

The Pillars of the Earth

by Ken Follett

About the Book

“Follett risks all and comes out a clear winner,” extolled *Publishers Weekly* on the release of *The Pillars of the Earth*. A departure for the bestselling thriller writer, the historical epic stunned readers and critics alike with its ambitious scope and gripping humanity. Today, it stands as a testament to Follett’s unassailable command of the written word and to his universal appeal.

The Pillars of the Earth tells the story of Philip, prior of Kingsbridge, a devout and resourceful monk driven to build the greatest Gothic cathedral the world has known . . . of Tom, the mason who becomes his architect — a man divided in his soul . . . of the beautiful, elusive Lady Aliena, haunted by a secret shame . . . and of a struggle between good and evil that will turn church against state and brother against brother.

A spellbinding epic tale of ambition, anarchy, and absolute power set against the sprawling medieval canvas of twelfth-century England, this is Ken Follett’s historical masterpiece.

Praise for the Book

“Follett is a master.”

— *The Washington Post*

“Wonderful . . . will fascinate you, surround you.”

— *Chicago Sun-Times*

“A towering tale . . . a ripping read . . . There’s murder, arson, treachery, torture, love, and lust.”

— *New York Daily News*

“A historical novel of gripping readability, authentic atmosphere, and memorable characterization. Beginning with a mystery that casts its shadow, the narrative is a seesaw of tension, suspense, impeccable pacing . . . action, intrigue, violence, passion, greed, bravery, dedication, revenge, and love. A novel that entertains, instructs, and satisfies on a grand scale.”

— *Publishers Weekly*

Courtesy of Penguin

About the Author

Ken Follett

British Writer (1949–)

Updated: 11/15/2007

Known As: Follett, Kenneth Martin; Martinsen, Martin; Ross, Bernard L.; Stone, Zachary; Symon, Myles; Follet, Ken; Myles, Simon; Myles, Symon; Follett, Kenneth; Follett, Ken

Personal Information: Born June 5, 1949, in Cardiff, Wales; son of Martin D. (a tax inspector) and Lavinia C. Follett; married Mary Emma Ruth Elson, January 5, 1968 (divorced September 20, 1985); married Barbara Broer, November 8, 1985; children (first marriage): Emanuele, Marie-Claire.

Education: University College, London, B A., 1970.

Religion: Atheist.

Avocational Interests: Music.

Addresses: Home: P.O. Box 4, Knebworth, Hertfordshire SG3 6UT, England.

Career: Writer. Trainee journalist and rock music columnist at *South Wales Echo*, 1970–73; *Evening News*, London, England, reporter, 1973–74; Everest Books Ltd., London, England, editorial director, 1974–76, deputy managing director, 1976–77; full-time writer, 1977–. Bass guitarist in the bands Damn Right I've Got The Blues and ClogIron.

Awards: Edgar Award, Mystery Writers of America, 1978, for *Eye of the Needle*; *The Pillars of the Earth* was voted “one of the nation’s 100 best-loved novels” by the British public as part of the BBC’s The Big Read, 2003.

WRITINGS

NOVELS

- *The Shakeout*, Harwood-Smart (London, England), 1975.
- *The Bear Raid*, Harwood-Smart (London, England), 1976.
- *The Secret of Kellerman’s Studio* (juvenile), Abelard, 1976, published with illustrations by Stephen Marchesi as *Mystery Hideout*, Morrow (New York, NY), 1990.
- *Eye of the Needle* (Literary Guild selection), Arbor House (New York, NY), 1978, published in England as *Storm Island*, Macdonald & Jane’s (London, England), 1978.
- *Triple*, Arbor House (New York, NY), 1979.
- *The Key to Rebecca*, Morrow (New York, NY), 1980.
- *The Man from St. Petersburg*, Morrow (New York, NY), 1982.
- *Lie Down with Lions*, Hamilton (London, England), 1985, Morrow (New York, NY), 1986.
- *The Pillars of the Earth* (also see below), Morrow (New York, NY), 1989.
- *Night over Water*, Morrow (New York, NY), 1991.
- *A Dangerous Fortune*, Delacorte (New York, NY), 1993.

- *Pillars of the Almighty* (selections of text from *The Pillars of the Earth*), Morrow (New York, NY), 1994.
- *A Place Called Freedom*, Crown (New York, NY), 1995.
- *The Third Twin*, Crown (New York, NY), 1996.
- *The Hammer of Eden*, Crown (New York, NY), 1998.
- *Code to Zero*, Dutton (New York, NY), 2000.
- *Jackdaws*, Dutton (New York, NY), 2001.
- *Hornet Flight*, Dutton (New York, NY), 2003.
- *Whiteout*, Dutton (New York, NY), 2004.
- *World without End*, Dutton (New York, NY), 2007.

UNDER PSEUDONYM SYMON MYLES

- *The Big Needle*, Everest Books (London, England), 1974, published as *The Big Apple*, Kensington (San Diego, CA), 1975, published under name Ken Follett, Zebra (New York, NY), 1986.
- *The Big Black*, Everest Books (London, England), 1974.
- *The Big Hit*, Everest Books (London, England), 1975.

OTHER

- (Under pseudonym Martin Martinsen) *The Power Twins and the Worm Puzzle: A Science Fantasy for Young People*, Abelard, 1976, published under name Ken Follett as *Power Twins*, Scholastic (New York, NY), 1991.
- (Under pseudonym Bernard L. Ross) *Amok: King of Legend*, Futura (London, England), 1976.
- (Under pseudonym Zachary Stone) *The Modigliani Scandal*, Collins (London, England), 1976, published under name Ken Follett, Morrow (New York, NY), 1985.
- (Under pseudonym Zachary Stone) *Paper Money*, Collins (London, England), 1977, published under name Ken Follett, Morrow (New York, NY), 1987.
- (Under pseudonym Bernard L. Ross) *Capricorn One*, Futura (London, England), 1978.
- (With Rene Louis Maurice) *The Heist of the Century* (nonfiction), Fontana Books (London, England), 1978, published as *The Gentlemen of 16 July*, Arbor House (New York, NY), 1980, revised edition published as *Under the Streets of Nice: The Bank Heist of the Century*, National Press Books (Bethesda, MD), 1986.
- *On Wings of Eagles* (nonfiction), Morrow (New York, NY), 1983.

Also author of film scripts *Fringe Banking*, for British Broadcasting Corp., 1978, *A Football Star*, with John Sealey, 1979, and *Lie Down with Lions*, for Scott Reeve Enterprises, 1988. Contributor to *New Statesman* and *Writer*.

Media Adaptations: *Eye of the Needle* was adapted for the screen by Stanley Mann. The 1981 United Artists film was directed by Richard Marquand and starred Donald Sutherland and Kate Nelligan. *The Key to Rebecca* was filmed as an Operation Prime Time television miniseries in April, 1985; *On Wings of Eagles* was filmed by Edgar

Schenick Productions and broadcast as a television miniseries in 1985. *The Third Twin* was adapted as a 1997 television feature starring Kelly McGillis and Jason Gedrick. Author's books have been adapted as sound recordings, including *Under the Streets of Nice* Dove Audio (Beverly Hills, CA), 1991; *Jackdaws*, Penguin, 2002; *Hornet Flight*, Books on Tape, 2002; and *Whiteout*, Penguin Audio, 2005.

Sidelights

Ken Follett has blended historical events and action-adventure fiction in a series of bestselling novels, including *Eye of the Needle*, *Triple*, *Lie Down with Lions*, and *The Pillars of the Earth*. Follett's work has proven immensely successful in the United States, making the native of Wales one of the world's youngest millionaire authors. Follett penned his first bestseller before he turned thirty, and each of his subsequent novels has made a debut with a massive first printing and vast publicity. *Washington Post* correspondent Paul Hendrickson claimed that Follett has earned a reputation as an "international thriller writer with a genius for threading the eye of the literary needle."

Follett's early works were published under various pseudonyms. Most of these novels are murder mysteries or crime fiction, based loosely on cases he covered as a reporter for the London *Evening News*. Follett finally got a widespread audience with his eleventh book, *Eye of the Needle*. *Newsweek* correspondent Peter Prescott described the work as "rubbish of the very best sort . . . a triumph of invention over convention." Still in print more than twenty years after its initial publication, *Eye of the Needle*, which won the Edgar Allan Poe Award from the Mystery Writers of America, has since sold more than ten million copies worldwide and been translated into more than twenty-five languages.

With *Eye of the Needle*, Follett established himself as a new sort of thriller writer — one who found a compromise between the serious and the popular. Follett's works have been cited for their special sensitivity to female characters as well as for an overall psychological complexity not often found in adventure stories. *A Dictionary of Literary Biography* contributor noted that a positive feature of Follett's novels "is his humanizing of his villains. All are well rounded and complete, with credible motives and understandable passions — if anything, they are sometimes so sympathetic that they jeopardize the reader's relationship with the hero." In another *Dictionary of Literary Biography* entry, a contributor contended that the author's heroines "are realistically portrayed women who have led fairly ordinary lives but who are capable of heroics when needed." By creating such sympathetic heroines, Follett has been able to lure female readers to novels that traditionally appeal primarily to men.

Follett's forte — in fiction and nonfiction — is the variation upon history. Every human relationship is somehow blighted or molded by the complexities of world politics, and all emotional and sexual entanglements are played out against a backdrop of historical events. *A Dictionary of Literary Biography* contributor wrote: "Each of [Follett's] best works grows out of news stories and historical events. Cinematic in conception, they follow a hunter-hunted pattern that leads to exciting chase scenes and games of wit and brinkmanship." Several of Follett's books confront the complex issues of Middle Eastern

politics, and his novel *Lie Down with Lions* offers an ambiguous portrait of the factional strife in Afghanistan. *Time* contributor Michael Demarest claimed that the author's strength remains "an acute sense of geographical place, and the age-old knowledge that character is action." Demarest added: "He brilliantly reproduces a distant terrain, complete with sounds and smells and tribal rites."

A *Dictionary of Literary Biography* contributor related some of the reasons for Follett's extraordinary success as a novelist, explaining that in his "exciting, intelligent, generally well-written . . . thrillers, not only are the major characters well developed, but the minor characters are given attention as well. The reader is always able to understand all the characters' political, social, economic, and sexual motives. Follett makes certain that even his villains have sympathetic sides." The contributor went on to note: "He also reveals a thorough understanding not only of the history and techniques of espionage but of the intertwining complexities of twentieth-century world politics. Equally important is the skill of his plotting. While spy fiction is frequently complex and bewildering to the reader, Follett's work is consistently clear and easy to follow."

In 1989 Follett made a break with thriller fiction. Since then he has written three massive historical novels, *The Pillars of the Earth*, *A Dangerous Fortune*, and *A Place Called Freedom*. *The Pillars of the Earth*, set in twelfth-century England, recounts the four-decades-long construction of a cathedral and the efforts of Prior Philip and his master mason, Tom Builder, to complete the building and keep it from falling into the hands of a rival bishop. Critical reaction to that novel was mixed, perhaps because it was such an unexpected departure for Follett. Gary Jennings in the *Washington Post Book World*, for example, found that "the legions of fanciers of Ken Follett's spy novels will likely be dismayed by his having turned now to historical fiction." Margaret Flanagan in *Booklist* called *The Pillars of the Earth* "a towering triumph of romance, rivalry, and spectacle from a major talent." Margaret Cannon in the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, while acknowledging the book's tendency toward overwriting, admitted that "the period is so good and the cathedrals so marvelous that one keeps reading anyway." Despite some skepticism from critics, *The Pillars of the Earth* became Follett's most popular book.

The historical novel genre has proved compatible with Follett's skills. *A Dangerous Fortune* and *A Place Called Freedom*, weave complicated stories of intrigue in England and the Americas. In *A Dangerous Fortune*, an English schoolboy's drowning sets off a chain of events that leads to national crisis, as rival bankers seek to undermine each others' positions. "A *Dangerous Fortune* leaves us feeling as though we've visited an age very different from our own, and understand it far better than we did," wrote a *Rapport* contributor. "Follett's . . . tour through privileged Victorian society . . . won't be easily forgotten." In the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, Thomas Hines cited *A Dangerous Fortune* for its "eye for the telling historical detail and a fair sense that people from the past weren't like us — and that's precisely what makes them so interesting." *A Place Called Freedom* tells the story of Malachi McAsh, a Scottish miner who rebels against a lifetime of servitude to the brutal local laird. McAsh's quest for freedom leads him to trouble in London and indentured servitude in America, at a time when the very ideals of human liberty are being debated there. A *Publishers Weekly* contributor noted that in the

novel, Follett “adroitly escalates the suspense by mixing intrigue and danger, tinged with ironic complications.” The critic concluded that *A Place Called Freedom* is redeemed “by Follett’s vigorous narrative drive and keen eye for character.”

Between these various historical sagas, Follett completed yet another thriller, *Night over Water*. Set in the last dark days of 1939, the novel recounts the last transatlantic voyage of the opulent Pan American Clipper, its passengers all bent upon various deadly intrigues. According to *Spectator* reviewer Christopher Hawtree, *Night over Water* “marks a return to World War II and top form” for Follett. Hawtree added that the novel provides “a smoothly-controlled bumpy landing. There is no reverse-thrust to this narrative which sedulously leads one into the dark and all that is revealed therein.”

Follett chose more up-to-the-minute topics for his next two thrillers. *The Third Twin* spins a dark plot of violence and intrigue around genetic research and human cloning. Deemed “great plane reading” by a reviewer in *Entertainment Weekly*, the book was adapted as a TV miniseries. Also pertinent to themes in late-twentieth-century American culture is *The Hammer of Eden*, in which a charismatic cult leader in California threatens violence when the state plans to build a new power plant on the site of his secret commune. The leader, named Priest, steals a seismic vibrator from a local oil-drilling operation and vows to flatten the entire state with a super earthquake if his demands are not met. “Taut plotting, tense action, skillful writing, and myriad unexpected twists make this one utterly unputdownable,” wrote Emily Melton in *Booklist*. *Library Journal* reviewer V. Louise Saylor, however, cited the novel’s reliance on coincidence and its sympathetic portrayal of Priest as flaws that keep *The Hammer of Eden* below the level of Follett’s best work.

Code to Zero marked a return to classic espionage for Follett. Set in 1958, the novel concerns the U.S. Army’s attempt to launch the *Explorer 1*, which would have been the country’s first rocket in space, during the height of the Cold War. Though some critics objected to Follett’s use of amnesia as a major plot device in the novel, others hailed *Code to Zero* as a welcome return to form. A reviewer in *Publishers Weekly* considered it an “absorbing” and “tightly plotted” tale, and *Booklist* contributor Bill Ott praised it as “a classic page-turner on a classic theme.”

In his novel *Jackdaws*, Follett focuses on the exploits of Felicity “Flick” Clairet, an English Special Operative agent working in northern France just prior to D-Day. After a failed attempt with the French Resistance to destroy the German’s communications headquarters, Flick sets out to reestablish her reputation and recruits a nearly all-female British amateur unit nicknamed Jackdaws to do the job. The unit includes a diverse cast of characters — including a socialite, a murderess, and a transvestite — who parachute into France and set out to complete the crucial mission in preparation for the upcoming Allied invasion of Normandy. A *Publishers Weekly* contributor noted the “many twists that make this novel such fun.” Robert Conroy, writing in *Library Journal*, called the book “an exciting look at the dangerous world of courageous souls.”

Another World War II suspense thriller, *Hornet Flight* tells the story of young physics student Harald Olufsen, who accidentally finds a German radar installation on an island in Denmark. The radar unit has enabled the Germans to successfully target the British nighttime bombers. Harald photographs the radar site, joins a young resistance group, and soon finds himself and his Jewish girlfriend trying to deliver the photos to the British as they run from a corrupt Danish police detective and the Germans. According to a *Publishers Weekly* contributor, the author “hits the mark again with this dramatic and tragic tale of amateur spies.” Writing in *Book* Chris Barsanti referred to the book as an “assured novel of espionage and romance.”

Follett focuses on a modern-day suspense story in *Whiteout*. When an experimental drug to treat a deadly virus and a sample of the virus itself turns up missing from a pharmaceutical research company in Scotland, the firm’s security chief, Toni Gallo sets out to track them down before they can be used for biological terrorism. Toni soon discovers that the thieves may have been helped by Kit Oxenford, who is the son of the company’s founder and deeply in debt due to his gambling addiction. The story, which takes place over Christmas Eve and Christmas, finds Toni falling for Kit’s father as she battles the criminals during a snowstorm that has them all trapped in the Oxenford estate. A *Publishers Weekly* contributor noted that the author’s “nail-biter ending drags readers to the very edge of their seats and holds them captive until the last villain is satisfactorily dispatched.” In a review in *Library Journal*, Terry Jacobsen wrote that Follett “makes the formula work with his trademark strong females, large cast of characters, and race-against-the-clock pace.” Amy Waldman, writing in *People*, commented: “The emotional twists really set this novel apart,” adding that the author “delivers a thrill lover’s ultimate present.”

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Follett positively relishes the label “popular writer.” He once commented in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*: “I’m not under the illusion that the world is waiting for my thoughts to appear in print. People want to be told a story, and that’s what I’m up to. I think of myself as a craftsman more than an artist.”

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BOOKS

- *Authors and Artists for Young Adults*, Thomson Gale (Detroit, MI), 1999.
- *Contemporary Popular Writers*, St. James Press (Detroit, MI), 1997.
- *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Volume 87: *British Mystery Writers since 1940*, Thomson Gale (Detroit, MI), 1989.

PERIODICALS

- *Book*, January, 2001, Tom LeClair, review of *Code to Zero*, p. 78; January-February, 2003, Chris Barsanti, review of *Hornet Flight*, p. 81; March-April, 2003, review of *Hornet Flight*, p. 39.
- *Booklist*, June 15, 1989, Margaret Flanagan, review of *The Pillars of the Earth*; September 1, 1998, Emily Melton, review of *The Hammer of Eden*, p. 5; October 15, 2000, Bill Ott, review of *Code to Zero*, p. 390.

- *Chicago Tribune*, October 25, 1987, review of *Paper Money*, p. 6; September 10, 1989, review of *The Pillars of Earth*, p. 7.
- *Entertainment Weekly*, October 24, 1997, review of *The Third Twin*, p. 59.
- *Globe and Mail* (Toronto, Ontario, Canada), September 2, 1989, Margaret Cannon, review of *The Pillars of the Earth*.
- *Guardian*, October 29, 2000, “The Great Entertainer” (interview).
- *Library Journal*, July, 1989, Cynthia Johnson Whealler, review of *The Pillars of the Earth*, p. 108; October 1, 1998, V. Louise Saylor, review of *The Hammer of Eden*, p. 132; February 1, 1999, Mark Pumphrey, review of *The Hammer of Eden*, p. 136; August, 2000, p. 72; November 1, 2000, Robert Conroy, review of *Code to Zero*, p. 133; October 15, 2001, Robert Conroy, review of *Jackdaws*, p. 106; November 1, 2004, Terry Jacobsen, review of *Whiteout*, p. 74.
- *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, September 11, 1983, Don G. Campbell, review of *On the Wings of Eagles*, p. 16; February 16, 1986; October 4, 1987, p. 6; December 12, 1993, Thomas Hines, review of *A Dangerous Fortune*, p. 8.
- *Nation*, April 26, 1980, Robert Lekachman, review of *Triple*, pp. 504-505.
- *Newsweek*, August 7, 1978, Peter Prescott, review of *Eye of the Needle*; September 29, 1980, Allan J. Mayer, review of *The Key to Rebecca*, p. 83.
- *New York*, November 10, 1997, John Leonard, review of television miniseries *The Third Twin*, p. 68.
- *New Yorker*, August 16, 1982, review of *The Man from St. Petersburg*, p. 93.
- *New York Times Book Review*, September 21, 1980, Peter Andrews, review of *The Key to Rebecca*, p. 9; May 9, 1982, Stanley Ellin, review of *The Man from St. Petersburg*, p. 12; October 23, 1983, Hal Goodman, review of *On the Wings of Eagles*, pp. 20, 22; January 26, 1986, Josh Rubin, review of *Lie Down with Lions*, p. 9; January 14, 2001, John W. Dean, review of *Code to Zero*.
- *People*, November 10, 1997, Terry Kelleher, review of television miniseries *The Third Twin*, p. 17; December 20, 2004, Amy Waldman, review of *Whiteout*, p. 57.
- *Publishers Weekly*, January 17, 1986, John F. Baker, “Ken Follett,” interview with author, p. 54; June 30, 1989, Sybil Steinberg, review of *Pillars of Success*, p. 86; July 21, 1989, Gayle Feldman, “The ‘Pillars’ of a New Success from Ken Follett and Morrow,” p. 38; April 13, 1990, Diane Roback, review of *The Mystery Hideout*, p. 66; July 19, 1991, review of *Night Over Water*, pp. 44-45; June 5, 1995, review of *A Place Called Freedom*, pp. 48-49; November 27, 2000, review of *Code to Zero*, p. 53; October 15, 2001, review of *Jackdaws*, p. 44; November 11, 2002, review of *Hornet Flight*, p. 42; November 15, 2004, review of *Whiteout*, p. 42.
- *Rapport*, January, 1994, review of *A Dangerous Fortune*, p. 21; November 9, 1998, J.D. Reed, review of *The Hammer of Eden*, p. 45.
- *Spectator*, November 16, 1991, Christopher Hawtree, review of *Night Over Water*, p. 46.
- *Time*, September 29, 1980, Michael Demarest, review of *The Key to Rebecca*, p. 88; May 3, 1982, Michael Demarest, review of *The Man from St. Petersburg*, p. 76.

- *Tribune Books* (Chicago, IL), September 10, 1989, review of *The Pillars of the Earth*, p. 7; August 30, 1992, review of *Night Over Water*, p. 8.
- *Washington Post*, September 7, 1983, Jonathan Yardley, review of *On the Wings of Eagles*, p. B1; September 21, 1983, Paul Hendrickson, "Ken Follett's Winging Ways; Sweet Success with a Real-Life Thriller," p. B1; June 1, 1985, Carolyn Banks, review of *The Modigliani Scandal*, p. D12.
- *Washington Post Book World*, April 25, 1982, review of *The Man from St. Petersburg*, p. 3; February 2, 1986, review of *Lie Down with Lions*, p. 9; August 20, 1989, Gary Jennings, review of *The Pillars of the Earth*, p. 8; November 21, 1993, review of *A Dangerous Fortune*, p. 4.

ONLINE

- *Ken Follett Home Page*, <http://www.ken-follett.com> (May 22, 2006).

Source: *Contemporary Authors Online*, Thomson Gale, 2007

Source Database: Contemporary Authors Online

Author Interview

Q: You took a risk to write *The Pillars of the Earth*. Were you confident it would work both critically and commercially or were you surprised when it became such a success after it was published in 1989?

Ken Follett: I felt I had written a very commercial novel with a heavyweight theme, and I was hoping for a big reaction from critics and the public. The reviews were mixed and the public response was, at first, muted. The book sold about the same number of copies in the United States as my previous book, and frankly I was disappointed. But over time it became clear that *Pillars* was a phenomenally popular backlist title, selling at double the rate of my others. So I was surprised twice.

Q: You've said that you consider *Pillars* to be your best book to date. Do you find that paradoxical, since you're known primarily as a writer of thrillers and suspense novels?

KF: It was never my ambition to become famous for a novel about a church. I'm still kind of surprised that I wrote it. Of course, it's not really about a church; it's about a group of people who set out to do something that seems almost impossible.

Q: Did you know as you were completing *Pillars* that there would be a sequel?

KF: *Pillars* was the first book that truly exhausted my imagination. When it was done, I felt as if I had run a marathon. I certainly had no thought of a sequel — in fact, if you had told me then that I would one day have to do it all over again I think I might have thrown myself off London Bridge.

Q: You've said that you were nervous about creating a sequel to *Pillars*, which was so beloved by its readers. Now that you have finished *World Without End*, do you still feel that way?

KF: No. I was worried, because so many sequels fall below the standard of the original and seem exploitative. But I'm confident that *World Without End* will give readers the same kind of pleasure as they got from *Pillars*.

Q: Why did you wait so long to write *World Without End*? Was it concern about measuring up to *Pillars* or did you simply need that time to gear yourself up for another major historical novel?

KF: I certainly was concerned to write a novel that would not disappoint the legions of fans of *Pillars*, but there were other reasons for the delay. At the end of *Pillars*, all the major characters are either very old or dead. So I could not write another book about them. Eventually, I decided to write another story set in the same town two hundred years later. Also, I spent a long time searching for a theme as grand and as engaging as the building of a cathedral. When finally I thought of a story based around the Black Death and the birth of modern medicine, I felt I had at last come up with a big enough theme.

Q: Why did you set *World Without End* in the fourteenth century, some two hundred years after *Pillars*? In what sense was that a time of new ideas, ferment, and change?

KF: Until the Black Death, everyone believed that the best way to recover from illness was to pray. The plague changed people's thinking. It destroyed their faith in the old methods. In religion, there was a new emphasis on the individual's personal encounter with God, not necessarily mediated by the priesthood. And, in medicine, the emphasis was on observation and record keeping, which gave physicians practical knowledge about what treatments actually worked. Of course, these changes were fiercely resisted by traditionalists, and this is the background to some of the dramatic conflicts in *World Without End*.

Q: Some of the characters in *World Without End* are descendants of characters from *Pillars*. Can you name a few?

KF: The main female character, Caris, is a descendant of Tom Builder through Tom's daughter, Martha. Caris and all her family have brown eyes flecked with gold, as Tom did. Merthin, the principal male character, is descended from Jack and Aliena, and has Jack's red hair as well as his inspired architectural imagination. Merthin's brother, Ralph, is more like Aliena's brother, Richard, in being a great soldier but not much use for any other purpose.

Q: What are the main strands of the story in *World Without End*?

KF: At the beginning of the book, the main characters are all children, but each of them has an aim in life, although they may understand it only vaguely. Caris wants to be a physician, Ralph wants to be a baron, Gwenda longs to be free, Godwyn aims to be Prior of Kingsbridge. The story shows how they struggle to achieve their ambitions — and how their individual destinies are violently disrupted by the plague.

Q: What do you hope readers take away from this novel?

KF: I wanted to write a book that would stay with readers for the rest of their lives.

Q: Do you see a third book in this series?

KF: I certainly don't see it yet, even vaguely, but it's possible.

Q: Your work is clearly inspired by the architecture of historical buildings — do you envision that any modern architecture will lead you to create a novel?

KF: I have toyed with the idea of a novel about the building of the first skyscraper.

Q: Are there other interests, hobbies, intellectual pursuits of yours that might one day find themselves the subject of one of your books?

KF: I'm interested in Shakespeare, but there have been too many stories about that period. I'd like to write something about the blues one day, but I hesitate because I feel an American writer could do it better.

Q: You've said that in childhood you found your escape in the world of books. Is that still true? Who are you reading now? Is it harder now, in the age of television and Internet distractions, to find new authors?

KF: I still read a lot all the time, some history and biography but mostly fiction. I just finished a wonderful novel called *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri. One of the reasons I liked it so much is that the author engages the reader totally even though not much happens — quite the opposite of my own books, which are full of incident!

Q: Your wife is a Member of Parliament in Britain, and you are also involved in politics. Is that a completely separate realm from writing for you or do they feed one another?

KF: I never write directly about my own life, but indirectly everything ends up being used in my work. For example, in *Pillars* and in *World Without End*, there are elections in which the monks choose their prior. My handling of those dramas is strongly influenced by things that I have experienced as a political campaigner.

Q: You and your wife have a large blended family, and you all spend quite a bit of time together. How do you balance work and family? Has that changed over the years?

KF: There's no balance. I always give my children priority. If they phone, or show up at my house, I drop my work and talk to them. Nothing else is as important.

Q: What is a typical day like for you, or is there such a thing?

KF: I start work early in the morning, around seven. I do an hour or so then walk the dogs and have breakfast. Then I work until four p.m., with a break for lunch. After four, I return phone calls and reply to emails for an hour or two. I have a glass of champagne at six. Then I either cook dinner at home or put on a suit and go out on the town.

Q: What is your next project?

KF: Give me a break!

Courtesy of Penguin

Discussion Questions

1. Ken Follett has said: “When I started to look at cathedrals, I wondered: Who built them, and why? The book is my answer to that question.” Why do you think the great medieval cathedrals were built? How does the building of the cathedral satisfy the ambitions of the main characters — Tom Builder, Prior Philip, Aliena and Jack? How does it affect the lives of other important characters in the story?
2. Read the first scene in Chapter 10 and think about the prose style — the number of words of one syllable; the length of sentences; the length of paragraphs; the adjectives used. Why do you think the author writes this way? Compare the last scene of the same chapter. What is different about the author’s purpose in these two scenes?
3. Although *The Pillars of the Earth* is fiction, it includes some real-life characters and incidents from history, such as King Stephen at the battle of Lincoln, and the murder of Thomas Becket. Why does the author mix fact and fiction like this? Are the factual scenes told from the point of view of the real-life characters, or the fictional ones? Are the fictional characters major or minor players in the big historical events of the time?
4. Women were second-class citizens in medieval society and the church. Is this accurately reflected in *The Pillars of the Earth*? What attitudes to women are shown by Prior Philip and William Hamleigh? How do Agnes, Ellen and Aliena respond to society’s expectations?
5. Some readers have said that they look at medieval churches with new eyes after reading *The Pillars of the Earth*. Do you think you will do the same? In the book, churches are usually viewed through the eyes of a builder. How does this affect your understanding of the architecture?
6. Ken Follett has said: “I’m not a very spiritual person. I’m more interested in the material problems of building a cathedral.” Is *The Pillars of the Earth* a spiritual book? What motivates Prior Philip? What does Tom say at the beginning of Chapter 5, when Philip asks him why he wants to be master builder? In Chapter 16, why does Philip ask Remigius to come back to the priory?

Courtesy of Penguin