



Joanne Harris

Holy Fools
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Much of your work seems to reflect small aspects of your identity. *Coastliners*, for example, was inspired by memories of summers with your relatives in France. Does *Holy Fools* have any personal significance to you?

Yes, it does on two levels, one of course it is set in a part of France which I know very well and which has a lot of emotive associations. As a child I was very interested in the history of the island on which there was a castle and a monastery with a particularly bloody history and around which there were a multitude of stories. On another level, *Holy Fools* gave me the opportunity to explore and to articulate a number of feelings and ideas that I have had about the nature of religion and the organizations concerned, as well as to express what it feels like to perform. I particularly enjoyed the character of Juliette and the nature of her performances; walking the tightrope in front of a breathless audience all

the member of which secretly want her to fall. I know exactly how she feels ...

You chose a very specific time frame for this novel, approximately one hundred years after Martin Luther sparked the Reformation and one year before the publication of the King James Bible. What led you to opt for the summer of 1610?

It was the year of the assassination of the King, Henri IV, which led to enormous social and political upheaval in France with repercussions all over Europe. It was a particularly interesting time for theatre only a few decades before the emergence of the French playwrights of the 17th century. Religious thought was in upheaval and radical thinkers like Rabelais were emerging to challenge the religious status quo. Interesting times make for dramatic stories and that year was full of them.

***Holy Fools* brims with suspense, murder, romance, and mystery. How are you able to maintain a literary storytelling style in the midst of such an active plot?**

I don't tend to think very much about my style. I try to let it evolve organically as much as possible. Because I have a background in music and languages I tend to be very sensitive to the sounds of words and so I find it useful to read the finished book aloud and to eliminate anything that sounds ugly or which destroys the flow of the narrative. Because this was a historical novel I was faced with the choice of using original and authentic language or of deliberately introducing modern dialogue into the narrative. I chose the second option which, although anachronistic to a certain extent gives a certain freshness and liveliness to dialogue, without which everything would have sounded extremely flat and old-fashioned. As for being literary I don't tend to try for a literary style especially. Perhaps it is because English is only my second language.

In what ways do you consider *Holy Fools* to be a prequel to *Chocolat*?

It isn't really a prequel in that it has none of the same characters and isn't set in the same place. On the other hand, I wrote the first draft of *Holy Fools* just before I wrote *Chocolat* and some of the same ideas emerge in both plots. In both situations there is a conflict between a free-spirited nurturing tolerant woman and an egotistical repressive man, and there is a conflict between the religious establishment and a human quality of kindness and tolerance which may seem to be at odds with each other.

Have you made any decisions about the setting and time period for your next novel?

I tend to choose the story first and decide on the setting and time period later in most cases as immediately suggested by the plot. I haven't decided yet what my next novel is going to be instead the next book will be a selection of short stories, most of them based in England in the present day, and based on events and incidents I encounter in my everyday life.