

Novel Dialogue 1.5  
James Robertson speaks with Penny Fielding  
April, 2021  
Transcript

**John Plotz**

Hello and welcome to Novel Dialogue, a new podcast sponsored by the Society for Novel Studies. We sit novelists and critics down together to explore the making of novels and what to make of them. I'm one of your hosts John Plotz, you'll be hearing from my partner Aarthi Vadde in upcoming episodes. Today I'm joined in conversation by the terrific Scottish novelist James Robertson and Penny Fielding, not only a distinguished scholar of Scottish literature, but also president of the Society for Novel Studies.

A brief note on what this podcast is exactly. Years ago at a conference, Aarthi and I heard a novelist describe the experience of talking to academics as inviting a cow to a butcher's convention. And James I really hope you don't feel that way: we would have preferred a slightly different metaphor, maybe inviting a cat to visit a high school bio lab. But we do take the point.

Still, over the years that we found that some novelists do enjoy talking with scholars about the underpinnings, the ground rules, and the history of what it is they do. So Novel Dialogue invites a novelist and a literary critic to talk about novels from every angle. How we read them, write them, publish them, remember them. We hope to bring you, our dear listeners, a lively, sophisticated dialogue that dissects the art of novel reading and writing, and considers the influence of characters, plots and stories on how we think about the world. If you like what you hear, please subscribe to Novel Dialogue on iTunes, Stitcher, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcast and spread the word to friends.

It is a great pleasure today to welcome my friend Penny Fielding. Hello, Penny.

**Penny Fielding**  
Hi John.

**John Plotz**

Hey. Penny, I don't hear the joy in your voice that I feel.

**Penny Fielding**

Oh John. 'Tis is a cold winter's day in Scotland.

**John Plotz**

Yeah, I gotta say it's a pretty cold winter's day in Boston too. Penny is the Grierson Professor of English Literature at University of Edinburgh and author of among many other things, a wonderful collected, a wonderful edited collection on Robert Louis Stevenson, countless articles and two amazing books, *Writing and Orality* and *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography*. She's joined, at least in Scotland, if not quite in person, by the prolific and conceptually amazingly inventive novelist, James Robertson. Hello James, welcome.

**James Robertson**

Hello John, how you doing?

**JP**

I'm going well thanks. So you're going to hear a lot more about James, who grew up in Bridge of Allan, lived for a time in the writer Hugh MacDiarmid's house (I kind of want to hear about that part) got a history PhD writing about the novelist Walter Scott, in fact, from Penny's own university, and worked as a bookseller in both Edinburgh and Glasgow. I'm guessing this conversation will range from his witty 2000 debut novel *The Fanatic* to 2016's *To Be Continued*. But I just want to start by saying that I hope everybody rushes out immediately after this podcast to get to know him the same way I did, which is by reading his 2006 genre-bending and mind-bending novel *The Testament of Gideon Mack*. So with that I'm going to hand the virtual talking stick over to you, Penny.

**PF**

Thank you, John. And I thought we would start with a bit of that novel, *Testament of Gideon Mack*. It's a novel that's been very influential in Scotland and actually is much beloved by our students at University of Edinburgh. So I think James has agreed to read us a little bit and to introduce that novel to us.

**JR**

Yeah, I've taken a bit from quite near the beginning of the novel, just so that I don't have to spend too long explaining all the preceding stuff, if I read something from halfway through. The novel *The Testament of Gideon Mack* is really about a Church of Scotland minister called Gideon Mack and the bulk of the book is a found manuscript that he writes, which is only found after he has died or gone missing and nobody knows where he's gone to. And then so I'm just gonna read, yeah, from near the very beginning of his testament and then I think it's all pretty self-explanatory. All you need to remember, as I said, is that he is a minister in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, sometimes known here as the kirk.

"A misty Saturday afternoon in early January, cold heart of the winter and start of this year of revelation. I am running through Keldo Woods on the forestry workers' track, my mind tuned to the clean sound of my breathing and the slap of trainers' soles as they crack frost-veined dubs and spatter icy mud up my shins. I turn off the track and onto a narrow footpath that climbs slightly as it winds through the trees. After a few hundred yards it levels out, then divides in two. I go left, then at another fork left again. I remember all this as clearly as if I had it on film. In fact, sitting by the fire, remembering is a little like watching a film. I know I am deep in the woods where few people venture, but there comes an open area where the tall pines give way to tummocks of coarse grass and thick, springy moss cushions that turn green and summer but are frosted and brown on this wintery day. And there it is. To the right of the path, in the middle of this space, a stone, looming in the mist, like a great tooth and a mouth full of smoke. It brings me to a sudden and astonished halt.

"I stepped off the path and crunched over the spongy ice-laden ground to where the stone stood. It rose three feet taller than me. A lichen-blotched molar, a giant's blunt pencil, a solitary petrified stub, centuries of rain and wind, it seemed, had in some places smoothed and in others wrinkled the surfaces. It looked as if it had been there forever.

"But it hadn't been there two days earlier when I'd come that way for the first run of the year. I was sure of it. The first day and the first run. For 14 years I've been running the byways of the countryside around Monimaskit. I reckoned I knew them as well as anyone. There had never been a stone there. I was sure of it.

“I put out my hand and tentatively, as if expecting an electric shock, let the backs of my fingers brush over the cold surface. Then I pressed my palm against it, leaning into it the way I did against the doorjamb, when warming up to stretch the muscles in the backs of my legs. What was I expecting? That it would shift a little, maybe even topple, or crumble to dust? It didn't even flinch.

“I'm writing of less than a year past, but it seems decades ago since I stood in those woods staring at a stone that shouldn't have been there. The only word came to me to expressed by this feeling was *fuck*.

I started saying it between breaths as they slowed down a little. *Fuck, fuck, fuck*. The breaths were mine, but then they were outside and away into the atmosphere. I was in front of a standing stone that didn't exist. ‘What the fuck is going on?’ I said loudly. A minister using that word may be thought daring or dangerous but my voice sounded wee and lonely in the silence, a voice bleating in the wilderness. If God was out there, he was either deaf or didn't care. He didn't at any rate strike me down. I thought of Peter Macmurray one of my elders. Had he chanced to overhear my expletives, he would certainly have expected God to take a potshot. But nothing happened.

“The stone, certainly, was not offended. It continued to be there, continued not to disappear. It didn't give a damn about me, or even a fuck. I started to shiver. ‘Don't get cold,’ I told myself, but I wasn't called. I backed away. The stone remained. It looked disapproving, as if it knew who I was. I didn't like it, felt a strange panic rising in me. I returned to the path and started running again.”

And it's kind of funny because I was, I went out for a run this morning, just a short one and the weather was just exactly what it was like this. Funnily enough also where I stay (and this is completely, this is really weird) where I stay, about 2 miles away from the house, is an old Pictish standing stone that just sits up on the hill and I run past all time and that wasn't actually the stone that I was thinking about when I wrote that passage. But the area of Scotland where I live is in Angus. There are loads of Pictish remains and the countryside is littered with these standing stones, they're all over the place and they're anywhere between about 1200 and 1500 years old, so there, so I think that that's that was kind of weird, you know, I'm reading that passage out today and having run past a stone this morning.

**PF**

Or at least you think you ran past the stone this morning. That's a wonderful passage and introduces some of the themes of your work which we might get onto later. You know, particularly ideas about the relationship of evidence, belief and the problem. So we will talk about that later, I hope. But perhaps we could just kick off conversation with going back in time and asking you, James, when you started writing. How did you know that you were going to be a writer?

**JR**

I knew I was, I knew I wanted to be a writer from a very, very early age. Pretty much as soon as I could physically write, I was starting to write down stories and things or I was drawing cartoons and comic strips and things. I knew I wanted to try it. I liked books from a very early age and I think I could read pretty quickly. You know, by the time is about 5 and I loved what books did that they that they kind of enable you to get into other worlds. And I pretty much decided then that what I would really like to do would be to be able to make these things. So yeah, from a very early age I was writing stories and so on.

And I started writing a novel probably when I was about 9, 9 or 10. It was terrible. But and then I went on to my teens writing. Actually, at that point I was infatuated with the American West, with Wild West, so I was writing Westerns even though of course I've never stepped outside of the British Isles. But I was writing Westerns 'cause I was brought up reading Louis L'Amour and J.T. Edson, and Will Henry and all these great writers of Westerns. So that was what I thought I was gonna end up writing. But it turned out differently.

**PF**

So just to put you on the spot that I'm in now, if you were in my position and had to host a conversation with a novelist, living or dead, who would you pick?

**JR**

Well, this is, I've been puzzling over this for the last day or two trying to wonder who I would end up choosing, and then I'm going to stick my neck out here and go back and to try to interview at a dead writer and I've chosen, probably, and this is not a very good choice, I've chosen Robert Louis

Stevenson, who I read, started reading when I was quite young and I, he's probably the writer I go back to most and reread his books, but I'm kind of worried because I think probably if I did get a chance to interview Stevenson, he would be bumptious and self-opinionated and wouldn't listen to what I was asking him and so on. Sometimes it's not a good idea to meet your heroes, and I'm not sure if I would actually have liked him very much. But I do love his work, I love his writing, and I would particularly want to ask him about two novels.

One is *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, which I've read dozens of times and which reveals something more to me every time I read it. And I'd like to ask him about some of the thinking behind that short, that wonderful book. Actually I'm lying, I would like. There's so many books as I want to ask a bit, but the other one I would like to ask about his great, last, unfinished novel *Weir of Hermiston*, which to me is it's just a tragic part of his life. It should have been probably one of the greatest novels ever to come out of Scotland. He died, obviously while he was still writing it, and I would really want to just quiz him very hard about exactly what he had in mind, you know, and where he would have taken it towards the end and then with his permission I'd go off and finish it for him.

**JP**

Can I jump in here? Actually, I love those answers, James. And can I ask just 'cause probably I'm like a lot of the readers and that I know *Jekyll*--and our listeners in that I know *Jekyll and Hyde* much better than I know the rest of Stevenson, even though I love the other things I've read as well, of course. But can you say more about *Jekyll and Hyde* and what draws you to it or what you'd want to know about it?

**JR**

Well, *Jekyll and Hyde* is such a fascinating book and I'm sure we'll come back to this later in the conversation because it seems to me to be a sort of text that sits alongside another great Scottish novel from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. And I find both of those books fascinating because no matter how many times I read them, I come out the other side still not really having managed to grasp what's going on. They're both intriguing, but also slightly frustrating and mystifying because they don't provide all the answers, but I, but I like that--

**JP**

Yeah.

**JR**

--'cause I don't think novel should provide answers necessarily. They should provoke questions. But the reason that I really like Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* is it, it's such a compact book. It's only 120 pages long or something, and yet he, he's really trying to get to me, to my mind, he's trying to get inside his own head, but also trying to move the thinking of a novel from the 19th century into the 20th century. It seems to me to be a bridge between the sort of Victorian "we're writing big novels" to the sort of modernist "we're writing fiction." And it's a book that, as I said, it doesn't really reveal what's going on. It doesn't--every time I look at it, I find a little sentence that comes back--

**JP**

Yeah.

**JR**

--and hits me again, and I think *oh that didn't feel like that the last time I read this book*. So yeah, it's just a book that one never gets to the end of in spite of the fact that it's a very very short book.

**JP**

That's great.

**PF**

I always think that if I could go back in time, I would like to be one of the first people to read *Jekyll and Hyde*. Imagine reading it and not knowing not knowing.

**JP**

Yeah.

**JR**

It's a little bit like watching Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*--

**JP**

Yeah.

**JR**

--before you know actually what's going on there. You know, how shocking that must have been for people who watched that movie in 1960. And you're absolutely right, Penny, when you don't know what's going to happen in *Jekyll and Hyde*, it is actually astonishing and shocking.

And also there's two other things very briefly to say about it. One is that of course, at some level he's talking about doubles and split personalities, and that goes back to his, his own sort of upbringing in Edinburgh. But it's set in London and that I think, is a significant shift. It is also set round about the time of the Jack the Ripper murders. I can't remember it now, but they happen very close together, those two things and there's a sense that he's really delving down into them and deep into the mists you know of London, the fog of London at the tail-end of the of the 19th century. He's really digging deep into the morality, I think of that city, and also the civilization it represents.

**PF**

I wonder if we could talk a bit about another novel based on a trial. Your novel, your second novel, *Joseph Knight*, which you wrote before our recent kind of public acknowledgement of the role of Scotland in the slave trade. And I wondered if you could talk a bit about why you decided to write that novel with a character, titular character, Joseph Knight, who barely appears in it until the end. But you find out throughout the novel there's so much about the problems of justice and the difficulty of obtaining justice in Scottish Enlightenment, which we know have been trained to think of as being, you know, a kind of haven of rationality and fairness.

**JR**

The reason I started writing this book was, I'd had one novel published, *The Fanatic*, which we might talk about a wee bit later and a friend who had read that actually just handed me a sheet of paper which was a photocopy of a page from a history book about Dundee, City of Dundee, and he said *there's an idea for your next novel* and all it said was something like *Dundee was for a while the home of Joseph Knight, the first Black slave to win his freedom in Scotland*. And he at one point lived in Dundee and married a girl from Dundee.

And I looked at that and the date when this was supposed to happen was 1778 and I began to scratch my head because I had done a PhD in the History Department of Edinburgh University some years before, and I

had actually studied that period of Scottish history, the Scottish Enlightenment when I was doing my PhD on Walter Scott's work. And I had never heard of this Joseph Knight court case, and that surprised me because I thought I knew that period of history quite well. And so I thought what's going on here and how come I don't know about this slave and his bid for freedom through the courts? And that was what started me to look into it and what I feel I discovered--this was about the year 2000 that I began to do the research--was that the whole history, not just of Joseph Knight the individual slave, but the whole history of Scotland's relationship with slavery had either been lost or forgotten, or perhaps more worryingly, had been sort of brushed under the carpet because it was actually an inconvenient truth. And more than once...

**JP** (with a sarcastic laugh)

That never happens! No no, that never happens.....

**JR**

Well, the more I researched and the more I looked, the more I thought 'hang on there's a story here that that I don't know about.' This is, you know, I've done two history degrees for heaven's sake, how come I...because, I don't want to go on too much about this, but my perception and I think the perception of most people in Scotland 20 years ago was that slavery was something that had happened in, or been associated with places like London and Bristol and Liverpool. Those places had been the ones who had been trading in humans, taking them from Africa across to the Americas and then bringing back the products of slavery, you know, to the "Mother country" so called.

And I had no real sense that that Scotland had been, had much to do with all of this, which of course was a ridiculously naive thing to think, but it just wasn't written about. There was virtually nothing in any Scottish history book about our engagement with slavery. I said it was a revelation really for me to write the novel because it taught me so much that I didn't know, and one of the things it taught me was (again, that now I think how naive was I) but it taught me the, when you think about the system of slavery as an economic system, as a model system, as a social system, the one thing that underpins it, that holds it, makes it function, is violence and the threat of violence. And if you take that away that there is no thing, there can be no thing such as slavery because nobody would allow themselves to be subjected to

slavery if the implicit or explicit threat of violence was not hanging over their heads every single day. And the violence that I found in doing my research in the Jamaican sections of the book were just utterly unbelievable. Again, I'm naive, or I was naive. This is not stuff that was unknown to other people, but I hadn't really considered it, and I certainly hadn't considered it from the point of view of being Scottish, and that this is something that that my country and my people, admittedly a couple 100 years ago or more, had been deeply engaged in.

**PF**

Yeah, and this is something that's very much topic of conversation now, has recently become so, we, in Edinburgh there's a big debate about what we should do with the statue of Henry Dundas, St. Andrew Square. Dundas was one of those defenders, but also became notorious for slowing down William Wilberforce's attempts to get abolition back to Parliament.

**JP**

Can I actually ask an open-ended question about, this is just something that's been on my mind since yesterday when I discovered that Johns Hopkins who founded Johns Hopkins University was a slave owner. When I taught there we were told *this guy was a great abolitionist*, because that's just what you said about people in the mid-19th century if you didn't know, you were like, *Oh yeah, they were really anti-slavery* and then come to find out you know, he was an enslaver as they say.

I guess I'm just thinking about, it made me think a lot about the word "*implication*" like the sense of connected culpability or genealogical culpability. And I don't know, James, what you were saying about Scotland and *my people* made me think about that question. Do you have sort of further thoughts about that? Again, in the vein of fiction about what your novels, how your novels think through that question of implication or connection? 'Cause there's, so much of your novels are about resonance between past and present...

**JR**

Well, maybe, I'm not sure if I can highlight, how I can answer that best, but maybe I could, maybe I could answer that by quoting the epigraph or one of the epigraphs to the novel *Joseph Night*, which is a quote from the Nigerian writer Ben Okri in his book *Birds of Heaven*. I came across this when I was writing today, I just thought this is really a really important thing to say, and

he says this: "Nations and peoples are largely the stories they feed themselves. If they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer the future consequences of those lies. If they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, it will free their histories for future flowerings."

I think I'm trying to do with some of the some of my writings or my fiction. And I don't mean that kind of narrow nationalistic kind of way that somehow you know, you can cleanse the past and then we all go forward into a beautiful, bright future. But Scotland at this particular juncture is in a place of political flux you know and trying to make, work out, decide whether it wishes to take on more political autonomy and self-government and so on. And it seems to me that you, that with those kind of questions comes an absolute need to look into your past and find out where you have come from in order to have some kind of sense of where you might want to go in the future.

**PF**

So I wonder if you ever look back to your novels and what's your relationship with them after you've read them? Do you think, "Well, I wish I had done something differently," or how, do they change in your relationship with them?

**JR**

It's kind of funny, it's interesting, isn't it? I think, I mean at one level you write a book, you finish it, you say I have now, I've done as much as I possibly can to make that as good a book as I can make it, it now needs to go out into the world and have its own life. And at that point there's nothing more you can do so you kinda have to let it go. And so I don't sort of sit there rereading or rethinking those books. They're gone, they're over for me at least at that level. And also the nature of publishing is that before one book is published I'm usually, my heads well into the next one. You know that's just the nature of things. And I don't, I'm not a very prolific writer in the sense of, you know some people turn out a novel every one or two years. I, my, I think my average is about one every three years, so I'm quite slow. But that's just the way I work, and I've always got lots of other projects on the go anyway. So I don't go back and dwell on them although sometimes I do when something like this is going to happen, I kind of open them up again and look at them.

Another Scottish novelist, called Allan Massie, said something really interesting that lodged in my brain some years ago. He said that, very often, he was actually saying this in relation to academics in critiquing fiction, and he said they thought, academics often didn't know how a novelist's mind works, And he said that very often in his experience, and I thought, yeah, I'm with you on this, you don't actually know what you've written until sometime after you've written it, and even some time after it's been published. So then somebody comes along and usefully says, I think this book is about this and you think, *Oh yeah, they're right*, but you didn't necessarily think that yourself at the time, and I don't think that that's just, you know, that the laziness or not, or kind of not having thought through what you're trying to write when you did. I think it's just that the process of writing a novel for me is a very, very intense thing that takes a long time. It takes me two years, three years maybe to write a book. So I'm constantly thinking about it, and driving it forward as I do that, and I write, you know, five, six, several, seven drafts of each one. But even then, so you get closer and closer to thinking 'yeah, I know what this book is about now' with each draft, but actually sometimes I don't really know until sometime after it's finished. And even then I don't know.

I mean people come up to me still with *The Testament of Gideon Mack*, and say *so did Gideon Mack really meet the devil?* And my answer to that is *I don't know*. And then they start saying, *well, you're the author, so surely you must know*. And I said, well, that's not for me, that's not for me to answer this. It's for you, the reader, to answer. And I think again, just I love that idea, for me, again, a book, a novel in particular, for any book is a two-way process, you know somebody writes it and it's published. And then it goes off and sits on a shelf in a bookshop, in a library, wherever and it's effectively asleep until such time as somebody else comes along and opens up and starts reading it. So the reader simply by reading it is the other half of the creative process and the reader must bring something to the book in order to make it work, and that I think is absolutely fascinating because of course, no two readers are going to read any book in exactly the same way. And I think that you know you can say that that's the same for a film or a picture or something, but I don't think, I don't think it is the same. I think a printed piece of creative writing is in some way quite unusual in that sense, that you require somebody else to really invest their imagination in it in a way that doesn't happen with other art forms in quite the same way.

PF

James, I think you have another novel that is just leaving your desk and leaving your imagination for the world.

**JR**

Yeah.

**PF**

Could you give us a little hint about that?

**JR**

It's called *News of the Dead*. And again that's kind of interesting, there's a phrase that somebody uses in the book when they say "we've heard, we've heard news of the living, but we've not heard news of the dead" and that jumped out at me and I thought that's yeah, I think that's what this book is about. Although I may discover that I'm wrong. It's set in Scotland again. It's set in the part of Scotland that I live in which is Angus, which is about 65-70 miles North of Edinburgh. It's a very rural part of the country and there are a number of very beautiful glens that run up into the Cairngorm mountains and it's set in one of these. But it's actually set in an imaginary glen that I made up. And the novel takes place over--It's a very, very, in this one very small secluded place--but it takes place over a great deal of, a large period of time.

Part of the story is set in the 8th century, part of it is set in the early 19th century, then partly set in 20th century and actually today as well. In fact, when I was redoing the rewrites, I realized that although I hadn't really realized it, there actually was a Coronavirus/pandemic/thing going on there so the novel does have that element in it as well. So it kind of goes, covers about 1200 years. But it doesn't say jumping back and forth in time, but it absolutely rooted in one place.

**PF**

Well, that is definitely something to look forward to and I, like you, I very much hope that we'll be able to turn up in person for the Edinburgh Book Festival. But if not I will be there in virtual spirit. So now we come to the most important question, James. The highlight of any Novel Dialogue interview and that is what is your favorite treat when you're writing? So what do you eat or play or do when you need that Just a little bit of extra inspiration?

**JR**

Yeah, I do, I used to just eat biscuits all the time. I'd devour packets of biscuits, but that's not very good idea anymore. So what I usually do is I actually like to go out and get some exercise so I go for a run. I find that it's actually a really good way of just A. relaxing, getting away from the desk, straightening my back and all of that sort of thing, but also I often look out thinking, oh I'll go for a run and that will help me to sort out what's going on in my head. And of course, that's not what happens when you go out for a run. In fact, what happens with me at least is I empty my head and I just get sort of the vibes and the pleasure of just the physical exercise. And also being able to run through what is, I have to say, very beautiful landscape 'round about here. So it's, you're kind of feeding your sensations in all kinds of ways, your senses in all kinds of ways. But that actually is the best thing I can do when I need to get away from the desk and so on. Weirdly very often I come back and I do find that actually the thing, the problem, the issues I've been wrestling with in my head have in some senses, sometimes moved on and I can actually work my way through them, yeah.

**PF**

I hope you haven't seen any standing stones or fallen down a waterfall and met the devil. But anyway.

**JR**

No, yeah, but the standing stone that I run by, that I mentioned at the start of this, I absolutely can't go by without touching it. It's the sort of big superstitious thing that you know I have, I have to touch that stone and the day that I forget and go past it something terrible will happen.

**JP**

I have to ask what your biscuits of choice were though? Since I'm always on the lookout for a new cookie.

**JR**

You know what, I don't do it anymore because it would be, you know, like I would open the pack of biscuits and then I would eat the whole lot and so it's a long time—

**JP**

Right.

**JR**

--now since I did that an but no I couldn't actually give you a, I couldn't give you a biscuit of choice to go to anymore.

**JP**

You can't even give into the mental temptation, I get that. Alright.

**PF**

I will step in to recommend Scotland's finest biscuit, the Tunnock's Caramel Wafer.

**JR**

Oh, now you, now you see, now you started something. Actually, the biscuit I really did used to like was the one called the Abernethy biscuit. Do you remember, have you come across these? Yeah, they're quite plain, but they are delicious. They've got something, I don't know what. Anyway now you started I'm gonna have to go find some.

**JP**

Oh man, alright well this we'll definitely put a link to on our web. I really want that, what is it? Tunnock's caramel wafer?

**PF**

Tunnock's is the maker, caramel wafer cookies in American, biscuits to us.

**JP**

I'm getting one tomorrow. Well, OK, I mean so as we approach the end of another Novel Dialogue, besides thanking the two of you, we would also like to thank the Society for Novel Studies, which also means thanking you Penny, for its sponsorship of the podcast, and acknowledge support from Brandeis University, the Mellon Connected PhD Program, and from Duke University. Nai Kim is Novel Dialogue's production intern and designer, Claire Ogden as our sound engineer. And I should say that other recent and upcoming dialogues include Bruce Robbins speaking with Orhan Pamuk, Kelly Rich with Teju Cole, Elizabeth McMahon with Helen Garner, author of a lovely, I shouldn't say a lovely novel about addiction, but I will, a lovely novel about addiction, *Monkey Grip*.

So James, thank you so much. This has been fantastic and you know much appreciated.

**JR**

No, a real pleasure to meet you. And yeah thanks. Thank you very much. Thank you, Penny for-- I'm sorry I hope I didn't go too much off-piste, but we covered a lot of ground.

**PF**

We did! Thank you, James from me, thanks.

**JP**

It was great. And so from all of us here at the butchers' convention, thank you for listening and we hope to talk to you again soon.