

## Helen Mort: Never Leave the Dog Behind

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**James Nash:** Hi everyone. And welcome to this very special, digital weekend as part of the wonderful Ilkley Literature Festival. My name is James Nash and I'm a writer, poet, sometimes journalist and a regular literary chair and host and it's my enormous pleasure this morning today to be talking to Helen Mort, who's written rather a lovely book called *Never Leave Your Dog Behind*.

Now I've read this, because I'm like that, slightly nerdy, in conjunction with this book of poetry, which is called, let me read it from the side *No Map Could Show Them*. And there are so many things I want to talk to you about both this lovely book and the things you write, but welcome Helen, poet, writer, academic, to this event. How are you this morning?

**Helen Mort:** Well, thanks, James, what a lovely introduction and I really like to imagine people reading my books in parallel because they often consider sort of similar related themes. And so I love the idea of the poetry and the nonfiction speaking to each other. So that's fantastic. I'm good thank you it's nice and sunny here in Sheffield, it's lovely.

**James Nash:** It's sunny here in the East Riding of Yorkshire. I also confessed to having read *Black Car Burning* because I am a completist and if I read one thing, I want to read everything, but I just want to start off with thinking about how you began writing. Have you always written?

**Helen Mort:** I suppose the short answer to that would be yes, pretty much always. Actually, if you believe my mum always, because she, it's one of these things, you don't know if it's family legend or tall story, but she says that she always read to me as a small child. And apparently, again, it sounds apocryphal, but the only thing that would stop me crying when I was a baby or a toddler, was having a story read to me.

And she thinks that, well, she'd remember wouldn't she, she would know if anyone did. That I dictated a poem about trains to her before I could write. And I got her to write it down. It was quite sort of sound based apparently quite rhythmic. So obviously I had the bug quite early, and yeah, all through school all through teenage years, which weren't particularly fun, like they're not for many people.

I carried on writing the usual angsty sort of poetry. But I was lucky enough to get some of my work recognised in this brilliant competition called the Foyle Young Poets of the Year award. And so, that kind of gave me the impetus I think or the confidence to try and push on with entering competitions, with sending my work to magazines, because it gave me the confidence that perhaps some people out there, apart from my long-suffering mum, might want to read what I'd written.

So it's been a lifelong passion really, and sort of the place where I feel like I'm most myself. So. I can't see it going anywhere. And as you've said, I first published poetry, but I've gone on to write in lots of different genres and every single one affords new challenges and possibilities. And I love it.

**James Nash:** I mean, what I've noticed about your writing, you know, your poetry, the novel, this book which I suppose, *Never Leave the Dog Behind*, is writing from life, all have the

outside, the outside world in them. And what does being outside give to you as a poet and as a writer and as a person?

**Helen Mort:** Again, I think this like many things, this goes back very much to childhood. Not cause I grew up in a particularly outdoorsy sort of rural place. It was, I grew up on a main road, on the way to Bolsover in Northeast Derbyshire in Dennis Skinner's constituency. So it was quite a magical for me, like strange ex-industrial, in-between sort of area that wasn't quite rural, but definitely wasn't urban either.

And the view of these strange features of the landscape, like the open casting sites, that I didn't understand when I was little. So I suppose from early on, I was quite curious about the outside and about landscape. I remember being very effected by Arkwright village when I was a kid, a village that moved from one side of the road to the other, because of open casting, the whole village had to move and I just, I think I grew up with those mysteries and that interest in place and what was going on. But my dad is a really keen walker and mountain hiker. He doesn't do rock climbing, but he used to take me out on long walks from probably a bit before I was quite capable of covering the distances but I sort of managed it anyway, and I think those preoccupations stay with you for your whole life don't they? That was always where I was happiest and that's carried through into my writing as well, because I get a lot of my best ideas when I'm away from the desk. And when I'm out for a run or a walk or dog walk.

And when I'm out somewhere, especially if I can get high up, I've always liked being high up something about that sense of perspective that you get around here, round Sheffield where I am now.

**James Nash:** And is there, I mean, I imagine for you as for many people, in this last, very strange year, getting outside, running outside, taking the dog for a walk outside has provided some kind of consolation of some kind.

**Helen Mort:** Definitely. It's been, so the start of the lockdown last year, coincided with my now two-year-old son learning to walk confidently. And so I just spent, my daily exercise every day was a growing sort of circumference of loops. So at first it was to the bottom of the garden and back, then it was, round the flats just behind our house and then it was round the block, then it was to a park. And finally it was, when restrictions allowed, it was up on Stanage Edge in the Peak District. So it was incredible to have that focus and that time with him to see, made me think again about walking and about things that I take for granted and about the environment. Just seeing it through his eyes and seeing it all for the first time.

It kind of takes you back to that childlike state, which I think as poets and as writers, we never really let go of any way do we? We're always a bit like that.

**James Nash:** So tell me where this book *Never Leave the Dog Behind* came from. It's got being outside in it, it's got dogs in it, but where did it come from? What made you want to write it?

**Helen Mort:** Apart from those being two of my favorite things: being outside and dogs. It was a bit of a strange starting point, really, because I note in the book that I was actually terrified of dogs until probably about 10 years ago. So it's not that long since I've been a dog lover, really.

I was absolutely just petrified of them when I was a kid. But it came from a year in the Lake District when I was poet in residence at the Wordsworth Trust. And I had a rescue whippet called Belle when I was there who kind of, I decided I had to get a dog to get over my fear of dogs, which might sound a bit perverse, but, it worked. And I explored that landscape so much with her and saw it again through her eyes, a bit like walking with a toddler, when you're walking with a dog, you become aware of different facets of the landscape and different senses even. And I started making notes back then.

I wrote a poem about my dogs. I ended up with two whippets, one is not enough. So I just started to chart those sensations. And then years later, lots of things came together. I'd become very interested in the work of search and rescue dogs here in Derbyshire. And I went to be a body, I can talk about that more later, a body for search and rescue dogs, where you lie down and get them to find you. And so I just became really interested in the ways that dogs interact with us in mountains. And, how many of the climbers that I knew, whether that's famous climbers or just acquaintances of mine talked about their love of sharing the mountains with their dogs. So it seemed like a good topic to try and explore a bit more, I guess. And my dog Belle, the first dog that I had, she died around the time I started writing this book and I think that was the catalyst because I'd been writing it in bits and pieces, but I'd never sat down and thought of it as a book. And it was kind of a tribute to her I think.

**James Nash:** I think one of my favourite moments in the book is where, near the end, where you've gone out for a run and you come back and you write a poem about sleeping with your two whippets, dreadful person that you are. I don't know of anybody who sleeps with their dogs, apart from me of course.

But I just thought it was amazing how you are outside and I absolutely get it, and ideas come thick and fast. You come home and you write them down straight away. It's extraordinary because when you're outside with a dog, you notice the seasons in a way that you don't notice them ordinarily, or I have started noticing them with a keen retention. Is it the same for you?

**Helen Mort:** Absolutely. And I think, I probably should have mentioned when you were saying, where did this book come from as well, but it does sort of touch on our states of mind, I guess, as well. And, I think, I don't mind talking about this cause I do in the book. I think when I, when I was in the Lake District, I was struggling a bit with some of those things and my moods were pretty low and I just remember thinking, with a dog, you have to go out of your door every single day, come rain or shine, and you have to go out and make contact with the world and actually by extension through other people, because you're going to say hello to someone and something about that was hugely important for me at that time.

And I think as you say, it just makes you, it gives you a different sense of being connected to your immediate environment. So many people must have found that in the lockdown too, like you say, so lots of dog walkers. I know dog ownership has gone up in lockdown, I think.

**James Nash:** There's a kind of friendly society of other dog walkers isn't there? So, you know, you can actually have lovely, friendly relationships with people you see once a day.

**Helen Mort:** Yeah and you, I remember my husband saying to me that when he moved to the part of Sheffield where we now live, when he first moved here, all the first people that he

knew were dog walkers. He'd see people when he was out with his dogs and he'd meet them and that was his way of fitting into the neighbourhood. They really do connect us people, they're talking points aren't they?

**James Nash:** Absolutely yeah. I'm wondering whether it would be really nice to hear something from the book. And I wonder whether you could give us a reading Helen?

**Helen Mort:** Yeah, of course. I will read you a little bit about Belle, who's the dog that I mentioned, who this book is sort of a tribute to in a way. So, sorry I should have said that there are chapters in the book where I interview different dog lovers and talk about mountain rescue and stuff like that, but weaving through them are these little, sort of interludes. Short sections of sort of life writing and writing from my own experience, which I like to think of the structure of the book being a bit like a whippet. Whippets are pretty bad at recall and they follow their noses wherever they want and kind of dart around from side to side. So I thought the book would be structured a bit like the running path of a whippet. So this is one of those interludes. I've been running for a long time, unraveling a spool of breath. I've not lived here long enough to know the landscape by name, but I found a tarj, a frozen rut of track, the place where a stream used to be. All the time the lean dog runs ahead of me. I can't call her mine. Not yet. She is the color of musical notation. Something about her body makes me think of a harp. Perhaps it's the broad curve of her chest its half wing shape. Or the way her legs grasp up the path like quick fingers, fingers plucking at strings.

Sometimes I whistle out her name and she comes back to me for a moment. Belle. This is a high thin sound, a clear thought. We reach the plateau and the way curves back down into Grasmere. Everything is visible for a moment. Everything is open, white and pale grey, and then she's gone. A whippet is built to run not far but fast. Its heart is large and slow beating, often arrhythmic at rest, but that heartbeat settles when the dog can run, sets into the rhythm it knows best.

Whippets run with double suspension gallop, all four legs off the ground, twice in each stride. And whippets are built to chase rabbits, squirrels, hares, sometimes a deer. They're quick enough to catch, not always strong enough to kill large quarry. When they track their prey, they excel at leaving the world behind. The winter I moved to Cumbria my grandfather was dying. Nobody told me because nobody knew yet. I paced around a house too big for me putting things in place and then putting them somewhere else, arranging, admiring. The rooms leaked into each other. On the drive up from East Anglia, with all my possessions crammed in the boot, my car had broken down 14 miles away from the city I'd just left.

I sat by the roadside wondering if it meant I should go back. Then my friends, Al and Dor came to the rescue in a shiny people carrier. I arrived in the Lake District as a passenger opening bottles of beer with the metal of the seatbelt fastener. It took me a week before I noticed the village silence.

The way the rain on the roof amplified it. When the first snow came, I phoned a local animal shelter because I wanted to volunteer as a dog walker. Do you mind if I ask you a bit about yourself? I'm a writer. I work from home. And what else do you do? The pause lasted a half beat, a whippet heartbeat. I climb mountains and I like to run.

On your own? Yes, I live alone. You might suit a sighthound, lurcher maybe, or a whippet. And that's the beginning of it, that was the beginning of the whippet, a lifelong fascination with whippets.

**James Nash:** The thing I love so much about that piece, I love the musical notation. I love the way you describe the way a whippet runs.

I have loads of friends who've owned whippets and greyhounds, and there's nearly always a point where they just bugger off, they just run away because they can and it's kind of fascinating. And I'm comparing it to my elderly dog, who's around here somewhere, who's a dachshund, who doesn't do that kind of wonderful four legs off the ground, he toddles. And I think everyone single dog, every single breed of dog has a different way of moving. Doesn't it?

**Helen Mort:** Absolutely. And each way of moving is equally fascinating and their shapes are so fascinating aren't they? You can't believe they're all the same family and yet they are. I always think whippets look a bit like cheetahs. When I see a cheetah running the shape of it is the same as a whippet.

**James Nash:** You talk about that earlier as kind of life writing. Now, what I'm interested in here is how much of yourself you reveal in that about what's happening in your life, where you're up to in your life. When you write, do you discover things about yourself Helen?

**Helen Mort:** Definitely, but it's not always a straightforward relationship. And I'm sure you identify with this from writing both fiction and nonfiction that sometimes the boundaries are a bit blurred. So I know from my fiction that often I'm making things up, but actually revealing quite a lot about myself in the process without knowing it sometimes.

And likewise, with non-fiction, you're sometimes doing a version of, even when you're using real details, you're fictionalising your own life. You're turning your own life into a story which can make you feel oddly detached from it actually after you've written it, it doesn't feel like yours anymore.

It's a story that you're telling yourself. Which of course is what we do every time we remember. That's quite literally what happens. We're telling ourselves stories. But definitely you do. I love the way that writing can be a means of discovery. And I always set out with an idea and an aim, but I hate knowing exactly where I'm going to end up.

I don't think I'd enjoy it so much if I knew exactly what I was going to discover along the way. And yeah, the whippet track-like structure of this book was really fun because those interludes, those small personal bits ended up being quite, yeah, quite poignant, I think. And I went back to my teenage years and stuff that I didn't particularly expect I would do, but it seemed relevant in the course of the writing.

**James Nash:** Yeah. I also like the fact that landscape, particularly in No Map Could Show Them, has the personality in places and mountains and hills have personalities. Is this how you experience that outside world?

**Helen Mort:** Yeah, definitely. I love how we get aspects of our character from the places we gravitate towards.

You know, there are different kinds of people aren't there, there are mountain people and there are sea people. And there are geographical influences I think on our personality. In fact, I was really interested there was, some kind of journal of psychology study, not long ago that found that there was actually a distinct personality type for people who lived in mountainous regions in America, they all shared certain personality attributes. Now, whether it's hard to know, isn't it, whether that's because those landscapes attract a kind of person to them or whether the experience of living there brings out particular traits.

I don't know, but yeah, definitely. I experience the moods of place, especially somewhere like where I live now in the Peak District, the different areas of Derbyshire are so different. They've got such distinct personalities and they give you a certain feeling, whether it's a haunted feeling or a joyous feeling or a slightly, kind of, yeah, almost grief-like, sparseness.

Yeah, I really do think places have a personality. And in my novel that you mentioned *Black Car Burning*, I decided to have some fun with that. And I wrote these little bits that were in the voices of the locations in the book, and that was so much fun.

**James Nash:** Yeah, I love that. I love that, but because extensively, I kept seeing it being written about as a crime novel, but actually I read it as a kind of prose poem, the kind of prose poem that had other voices happening through it.

And I absolutely loved it. One of the things, I mean, so much of this book, this is going to be a great Christmas present for people. I think lots of people are going to get to this Christmas, was that you actually had a bibliography at the end of it, and in a kind of very scholarly way, which I adored and appreciated, but I also got the feeling that it was a bibliography of books that you wanted to share with people.

**Helen Mort:** Definitely. That's my favorite thing about reading is that books lead to other books in a sort of natural and ever unfolding web of connections. And so it's nice to be able to tell people what your influences were and where they can read more if they want to. There's some great books that I read in the course of this, I was reading books from the sort of late 1800s about mountaineering with dogs and descriptions of early mountain dogs and all kinds of stuff like that.

And of course, I got to meet loads of fascinating people as well from dog trainers and dog handlers to Sir Chris Bonington, who was kind enough to let me interview him and he is such, I think it comes across in the chapter that he's in, he is such a dog lover. He is absolutely his heart is with the dogs that he's owned. It really is. And what an incredible person to get to talk to.

**James Nash:** Brilliant. I mean, absolutely. I was also interested in the whole business of how dogs have become central to your life. Do you live with a dog at the moment or are you planning to live with a dog at some point soon?

**Helen Mort:** I pulled a face then because I've got immense guilt about this, at the time that my book was published for about the first time in years, I don't live with a dog at the moment. Certainly, we have visiting dogs, temporary dogs, but no permanent dog. But I do have a cat, so I feel like a huge traitor to the cause. Although I like to subvert it a bit by taking pictures of my book with the cat cradling it between her paws and wondering if she understands the irony of the gesture, but I would love another dog.

I think perhaps when my little boy is a bit older, that will be a really nice thing to do. At the moment he's definitely enough to keep me busy at the moment, but I know he'll be a dog lover. He's bound to be and he's obsessed with dogs already.

**James Nash:** And on the cover of this book is an alien dog. Who's dog is that?

**Helen Mort:** Oh my goodness. Now that dog deserves a book all of their own. That is Scout, Scout is a wonderful search and rescue dog from the Peak District and Scout's handler and owner is Paul Besley, who does lots of great work in mountain rescue. And I was lucky enough to be able to follow Scout's journey while I was writing this book from him.

So when I first met Paul, dogs who are going to work with their handlers in mountain rescue have to go through quite a rigorous training process and then an examination process. And I met Scout and Paul while Scout was preparing for his exam and then he passed it. And so now he's a fully qualified search and rescue dog, and he is an absolute, as well as being a handsome dog, he's so smart and he's such a bundle of fun and seeing the relationship, the working relationship between Paul and Scout, was just so inspiring and so moving. And Paul describes them as being like two craftsman working on a job together. And that is it. I did ask Paul if any kind of dog can be trained to be a search and rescue dog, and the verdict was probably a whippet wouldn't be the best. And I can definitely agree with that. They're not the smartest and very comfort-oriented. So they'd be better at rescuing you if you were in front of a fire with a blanket than they would be going into a blizzard in the hills. But, on a serious note the work that mountain rescue dogs do is phenomenal.

It's so exciting to see how they are still even with all the technology and all the advancements that we have now, dogs are still often the best way of finding someone.

**James Nash:** I was fascinated when earlier you said that you had been a body to be discovered. Tell me about that, that's a fantastic story. What did you have to do?

**Helen Mort:** Yeah, a dog's body. So if you imagine teenage me or young early twenties me would have, this would be my worst nightmare to lie down and play dead and wait for a dog to find me. I would have been terrified. No it's wonderful. Obviously, SARDA, which is the Search and Rescue Dogs Association couldn't do the work that they do unless the dogs are able to train. And so they need volunteers. They need people to, people like I was on that occasion who are willing to spend their evening going out onto a moorland somewhere, and lying down in the bracken or behind some stones and hiding.

And they set up little circuits for the dogs to follow and find. And then usually when you're training them, when they come up and find you, you'll reward them. So you might play with their favourite toy with them for a bit, or Labrador breeds they're quite treat motivated.

So they might get a treat, something to eat and, yeah, it's just bliss because it makes you, while you're waiting to be found, it's a very strange experience, but it's so still and quiet and you're just contemplating the environment in a way that I don't normally, cause I'm normally the kind of person who's always on the move.

It's not normal for me to just sit and look at the sky or look at the ground. And, it was brilliant apart from all the midges, that were feasting on me while I was laying in the grass. And when Scout came to rescue me, I just wanted to give him a big cuddle, because he's such a

lovable dog. I'm campaigning for Scout to have his own calendar, a Scout picture for every month of the year. I think that would be great.

**James Nash:** Brilliant. Now I wonder whether as a special favour, you might read me the poem that's at the end of the book. Would you mind doing that? Cause I think it just encompasses so much of what we've been talking about and it moved me so much when I read it myself, is that okay Helen?

Yeah, of course. Thank you. That's my favourite kind of request to get, to read a poem. My cat's actually appeared and is trying to sabotage this event by meowing outside the door. She knows I'm about to read a poem that's called *The Dogs*. So maybe there'll have to be a cat sequel, but yeah, this was written when I was living in the Lake District and it's about my two best canine friends when I was there.

**Helen Mort:** And yeah that sense that, I know you'll know from your dog and anyone who has a pet really, that they're very close to, that point where you start to think, "Hmm. I'm sure I'm becoming a little bit cat or a little bit dog" or, whatever it might be. So it's just called *The Dogs*. Some mornings waking up between the sandy whippet and the black their breathing slow as mine, their eyes more sorrowful.

I remind myself, I'm not a dog. It's not acceptable to taste the grass or roll in moss until I'm masked with it. There are deer in the woods I'll never see. My thirst discriminates, it does not have me bend my grateful head to puddles, gutters, hollows in the rock. I don't track rabbits in my sleep. I'll not know love like theirs, observed in mute proximity.

And if I sometimes sit bolt upright after dark sensing a movement in the yard, it's only that I've learned a little of their vigilance. I'm not like them. One night, I'll set off past the meadow down behind the beck, beyond the blunt profile of Silverhowe and nobody will call me back.

**James Nash:** Thank you, that was an absolute treat.

Thank you so much. I always think it's a privilege to hear the writer read their own works because then when I read that poem again, I'll hear your voice Helen. So lovely, thank you. Are you, what are you writing at the moment? I know you teach at Manchester Metropolitan University. Does that give you time or space to write?

**Helen Mort:** Well, I'm very much part time there these days. And it's lovely because I think teaching feeds into your work as a writer and vice versa, the two kind of go hand in hand. But yeah, I'm working on a related project. In fact, I've just sent the manuscript off in its draft form, working on another non-fiction book. Well, *Never Leave the Dog Behind* is more like essays, I suppose. I think of it as these discursive essays. This is my first sort of full work of non-fiction and it's a kind of blend of memoir and biography. It's about mothers, sons, and mountain adventure. So partly inspired by the life of Alison Hargreaves, who I've written about before, in my poems, who was the first woman to climb Everest unsupported, but tragically died on K2 the following year when she was descending from the summit, leaving behind her two children.

And obviously there was a big furor about motherhood and risk-taking. And then even more strangely, in terms of coincidence, her son, Tom ended up becoming a really successful climber in his own right, following in his mum's footsteps. And he died, in 2019, in the

mountains when my own son was only a couple of months old, so it started me thinking about my own relationship with risks and with the outdoors and how my fascination with her has developed through my life and where it comes from. Cause I didn't know her, why am I so obsessed with this inspirational woman that I never knew, but who climbed and lived in Derbyshire like me. So the books sort of explores those things and it explores the different attitudes we might have to fathers' and mothers' risk taking as well.

And it's coming out with Ebury in 2022. So next year, so I've got a bit of time to work on my redrafting before then. I'm really excited about it. It feels like one of the books that I most needed to write. It's been there bubbling away, I think for a while.

**James Nash:** I mean, I get the sense from having a look at the books you've read and having written and having read some of the more recent books you are interested in this kind of feminist perspective on women. Doing the things they want to do. And as you say, taking risks, is that true? Am I kind of making it too simple?

**Helen Mort:** Yeah, no, no, absolutely not. I mean, everything is always both simple and complicated, isn't it? It's that they're both at the same time. And I think, yeah, I am interested in that. I mean, I'm always interested in climbing narratives in general.

And I don't ever wish to deny that men also experience hardship and conflict in the mountains. I'm more, what I'm interested in is how as a society we view risks and achievements. So, yeah, I mean, nobody particularly knew that, George Mallory was a father of three, but the first thing everyone knew about Alison Hargreaves was that she was a mother of two. And yet I'm only ever interested I think in subjects that also make me feel a bit personally conflicted or uncomfortable. So I think in this latest book I'm trying to square, not square, because I'm not looking for a resolution really, but I'm grappling with the fact that, I staunchly defend any mother's right to do whatever they want and to have their freedom and have their independence. At the same time, I have felt a changed relationship with risk since becoming a mother. And it has changed, no matter what I might think. And so trying to weigh those things up is really complex.

And, Alison throughout her life would often say that she wasn't actually taking risks, that it was only other people that died in the mountains. And that's the myth that sustains all climbers, it's always someone else until it isn't. And so I've been revisiting those things and thinking, well, what would she have thought of her son becoming a hugely successful international climber and then dying in the mountains?

Would she have been pleased that he died doing the thing he loved just as she did? Or would she have been hugely fearful of him becoming a climber? And of course, the reality is messy and it will be a bit of both. And it's also about me kind of encouraging my son to be quite adventurous, which I have done.

But then also getting that sudden vertigo feeling where you think, Oh, he's going away from me. He's becoming independent. And I think obviously I've chosen the vehicle of mountaineering to talk about this, but that's something that most people, parents or not, identify with in terms of their relationship with others, that strange dance around separation and closeness that we feel and responsibility.

**James Nash:** As an ex-teacher I think I've never done anything in my life where I've not done a kind of internal risk assessment. And I suspect as a parent it's exactly the same. So maybe we will look forward to at some point in the future, a book entitled Never leave the Lad Behind.

**Helen Mort:** I love the idea of that. And I should say as well, that that thing about the risk assessment and the responsibility, there are so many connections between having a dog in the mountains and a child and Chris Bonington talks about this episode, which I narrate in the book where he took his dog on what turned out to be a really dangerous, scramble on Sharp Edge, on Blencathra, I think. And the dog nearly slipped. He just said, when I got home, my wife was furious, she was so angry that he'd taken the dog up there. So dogs are kind of like our children as well I think so maybe the books are related. May we never leave anything behind and I'll have a massive menagerie going up the mountains.

**James Nash:** Is there still a chance, does poetry creep in every now and again? You're writing a lot of writing from life now, memoir-y kind of stuff. Do poems still appear?

**Helen Mort:** Absolutely. I am also working on a third poetry collection, which will emerge at some point, not too distant future I think. Again, it's related, it's sort of about, a lot of its themes around the body and, yeah, what we do with our bodies, especially outdoors and the limitations and possibilities of having a body. So it's kind of linked to all this stuff too.

**James Nash:** Thank you Helen. Can I just say that it's been a most brilliant conversation this morning. Thank you for sharing so much of yourself and so much dog-related stuff of interest. It's been completely brilliant, not only to talk to the writer, but also hear them read their work.

So thank you. Very much. Thank you. It's been brilliant.

**Helen Mort:** Oh, thanks James. It's so good to talk to you and to have such sensitive questions that allowed me to talk about it and yeah it's been a pleasure and lovely to be at the Ilkley Literature Festival. One of my favorite festivals to go to.

**James Nash:** And all I need to say is if you want to buy this book, you can get it via the excellent Grove bookshop, which is a jewel in the crown of independent bookshops in the centre of Ilkley, online, phone them and the book can be yours in a matter of days. It's an absolutely brilliant book, do read it if you like the outside, if you like dogs, if you like poetry, this is the book for you.

Thank you.

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