

Some communal thoughts on poetry and anti-fascist culture

In the afternoon of the second day of poetry emergency, we took a break from readings and performances to come together in discussion, addressing our communal thinking towards the relationship between (our) poetry and anti-fascism, the place of radical poetry in anti-fascist culture, or, as Danny Hayward, who facilitated the discussion, described it:

The problem of what art making or expressive work or work which is antithetical to normal modes of communication might mean in an attempt to resist the take-over of social institutions by racists and misogynists and their little cheerleading [inaudible] of symbols and mascots.

The discussion's participants included performers, the event's organisers, and audience members, engaged in spontaneous open conversation. The following is a lightly edited transcript of the recording that discussion, with names excised or unknown, rendered up as multiply voiced prose.

Free floating as it is, our conversation drew together an array of perspectives and experiences, which are here re-offered up as stimulus, provocation, a set of vital(ly incomplete) questions, warnings, correctives and beginnings for moving towards an effective anti-fascist thinking, writing and acting, which we might hope to place at the core of the culture which we claim and create, with openness and generosity, as 'ours'.

Voices do not always chime in harmony, perspectives, priorities, & prior knowledges differ, and there are occasional moments of conflict, but we hope in its totality these re-present an ongoing process of collective learning, for us all.

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*By way of introduction to the discussion, Danny read through a series of pre-prepared questions, to which we were invited to attend as we saw fit, and which in themselves invite much attention:*

Can we get through this whole thing without mentioning Ezra Pound?

How can we understand 'anti-fascism'? Is the main object of anti-fascist culture the culture of actual fascists, or an 'authoritarian personality', or 'male fantasies', or what?

To what extent is it necessary to speak in the enemy language (Verity: 'this is almost completely in the voice of reaction')? What are the politics and aesthetics of ventriloquism as aesthetic emetic?

Is anti-fascist culture primarily creative, assimilative or connective?

How does anti-fascist poetry deal with the changing geography of fascism? In the 70/80s the most vital anti-fascist art was made by musicians and poets for whom the word 'fascism' was defined by a conflict around race and class in the contested spaces of deindustrializing inner cities. If the conflict between fascists and anti-fascists is less frequently face-to-face, what amounts to an adequate aesthetic response?

What are the implications for an anti-fascist poetry of the fact that by far the most dominant form of fascist culture in the present in the white male Youtube personality (or, that the culture is overwhelmingly discursive)?

What are the limits of trying to be disgusting?

Anti-fascism as an ideology of art production is inseparable from the deliberate rediscovery of popular forms. But what are the popular forms in contemporary poetry? What can anti-fascist poets draw from them?

If the thought-world of the last question is essentially Leninist, and this is taken to be an undesirable inheritance, then what is an adequate approach to questions of 'the popular' c. 2018?

What practical contribution can poetry make to the boring, destructive controversialising around the politics of 'free speech'?

Are there any significant trends in contemporary language art that, while not fascist in themselves, should be categorically disqualified from any aspirationally anti-fascist cultural practice?

Should anti-fascist poetry fight for ownership of contested but politically neutral categories (nihilism, negativity, rebellion, 'counter culture') etc. or is this a fundamentally losing stance?

How can poetry resist the damaging consequences of the reification or stereotyping of categories like 'fascist', 'anti-fascist', etc.? Is there a sense in which the everyday use of those concepts represents a sort of conditioned stupidity? [I might say something about that before the discussion opens up]

If the object of anti-fascist poetry is the whole social domain of language, rather than (e.g.) the vanishingly marginal and aesthetically insignificant realm of the contemporary poetry of the far right, or of someone who didn't win the Forward Prize, then is there any strip or artery of language as a social domain that should be of primary anti-fascist significance?

The sense in which self-avowed fascists possess 'a culture' is roughly similar to the sense in which most large sports teams possess one (see: centrality of slogans, mascots (Pepe), objects of competitive identification (Milo DESTROYS feminist), etc.). Should anti-fascist artists, poets, etc., be trying to contribute to the production of a parallel culture of equal symbolic articulacy, or should they be trying explicitly to fight against the tendency for anti-fascist culture to assert itself as an opposing 'team'?

What does neutrality mean anyway?

Same question but with nihilism?

Should anti-fascist art be concerned primarily with fascist depravity, or fascist morality?

Is the greatest Popular Front poet Brecht or Celan?

Do aesthetic brokenness or fragmentation ('degeneration') have a fundamentally anti-fascist role, or are they aspects of a self-isolating culture for which politics is an instrument of self-identification?

What is the relationship between the 'anti-fascist' movement and actual fascists?

Is 'anti-fascism' a wider category than fascism? If it is, is this in part due to its roots in popular frontism? Does it need to be narrowed down again?

What about David Aaronovitch?

For contemporary poets, is it most important to think about anti-fascist morality, or anti-fascist depravity?

What defines an aesthetically progressive relationship towards the social category of impatience?

What defines an aesthetically progressive relationship towards the social category of progress?

Is there any more certain way for poetry to ensure its irrelevance than to try to preserve itself?

In what sense does contemporary fascism possess a politics of care?

Is liberal anti-fascism an analysis or an internalised phobia? If it is the latter, what is the politics of the phobia?

Is the category of fascism intrinsically phobic in the majority of its current uses (and therefore inimical to a deeper confrontation with the innumerable petty psychic backlashes that are grouped under its heading)? Or is the content of fascism today really nothing but the umbrella under which sundry backlashes occur?

What poems of the last 30 years most effectively attack the expressive division of labour?

What are the basic aesthetic characteristics of latent anti-fascism?

In connection with this, is there a progressive side to poetry's fundamental individualism, in spite of its bad smell of overripe afflatus?

When did you last read an article about the global financial crisis in (say) the newspaper?

We are sensitive to the operative contradictions of the culture of the far right. We know how ridiculous it is that fascist nerds spend all of their time pontificating about white culture and yet think that the greatest music ever recorded is by Metallica. We likewise see straight away the discrepancy between their defence of conservative cultural values and their obsessive meme posting. But are we less sensitive to the operative contradictions of anti-fascist identity?

Should anti-fascist art try to contribute to the formation of anti-racist, anti-sexist working-class identities, or should it fight against the category of social identity and the social circumstances that cause people to need such a thing?

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The discussion:

One clarification – in a way it feels boring for me to talk about antifascist culture, not just because I've talked about it a lot, just like almost everyone has I suspect in the last few years, and because it's difficult to make progress in abstract discussions of culture independently of discussions of actual work, things that people are doing – but also because I feel like in a sense the whole inheritance of the dominant culture is antifascist. I don't mean that it's dominated by antifa, that obviously isn't true, but a stereotyped understanding of Nazism, and the political status of western liberal democracy in defeating Nazism, is drilled into almost everyone's head from the moment we go to school, and we all carry around these tropes or historically generated archetypes of what fascists are and how they get beaten, which are difficult to expunge or to push out of ourselves in order to see what happens to be going on right in front of us right now. I don't know how to deal with that exactly but it feels like that fact about our socialisation as citizens – of western european and north American states – has some bearing on where discussion of what an active antifascist culture that is adequate to our society now might be.

In relation to that last point – on the one hand I see what you're saying about this inheritance of anti-fascism – everyone is nominally against fascists except actual fascists, right – but that category of people who are nominally against fascists includes people with basically fascist ideologies, and includes the vast majority of the apparatus of dominant cultural production which is extremely tolerant of fascist things being said and done, or extremely willing to perpetuate and allow and engage with open discussion about the validity of fascism without explicitly saying so. That disjunction seems really important in the question of the difference between an antifascist culture where everyone admits that the nazis were bad, and an actual antifascist culture, either in terms of confronting fascists or – and I think this is also an important distinction in what we might mean – being anathema to fascists. These are slightly different things that an antifascist culture might be. But the vast majority of popular culture doesn't do either at all, whilst it may wish to, or believe itself to, or, more problematically, believe that to be done with and therefore not a matter of address.

Coming from somewhere where the first language isn't english, I sometimes feel like in places where the first language is english, because they have such a universalising spread, there is a tendency to see many things, but maybe particularly fascism as well, in a way that is global in a certain sense, because anything that's produced in a place where the language is english has to have that reach of reaching other places – and also there's an attempt to make it universal, whereas, [in other parts of the world], any conversation around fascism is much more situated in history and regional struggles and things of that sort.

That's a good context for what I was going to say. I don't want to assume a) that everyone in the room has the same understanding of what fascism is, b) that everyone has the same level of engagement with these many many questions, but I think that what [x] said is absolutely true – that a lot of people think that probably when you're having this discussion, you're thinking about anti-fascism as being against like, the EDL – so, organised popular street fascism in the uk – so I wanted to set this and say some facts about those things, because people aren't always aware. Like, there are big mobilisations in this city, and in London, and other smaller places. Like in leeds we have these kind of pop-up Tommy Robinson demonstrations, they happen very quickly and people don't know about them. Basically there's this evolving street popular right wing stuff which is very strong at the moment because those people are making alliances with each other, or at least it has a possible strength because e.g. Tommy Robinson and UKIP are now working together, despite the fact that the edges of those politics are very

different and probably not reconcilable. And then we've got The State. So when [x] is talking about having had a fascist state – we don't carry that stuff with us. So it's worth saying that now, because if we have these discussions about culture and what we do etc, I think how we speak or how we are in relationship to the state is, for me, often quite different from like, mobilising and being present [at demonstrations], and there are practical things to talk about there.

I think in an anglophone context, we maybe think about the universal qualities around fascism, and we maybe aren't thinking about how [fascism] is manifested in national, geopolitical contexts. And that's also this question of what fascism are we talking about – are we talking about the EDL, or Bolsanaro and Modi at the same time, and can we have that conversation at the same time? And... In response to the comment that we have a generally antifascist culture in Britain because we're taught that the nazis are bad – that's about empire. Whilst we're taught that the nazis were bad, we're given no critical education about the politics of empire, Britain's deep colonial history, and how the contemporary emergences of fascism are completely inextricable from that politics of empire. And simultaneously, it's also about how we think through antifascism in relation to anti-racism, and is that even separable? Even in the first five minutes of this discussion, I'm thinking about what are the important bits of British antifascist cultural politics or culture for me, and it's culture from the 70s and 80s that's predominantly produced by black and brown people, which is antifascist and also anti-state – again coming back to this question of, who are the powers that you're trying to push against? Is it the person who's going to beat you up for being brown, or is it the cops who are gonna come and arrest you? So I think there's this question about empire and you really can't extricate that out, and it's also about the complicity of whiteness within anti-fascist culture, so think about how that's constructed.

Or is it about Theresa May talking about a hostile environment?

My question is – are there any poets we know about who've got fascist sympathies? On our scene, etc?

Not worth thinking about. Or reading.

They do exist. I've been at events where someone has done an anti-muslim poem. And they've been told that that wasn't ok in the space, but they exist and they think they have the right to say these things. Particularly in the performance poetry scene, it can be quite broad and there's a lot of different people in that scene. So people have these views, and they do write poetry on it, so unfortunately it exists.

How do you reconcile passivism and antifascism? Because I have this thing of allowing people their anger and allowing them to express it, so when people say 'punch a nazi', it's antithetical to my views. I was brought up as a quaker – I don't religiously identify with that, but I heavily believe in pacifism and kindness, and I understand that that's kind of a privilege maybe from my background that I'm able to think like that, and I haven't encountered violence on the same level that other people have, but I'm wondering is it possible to reconcile the two, or is antifascist fightback – does it have to be violent?

I think there's room for both isn't there, and everyone's got their own limits. I'm not a pacifist and when I was younger and had my health I certainly wasn't a pacifist, but I would never put someone down for not wanting to use violence. Everyone's got their own role to play.

The other thing – if you're a pacifist and you've never felt like punching a nazi, you're probably living in a nice little bubble somewhere in the countryside. I'm a quaker and I'm a pacifist, but, I think, you see

things, and you get angry about it, so you do have those feelings even if you don't express them by actually punching a nazi. So acknowledging anger even if you're a pacifist is probably a necessary thing to do.

I think poetry fundamentally is non-violent resistance – that's what poetry is, in and of itself. I suppose every 'poet', in inverted commas, has to decide – do I feel comfortable using my non-violent resistance in the contexts where violence is permitted or encouraged? And that's a challenge. I consider myself a pacifist, and personally I feel uncomfortable knowing that any poetry I ever wrote would be performed in a context where violence is present. But then I understand why people resort to violence, I understand violence.

It's a tricky one. I wrote a poem including the line "if you see a tory on the street cut its throat", which is not a particularly non-violent line. But after Jo Cox got assassinated I decided I would never read that line again. But if someone had heard that line and gone and beat the crap out of a fascist I would have been extremely happy.

I think it's important to be honest about that and to say that.

I think there's an important issue about violence as a practice and as a category, in that fascism has changed over the last 25 or 30 years. The violence of the anti-fascism of the late 70s and 80s that I know about was the violence of working class people trying to defend themselves from those who make violent incursions into the places where they live, and where their families live, and their friends, and the people who they rely upon and need. There's a very obvious sense in which it's a violence of material necessity. The violence of the working class expressive culture of the late 70s and 80s seems like it must have been related to that fact, to what is imposed upon you as a direct necessity as an immigrant community in an inner city which is full of proletarianized white people who resent that situation and...

And that's still true – when the EDL tried to march through Walthamstow about five years ago the whole community came out and blocked it. It wasn't just a few countercultural antifa stopping them, it was just regular people.

But what I'm thinking about – there's never been a moment in antifascist culture where we've had something like the endless recycling of a three second loop of someone being punched in the face as the archetype and fundamental symbolic vision of what a fulfilled antifascist movement is. That's not necessarily an attack on that gif, but it changes the way in which violence operates within antifascist movements as they define themselves. And the related question for me is about what kinds of spontaneous working class antifascism there is to relate to or to learn from. In your own work [x], for example, you act as a historian of moments which could be revived for us in their energies and their linguistic materials, but which at the same time have been swept away in some respects by the movement of capitalist urban development over a period of thirty years. And this is why we need to reflect on the way in which, first of all, antifascists and fascists tend to meet in different ways than they did thirty years ago – often they meet on the internet, sometimes they meet in these kind of stage show confrontations which are filmed and immediately beamed across the internet, both sides claiming victories by taking clips of 'their people' punching the people on the other side. The most brilliant working class art made by black and brown people today which all of us know and listen to and are exposed to on a daily basis is also made by people who find themselves in a different urban and geographic setting than they did when dub or punk were the main expressive forms of working class

antifascist culture. I feel like if we want to talk about how poetry can relate to the existing latent antifascism of working class culture today then all of that needs to be taken into account and we need to learn as much as we can about working class popular forms and the social relations that are at their base.

Speaking as a working class person, what's a working class popular form?

Rap. That's the most obvious one right now, worldwide.

Yeah I didn't think about that actually ... [inaudible] ...

Old people can like rap too.

I'm not sure what we're talking about when we talk about working class popular forms. I mean surely most of these, many middle class forms, they haven't got a lot to do with the working class, surely, not the white working class anyway.

Which are you thinking of?

What, of a poetic form, or an artistic form?

I mean of the forms that I just mentioned – so I mentioned rap, and then dub and reggae...

Well I associate those mostly with race, and not with class.

Really, because I don't.

I think it's a bit of a fantasy to think that there's all this working class anti-fascism out there, I'd like to see. It's not there. There might be some.

There is. Especially around Bradford and West Yorkshire, where all the race riots went on, and there is a threat of violence kind of ever-present in those areas. So these people do exist, and they do put on events, and they do do poetry.

Again, on the performance poetry scene, which operates outside of universities, outside of institutions, and they're usually free events, so more people come to them, there are plenty of people who have antifascist poems. There are people who also have fascist poems too – but I know, am friends with, have dated people who write like this [against fascism] and are from these backgrounds, so it is out there, it's just maybe you haven't seen it yet.

Well I know it exists, but I don't think it's to that kind of extent...

But if you see black working class antifascist culture and think of that in terms of race then you're excluding that from your survey of the working class, so that's why you can't see it. Because when you see it you see race, instead of seeing that those black people are working class as well.

As a poet and somebody who – I haven't done much political organising recently but I have in my life done a lot of political organising, and also put on events and do try as much as possible. Sometimes it

feels to me like trying to do stuff that's to do with really important political questions and organising – both organising and supporting that organising, so showing solidarity, raising money, making something an issue – and being a writer, and being in association with other writers and poets and performers, feel like very separate things quite a lot of the time. And obviously, one of the things that we've been trying to do with this festival is bring those things a little bit closer, and put on people who are writing, in different ways, very politically. And I'd be really interested to hear about how other people in this room want to, or are, or aren't, able to do that organising, with art or writing, in the spaces that they're in, because my experience of trying to bring those things together has often been quite fraught. I wonder if that's because of the fact that I'm involved in more experimental work. So an example from my life – in Leeds there was an EU migrants day called 'one day without us', a sort of pseudo migrant strike, and I read this long poem at it, kind of an essay poem, but on a big booming mic in this semi staged rally thing, and it was really strange, because I felt really uncomfortable, and some people liked it, some people just left. So I'm talking about these practical things. And also, when we put [x] on in Leeds, we had a chat about the new alt-right and how to organise against it, and [x] gave a talk, and then gave a poetry reading the next day. And those two things were totally together in my mind, for me because of where I'm at, but actually really different people came to them. We marketed it to everyone we knew, but I'm interested in that stuff. Because I think, if you're a writer you can make a difference at these levels, but maybe there's lots of questions about audience, about what people go to for. Do they want to relax when they want to listen to poetry or do they want to be antifascist or do they want to relax in an antifascist way. What's the poem that you're going to bring in when there are 50 EDL on Briggate and there's only 10 of you – these are the problems and questions I've had.

The one thing I can think of maybe as a point of encouragement for that, is a moment that I know that poetics and political action felt more conjoined – and maybe it's a shame, but it was around strike action around the academy, the university, student protest and student occupations. Maybe that's because it's *us* at stake, and that's a shame, but the speech acts, and along the picket, felt like there was more of a dialogue between the two actions of poetry and protest there.

I was on one of those picket lines, and it was good – but at the same time I felt like the poetry was light entertainment, and the real stuff was the speeches and so forth, and somebody like one of us popping up and reading a poem out – I did worry about that a lot, whether this was some light entertainment for people to have a rest, before they started getting [inaudible]

Maybe this is a problem that joins up with the question of practical contributions to politics through speech – the act of reading a poem over a microphone, and making a speech over a microphone. I don't know if the students heard it like that, I can't speak for the students, but I felt an energy, particularly at your poem on one of the picket lines –

– Well that's just cos I was swearing a lot

But it's ok to entertain people who are on a picket right?

It's part of the action of the picket.

It's part of the solidarity. That helps people stay longer.

Well, it's no different to singing the songs, and perhaps more important than the speech.

I think it comes from a worry that I had when I was doing a lot of readings at occupations, where there'd be a guy talking about what to do when you got nicked, and then I'd bob along and read a poem, and it just seemed to be less [inaudible]

But maybe people came because... That's just the event, but the action of organising and coming together in the room meant that everyone was there at the same time.

Also no one wants to spend their whole fucking life being told how not to get nicked.

You can't hear that all of the time.

I'm wrong as well, because it is taking the poems out of the poetry room and putting them in a different context, which does mean something.

I wonder if there's something to be said about how, very broadly speaking, for someone who is part of an audience and is listening to someone read poetry – is there the expectation that what that person is saying isn't prescriptive, but it's got more of an affective charge, that is more heightened to entertainment, than to something I actively want and need to listen to in order to then do something? Which is no fault of people who read poetry, or it might be, but it's more of an expectation I think.

I find it difficult to think about anti-fascism in isolation from what you want the world to be like after you've got rid of the fascists. Like, the dismantling of borders or the state. Because my engagement with solely antifa groups has mostly been like, anarchists who I think embody a lot of the things that I don't want to be engaged with. For me I find it so difficult to reconcile political organising and poetry, and I'm much more interested in being immersed in political organising and then thinking, what skills from poetry can you use for that – and especially with writing, there's so many things you can use if for, rather than trying to start with poetry and then think, where can that take me.

There are ways you can join up the actions. For example, Poems for Pussy Riot – we had an event that had experimental poetry, we read our own poetry, I also read Anna Akmatova, who was a poet who was banned for a long time in Russia. It was in support [of Pussy Riot], but we also had an anthology, and the money we raised went to their legal fund. So it was a positive action in two ways: we had an event where we were trying to, yeah, entertain, but also speak out about it through group speech, but also we did something positive in monetary terms. It felt like a good action.

Also the Grenfell fire anthology that I was involved with – they had loads of readings around the country, to raise money to put into the fund to help the people who were made homeless. So there is that aspect of it. But I want to say something about the entertainment aspect of it too. I don't want to go to a revolution that doesn't involve dancing, and there are times when it can all seem a bit negative, and there's nothing positive coming out of it, and I suspect a lot of people just walk away. So you need positive things, you need entertainment.

It comes back to the pacifism thing. I was talking to [x], and we were saying, that's the joy, that's the dancing - the world without [fascism etc]. So ultimately the violence of antifascism is important as a means to the end of being able to be pacifist.

Can I say something about violence, and language? A type of poetry that says it's antifascist is very often quite violent, in the language it uses, and in its delivery, there's an anger. Can we separate this violence of language from the physical violence that we wouldn't get involved in?

It's a different type of anger though. I mean, I was watching a documentary about contemporary fascist punk bands, moronically going on "keep up the hate, keep up the hate!", and I got really worried. I was thinking, well, a hell of a lot of my poetry's powered by hate. But it's a different type of hate.

Difficult. I remember the punk days when you had the bands, and trying to separate Sham 69 or something -

Who weren't fascists -

Who were kind of...

They had a fascist following but *they* weren't fascists

But it's difficult isn't it, how do you split that?

Well this is the difficult thing. This is kind of where I was going when I asked if there are any fascist poets around on the scene. Because - I can remember the punk days as well, and if fascists turned up at gigs then we'd beat the crap out of them. And that wasn't a macho thing at all, it wasn't just men, it was men and women beating the crap out of them. I'm not advocating that at poetry readings...

I'm not quite as convinced about this idea that if it's through language it's not violent. Just think about political rhetoric - these kind of greasy, oily, extremely slick, very well put together bits of rhetoric, advocating intervention in foreign countries, cuts, all of that. That's violent. And actually, its seeming not to be violent is part of its violence as well. So maybe there's a question about form in poetry actually [inaudible]

The real violence is the picture of the happy middle class family isn't it.

And that it appears to not be violent is part of its insidiousness. Which is much more insidious than somebody screaming at you actually.

Well that picture of the happy family was the main picture that fascist Germany put out, wasn't it.

Which they're doing again now, the [inaudible], using pictures like that now.

But there's always the other side of that as well. The hostile environment, the kind of policing that enables the kind of violence that is enacted on an everyday basis, that Theresa May institutionalised legally in Britain the year before she became prime minister, right? The white middle class happy family can only appear because the state is enacting a series of violences on another level that are out of sight, that are happening every day, that involves detention, that involves containment, that involves detaining people in detention centres under the mental health act, etc. It's only because of that kind of violence at the same time that we can have that picture.

I think so far we've mostly been gauging antifascist poetics and poetics through the imaginary of the street demo – the antifascist demo, and all that. And that's great. But also, to bring it back to some of the other questions [that we started with] – once we're out of that space where a lot of the fascist discourse circulates, back in the internet, does that mean that we have to re-evaluate the forms, or to come up with different ways of gauging effectiveness or gauging connection, or the bodies that [inaudible]...? Because you can see that, when you go to this universe of talking heads and algorithms leading you from one video to another and another and this group of muscly people just saying the same racist arguments, I guess it becomes very much about language rather than about the application, and that may be significant.

I'm not sure if it's going in the direction that it should be, but – thinking about the poetics that are again not in the street demo but on the internet, I was really happy when you mentioned rap, because I remember being at a similar talk a year or so ago where people were talking about politics in poetry and why poetry wasn't political enough, and I didn't feel comfortable enough to say anything but I remember thinking – why aren't people talking about rap? Bringing it back again to how violence can be conveyed through language – if we think about what most people, like my parents for example, would think of as rap, or even grime in the UK specifically, there is something that's very combative, and also maybe in a way antifascist about a working class person that says very defiantly and very violently, 'look at me now, I didn't have anything, now I have all of this, and you hate me, and I hate you back'. And I feel like that's something that's too [inaudible] on the internet, and often it seems very divorced from the forms of poetry that we're talking about in these spaces.

So I suppose I would draw a distinction, personally, between violent imagery and violence, which I think is important. And I think also, the way that poetry is violent is not inherent in itself, it's how it's used, it's how it's interpreted, it's how it's received. I think a lot of poetry, if you think about the nineteenth century or... poems like *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, or *Chanson de Roland*, I think they were used, probably incorrectly often, to justify jingoism and state violence at certain points. But I don't think that means that those kinds of poems are violent. And I think the same can be said for rap – rap has a lot of violent imagery, but if somebody is acting violently because of rap, I don't think that's an intrinsic problem with the rap.

No it's not, but I have heard people using that as a justification. There was a guy who did a very violent poem about cutting up a women – sexually violent, it was physically violent poetry that I found absolutely appalling. I confronted him, and he was like, 'oh Eminem does it', and that was genuinely his response, and I said, that's not acceptable. To me it was enacting very – I'm not even going to go into how graphic this was – violence on women, and I thought it was so appalling to justify it that way, but unfortunately, people out there are using those justifications.

One of the things you sometimes come across is people who will write something that is in the voice of a racist – and they just sound racist, because they can't quite get it. They're trying to be ventriloquists, and critique it, but they don't really have the skills to do it. With some people I can forgive them for that, but with some people, like that person, it probably reveals more about them than anything else.

I was just going to say, and not to sidestep, and hopefully it feels like a good wrap-around – I think, when I make my stuff, I try to pay attention to that. I don't just speak in one language in the work that I make and then a different language in the life that I lead – so I wonder if that's a useful thing.

Yes.