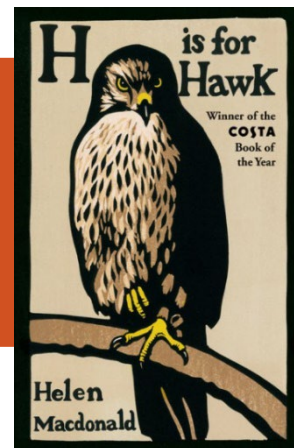




H is for Hawk

Helen Macdonald



Author Background

Helen Macdonald was born in 1970 and grew up in Surrey, England. She studied English at Cambridge University and is currently an Affiliated Research Scholar at the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the university.

An experienced falconer, Helen has written and narrated several radio programs and appeared in BBC documentaries.

Helen has written four books, *H is for Hawk* (2014) being her better-known work which won the 2014 Samuel Johnson Prize and Costa Book Award. In 2016, the book also won the Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger in France.

Helen, naturally, resides in Hawkedon, Suffolk, England!

Book Summary

When Helen Macdonald's father died suddenly on a London street, she was devastated. She had been captivated by hawks since childhood but never been tempted to train one of the most vicious predators, the goshawk, until now.

In her grief, she saw that the goshawk's fierce and feral temperament mirrored her own. Resolving to raise the deadly creature as a means to cope with her loss, she adopted Mabel, and turned to the guidance of *The Once and Future King* author T.H. White's chronicle, *The Goshawk*, to begin her challenging endeavour. The undertaking tested the limits of Helen's humanity and changed her life.

This book is an unflinching account of bereavement and a unique look at the magnetism of an extraordinary beast, with a parallel examination of a legendary writer's eccentric falconry.

Obsession, madness, memory, myth, and history combine to achieve a distinctive and innovative blend of nature writing and memoir.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ When Helen was young, she remembers her father telling her that 'when you wanted to see something very badly, sometimes you had to stay still, stay in the same place, remember how much you wanted to see it, and be patient.' How is being patient important to Helen throughout this book?
- ❖ Helen has lost her father and is grieving. Where did you find yourself drawn to her in sympathy or empathy? Were there times when you found her less sympathetic? If yes, when?
- ❖ "The book you are reading is my story," Helen writes. "It is not a biography of Terence Hanbury White. But White is part of my story all the same. I have to write about him because he was there." How does Terence White's life story help the reader understand Helen's journey?
- ❖ Helen finds her father's photographs help her feel that something of him remains, although he has gone. Does this resonate with your experience of the grieving process? What material things have become important to you after the loss of a loved one?
- ❖ After living several days with her hawk in her flat, Helen observes, "I was turning into a hawk". What do you think she means?
- ❖ How important is human friendship to Helen as she travels through her grief?
- ❖ Helen describes training a hawk in close detail. Does that engage you or are other parts of the narrative equally or more important to you?
- ❖ Helen describes herself as 'a watcher', a characteristic she says has both positive and negative aspects. How does being visible or invisible change in significance as Helen trains Mabel?
- ❖ "Hunting with the hawk took me to the very edge of being a human," says Helen. What prevents her from going over that edge?
- ❖ Ultimately, Helen will stop looking after Mabel. How important is letting go of the hawk to Helen's journey?

References

- ❖ Guides: <https://guides.rcls.org/c.php?g=814916>
- ❖ Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helen_Macdonald_\(writer\)#Biography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helen_Macdonald_(writer)#Biography)
- ❖ Bookbrowse: https://www.bookbrowse.com/reviews/index.cfm/book_number/3175/h-is-for-hawk