

*“It takes a special person to take on an established series. Robert is that special person.”*



By Aurelia C. Scott

▶ Louise Penny says that plotting her bestselling mysteries about Chief Inspector Armand Gamache of the Quebec Sûreté is a balancing act. “I know where the story is going, but I don’t want to hold my characters so firmly to the outline that they can’t breathe. As a result, there are always surprises.” For example, in the first draft of her newest book, *The Madness of Crowds*, Penny didn’t refer to the COVID-19 pandemic until two-thirds of the way through. “I thought it would be the last thing people would want to hear about after living through so much sadness,” she explains during a Canada-Maine Zoom visit. “But then I realized that my characters’ lives were as affected by the virus as we all have been. So, by the second draft, I mentioned it on page 1!”

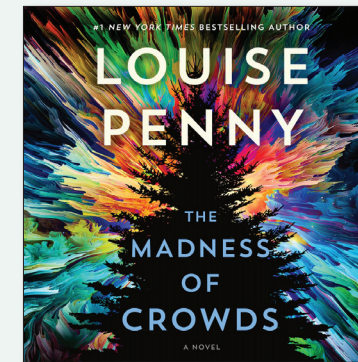
Set in a post-pandemic present—“a time of healing,” says Penny—the audiobook begins with Chief Inspector Gamache struggling to guard a scientist whose government-sponsored study has devolved into a mash-up of misinterpreted statistics and eugenics beliefs. When the Canadian government disassociates itself from the findings, the scientist goes public with her proposal for mandatory euthanasia of the disabled and elderly. Her speeches draw huge and fervent crowds. Soon, someone dies. “The concept dovetailed perfectly with the idea of a virus,” explains Penny. “Ideas and diseases both spread from person to person. They gain traction as they infect the population.”

The author of 18 novels about Gamache and his colleagues, family, and friends, Penny says that her books, which are “one ongoing story,” are not really about murder. “Instead, murder is a launching point to explore the issues that Gamache and others struggle with.”

In this case, the issue is eugenics coupled with mandatory euthanasia of the elderly or infirm. “The Nazis used eugenics in ways that are so clearly wrong,” says Penny. “But what about our increasing tendency to abort fetuses that have identifiable disabilities, such as Down syndrome? What about the animals we raise for experimentation? And our elderly or frail relatives? During a time of illness, for example, should they be abandoned or forced to die while we save the young and healthy?” Penny’s husband Dr. Michael Whitehead, the model for Armand

Photo by Jean-François Bérubé

**THE MADNESS OF CROWDS:**  
Chief Inspector Gamache/  
Three Pines, Book 17  
Louise Penny  
Read by Robert Bathurst



Narrator Robert Bathurst returns listeners to the fictional Canadian village of Three Pines in the 17th addition to Louise Penny’s Chief Inspector Armand Gamache series. Bathurst masterfully voices Gamache, his two assistants, and the many characters who inhabit this story. Bathurst’s flawless pronunciation of French phrases contributes to creating the atmosphere of this tiny Quebec village, just coming out of the pandemic and celebrating the Christmas season. Gamache’s holiday is interrupted by the appearance of a visiting statistics professor whose thesis promotes genocide and threatens Gamache’s sense of justice and his family. Listen to this audiobook not for the crime-solving or the mystery and tension, of which there is little, but for a timely and provocative exploration of the thin line between kindness and cruelty. *E.Q.*

Macmillan Audio 12 hrs. Unabridged  
Trade Ed.: CD ISBN 9781250810670 \$39.99 (also DD)

*Bathurst’s flawless pronunciation of French phrases contributes to creating the atmosphere.*

Gamache, was 82 in 2016 when he died peacefully at home, having lived for several years with dementia. In contrast, many seniors died of neglect and abandonment in Canadian care homes during the pandemic, so many that several provinces have launched investigations. “These are troubling issues that exist on a continuum,” says Penny. “We need to keep wrestling with our concerns about them.”

At the same time, Penny feels strongly that the pandemic helped us rediscover the importance of kindness. “Ultimately, my books are about friendship and community. Three Pines survives because of the love that exists there. Love in all its forms—between people, people and pets, villagers who support each other even when they disagree and who don’t sweep the past under the rug. Villagers who own their past while moving forward.”

The world of Three Pines is brought to listeners’ ears by the well-known British stage and television actor Robert Bathurst, who began performing the series in 2015 after the death of longtime narrator Ralph Cosham. Penny, whose friendship with Cosham was such that she accompanied him to the Audie Awards ceremony where he won top honors for *The Beautiful Mystery*, says about Bathurst, “It takes a special person to take on an established series. Robert is that special person. He has done wonderfully. I’m overjoyed for him and me and the readers, who I admire for persevering through the change. We’re so lucky! Everyone loves him.”

Penny, who dines with Bathurst whenever she is in London, is particularly delighted that he will join her for the final stop on her virtual book tour for *The Madness of Crowds*. “Robert’s just such a terrific fellow. He will be interviewing me from England. It’ll be late his time, but he’s still game! People can ask questions of either of us, so I hope we have lots of audiobook listeners. It’s going to be so much fun.” (For more information about the August 29 event, visit [louisepenny.com/events.htm](http://louisepenny.com/events.htm))

*More Listening*

**ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE**  
Louise Penny, read by Robert Bathurst  
Macmillan Audio Unabridged  
Trade Ed.: CD, DD

**A BETTER MAN**  
Louise Penny, read by Robert Bathurst  
Macmillan Audio Unabridged  
Trade Ed.: CD, DD

**KINGDOM OF THE BLIND**  
Louise Penny, read by Robert Bathurst  
Macmillan Audio Unabridged  
Trade Ed.: CD, DD

**GLASS HOUSES**  
Louise Penny, read by Robert Bathurst  
Macmillan Audio Unabridged  
Trade Ed.: CD, DD

**A GREAT RECKONING**  
Louise Penny, read by Robert Bathurst  
Macmillan Audio Unabridged  
Trade Ed.: CD, DD

