



**Bidisha, Luan Goldie and Zoe Lambert with Joelle Taylor.
Bradford Literary Festival**

Joelle: Hello, and welcome to Bradford Lit Fest for Big Book weekend. My name is Joelle Taylor. And I'm here to channel the debate that should have happened in June during Bradford Literary Festival. Well it's going to happen here now in the digital sphere. I'm very excited to do this. I'm a poet and author myself, but I'm also an activist whose worked a lot in women's activism over the years. Today, this particular panels looking at the feminism strain, strand, that was within Bradford Lit Fest, and we're going to be looking at specific book released last year. It's an incredible anthology of fictional writing, fused with more academic and analysis texts to create a read that is challenging, informative, moving, and just a really good, meaty kind of read. To give you a bit of background about how the book was created. It's out on Comma Press, part of a series of their historical works, and they asked twenty authors to look at the history of protests within Britain and to choose twenty acts of defiance and to look at reimagining them and rewriting them. So here, today, we have three of those authors, each of whom have centred women in the struggle and within their own narratives. So, I would like to introduce first of all, Zoe Lambert. Zoe is an author of a collection of short stories called The War Tour and is a lecturer in creative writing, and literature at Lancaster University. Hi, Zoe.

Zoe: Hiya

Joelle: We have Luan Goldie, who won the Costa short story award in 2017. And whose debut novel Nightingale Point was published in 2019. Hi,

Luan: Hi

Joelle: And finally, we have Bidisha. Bidisha is a writer, TV and radio broadcaster and filmmaker. She's written a lot of books, her most recent of which is Asylum and Exile: Hidden Voices, and most recent films a critically acclaimed An Impossible Poison.

Hello, everyone, and thank you so much for coming to join us today. What I'd like to do to start off with just so that everybody at home knows exactly how we're going to run this. We're going to start with a short reading from each of the authors. And I'll ask a few questions. Perhaps the other panellists would like to pose a few questions. And then at the end, we'll go to more general debate about the use of fictional writing



within political discourse and the centring of women within struggle. So can we start, first of all with Bidisha? Now Bidisha, you wrote a story which looked at Boudicca, and this kind of classic uprising. It's an extraordinary story, particularly in the way that you tell it, but I won't spoil it for the viewers at home. Would you mind reading a short extract from that?

Bidisha: Yeah, I have a really, really short, little, little bit. So, this is where they are led by Queen Boudicca, who is the Iron Age Queen and they're going straight into a battle so that happens halfway through.

“We towed slowly uphill as the sun rose and the air thawed until we're on the plain of the valley that tilted up to meet a wood. I heard heavy hooves come up alongside us. It was one of Lucius's men riding a colossal iron grey horse. He shouted in a constant peel. They're here. They're here. They're here. Our convoys split up, the queen and her aides rode to meet the enemy head on. The healer and her apprentices branched off to set up a camp for the wounded and the family groups diverted to sheltered land lower down the valley. We warriors streamed behind our queen on foot and on horseback screaming and beating our weapons. We held aloft our spears and knives, our long swords and stolen broad swords our field workers scythes, even jagged stones while others fisted their bright oval shields proudly. My friends and I gathered pace and in that wild gallop, I found all the hate words I'd stored up spewed from my mouth in a revolting flood.

My voice was unrecognizable to myself. It was rough and bitter as poison. We raced up the slogan crammed together so tightly that my horse became frightened and reared up on its back legs, twisting in panic. I lost my seat and fell. The horse thudding down beside me. It scrambled up and bolted, slowing only when it was near the family carts where it paced tossing its head and trembling. I righted myself and ran with all the others pounding towards the wood. We drew closer, crushing in together. I saw the Roman army standing above us, the shadowy wood at their back. At last, we were to fight our occupiers and rid them from our land. And so the battle began.”

Joelle: Fantastic, thank you so much Bidisha. And it's really interesting you chose that point. So there's so much in the story of Boudicca, I think we're brought up to believe of Boudicca as the kind of she was the Iceni queen, and the last kind of gasp of the original inhabitants of Britain, before the Romans invaded, kind of fighting back. But within your story, it's very nuanced. So, it's very layered. One of the things I want to pick up on straight away is the use of violence in the story, which I think is very rare within stories where we talk about these kinds of uprisings. What can you tell me about? Why did you choose to kind of, sort of bring up the brutality of the resisters?



Bidisha: Well, the Roman Empire and all empire and colonization is a violent act. And exactly as you say, Boudicca's story is one of male violence. So it's patriarchal violence in the sense of colonization and occupation. But it's also that Boudicca was dishonored because, once her husband died, it was like, she had no protection from the Roman Empire at all. And so the male slaves in her house ransacked her house, her daughters were raped. So she came to her radicalization process through male violence. And what I love about the story is that she externalizes her anger and the character in the book, the character who's narrating it says, well, it took my queen, you know, one night to get angry and act on it. And it took me longer because the narrator of the story is also a survivor of sexualized male violence and it takes her 13 years. So she's 40 when she's narrating the story and Queen Boudicca is actually younger than her. And I love the externalization element of it. I absolutely think that anger is a good thing, as long as you don't store it inside and let it give you an ulcer. If you act on it, then actually, it feels very, very positive. So, I love the element of, of action, and it was an extremely violent time. The other thing is that everyone worked on the land. You're an occupied force, you have been kept down through brutality. And so, the idea that there are women warriors and women military leaders is not completely and utterly unheard of.

Joelle: Yeah, I mean, it's so very rare that you get to hear about women kind of being this, this sort of violent and brutal. It's one of the things that I found really engaging about the story makes it much more real.

Bidisha: Yeah.

Joelle: And you talk, you say explicitly within the book, this is a war of wronged women. And these women are kind of evoking the goddess Andraste who is the goddess of war. Is this something that was in the centre of your approach to writing the story? I know that colonialism is a huge strand within it. Or did you want to write it because this is a kind of classical? Or a really good example of the wronged woman's story, the initial, the origins?

Bidisha: Yeah, I think that's absolutely right. I think part of the reason that Boudicca as a figure has survived for so many centuries, I mean, she was active in 61AD, so it's been a long time, is that she taps into every person's inner core of rage and that it's specifically gendered. You know, it's about male violence. It's about the rage that you feel and the powerlessness that you feel as a witness or a victim or a survivor of, of male violence of that kind and it's about violence at various different levels. So all of the characters, whether they're men or women in the story, they, they're living with political violence and military violence and personal violence and



poverty. And so when Boudicca leads her army, it's like you're seeing the absolutely cathartic, busting out of decades and decades of rage. I mean, the fact is that Boudicca's rebellion didn't work, she wasn't successful and the Roman Empire carried on for many hundreds of years afterwards. But she was so angry that there's actually a burned layer, archaeological layer in the land. That's how we know about her. Like, that's how angry she was. And I have to say, I'm an incredibly angry person myself, and I externalize my anger a lot. And I'm physically, I physicalize my anger so I really responded to the idea that she was so angry, she literally left a mark,

Joelle: She burned free. A woman's fury. So, the last question I've got for you is something slightly more technical, and now I'll be asking all of you so maybe we can all talk about - is what was the process like, writing a story from a historical characters perspective? Is it evidenced or is it imagination or is it a mixture of everything?

Bidisha: It's, that's a brilliant question, and it's part of the funness of the process. I deliberately chose Queen Boudicca because it's pre the Industrial Revolution. So they lived in huts with, with branches for walls and thatch on the roof. Actually, there isn't lots and lots of evidence about Queen Boudicca, like the idea that we have that she's this beautiful, muscular woman with gorgeous, long, goldy red hair. That's actually all kind of editorialization that happened afterwards, I read lots and lots of books about what it was like to live in an Iron Age settlement. There is a lot of archaeological evidence about that, generally. And so you find out that they were really fantastic at making, at weaving clothes, great jewelry, good with weapons, and you build it up from that. But a lot of it is just having that research there because it's just so incredibly rich and inspiring. And in terms of the characters, I don't think human nature has changed in millennia. So, if women and girls were angry, then we're still angry now and also afraid of war and conflicted about war. All of those feelings would still have been there. Plus, they weren't middle classes. They were living off the land and really quite, quite ready to fight. So, it's quite refreshing, where you have characters that don't have lots and lots of qualms about going to war. They just did it.

Joelle: Okay, fantastic. Thank you. This leads us actually quite perfectly into my next author, Zoe Lambert. Zoe, you wrote a short story called Seeds of Hope, and it's a story which surrounds the action that involved 10 women, full and direct action, who broke into a BAE base to sabotage a Hawk Jet. The Hawk Jets were complicit in the East Timor genocide and the story looks at the power of collectivity, sacrifice courage how women organize together.



Could I ask you to read a section from that, please?

Zoe: Sure, My story begins actually at the end of the action when they are acquitted in Liverpool Crown Court. But I'm going to read a little bit from the middle about the action itself.

“On that January night, the security guards had finally arrived at five in the morning, shocked to find three women in the hanger. They escorted Jo and the other two hammerers after hours of waiting and telephoning, leaving a message on John Pilger's answerphone, his number found from directory inquiries, then calling Angie whose role was to openly do press work and make a second attempt if theirs failed. They finally got through to the Press Association, who were incredulous when Jo told them to call BAE.

One of the guards sat Jo, Andrea and Lotta down in the lodge to wait for the police. “You're the women who've been leafleting at the gates’. They nodded, still shivering despite their body warmers and heavy coats. ‘This will warm you up.’ He handed them steaming mugs of tea, as if they were the victims of a crime, not activists who'd hammered on a Hawk Jet, causing £1.5 million worth of damage, before arranging pictures of smiling Timorese children around it, turning it into a shrine with seeds and ashes.

It felt like an age since they caught a train to Preston at 6pm and waited in Pizza Land for the last bus to Warton, barely able to eat the garlic bread and pasta they'd ordered, a holdall of crowbars, bolt cutters and hammers tucked under their table. The court hadn't believed they travelled by public transport. But after the bus dropped them at Warton, they had taken up a position behind a hedge, not far from the perimeter fence waiting for the security patrol. Snow still lay on the ground, crisp beneath their boots, their noses already cold. On reccies they had learned that the Sunday patrols only passed every two hours, whereas other nights it was half an hour as if BAE didn't expect trespasses on the day of rest. Once the patrol had gone, Lotta fished the bolt cutters out of the bag and cut a small discreet hole in the fence. Andrea and Lotta climbed through while Jo took one of our peace cranes from her bag and tied it above the hole. The floodlit hanger was barely a hundred meters away. As the others ran up the steep bank towards it, Jo checked the crane, took a deep breath, and run after them.”

I'll stop there.

Joelle: Thank you so much. Absolutely brilliant. So Zoe, as you were reading that I was transported back to Greenham common. And as I read your short story as well, I was like, this is the kind of activism that I grew up on. What made you, What drew you to this particular story and in this particular movement?



Zoe: I think it was because it was part of that peace movement of that era. They were, and I like the fact that it was in the northwest, I'm from the northwest. This happened in Preston, and it's not that far from where, you know, from where I'm from, and I was really inspired by a group of women who did this action and they were the first all women group of Ploughshares activists. Ploughshares had been going for quite a while and then and in the movement the participants took personal responsibility to disarm weapons in a non-violent and peaceful manner. But prior to their group, all the hammerers, the ones who had done the dirty work had all been men. So, and often the women for whatever reasons, they noticed, Jo noticed, that they ended up taking on a supportive role. So, they wanted it to just be all women, and for them to work together. So I guess it was just it was because it was a by women that really inspired me.

Joelle: Yeah. How did this effect do you think the organizing structure and what was looked at in particular, the preparation workshops? There's a part in the story where they look at the preparation workshops, how is everyone going to deal with the fact that you might get 10 years in prison? So how does their womanhood affect that?

Zoe: Well, they viewed all ten members as equally important. And they took mutual decisions over everything, there wasn't a leader. In my first draft, I, for some reason, I over overestimated and one of the members influence so I had to re-write when Jo read it. She was like, 'No, no, It wasn't me or Angie telling everybody, we worked together. And they did a lot of, I think they did a lot of preparation work where they supported each other, talked things through, really, they spent two years preparing for this many weekends at each other's houses. And through it all, there was a sense of mutual support, which I found was really interesting that really came out of Greenham common, out a lot of the values that, of that era.

Joelle: So you're talking about Jo Blackman, Jo Blackman was one of the actual activists who were involved in this incredible moment in history. And how closely did you work with her? It's really interesting. She wrote the afterword and my immediate question was like, and you know how much to-ing and fro-ing was there between you and Jo?

Zoe: Well, I interviewed Jo and Angie Zelter together for a day, I went and spent a day with them. And that was really amazing because they're such wonderful women. And then, I don't know, I had to go away then and do some research and sort of let it all filtered through to write the story. And I think it was a strange experience for them, because they were the subjects of my story. So it was, that was



- yeah, that was a little tricky at first in the writing process, because I wrote a draft but then I sent it to Jo and basically had, you know, she could check it through and see and, and then I did whatever she wanted in the story went.

Joelle: So you were faithful to the true story and the voice of those original women protesters.

Zoe: Yeah, I really tried to be. At one point I dressed to Jo in tweed and Jo never wore tweed, so I took that out. I don't know where I got that from. So yeah, so I was, I was really faithful.

Joelle: Was that really challenging as a writer of fiction? This is what you are known as, as imagining stories. So how can we use our imagination in political discourse to kind of further the issue do you think?

Zoe: I think it's, I think it's really important because when you when you write a story, that the reader becomes engaged with, and they kind of emotionally become part of the story when they're reading it. So, I think fiction has a real and as well as creative nonfiction, the techniques of fiction have a really important role to play. And I think, I think that's, I think, in the whole book, I think you can really see that the, how the stories draw you into these moments in history, in ways that history, the writing of history doesn't.

But overall, I think there's a really a nice interplay between the imagined writing and the imagination, and then the essay and the account with it that gives you more context and history that if you tried to put that into a story, it would be a bit clunky.

Joelle: Yeah. Yeah. Well, thank you very much for that. I think it's a really, it's really excellent for me to see myself in a sense represented in a short story. And this is what I get from the whole of the anthology. It's, it's a very empowering book to read. So now we're gonna go on to our final author, Luan Goldie. Hi, Luan, thank you so much for waiting. So, you wrote a short story called The Done Thing, which is a story that kind of astounded me in its perspective. It looks back at the Ford Dagenham women's strike of 1968, which as you know, is credited with kind of being the catalyst for the Equality Act of 1970, I think I am correct in saying, but it looks at it from the perspective of a granddaughter who's both kind of migrated class, you get this sense that she's from a working class background, but she's moved to a more middle class and she's even left the UK and is living in the States and it's how she processes this story. So, would you do us a reading, please?

Luan: Yeah, sure, very short reading - The Done Thing.



“Gran picks up a pair of heart-shaped sunglasses from the sea of crap on sale. The stall holder lifts a tiny mirror and smiles encouragingly. Ben whistles, ‘Looking good Mrs A.’ Mrs A? Why has he started talking like The Fonz. He never talks like this when we’re back in America. It’s one of the hundred annoying habits Ben’s taken up since we arrived at Heathrow. ‘You don’t think I’m too old for them?’ Gran asks, tipping the glasses down her nose, doing her best Lolita impression. ‘You? Old? Never.’ Ben tries a pair on too, with eyes shaped like flamingos. He nods along to the whiny Drake song from the stall holder’s phone. He’s being goofy, but Gran seems to like it, she seems to like him. At least someone does. He’s gone down very badly with my dad the last few days. ‘Five quid,’ Ben shouts in a fake British accent, ‘bargain.’ Again, Gran chuckles. ‘Told you, it’s cheap here. Everything is cheap.’ She’s right, Dagenham Market is cheap. It’s also shit.

‘Do you have markets like this in America?’ Gran asks. ‘Of course there’s markets in America,’ I say. ‘But where we live they’re a bit more artisan you know? Handmade soaps, truffles, limited prints, that sort of thing.’ ‘Oh no,’ she says, ‘truffles. Sounds all a bit pretentious’ Pretentious. She’s talking about me. Gran slows, she’s getting tired. I take her other arm. ‘Are you okay? Do you want to sit down?’ She tuts, ‘Oh calm down. I can walk fine.’ ‘Oh Mrs A,’ Ben throws his arm around Gran, ‘You would love Seattle. You’ve got to come and visit.’ ‘Yes, I’ve always wanted to go. I do like Frasier. They show the repeats on Channel 4. Was it really filmed in Seattle? You never know, do you? Like Eastenders is actually filmed outside of London. Cockfosters I think.’ ‘Really?’ Ben says .

They hobble off ahead to find Dad, who insisted on getting a chicken chow mein for breakfast. He sits with his new wife Elaine in the makeshift food court. ‘Didn’t buy anything then?’ Dad says, ‘guess it’s not your sort of thing anymore is it? Now you’re all living abroad?’ ‘What’s living abroad got to do with shopping?’ I say. Dad nods over to Ben and Gran, their heads close to each other giggling about something. ‘1968’ Ben says ‘No way. You must have been a baby.’ And again, Gran laughs. ‘What’s so funny?’ I ask. Instantly she stops and her face falls back to neutral. ‘Your Gran was just telling me about her anarchist past’ Ben says. Gran slaps him on the knee. ‘Oh, stop it.’ ‘I didn’t know that Ford made cars in England’ Ben says ‘They don’t anymore’ chimes Dad ‘we don’t make anything in England anymore.’

Joelle: That’s fantastic. Thank you so much Luan. And so obviously, the thing I want to start up on about this is this subject the Ford women’s strike. Just to explain to people at home what that was - Ford Dagenham strike. All the women seamstresses went on strike because they were graded as lower standard or lower quality. And this happened in - would you like to explain it to everyone actually.

Zoe: Just like you say 1968, the women they walked out. They were paid on the same level as the people that cleaned the factories basically what they what they



did for work, it was seen as unskilled. They were women. So they got what the company thought was a fair It was a fair grading the company thought this is fair pay for what you're doing. But the women - they knew it wasn't. So they did go out on strike to get graded as skilled workers, but they never actually got it at the time. They didn't get it until like 15 years later, actually.

Joelle: Yeah. So this is what I want to ask you about what's so interesting about this story it disrupts this traditional kind of Hollywood narrative of the Dagenham Ford strike. You know, it's been made into a successful film 'Made in Dagenham', and it's also a musical. Why did you decide to come from that angle rather than go for this kind of big sort of blockbuster story?

Zoe: Why? Well, it was when I spoke to Dr. Jonathan Moss, who I worked with on the story and he'd done lots of oral histories with the women and they spoke about the strike. And he just kept saying to me that he found it really hard to talk to the women about the strike because they were always like, 'oh, but it's just you know, it was just the done thing. It was just, it was just a strike' and they made it out to be like the smallest thing they had ever done. They thought it was kind of, like a bit silly almost, that there's a film about it. There's a musical. They're like, what's the big deal, it was just a strike. And they sort of took that attitude about it because they didn't get the grading they wanted. And because back then, one of the women said Ford was just a rowdy place to work. So, things like this were really common. There were always lots of strikes going on. So they really didn't see it as this huge thing. And I thought, that's so interesting. It wasn't how to write the story. It really wasn't. But that's what kept coming across when I spoke to Dr. Moss, and then when I read lots of the oral history, and I thought that's so interesting that to them, it was just what you did. But when I hear about the strike, it's like wow, these women and what they had to do, and they were still making the dinner and doing the school run and on the picket line, and it's incredible, but when you get a bit deeper into it, you see, it's a bit different.

Joelle: So another interesting aspect of the story is rather than tell the Grandmother's story from her perspective and following the Grandmother's story, you chose to tell it from a contemporary perspective. So, it's a Granddaughter who doesn't know about this story from her Grandmother. So can you tell me a little bit about why you chose to write from that perspective and about the tension between the two of them?

Zoe: Well, I was sort of thinking about myself, maybe, because I'm from East London, but I'm originally from Glasgow, and I'm that person who's always asking my Grandparents What was it like back then? What was it like in the war? What was this like? What was that like? And no one was ever interested in telling me any stories about working class life back in the 60s, 70s, they never want to talk to



me about it. So I had that in my head of how frustrating it would be to know that someone in your family has done something like this. But they don't want to talk to you about it, because they don't think it's a big deal. So that that was my thinking behind the character. Just so desperate, tell me something interesting and the Gran's like, 'Stop asking'

Joelle: But also I mean, there is a real sense of a kind of class disparity isn't there within it. She feels it's a failure the Grandma's feel it's not just a failure because they didn't get the equal grading. But also because our husband died at that time. So it was a sense of, she just felt as a loss, and she doesn't want. Yeah, so I want to talk a little bit about class as well, because it's rare you get to hear these stories about what I think of as a migrating class. I'm working class background, but I know that that the people that, you know, my family essentially wouldn't see me in that way. They see me as this more kind of migrant lower middle class. So can you tell me a little bit about how you've incorporated that in the short story?

Zoe: Well, I work in the borough of Barking and Dagenham now. And I am a primary school teacher. So I work at a school in Barking, and you know, being a teacher, and also lots of our parents know that I'm also a writer or a published author. I feel like I'm not really seen as someone from East London who's working class, but to me deep down, that's what I am. So I really wanted to get that across in the story as well. Yeah, like you say that sort of movement between the classes and that, that sort of disconnect, because she is quite disconnected, the granddaughter - she lives off in America. She comes back to Dagenham and wants to show the boyfriend oh look at this amazing market. But then she gets there and she's like, actually, it's a bit crap. And that's sometimes how I think a lot of people who sort of move classes, you do feel that sometimes. You're proud of where you came from, but, you know, sometimes I'm like, this is a bit rubbish. And it's – terrible!

Joelle: I completely identified with that aspect of it. Absolutely. Well, thank you very much. We're going to continue now I'd like to if we can open it up a bit. So take the focus off me asking questions. I'll start us off a little bit and just to generally talk about fictional writing, political fictional writing and its power, perhaps, but also to talk about - my other big question which I ask everybody is, what is women's writing? What is it? So she start off with that? What is women's writing? Bidisha? What do you think of that?

Bidisha: It's a good question. I don't think it's a misplaced question. Women's writing is, whatever women are writing at any one time. It's the same as my answer about what is national culture. It's whatever is happening within the borders of any state at any time, whether that is what I call romantic realism, which people call Chic lit, which I think is very insulting, or it's science fiction, or it's crime. I mean, the fact is that women writers in the UK are enormously successful. We are at the top of the



bestseller list in pretty much every genre we're 80% of fiction readers. And publishing as an industry is dominated by women, and of course, if you slice that class wise and race wise, that's very problematic in lots of ways. But if you're just looking at gender, it's a women's industry, and we're really winning at it. And for a long time, we women didn't get the main literary prizes, but that, after a lot of activism, that's changing as, as well. So my definition of women's writing is whatever it is that we all are typing into our Word document, is what it is. And I do think that we have obviously got a sensibility and a sensitivity towards women's and girls experiences. And that is only to the good because it adds dimension to our work and it doesn't really matter what men's, to me at least, what men's writing is or what they think about what we do.

Joelle: But is there men's writing. Who cares? (laughs)

Well, I guess it's that whole kind of writing from universal eye. Okay, so Zoe, What's your response to that?

Zoe: I don't think men ever have to define their writing in terms of gender do they? They never get asked that question, what's men's writing? And but I don't think all these fights are completely won. Like in universities it's still a big thing not that women's writing isn't taught. And as well as BAME writers as well that you know, we're still fighting those battles that the canon, the literature has been done and it's done is written by written by men so it's still I feel like those, on a daily basis, on a daily level, I'm actually still making sure I teach short stories by women. And I'm not just going back to Chekhov and Carver all the time and, and that diversity is there. So I feel those battles are going on still.

Joelle: Yeah, sure, Luan. What's your feeling?

Luan: Difficult I don't. It's not something I've really thought about that much. But when you're saying how female, like the publishing industry is, I was actually really surprised by that. I mean, I'm quite a new writer only got, my debuts out now. I still feel like I'm really fresh to the industry. And I did expect it to be a lot more men. But when I go into the publishing house, it's all women. I was really surprised by that. And before when I used to work in media publishing, it was, that was all men. So I sort of expected the same thing. So to me, I'm like, this is great. There's loads of women, the class issue I notice in publishing.

Joelle: Yeah, the class issue is very, very apparent, I think when you get into publishing



Luan: Yeah, very shocking. And people say it, people sort of said it to me at the start. And I sort of, Okay, I wasn't expecting it to be all working class people, obviously, but sort of going in when you go into the offices and you're going to the parties. It's like, Oh, wow. This is another level of I mean, some of the conversations.

Joelle: So let's, let's talk a little bit about the narratives that women can tell. Do you feel, I mean, Bidisha, I know what you're going to say you can write about anything you like. And you know, I agree with that as well. But do our agents and publishing houses feel that we can own different narratives?

Bidisha: No, your points exactly right that that just because we at our desks can write anything we want. There's a whole different level of judgment that comes into play as soon as you interface with the industry, itself. And so you see women doing particularly well, but within certain quite narrow boundaries. So Hilary Mantel is doing really well with historical fiction, beautiful, finely tooled deeply researched historical fiction. We always did well in romance, but that was, I think, because it was dominated by women that was massively under respected and really seen as some sort of lesser genre of writing always, in fact, it became the butt of lots of jokes around publishing around that the readership. Writing books about what a mess women are does very well, there's a huge new streak of 'Oh I'm in my 20s, and I'm a complete mess, and I have no idea what's going on', that does very well. So one of my concerns as a woman is that you're allowed to succeed within really narrow preset templates, which often play into pre-existing stereotypes. And that, that bothers me enormously. And absolutely, it's always been true that if a woman writes about a family, it's seen as being small and domestic and interior, whereas if a man write about write about a family and how he doesn't want to be a father and a husband is seen as some kind of universal dilemma, and I think they should know that, you know, the same ambivalence that they feel is shared by us. I mean, I do think that's actually a universal experience. But when women do it, it's somehow put into the little attic at the top of the stairs or the lady's bedroom I do hope that that's changing. But I wanted to say I absolutely take Zoe's point that if you look at syllabi in universities, sometimes just like for my own amusement I go on to the main, the main websites of all the main universities that teach creative writing, and it's literally eight white men and two other. And the others sometimes aren't even women. So, and that's across the board and you just look at who they give the big teaching jobs to, and the big professorships to, they literally give the money in the power to man.

Joelle: So how is it teaching Zoe? How is it teaching creative writing in university when you're sort of struggling against this, this kind of, I guess older white male canon. How do you navigate that?



Zoe: Well, I just make sure that I that my visiting speakers include women, are diverse in every way, that what I teach, and there's is a big movement - decolonize the curriculum is a huge thing at the moment. Students are very aware of this, they you know, they they're aware of what we're teaching them. They're questioning the canons that are on the syllabus as well. But it's, it's difficult I think, in my department, I think we're, it's very warm and everyone's, I think I don't face that on a daily basis. But we do have, you'll notice in many universities, like Bidisha's saying, it's like the big jobs, the big professorships are still often given to given to men. But that's a, that's a difficult thing to deal with. Because there's many, there lots of reasons that build up to people being in a position to have that prestige to be given that role. Um, but I absolutely love teaching creative writing. I mean, it's it takes it takes all my energy, but in many ways, but developing new voices and being part of the new wave. I've got PhD students, one whose just got his first novel coming out. My other one is Vietnamese. And she's published her first novel in the US. So they're about kind of being part of the movement where you're changing things by who you teach, and who you enable is really, really satisfying.

Joelle: Thank you. So, a final thing, obviously, when, when five women get together on a broadcast debate, we talk about women's issues and feminism. So let's end on something about the power of fictional writing within political discourse. Let's talk about that. What is the power? Luan can I ask you what you feel and the purpose and power of fiction is within a political writing?

Luan: Oh, well, you can see it just in Resist the book that came before in the protests movement. But I've been I've purely read fiction, I would never pick up a sort of history, but I just wouldn't. It's just not when I read in bed at night, on the bus, it's to be taken somewhere else. And it's only through fiction, so many of the things that are covered in those books I wouldn't have known about I wouldn't have engaged with and some of the people who've bought this book on my recommendation have said the same thing. Like I didn't know this happened, and I've always heard about the Cable Street riots, but I didn't really know what it was until I read the story. So it's just engaging, isn't it just, just gets different people to find out about things that they wouldn't have before. So you read the piece of fiction and you might go look it up online then just opens you up to new things.

Joelle: Can writing change the world?

Zoe: Yeah.

Joelle: Yeah, Bidisha?



Bidisha: Yeah, I definitely think that the word can change the world and actually a lot of what we saw about the MeToo movement that's been up and running for the last couple of years is that it's based on the word it's based on testimony. It's not based on saying, right, we're going to talk about capital I issues. And here's all my research about that. It's about saying, this is a story, it happened to me, you don't have to believe me, it doesn't matter what your reaction is. I'm gonna put it out there. And because it has the ring of truth about it, it's making a difference. And it's the same when you look at fictional narratives as well. If you say to someone, here's a book about 10 issues, and it's got 10 essays in it. No one wants to read that, it sounds awful. It's like being hectored at. But if you say it's about a woman who meets someone, and she has friends, and they decide to do this thing, which is really rebellious and fun and adventurous and has lots of intended and unintended consequences, and is inspiring then, there's a huge amount of joy in that it's not labor, it's not an education process. It's not something that you put yourself through. It's an experience that's really, really positive. And that's how it works. I mean, we all want the the revolution to happen in two days. And I don't think it happens that fast. But everything goes into the stream.

Joelle: Zoe – you can have the last word. What do you think is the particular power of political writing? Whether it's in prose or poetry...

Zoe: Well I'll go back to what Jo says in her essay with my story, she talks about what's needed to overcome the conditioning we have to be compliant subjects. What it takes to question the obedience that we are conditioned with. To do things, to make a change. And I think that's what fiction can do, it can tell stories that help people start to question the status quo and why we just say 'yes' and what we can do to change things.

Joelle: Civil disobedience

Zoe: Yes

Joelle: Okay, thank you, all of you so much. Bidisha, thank you, Zoe Lambert thank you, Luan Goldie thank you so much for joining me today, Joelle Taylor. And I would like to encourage you all on behalf of Bradford Lit Fest to get a hold of this amazing book. It's called Resist, Stories of Uprising on Comma Press, immaculately edited and curated by Ra Page.

Thank you so much for joining us and stay safe.