

# Hay Festival

**Rebecca:** [00:00:00] Before we start. If you could say your first and last name.

**Caroline:** [00:00:09] Caroline. Caroline, Michel.

**Rebecca:** [00:00:15] Hello, and welcome to Shelf Healing, UCL's bibliotherapy podcast. I'm your host, Rebecca Markwick. Our guest today is Caroline Michel. Caroline has been the CEO of PFD since 2007, before that she headed up at the William Morris agency in London for three years, she has over 25 years worth of experience in the publishing industry and ran both Vintage at Random House and Harper Press, at Harper Collins. She's the Chair of the Hay Literary Festival, Chair of the BFI trust, and was a Trustee of Somerset house. She is also a fellow of the RSA and Vice-President of the London Library. The Hay Festival this year is celebrating its 34th spring edition and has more than 200 acclaimed writers, global policy makers, historians, poets, pioneers, and innovators taking part in events across the 12 days of the festival. The festival will be broadcasting free online from Hay on Wye from the 26th of May to the 6th of June. And in case you hadn't guessed, Caroline is here in her capacity as Chair of the Hay Literary Festival. Welcome to the podcast, Caroline.

**Caroline:** [00:01:18] Thank you, Rebecca.

It's lovely to be here. And God listening to you talk about Hay Festival next week just makes me excited beyond belief. I mean, this, this time a year ago, we did not know what our future was going to be. You know, we, we heard in March, we were shut down. We had everything planned. We, you know, we built a site that holds 350,000 people who come through every year.

And ticket sales are our lifeblood as we are a non-for-profit organization. So we rely on people coming through, people seeing things, becoming an admin to pay coming back year after year. And it's, it's rather remarkable to be here now a year later. When we've transferred the festival to digital in every country around the world that we run the festival.

So, Hay last year it was incredible. Within two weeks, our sponsors agreed to stay put, um, we turned the festival from live into digital and we had over 500,000 people registered from all over the world, come and listen. Uh, and it was, it was one of the most exciting moments. I think that I can remember. We had 74 different countries come. People from 74 different countries have come and listen to events. We had very clever, well, then it felt very new and exciting having the chat room at the side. So people as they almost as if they were in a queue, anywhere in the world were meeting each other on the side of the screen, as we waited for the speaker to arrive and it was, it was electrifying and exhilarating.

And I think it was that moment that you saw that. People who are inspiring or inspiring on screen, on zoom as they are, you know, almost as much as they are alive. So that gave us the courage to, with our rest, the rest of our festivals around the world and Spain and Columbia and Peru, Mexico, and in creation to also to also run needs as, as digital events, which was all we could do. And so here I am now on the eve of our 34th festival. And over the last year, we've had over 2 million people join our events from all over the world. And that, that to me

is beyond exciting because I think it shows our appetite for learning and listening, being entertained for the pleasure of just listening to people talk about their passions, whether it's science, whether it's history, whether it's politics, but it's ideas, whether it's novels, uh, particularly children.

Um, you know, we, we have, oh, I'm rabbiting on. I just get so excited about the festival. As you can hear.

**Rebecca:** [00:03:57] Yeah, it was, it was so impressive last year, the speed at which you managed to get it turned around because like you said, it wasn't until March and the festival is in May. So it only gave you a couple of months.

**Caroline:** [00:04:11] It was amazing. We have the most incredible team. I got down there. It was literally the weekend before they, they locked everything down. I drove down on, on the Monday morning, sat with the team. We sat in the, um, in the office and just hit the phones, you know, talk to everybody we knew who might support us, give us a bit of money.

The board, incredible Hay Festival board, who literally spoke to, you know, everybody who might be able to help us in Welsh government and just everywhere. And the team without flapping without, you know, blinking twice, just set to, to set, you know, to create the most remarkable online festival. And I think, I think our writers and our participants, but just which is, you know, nobody for a second said, no, um, it's never going to work or no, I'm not going to do it.

They just think just the engagement and the goodwill from everyone from us sponsors, our patrons, our friends up, you know, the normal people who come and expecting a live event. Just everybody seemed to think, okay, this is what we have to do. This is what we'll do. So it was really lovely and it was lovely hearing people say they sat around their kitchen table as a family and watch the events for kids. The family events, the big events with some of our sort of main stars of, of last year. And, um, and it it's happened like that around the world. Um, Cristina Fuentes who runs our international festivals this morning, sent me a note from somebody in Columbia and he said, you know, through a time of darkness, the festival brought light, you know, through a time of bleakness, when you felt there was nothing to look forward to, there was hope, and it it's one of the, and we've had notes like that from people around the world.

And it's, it's been, it's been extraordinary, very humbling. I love that after Cartagena this year, the newspapers cause Cartagena in Columbia is a it's a, it's a very, very contained festival. It's in the beautiful parts of the old city and the events we can, we can seat a couple of thousand people. But it, it feels because it just contained, it feels that.

And because we ran it digitally, we reached a million people and the newspaper said this was culture democratized. And it was a wonderful thing to think that we give more people the opportunity to take part.

**Rebecca:** [00:06:36] Yeah. And that leads quite nicely into the question that I ask all of our guests here on Shelf Healing. Which is, do you feel that reading can be therapeutic?

Obviously, many people feel that if you've got a million people calling into to watch the festival in Columbia, but do you personally feel that reading is therapeutic?

**Caroline:** [00:06:57] I, um, I think reading is as natural as breathing, you know, I, I, I, you know, it's my life basically, you know, it's my career.

It's my passion. It's I can't imagine a moment where I'm not with a book or pages of the manuscript or I panic if I'm not. So it's not even so much therapeutic as a necessity for life. For me, you know, some, I can't remember as a child, I went to boarding school at the age of seven and I can remember my comfort, my joy, my entertainment, my pleasure, my feeling part of the world was through the pages of a book.

And that doesn't mean to say that I was some kind of swot I wasn't at all, but I just felt comfortable between the pages of the book. Hmm.

**Rebecca:** [00:07:47] I love that. That's such a brilliant way of putting it, you know, comfortable within the pages of a book. What, what kind of books do you tend to reach for then if you want to relax or get away from like work reading into more pleasure reading.

**Caroline:** [00:08:01] I didn't do English at University. Um, so I've got massive holes, you know, a lot of, uh, So I've worked with just the greatest writers in the world and, you know, Hay puts you into the area with writers from all over the world. And I'm, I'm so embarrassed so much at the time that I didn't grow up with. That innate knowledge of, you know, the great big reads from various countries.

And so, and I came to it all quite late, but I was very lucky, very early on because my husband ran Faber and Faber and I'd always loved poetry. And when I was, when I left, I did postgraduate law and I was terrible at it and left and went to work for a poetry magazine run by a friend of mine. It was called, it was run by William Cookson. Agenda.

Agenda. And it was run by a man, a brilliant man called William Cookson. And the magazine had been started by Ezra Pound and I was an editorial. I did it just, I had no other job just being a sort of junior editor at this magazine. I loved writing poetry. So I used to write poetry under an assumed name and send it in.

And my job was to read all the submissions. So I would take my poetry under different names. This is really good. William, look how this look, how this, this young person has just described, you know, the sunlight or the falling of leaves. What did he say? This is such crap right back. And just say so I would write my own rejection letters.

And I think, I think, um, I think my passion for poetry has always has always been there when Matthew, Matthew and I got together and got married. Of course it put me in the heart of some of the greatest poetry in the world. And I didn't have a great knowledge of, you know, uh, Eliot and um, Yeats, um, Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney, but I came to know their poetry through, um, through just, just being with them, hearing them, going to their, going to their readings.

And so I have, by my bedside, Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes is the *Rattle Bag*, which has the most fabulous collection of poetry. And there's one in it called *Donal Óg* that Ted used to read about a woman. It's, it's a medieval Irish pen translated by Lady Gregory about a woman who's left by the man she loves, of course, and it has those wonderful lines that kind of Auden echoes in *Stop All the Clocks*. You know, he was my north, my south, my east, Before we start. If you could say your first and last name,

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**Rebecca:** [00:10:40] Hello,

and welcome to shelf healing. UCL's bibliotherapy podcast. I'm your host, Rebecca Markwick Our guest today is Caroline. Michel Caroline has been the CEO of. PFD since 2007, before that she headed up at the William Morris agency in London for three years, she has over 25 years worth of experience in the publishing industry and ran both vintage at random house and Harper press, at Harper Collins.

She's the chair of the hay literary festival, chair of the BFI trust. And was a trustee of Somerset house. She is also a fellow of the RSA and vice-president of the London library. The hay festival this year is celebrating its 34th spring edition and has more than 200 acclaimed writers, global policy makers historians, poets, pioneers, and innovators.

Taking part in events across the 12 days of the festival The festival, will be broadcasting free online from Hay on Wye from the 26th of May to the 6th of June. And in case you hadn't guessed, Caroline is here in her capacity as chair of the hay literary festival. Welcome to the podcast, Caroline.

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**Caroline:** [00:18:26] I didn't do English at university. Um, so I've got massive holes you know, a lot of, uh, so I've worked with just the greatest writers in the world and, you know, Hay puts you into the area with writers from all over the world. And I'm, I'm so embarrassed so much at the time that I didn't grow up with that innate knowledge of, you know, the great big reads from various countries.

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And then Josephine Hart used to run, um, she was passionate about poetry and she used to run these evenings at the British library where she would introduce a poet and poems would be read by actors. But I just had so many more poets that way. I discovered the poetry of people that are obvious to everybody else, like Sylvia Plath and many others.

And, um, I like just, I just love poetry.

**Rebecca:** [00:21:45] We love poetry on this podcast. We only get a few people that come on and chat about poetry, but every time it comes up, there's so much love for poetry that you can really tell that shines through. And I wish we had more people to come on and chat about fabulous poetry.

Gotta love some poetry. You are the Chair, obviously, of the Hay Festival. What's your absolute favorite part about bringing the festival to people?

**Caroline:** [00:22:08] I think it's, um, you know, I came to, Hay I think I was probably at the very, very first, Hay uh, when it was in the school yard, it was in school. In fact, it hay and it was always pissing with rain and it was always, the mud is the sort of red that I find on my shoes and clothes um, still today, you know, from the last year or the year before. And I, um, you know, I remember Peter Floren phoning me up and saying, I'm going to do this festival in Hay do you think, and I can't remember, I was at Jonathan Cape, or something, and do you think authors will come? And I said, well, let's have a go.

And I remember bringing, saying to authors, you know, everybody from, you know, kind of Tony Morrison to Tom Wolfe, You know, just incredible writers, would they, would they be



interested in going to Hay? And at that point, I think there was Cheltenham and Edinburgh, and that was it really and there's something about, Hay, that is spellbinding.

I think even now in all, its splendor all over the world, but there's something about Hay about magic that, that everybody who has been involved in Hay and putting the whole festival together over the years has created just it is that incredible magic, but that it's the, it's the land itself. That's arriving though with this extraordinary kind of greenery around you.

And then I can remember being in the tents as they were whipping in fury and the kind of wind and rain again, listening to Ted Hughes or Seamus Heaney the feeling that you were in the middle of this unbelievable happening and the music and the humor and everything seemed to work at Hay whether you were listening to a novelist who was in a venturing chai and unknown onto the stage for the first time or, or a scientist who is explaining to you something that you never thought you'd ever understand and seeing, and hearing, or walking the aisles and bumping into all your literary heroes or your, or politicians, however much you might've felt hatred or scorn or contempt.

It's rather amazing bumping into them. And then, I think the magic of that was that, that essence of, Hay the fact that it's full of it's fearless, it's imaginative, it's creative, it's clever. It doesn't do the obvious. It puts people together. It wants to, it wants to surprise you the whole time that you could transfer that to.

I mean, we've been in over 30 different countries over the last 34 years, and now, you know, we have six or seven solid festivals worldwide and again in Cartagena on a rooftop one night I turned to this American woman who's flying in from New York. And I said to her, have you ever been to Hay? And this is, you know, under the stars, thousands of miles away from those green hills and this woman turned to me and she said, but this is, Hay. You know, Hay is where the festival is, where the writers are, where our incredible team has, you know, pitched up and somehow created this alchemy of ideas.

**Rebecca:** [00:25:16] I remember my, my main day job. Uh, I work with horses and a lovely friend of mine, Lara Prior Palmer. And I think it must have been 2019. Her new book, *Rough Magic* came out. She sent me a message a week before Hay and said, I want to ride Alfie into Hay can you take me? Because she can't tow and she's only got a trailer.

So I rocked up to where Alfie lives. We put him on the trailer and I drove him all the way to Wales dropped her off in some very, very tiny road in Wales. And then set her free really? And she spent three days riding across Wales to turn up at the Hay Festival to chat about her book with Alfie, her lovely horse.

And it was wild.

**Caroline:** [00:26:02] I remember that I went to that one. I remember that because I went to that, um, I think it was quite a wet Hay that year too. I remember that because I think it must've been a friend of mine who knew her said you should really go. And yeah. And that's, that is the most incredible thing about, Hay is that, you know, you can things that you've never thought you'd be interested in. I'm a city woman, you know, there's no way I could be,



you know, but she had done such an incredible journey and had such an extraordinary story. And that's, that's the magic of it is that you turn up on, you know, it could be nine o'clock on a really cold wet May morning in Hay in a tent that's not quite warm enough yet with everybody's smelling of damp dogs. They haven't quite dried out from the day before. And you are spellbound. You forget everything other than what you're hearing in front of you.

**Rebecca:** [00:26:51] Definitely. Yeah. And having known Lara for a long time, I feel like Lara and Hay are very much the same thing, you know, spontaneous fun, that's very unusual, but always enjoyable. Are there any particular events this year that, or talks that you're looking forward to particularly this Hay Festival?

**Caroline:** [00:27:10] I think, I think that it's, um, I mean, it's a, it's really interesting, yeah, this year, because it's, you know, how can we ever, ever try and understand the year that we will live through in terms of a wellbeing turned upside down with this pandemic.

And yet, you know, it's, it's been creatively, I think, one of the most exciting, and I think it's reflected in the programming. You know, one of the things that a lot of publishers have said to me is how desperate it's been for new novelists this last year, because what's really sold during pandemic books have done incredibly well in all formats and print, in E, and audio. Audio has had an extraordinary kind of acceleration of growth, but debut novelists what's sold has been well-known names and backlist, which has been fantastic.

You know, people returning to the names that they knew, but for a debut novelist, you know, no bookshops, nowhere to go and do a signing or do a reading or do. Nothing. So we've got, um, every night we have a new novelist talking about their, their novels, which I think is going to be really, really exciting. And then through the pandemic, we've lived through some extraordinary, awful things and the killing of George Floyd.

So Lemn Sissay is presenting sort of three part series where we're going to explore race and change that's needed and all those challenges, you know, it's some 300 years since our first prime minister, I think there's never been a better time to look at what it means to be a leader in a global world.

So we'll be looking at, but we have Cop 26 happening at the end of the year. I think climate change was one of the biggest and most important issues. So. Lots of conversations around that and the wonderful lore of beats looking at, you know, gender and sexuality and so on. And with all the children's stuff, we have Hay Days, we've got every children's author you've ever imagine appearing and being creative and full of ideas and imagination.

So there's all sorts of things where we're doing something different this year. We're starting. Um, each we're starting the best in ending the best book with a gala where we have writers, actors, um, you know, everybody you can imagine coming and doing readings and talks and things. So, so there's really something for everybody there.

Um, it's, it's very, very exciting and, you know, just lovely to be part of that and see it all, all arrive. I'm just trying to find some of the names of the people that we've got, because it just grows and grows and grows at the gala.. Cause it is, it is quite loose, but everyone from The

Duchess of Cornwall to, um, Stephen Fry to just, just incredible kind of nights, Simon Shama, just wonderful, wonderful people, um, from all walks of life.

I think that's the, you know, that's the beauty of being able to do, to do this virtually as well, because then we can have Mario Vargas Llosa wherever he is in the world. We can have Isabella and if wherever she is in the world, um, and have, uh, bring Hay in different countries to be part of the event from Hay and yet, try and make it feel as local as possible.

You know, it was still, um, we're going to base it from, um, Richard Boone's bookshop, um, and we'll have shots of the town we're going to put up bunting the town. So, and say that. So that Hay, Wales feels like Hay, Wales.

**Rebecca:** [00:30:33] That sounds absolutely fantastic. And you said earlier that obviously the festival being online has allowed more people to be part of the festival. As you said there was a whole, a million people at a festival in Columbia and also Hay Festival, usually max out at, I think like you said earlier, again, 350,000.

**Caroline:** [00:30:52] No, we, we have about, yeah, we have about normally about 24,000 in Cartagena, but it's, I think, I think we'd because we were going to try and do hybrids in Cartagena in January, but it became clear that we had to be taken virtual.

We could not believe the engagement, you know, it's it's, you have people who register and then you, you, you think, okay, it'd be wonderful that they'll register. And they come to an event to have a million people attending, um, across the whole of Latin America. And of course, we now work very easily in Spanish and in English with simultaneous translation and so on.

So, uh, festivals are open, you know, whether you are, when you in Cartagena or you're in Peru where you're in Segovia or Mexico, if you don't speak Spanish, it is not a problem in the translation is fantastic.

**Rebecca:** [00:31:44] Mm. So from the sounds of it we're loving the digital to bring more visitors, more listeners to the festivals. Have you found that you can put on more events and talks as well because it's remote?

**Caroline:** [00:31:59] Well, I think what, what, what we've done is we've used the digital carry on through the year. So we do this, the Hay Festival podcast. We do a monthly book club. Um, we do free programming for schools and we've got various projects like Hay Compass and Brecons Project.

And we have the Hay Player because they really clever thing about you know the team at Hay, um, is that they, they knew very early on the value of, um, recording events, I think, you know, ahead of just about any other festival, um, you know, I've been to virtually every festival across the world in my day job and Hay always recorded.

It recorded, you know, very, very early on both first in audio and then in video, and so what, what it's created is this extraordinary archive, which, you know, really has come into it since we started the Hay Player a few years ago, um, where, you know, the big thing is curation is

being controlled, being able to find what they want and to be able to present it well and where it's in its infancy.

But, you know, we've got 16, 17,000 people who subscribed to the Hay Player and it's growing day by day grows of people interested in. Being able to at any time and anywhere to dip into the Hay archive and to hit that favorite writers and it's, it's a wonderful thing. And I think the, I think what this has happened online too, is how important archive is and how important it is to hear people reading their own work or discussing their own work or there's conversations that we've had that you just never forget.

Um, and to have those caught um, and available is, is, is miraculous and wonderful. So. It's it's a, it's a, it's a fantastic thing. So I think we're really cannot wait to get back to life. You know, we're, we're looking at our winter festival, which has also in Hay which has conditioned being quite small, doing something bigger and bolder if we can in November, but they coming back, you know, sort of full tilt in May next year and around the world.

And yet, well also, I think the lessons that we've learned through the digital, you know, we, we stream into schools, we stream into libraries for the festival. Um, I think they'd love to see us do making the Hay festival in Wales, available of Britain to any school, any library, any community that wanted to make something with it, to be able to provide, um, extra things to give to give it a special feel that it's Hay festival week, wherever you are.

**Rebecca:** [00:34:41] Definitely. And what a lovely festival as well to, to get everywhere, because like you said, you stream it into schools. You have all of the children's talks and events available online as well. I imagine that was probably one of the harder transitions to make, because having been to Hay the kids events are very so almost interactive because kids are quite loud and they, they let you know if they're enjoying it. That must've been quite a difficult change.

**Caroline:** [00:35:09] We ha it's, it's always been an incredibly important part of Hay. Everybody realizes I think that if you can engage a child, you can if you can introduce and welcome a child's world of reading and literature, you provide so much, you provide, um, an escape route.

Quite often, you provide pleasure and entertainment. You provide, um, help in times of trouble and anguish and it's got to be fun. And, um, uh, you know, we have 15,000 school children through Hay normally we run schools, projects in Cartagena and all the places we have festivals, we do big outreach to the schools in all the local areas.

And it's, it's, it's amazing how you capture as much that as you can, when you record, because that's what makes it so unique, you feel the interaction, you feel the joy and you feel children's writers, you know, uh, so you know, the generosity of writers and the people who take part in the festival won't cannot underestimate they give their time if they are so generous with it. So we've been able to borrow more time from people to do the recordings that we need to do as well.

**Rebecca:** [00:36:23] Wonderful. And the Hay Festival has such a huge impact on literary world. Like you said earlier, bringing debut authors to brand new readers, giving longtime

fans of authors access to their favorites. How difficult is it? Do you find to have a good mix of new authors and old authors alongside sort of more topic based panels, especially in the digital sphere where people are choosing which ones they're going to be watching. Whereas at the actual festival, you're more likely to sort of accidentally discover something new. In the digital world you're kind of, you're a bit more, I'll watch this, I don't know who that is, I might not watch that.

**Caroline:** [00:37:03] Yeah. It's its discoverability, isn't it? We've got, we've got a very brilliant comms team run by Chris Bone who is very, very good at getting information out there. So, so before each day, you know, there's a little kind of, thing of this is what's happening today and you know, don't miss this and don't miss that and it peaks your curiosity and, and, and I always, and then I, you know, I would would like, cause I'm pathetic, I have the schedule in front of me and think, oh, that's interesting. I haven't heard about that. And what an interesting topic. And I think it's a it's a combination. That's the sort of fun of when you're there at Hay is catching somebody in the cafe saying, talking about something that looking forward to going to anything.

Oh, I never even thought about going to that and suddenly want to, or overhearing somebody in the queue saying I've booked tickets for this and that because of the reason why, and I think, digitally, you have more opportunity to do that because the social media messaging and how we sort of communicate.

Uh, so it's always, you know, discovery is, is the difficult thing. But I think the thing about Hay, it's, it's a trusted brand. So that if that person is coming to Hay um, the team who have been programming, they didn't, they don't just sort of say, oh yes, that book is published. That book is published. We'll have that person, that person that, and they just.

They want to put together the most interesting, the most diverse, the most original, whether it's, you know, wherever it's come from in the world, whoever is talking about it. It's just, it's, you know, it's just exciting. And you just get caught up in that and you find yourself thinking, oh, I'll just do five minutes of that.

And that's the beauty of digital and you're gripped and that's an hour later, you know, the times that I've just popped into a talk, um, of someone I've never heard of the subject that I find terrifying. And stayed because I couldn't leave.

**Rebecca:** [00:38:56] I think that's the joy of all festivals. Isn't it really discovering something that you would never have gone and seen.

**Caroline:** [00:39:04] Yeah.

**Rebecca:** [00:39:05] And that's wonderful, and has opened your mind to all amazing things. It's wonderful.

**Caroline:** [00:39:10] Absolutely. And it's just the ideas too, cause there are, you know, my, my day job is a literary agent and I cannot tell you the number of writers I found at Hay who, you know, have come in to talk about a subject or an idea they're part of a panel, or they're

part of a discussion or they're you know, and you just, you listen to them and you think, oh my God, that would be the most fantastic book.

Um, you know, or I wonder if they've thought about turning an aspect of that into something. So that it's not just people who've already written it's people who are just, who just full of ideas and certain spears, you know, whether it's, you know, with, with pharma or whether it's with, um, you know, science so or anything, politics, it's just climates everything.

And the other amazing thing is the people who've gone away when they've been at Hay or listen to a talk have gone and done something which has changed their lives or the lives people around them. There's some extraordinary stories about that too. Hmm.

**Rebecca:** [00:40:10] Now the festival has such a huge variety of authors. I think it's what over 200. Isn't it? This year? Yeah. That's a lot of authors. How hard is it to choose who gets a place or do you just keep adding people who you think amazing.

**Caroline:** [00:40:25] No, they are incredibly strict and it's, um, you know, so many people they think just because I Chair Hay that I'd have a vote or I get, I have to tell you that, you know, I have about as much clout as, you know, a dead mouse.

There's just, um, they are very, very, very, you know, they, the team gets together, they decide ideas, the teams, um, and so on, you know, Peter Florence, uh, the years that he's been doing it, you know, each and I named the first four years, absolutely no way, no favours, nothing. And, and the team are like that. You know, they, they put on who, you know, they have very, very, very good ideas and that's what they're going to do.

They're not going to take any bribery from me or anybody else trying to sneak in some of our authors or, or talks or things that I would like to hear. So it is, it's very, it's very fair. They, they talk, they listen, they watch, you know, throughout the, uh, Um, uh, things which are interesting, they, they feel the sort of threads and themes and you know, what people might be interested in hearing because you know, like everything, um, you can have the most brilliant program in the world, but if people aren't interested.

You know, you got to, you've got to wear that to inspire and please, and entertain and provoke our audiences and, you know, and support the worlds around us to support the book, trade to sport, publishing, to support, you know, uh, children in schools, libraries to keep, to keep our world vibrant and alive. It's what a festival does.

**Rebecca:** [00:42:04] I was gonna say, what, what a brilliant way to describe the Hay Festival. Now I've had a quick look, I say quick, there are so many events happening on the scheduled program that you can find on the Hay website. But are there any panels that you would recommend that touch on the topics of comfort reading or reading therapeutically?

I think I saw there was, there was one with the Elif Shafak that looked quite on topic.

**Caroline:** [00:42:28] Yeah. She's always, she's always extraordinary. She's always wonderful. I find it really difficult to say, because if you are happy, um, if you, uh, sitting somewhere, um, and you become actually absorbed, it transforms your state of mind.

I think, you know, if it's virtually, you know, it's a different sort of feeling than sitting in a tent of, um, or a venue of maybe just 20 people or 2000 people. I'm feeling that heavy silence of fascination and somebody when all audience is entranced by what they're hearing or feeling laughter welling up when in some of the comedy or that heavy sadness about.

You know, a memoir or a whatever and, and so it's all, you know, I think festivals are all therapeutic. Every session has something. If it excites you, that's good for you. If it gives you pleasure, that's good. If it provokes you, that's good for you. If it inspires you, that's wonderful. So I would find it difficult to, I mean, I've sat and cried and laughed and, you know, and come away in the end from, you know, many festivals, not just Hay with a sense of wellbeing, but Hay has a particular depth and kind of nuance too, to the way you come away from feeling, you definitely learned something you live, you have enjoyed notes and you will feel transformed.

**Rebecca:** [00:44:16] Definitely. I think that's possibly why the Hay Festival is one of the most well-known literary festivals in the world. I would, I would be very confident in saying, well, I, for one I'm very looking forward to the online Hay Festival this year, and hopefully the big, huge one that you've just described happening later on in the year as well. If fingers crossed. Thank you very much for chatting to me.

**Caroline:** [00:44:40] Thank you. I hope we will see each other next year in Hay.

**Rebecca:** [00:44:45] I hope you've enjoyed this special bonus episode of Shelf Healing this week as I chat with the Chair of the Hay Festival, Caroline Michel, all about this year's 34th spring festival in Hay that is available online. As always, all of the authors are in the show notes and links to the Hay Festival are also in the show notes. I hope those of you who are already going to the Hay Festival online this year really enjoy it.

And those of you who are listening, who haven't signed up, go do it. It's free. I'm sure you will love it. Thanks to Christopher Bone for helping set up this interview and to Nicholas Patrick for our music .