should, should try and see what, what it is that actually comes up to them if and not to feel too, too obligated towards the world of literature. Because I think a lot of people talk to me about guilty pleasures as if there was such a thing. You know, and they, they say rather humbly, well, you know, I like this, but I know it's trash.

It may be trash. It may not be any such thing. It may not also matter. Um, I enjoy graphic novels very much, particularly when I've been under treatment. And I haven't been wanting to, to plow through big thick books I've gone back to, to a whole collection of graphic novels that I've got hidden under the stairs.

And, and I've enjoyed those very much because, it's a different medium for delivery of story. It's, um, it's quite an immediate medium because of the illustrations, but also graphic novels can come in so many different genres that I'm always slightly astonished to people who tell me that they've never even read one or people who think that they're all kind of Marvel comics.

Um, Well, people from the literary world who believes that, you know, there is nothing literary in the world of graphic novels, which is completely untrue.

**Rebecca:** [00:30:02] Do you find that reading is helping you more than usual as you undergo treatment? I mean, I have a great love for graphic novels myself. So I'm fully with you on how happy they are to read, even if they covering difficult subjects, because you can be as slow or as quick as you like, and really revel in the beautiful art in so many of them.

**Joanne:** [00:30:23] Yeah, I think, um, I read it in a slightly different way. Um, I read a lot anyway, but I think I've, I have more time to read because obviously a chemo session takes a long time. And so, you know, I'm sitting there in my chair for five or six hours and it's quite good to have a variety of things. I've actually bought a Kindle.

Um, and I haven't, I didn't have one before, but, uh, I now carry hundreds of books around just in case I changed my mind and I went to read something different. Um, but yeah, since I think graphic novels are a good way of experiencing stories through the media of different senses. I think it's quite, it's quite a connection to me visually, um, as well as emotionally and, and actually I think,

I feel much the same about graphic novels as they do about animation. Sometimes it's, it's easier to access difficult and challenging emotional states of mind through part illustration than it is through just print or through photography. I think that's something that people access intuitively about animation and graphic novels that, that other novels sometimes struggle to express.

**Rebecca:** [00:31:37] I think going back quite a while now, but a Neil Gaiman *Sandman* graphic novels do that.

**Joanne:** [00:31:44] They do yes.

**Rebecca:** [00:31:46] So beautufully, the topics that they cover in *Sandman* are just heart-wrenching sometimes. But that, that use of, of the pictures. I, I feel gives her an extra element. Like you say that you maybe don't have in a novel.

**Joanne:** [00:32:00] Yes, that's right. And the illustration is also an aspect of this, I think, um, you know, it's, it's, it's not just tacked on it is an integral organic part of the narrative.

**Rebecca:** [00:32:14] Definitely. Have you discovered a new favorite graphic novel in your, your graphic novel hunting or, or if you got a favorite author or artist.

**Joanne:** [00:32:23] No, I'm, I'm discovering them all the time, but because I wasn't allowed to read graphic novels as a child. And because I discovered graphic novels and comics, when my daughter started to like them, um, I'm coming across writers all the time. I like Brian Vaughan quite a lot, I like his stuff a lot. Um, but I'm also very good at just picking things up and trying them out.

Um, there is an author called Una who I've been mentoring actually, um, who wrote a wonderful graphic novel called *Becoming Unbecoming*, uh, which is basically about, it's a rather harrowing account of sexual abuse, um, growing up during the seventies and eighties during the, uh, against the background of the, the Yorkshire Ripper investigation, it's an incredibly profound, troubling, sensitive story of mental health, um, rediscovery trauma.

Um, I can't imagine how that book would have been written in any other way. Um, then she has done she's illustrated her own story. She's told her own story. Um, I can't think of a better way of doing it.

**Rebecca:** [00:33:41] I've got one of my favorite sort of comfort graphic novels is *Chi's Sweet Home*, which is a lovely Japanese manga graphic novel based around this cute little kitten that grows up.

And it's just, they're very, they like short story graphic pieces, little comics. So each story is sort of six or seven pages. But over time, it tells the story of, of this beautiful, little kitten and getting lost. The first one you're in tears because he gets separated from his family outside. Cause he, he follows a butterfly and it really exciting and something he's all by himself or she is all by herself.

And then you end up sort of just with these brilliant little episodes that happen. You know, she goes to the vets, that's something exciting in the kitchen and they're so delightful and the manga so beautiful that, that they're just like you say, you can dip in and dip out, but each one there's, there's a lot to it.

So it doesn't matter that it's only sort of six or seven pages.

**Joanne:** [00:34:41] I think that's absolutely right. I think these can be very small. They can be poetic. Um, they can be fast paced or otherwise. I think there's a huge range that they can cover, um, I know I'm always discovering new stuff.

**Rebecca:** [00:34:56] I will highly recommend a comic graphic novel called uh, *Inkblot*, which is fantastic.

It's very fantasy. And the main character is fabulous and there's a cat, which she creates by accident that can create portals through through time and space. It's. It's fantastic. And it's beautifully illustrated.

**Joanne:** [00:35:16] Excellent. Well, I'm always, I'm always up for suggestions.

**Rebecca:** [00:35:20] Brilliant. I will pop all of the authors as so many authors, all of the authors and the novels that we've chatted about into the show notes and final, final opportunity.

Have you got any book that you would like to recommend to anyone to read that you think. Everybody should at least have a crack at?

**Joanne:** [00:35:37] I'm not really a great fan of books that everybody should read, because it's like saying, you know, food that everyone should enjoy. Um, books are extremely personal. Um, but there are books that I recommend to different people at different times. I usually tend to recommend books to people that they wouldn't necessarily have read. Um, but I need to know people individually to, to be able to to give them any kind of meaningful recommendation. However, um, I have just finished a reading, uh, Becky Chambers, rather wonderful Wanderers collection of books.

And I think that anybody who likes scifi and fantasy. Or who doesn't like scifi and fantasy should look at them because they're extremely beautifully crafted, um, they're very clever, they're very new too in terms of challenging the norms and tropes of scifi which has not generally been seen as particularly, um, feminine in its genre or calm or quiet or calm contemplative and her books are all those things.

So I would, I would advise having a look at those.

**Rebecca:** [00:36:47] Brilliant. Well, thank you very much for coming on. I loved chatting with Joanne this week all about writing long novels, short stories, tiny little Twitter stories with the Storytime hashtag well worth a follow. Also, it was wonderful to be able to chat a little bit about graphic novels there we love some graphic novels. I've popped everything into the show notes, quite a long show notes here, with suggestions from Joanne, what she's been reading. I hope you've enjoyed this. I've enjoyed very much this interview. Thanks as always to Nicholas Patrick for our music and I'll be back next week with another episode of Shelf Healing.