

Deborah Harkness: ‘I set out to write a story about Diana, Matthew, and Ashmole 782 in three parts and I stuck to that plan.’

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Deborah Harkness has a number of different positions listed on her resume: historian, wine blogger, and novelist. The author concluded the All Souls trilogy with *The Book of Life* in 2014. We spoke with Harkness to pick her brain about research, the editing process, and her forthcoming new projects. ([Photo Credit: Scarlett Freund](#))

Q: How did you land your deal for *A Discovery of Witches*?

A: My long-time agent, **Sam Stoloff**, took the book through the submission process. I was thrilled to work with **Carole DeSanti** at Viking.

Q: Can you describe your research process? Did you take a different approach with each installment or did you use the same method?

A: Much of the research for the books was done some time ago, and for another purpose entirely. As a professor of history, I've spent the best part of the past thirty years researching and writing about the sixteenth century and the history of science. Still there was work to be done, most notably visiting places I'd only read about previously.

As a historian, that's not always vital, but as a novelist it is—or at least it is for this novelist! I had to figure out information that we don't necessarily teach graduate students, like how fast a horse can travel on frozen ground in November. I also had to keep up with breaking developments in genetics as I wrote. That field moves very quickly, and the landscape looked very different in 2008 when I started the trilogy than it did five years later when I finished. Some of the hypotheses that my protagonists were working with in *A Discovery of Witches* were proven during that period.

Q: In your opinion, what's the best way to self-edit?

A: For me, I have to step away from the manuscript for a day or so. Then I download it to my iPad and read it there, noting what needs work. I find that changing the way the manuscript is displayed really helps give me a sense of detachment from it.

Q: How do you feel now that you finished such a massive trilogy?

A: Tired. Satisfied, too, because I set out to write a story about Diana, Matthew, and Ashmole 782 in three parts and I stuck to that plan.

Q: What's next for you?

A: I'm honestly not sure yet. I'm still teaching at the University of Southern California. I'm involved with the BBC's efforts to put the All Souls Trilogy on the small screen. I'm researching a work of academic history on 16th- and 17th-century scientific and medical miscellanies. And I'm playing around with a few ideas for novels. It's an exciting time for me, full of brainstorming and possibilities.

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