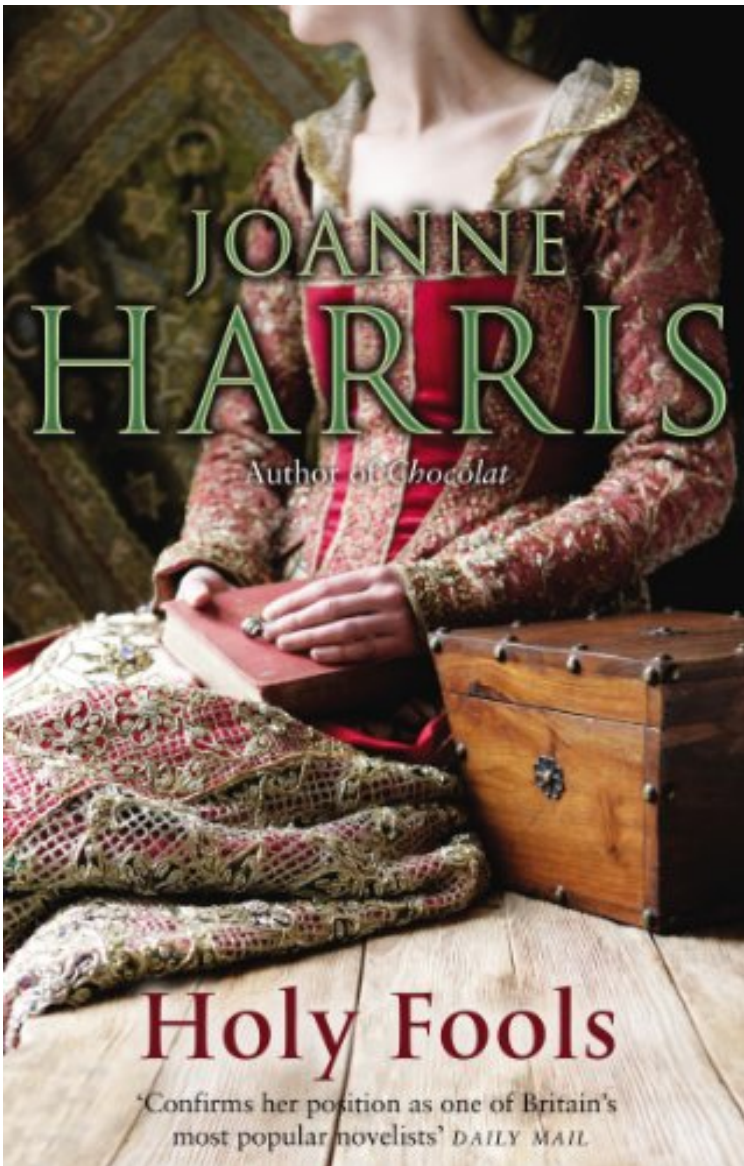


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Holy Fools



Par Joanne Harris
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn seventeenth-century France, against a backdrop of witch trials, regicide and religious frenzy, Juliette, one-time actress and rope-dancer, seeks refuge with her young daughter in the remote abbey of Saint Marie-de-la-Mer, and reinvents herself as Soeur Auguste. Until a new Abbess is appointed, bringing with her a ghost from Juliette's past, a man she has every reason to fear..co.ukHoly Fools is Joanne Harris's most enjoyable novel yet, a beautifully detailed and sharply observed piece that emotionally moves the reader unlike anything she has tackled before. The immense success of Chocolat and Coastliners has made Harris one of the most cherished authors at work today, and each new book is something of an event. Holy Fools is set in 17th century France, and the central character is Juliette, a former

actress and rope dancer who has given up her travelling life to become a teaching nun at a remote abbey. Juliette has settled with her young daughter into an existence very different from that she knew, and she finds comfort from the advice of the wise and friendly abbess. Harris brilliantly delineates both phases of her heroine's life: the colourful earlier era and the new demands of the semi-cloistered life. Things change radically when the abbess dies and her place is taken by an 11-year-old girl whose appetite for reform quickly destroys much that Juliet has come to love in her new life. What makes the book so refreshingly original is not just the unusual structure (the heroine's dual life alone is handled with radiant detail), but the surprising new trajectory the narrative takes after the death of the abbess, as everything Juliette was used to begins to go wrong. We become involved in every minor crisis, however much we question that the religious life is the answer to her problems. Juliette is a brilliantly drawn character, and the plotting of this ambitious novel is both thoughtful and invigorating, while the basic theme--the ploys we all use to distract ourselves from the painful realities of existence--is handled with subtlety. --Barry Forshaw

From Publishers Weekly "Love not often, but forever" is an adage with dangerous implications for Juliette, a gypsy acrobat in 17th-century France who strives to balance her wild yearnings with her hard-won wisdom in this passionate novel from the author of *Chocolat* and *Five Quarters of the Orange*. Harris gave hints in the latter novel of a darker sensibility, and she fully indulges that inclination here, broodingly exploring the mechanics of mass hysteria and the clash between the desires of the flesh and spiritual cravings. Juliette's involving narration alternates with the amoral reflections of her rogue lover, Guy LeMerle, the Blackbird ("He lived on perpetual credit and never went to church"). LeMerle is the leader of Juliette's troupe, which is disbanded after a clash with a town's authorities; at the same time, LeMerle abandons the pregnant Juliette, who is persecuted as a witch. Five years later, Juliette, now called Soeur Auguste, and her daughter, Fleur, have found refuge at the Abbey of Sainte-Marie-de-la-mer on the Brittany coast. Then LeMerle arrives at the abbey disguised as Father Confessor to the newly appointed abbess, Isabelle, a preternaturally severe girl of 12 whose uncle happens to be LeMerle's nemesis, the bishop of vreu. Isabelle causes Fleur to be removed from the abbey, and while Juliette struggles to get her back, LeMerle manipulates the nuns into believing Satan has their convent in thrall, in a complicated plot to revenge himself on the bishop. This fictional cassoulet suggests Aldous Huxley's nonfiction work *The Devils of Loudun*, with "demonically" possessed nuns caught in a web of sexual repression and political and religious oppression during an era of upheaval in France. Harris adds spicy characterizations, tart dark humor and seductively pungent prose, and poses some provocative questions: can 65 nuns be so easily misled? why does Juliette find herself drawn to such a selfish man? The title supplies an answer with almost unholy glee. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.