

Corinne Fowler: Green Unpleasant Land

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Emily Zobel Marshall: Hello and welcome to Ilkley Literature Festival Spring weekend interview. I'll be talking to Corinne Fowler today about her new book, Green Unpleasant Land and her work. My name is Emily Zobel Marshall and I'm a reader in post-colonial literature at Leeds Beckett University. Let me tell you a little bit more about Corinne. Professor Corinne Fowler is a research expert at the University of Leicester and director of 'Colonial Countryside: National Trust Houses Reinterpreted.'

She's also an expert in the legacies of colonialism, post-colonialism, heritage and representations of British history. She co-founded and led the centre for new writing for six years, where she brought together writers and researchers to commission over a hundred creative works. Welcome Corinne it's lovely to have you with us today.

Corinne Fowler: Thank you.

Emily Zobel Marshall: So I thoroughly enjoyed reading your book and I just wanted to start by asking you about the title. This is a beautiful book with actually one of your own paintings on the front isn't it? The title of your book; it's arresting, it's provocative, it challenges well-worn myths about the English countryside, the idea of the green unpleasant land.

So I wondered if you could tell us a little bit more about the choice of title and also about the William Blake poem from which it derives.

Corinne Fowler: Yes, I think the title has been seen as provocative and in many ways, any of the time, it wouldn't have been seen as that provocative. It's just, we're in a rather toxic moment in our national conversations.

And I think I did want to signal that it was a disruptive book and that I wanted it also to be a book, which was sort of purposely reparative in that, in the sense that Catherine Hall, the historian talks about reparative history, you know the England's green unpleasant land. It's not just about agriculture and estates and country houses, but it's also about colonialism. And it's also about a long-standing black presence, but it, you're right, it comes from Blake of course. And that poem in which he wrote, which was very much popularized by the song Jerusalem, and many people see that as England's sort of natural national anthem. But the interesting thing about that poem is that it really calls for a better world and built on England's green & pleasant land.

I think that the other lines that "I will not cease from Mental Fight, Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand: Till we've built Jerusalem, In England's green & pleasant land." it's just that we can't all agree what Jerusalem looks like, hence the discussions that we're having, so for me, it's quite a utopian book in many ways, despite the title and because partly because the countryside is so associated with Englishness, so associated with national narratives of Englishness and sort of official versions of what Englishness is, as well as unofficial versions and literary versions. But the countryside is definitely, you know really fiercely guarded site of belonging. We know that rural racism exists because there is evidence and there are many studies that show it's not people imagining it, it genuinely does exist.

And I wrote this book because I feel so strongly that we all have a right to benefit from the countryside. You know, here we are in the middle of this awful pandemic and greenery and greenways within cities, but trees and fields and mountains, you know these are the things which benefit us all, mentally, physically and spiritually in some ways. So I think that what history does is it

really helps us connect the countryside that we all think we know to empire and to world history, because we forget that dimension of the country side.

Emily Zobel Marshall: I think it's important, that idea that you put forward there of the, of the book being disruptive and disrupting well-worn narratives, you know as well as it being a utopian book.

You start your first chapter with a focus on the Olympic opening ceremony. So I wanted to know a little bit more about why you use this as your starting point and how that opens up your discussion in the book about our attitudes towards British history.

Corinne Fowler: Yes, I do. That's true that I do start with quite an extended passage on the Olympics opening ceremony in London a few years ago now. That was actually when I was starting the book, so it shows you how slowly I produced, produced the book, but it was, I thought it was a significant moment of coming together to reflect on our nation's history, even if that was in front of the eyes of the world. So you had these sort of colonial era scenes, reconstructed, reaching right through to the history of the NHS.

And it was done by Danny Boyle, as you know. And I was struck by the fact that the initial scene in the stadium was called 'green & pleasant land.' And it was an interesting scene because you've got this typical pastoral scene with a maypole and sheep and everything else and ducks and milkmaids, but you also had people dancing around the maypole and it was quite a multicultural theme.

And this theme provoked such a violent reaction, that there was a tweet by conservative MP Aidan Burley, and I've got the text of it here, he said, "Thank god the athletes have arrived. Now we can move on from the leftie multicultural crap. Bring back red arrows, Shakespeare and the Stones." And I thought it was fascinating that it highlighted how fiercely guarded the rural is and how seemingly offensive it is to have black people in rural spaces and how ridiculously, historically ignorant it is to think that that's not appropriate, but at the same time the ceremony itself, missed the opportunity to provide an historical justification for putting black people in that scene in the first place, but then the defence of the ceremony from the left was also very inadequate. So there was an article about that, which was saying, Oh yeah, but you know, we need to remember, but people have been here, Black people have been here since the Windrush. And you just think well no, they've been here for an awful lot longer than that. As any historian of empire will know, or you know so many of us have read Peter Fryer's book, *Staying Power* which reaches right back to Roman times.

And the section from Windrush on is actually really, really tiny isn't it? So I think I got really interested in the historical justification for exploring a black rural presence and realizing how underexplored it is and how it triggers people who are not comfortable with the society that we've become as a result of being an empire.

Emily Zobel Marshall: Yeah, and the book currently is also, is born out of a groundbreaking project. Isn't it? 'Colonial Countryside', which you delivered in partnership with the National Trust, which has had a really positive response, but has also triggered people. And we'll talk a little bit more about that later. But you spent several years trying to get this really important project off the ground, actually remember talking to you about it several years ago. And you know, about your struggles to get funding. And you'd been incredibly dedicated to getting the project off the ground. It finally got off the ground and has developed into this such a large scale and important project.

So, could you tell us a little bit more about 'Colonial Countryside' and what inspired it and also what drove you to see it through, in this way and upscale it in this way?

Corinne Fowler: Yeah, I'd forgotten all the struggles that I had to keep applying for money and perfecting it, and perfecting it, but I'm glad I did because it came together with all these different components in the right way.

But yeah, I mean, 'Colonial Countryside' is the child led, history and writing project guided by a theme of about 16 historians of empire. But also as you say, it's a commissioning project where we commissioned 10 writers to write pieces about 10 different country houses. And we're working on editing that book at the moment with Peepal Tree Press.

But I think weirdly enough, my idea for making it an education project was just thinking about the next generation. I was walking through New Street station in Birmingham. So very urban location, Birmingham, where I'm from, as you can tell from my accent. And I noticed there was an announcement about safety by a child and how closely I listened to it and how it touched me when I heard it.

And I suddenly thought, because I'd been a teacher in a previous professional life. I just thought that's it, you know we need, if children's say it maybe we'll all listen, cause really, really good people have been saying this for so long. And so I devised it as a child led project. I didn't necessarily know what that would mean.

But I trusted having been a teacher and having a son the same age as the other primary children that I was working with. I knew that they'd come up with something good. And they did, they rewrote guidebooks. They co-curated exhibitions. They spoke at big conferences, a British museum conference and so on.

And they came up with some excellent responses. But I think the other thing behind the project was really the fact that, you know as the Royal Historical Society report on race and history suggests that history is becoming, had become impoverished as a subject because it was too narrow, maybe too parochial to national in its focus.

And that there is some such important work going on by my colleagues working on the 'Legacies of British Slave-ownership', the 'East India Company at Home' project. And I really wanted to bring those two histories together as I have done in my book also, so that we could look at the full range and nuance and complexity of the countryside's connection to empire. But with that special focus on country has it's because they are so central to this story, as you know.

Emily Zobel Marshall: And it is so important, to include children's work and children's voices into these new narratives, as you say they are quite capable of responding to and absorbing the realities of our history.

And it reminds me of when I have taken my children to Harewood House over the years, and always try to tell them the alternative history of the house, which isn't there for them to see in the permanent exhibition. So I've tried to explain to them, this house was built on the backs of your ancestors in the Caribbean.

But also they're the voices of the future. Aren't they? And hopefully we'll see a shift in thinking and a shift in understanding of British history with the next generation. What I wanted to ask you as well, what's really striking about the book, Corinne is the way that you use these creative responses.

You've talked about the creative responses the children came up with and how rich they were, but you use creative responses to challenge the relationship between the English countryside and British

colonial history. And it's really unique in this way. I was wondering what you think that creative responses offer us in terms of understanding our historical past.

Corinne Fowler: I think the creative responses are important because, well partly because I didn't want to write a dry detached academic book. Because there are people's voices missing from the historical record from our accounts of rural places, from our country houses, from all kinds of heritage sites and museum collections.

But those voices, you know we can't recover them from the archives most of the time. And so I think that it was an ethical decision in lots of ways. I didn't want to write an unemotional book about centuries of harm, but at the same time I wanted to have that research rigour and that evidence base in order to show what the evidence was that I wasn't just making it all up or that any of the many, many historians that I refer to weren't making this up. So I mean the thing about creative work is it honours and respects the ghosts of those missing persons from national history and our accounts of national history.

But it also brings to life some quite sometimes dry and convoluted stories. If you look at the National Trust report, which we co-edited, a lot of these stories, these connections to empire are rather convoluted, they're complicated and they've got multiple strands and they reach across several generations and they're all braided histories as Margot Finn calls them between East India Company on the one hand, the slavery business on the other hand. And so I think that it's important to use writing as a way of bringing the stories to life and also respecting the characters who were participants in this history and deeply affected by it. But I also was keen to, to think about the traditions of writing creatively and academically, because Raymond Williams is one model because he wrote *The Country and the City*, which is such an important analysis of the rural and the urban and history of ideas about those things. But he also wrote *Border Country*, which was an account of his childhood.

Emily Zobel Marshall: Yes, what you say reminds me of Toni Morrison, the reason that Toni Morrison shares with us for writing her book *Beloved*. So a story which looks at African-American slavery, but she says, that the inner world of the enslaved is missing from the traditional historical narrative of slavery.

And it's only creative responses that can fill those gaps and actually perhaps offer us a certain kind of truth, which is missing from the historical narrative. Now what's also really unique about your book is that you include your own poems. So as well as analysing the writing prose and poetry by a whole range of writers, you also include your own work.

And I just read the first, in the preface, your first paragraph in your preface starts "A hand shot up. My questioner looked quizzical. I pointed at him and he said, 'Doesn't this sort of approach undermine your position as a literary critic? Writing a book with poems and short stories in it?'"

And you go on to explain beautifully, why it was important to include your own creative responses, but I wanted to know if you'd always written poetry and prose alongside your academic work.

Corinne Fowler: No, I absolutely haven't but I know that there are many people who've done it before me and I was really impressed by their efforts. So I think it just, it happened almost organically like 'Colonial Countryside'. It was, you know there were many unplanned elements and I think it was important to me. I was so immersed in other people's writing, that there were writers have really shown us the way, in opening up these global histories of the countryside, since the 1980s and V. S. Naipaul, I mean this is what I go through in my book. You've got Grace Nichols writing about gardens and the networks, the colonial commercial network, which sorts of allowed

plants to come to us. And she does these, she produced these wonderful metaphors of gardens with a kind of multicultural oasis.

And then you've got Manzu Islam talking about pheasants and how they are South Asian bird. And you've got people writing about putting their relatives' ashes in a river, which will hopefully go to India. And so on you, John Agard writing about morris dancers. Well I suppose, yeah, I think if you see also the research topic, you see the person, we shouldn't pretend that we're not involved.

We're all involved. This is a, it's a shared history and we've all got something to do with it in one way or the other. I do say in the book that our families either benefited from slavery, which is the case of my family, or were impoverished and traumatized by it and are dealing with that legacy even until today.

So I think it's more to do with questions about, what is research? What is this history? Who is it for and who do these stories belong to? And how do we tell them to get back to your point about writers and ethics really?

Emily Zobel Marshall: Would you share one of those poems with us, Corinne?

Corinne Fowler: Yes, so since this is the Ilkley Festival, I thought I might read one about, a poem, cause I've written poems about different sites of the rural, of the countryside. And this one is about woodlands and it's called 'An escaped slave Yorkshire, 1709.' So it's quite appropriate to your work, Emily as well with Harewood House. And it is really based on those many escaped slave notices that we have, which show in a really chilling ways, across all kinds of local papers how many people were in this country who were enslaved around that time? And I referenced a local river called the Wharfe. And also think about plants like rhododendrons, which of course have got rich colonial histories. So yeah, I'll just read that 'An escaped slave Yorkshire, 1709.'

They're hunting him. He wades barefoot across the Wharfe. Branches break their brittle bones, scrape his swollen toes, rake the riverbed, roll the eyes of pebbles. Night thickens. He stares at the bruised clouds, willing them to cover the moon. Sighs shift the debris of winter, leaves flutter like pages in the Earl's library.

He's not the first to flee along this riverbank, to lumber through these bars of beech. He hears wailing hounds, thudding hooves, flying clods, rasping stone. Lamplight flares. A lurch and leap, a flash: a gasp of gunpowder, a blast of blood inside his collar. He halts by the rhododendron. Round leaves dab his cheek as he falls.

Emily Zobel Marshall: Thank you, Corinne. That's a really beautiful poem. And you know, as we say, it fills in some of those gaps left by the historical narrative, and also it's a bold move to put your own writing, your own creative writing into an academic text because they're tends to be often a certain distance in academic writing, between the author and the subject, which makes them in some ways less vulnerable to criticism, but you have put your whole self into this book and it's very unique in that way. And that really comes across in the research. Now, in terms of the research, I was wondering what were the most revealing, because you've unearthed all sorts of interesting links about our historical relationship in Britain, in England and to our rural spaces. But I wanted to know for you, what were the sort of most revealing insights, the kind of the surprises, in terms of that relationship with the rural space. And I was, I thought, perhaps you could focus particularly on the moors. There's a section about the moors and that interests me being, we're living in Yorkshire, especially, but the moor's have been seen in literature's very much associated with the space of freedom, but you undercut some of these well-worn associations with the rural spaces in the book.

Corinne Fowler: Yes. I think that, as you've rightly said, I focus quite intently on first of all, unpacking the pastoral and ideas of the pastoral, it going right back to kind of, you know shepherds conversing about love and work in this idealized idea of idyll arcadia. And then you've got these contrasting sites, like moorlands and of course moorlands are the very opposite of the pastoral.

So they're really the stuff of folklore and legend, then associated with untameability, they're hostile they're desolate and they're uncultivated. And so I do look at some of the resonances, even between the use of moor and blackmoor and the association between more linguistically, but also the idea of race, which unconsciously gets projected onto it, but they, yeah you've got such long traditions and that's why I like to go back to the history of ideas through the literary lens. Cause you've got, you've got 'King Lear' who was exiled and associated with wilderness and wasteland. And you've got 'Macbeth', so you often get quite Shakespearian descriptions of moorlands even now in contemporary nature writing, you've have 'blasted heath' and 'folks cauldron' and phrases like this. But it's also associated with the devil. So I give examples like Exmoor Tarr Steps, there's a place called 'Satan's sunbathing spot' and Dartmoor's Brentor, which is associated with '*Jamaica Inn*', including in a film and an evil vicar.

But it's also been a place that people like Robert McFarlane, have explored, of beggars and wayfarers, itinerant workers, which I do go a bit into the history of migration, itinerant workers, Irish navvies and people who were out there building, polish people were building things on railways and things on across the moorland and also disabled soldiers, vagrants, so I've referenced some of Wordsworth, thinking about that. So as well as that idea of dangers, you've got these literary protagonists coming to sticky ends, you know *Lorna Doone*, and in Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. And then you've got the du Maurier's '*Jamaica Inn*', that I've already mentioned, you have got a sense of people, of the moorland being foreigners and outsiders, so I've got an extensive discussion of Heathcliff and what his racial origins might've been. I think it's left very ambivalent in the novel. And I mean, it's ambivalent and ambiguous in lots of ways, but Carol Phillips has a force and I do write about Carol Phillips and ideas of the Black Heathcliff, explored the colonial connections and the, with especially through that port of Liverpool.

Which find themselves, reshaping that whole region with the sugar wealth produced by enslaved people, but also the fact that it was the only business in town at the time. And so I talk about the ideas of the Black Heathcliff and because Nelly, the servant refers to Heathcliff saying, 'Oh, if you were a regular Black then you would...' And she carries on the sentence from there. But I think the point is that when historians think about the plantation economy and how it shaped the region, but he very viably could have been Black is the point. And so I explore some of those slave ownership connections as well in the book, but yeah, you're right, the moorlands are symbols of personal freedom, they're seen as relief from that, those new industrial centres by people like, by romantic novelists and poets and the idea that moorland is somehow untameable cause they're resisting modernity and there a way of escaping this awful industrialization and all its social consequences, but also they're associated with enclosure quite a lot.

And that sort of legal confiscation of land by landowners, is associated with uplands. And also in my book, I do begin to explore, the connection between the men who enclosed land and took and confiscated that common land and access to the common land and empire. The fact that many of them were also slave owners, that many of them were also East India Company men. So I think it's really important to open up those colonial dimensions of that aspect of history.

Emily Zobel Marshall: It was fascinating to read that the Brontës may have been inspired in their work by a family who had African people working on their farm which was really new information to me. And I thought that was absolutely fascinating.

So there's, you know such, your examination of Black and brown bodies in that rural space is really nuanced. And I grew up in North Wales and my mother was, my mother was African Caribbean. So she was a Black body in a very white space in, in very remote North Walian village.

And I remember one time in the local spa, a woman said to her, an old woman said, when will you be returning to Africa? And she replied in perfect Welsh. And I think that there's something also about our assumption that Black British and British Asian people don't feel any kind of ownership or belonging in a rural space is perhaps too much of an easy conclusion to make.

And you look at the poetry, for example of Grace Nichols and John Agard, and look at that relationship with the rural space in not, in a way which is perhaps less obvious. You also use this term, the post-colonial pastoral. Can you just expand on that term a little bit for us?

Corinne Fowler: Well it's used by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin to suggest that there's a post-colonial dimension to relationships, the pastoral, but they frame it in quite negative terms. So I don't entirely see that as being fully relevant as a concept to work by, by British Black, British Asian writers, because the... Huggan and Tiffin sort of implied that there's a negative relationship to the landscape. And what I've found is that there is absolute affection for, and deep, intimate, personal knowledge of the landscape. There's one poem that I looked at where the poet was saying every, every poet has a Blackberry poem and they're referring also to Black poets.

Every, every Black poet has a Blackberry poem, and he writes about the countryside, but there were so many people who've have for so long been writing about the countryside. And this is why I call it, there's been a rural turn in writing by British Black and British Asian writers, that has been almost completely ignored.

It's been going on since the 1980s, there's been a thorough re-appraisal of the countryside of the pastoral of the anti-pastoral, but the way in which we understand the global connections of the countryside very much led by writers very much overlooked. And so you still get people, for example, talking about Lemn Sissay as a poet of the urban street, but he's got so many rural poems.

And if you look at his images of himself over the last few years he's been, he's depicted in rural settings for so long. There's some very important photographs of him in parks, in the sea, in all kinds of country settings. And the, you've got Benjamin's Zephaniah has been living in the countryside for a long time.

I mean actually think about where poets live, so Grace Nichols, John Agard they're all in very close reach of the countryside. And I think it's really important to understand that things have both changed and not changed.

Emily Zobel Marshall: Yeah. So there's this body of writing, which has been overlooked perhaps because there's been a much greater focus on identity politics, on poets that respond to racial identity. What you also do in your book is you look very, you move very much from the national to the global. And as you just mentioned, you show us that these global connections form the framework of all aspects of British culture and society.

I was particularly interested in the chapter on gardens. I'm a keen gardener myself and I have an allotment. But I wanted to, I wondered if you could just tell us a bit, little bit about how first of all, the enslaved Africans in the Americas changed the food ways of the Americas and also the impact of Black migration to Britain on British gardening culture. So how those have changed with the impact of migration and forced movement across the African diaspora.

Corinne Fowler: Yeah. It's I think it's a really complex subject and there are many people who've written some fantastic books about this, I mean, there are stories and poems, which I quote from of enslaved Africans taking seeds and putting them in their hair so that they could plant some familiar things from home and have them all around them when they were, kidnapped and taken across the ocean. And so there, there's that dimension of things and the plots of land, which enslaved people had in order to grow some more food for subsistence.

And there's also the transportation of plants, like breadfruit, for example, because it was a cheap food from the Pacific that could then be used to feed enslaved people at the lowest possible cost. But then that became quite established in their food cultures in, in the Caribbean. But the, I think it, it's a complicated story because obviously the plants that came to us are very strongly associated with the colonial commercial networks, the shipping routes, they're traveling on the same ships as people who are being transported and goods, which are being transported back to Britain.

And there was a whole, initially an interest by very wealthy people who wanted these beautiful plants on the gardens and their grand estates. And they were the only people who could initially afford to buy the plants, which came from the plant hunters, but later, everybody became interested in these plants.

Then as the networks improved, it enabled all kinds of nurseries to spring up. And people were madly after these beautiful plants, which they'd never seen before, they wanted them in their gardens and so it became popularized in lots of ways. But I think that it's really important also to recognize that plants, which we take for granted, have these imperial histories and that there are many traditions of growing and gardening, all kinds of gardening expertise, which came with people from places elsewhere. And so there are now praises for Jamaican style gardens or the different styles of growing different ways of growing vegetables. So I messier ways of growing vegetables, not these neat ordered rows, which turn out to be not quite as productive as we all thought. And so there's, I think that if gardening is a really rich topic and it's something that Grace Nichols writes a lots about. And I've mentioned that before the idea that she's got these plants all nestling together, the bamboo with the rows, with the plants from different parts of the world, all together in this beautiful way in this space, complimenting one another, it's such a brilliant metaphor, for modern Britain and how it could be if we could all, if we could all think differently about it.

And so I think there's, there are fascinating stories. They're also horrifying stories. So for example, I write about Thistlewood the sadistic slave owner. And the fact that his diary details in horrible ways, his abuse of enslaved women, but also in the same diary, he's writing about his passion for gardening and his plants successes. So these things are all mixed up together in both cynical and inspiring ways.

Emily Zobel Marshall: Yeah. Thistlewood is an interesting character. And he also writes about his passion for folklore and records lots of Anansi stories in those diaries, but that's fascinating. And we are Corinne obviously a long way away from that sort of in, Grace Nichols poem that vision of multicultural Britain where we're growing well and positively together, perhaps we're moving further towards that. But you described in your, in one of your chapters on the English country house, that the country house is a zealously guarded site of national belonging. And your work with

country houses interests me cause I've also been working with Harewood House and thinking about positive changes to the historical narrative at Harewood. People though are extremely defensive of the sites of nostalgia. And I wondered if you, first of all could tell us a bit about the place that the English country households in the popular British imagination. And then secondly, talk to us a little bit about the kind of backlash that you've received from the project and the book, because it's really, you know ignited a sort of anger and hatred in the right-wing press. So, yeah, if you just, those two things really, you know, that the sense of the need to defend the British colonial country house, as a sort of symbol of everything that was great when Britain ruled the waves and then how that's manifested itself in the right-wing press of late.

Corinne Fowler: Yes, you're absolutely right. It's some massive nostalgic for country houses, which is partly fuelled by all those heritage films of the 1980s, when you, and also things like Downton Abbey, although that came much later and that's part of a whole long sequence of glorifying, particular eras of Britain's history, but at the same time country houses have been a real site of anxiety as well, because they've been falling apart and they've been crumbling in the post-war years. And there are all sorts of anxieties projected onto them as well as nostalgic thought. But I think obviously they are a massive draw in the heritage industry.

There are thousands and thousands of visitors per day to a lot of these houses. And especially when they crop up in costume dramas, they receive another influx of visitors. And this is even being called, given a name, someone called it the Downton effect. And obviously the country houses are sites, they're places where people go to relax at the weekends, especially.

Either with their young children or they go, they're a bit older and they want to look around the house, look at the beautiful gardens, relax, switch off and take refuge in them. And of course, there is a whole tradition of country house poetry which presents country houses as a rural ideal, as something which is separate from everything else, which shields you from the sound of fury of the city and so on. And so there is that aesthetic, which is set up in people's minds. So obviously it's going to be a little bit difficult for people if they suddenly find out that this house they've been coming to for years and switching off in and taking photo, family photographs in actually has a more sinister side to it.

Although I say that, but I want to pause and say that there was a policy exchange survey and policy exchange is actually quite reactionary in terms of it, our approach to assessing or reassessing our past and that policy exchange survey showed that 76% of National Trust visitors thought that the National Trust should talk about its colonial connections and are interested in it.

So we do sometimes get very loud voices, which represent themselves as the angry majority. When in fact, people much more reasonably find this history, unfamiliar, new and stimulating as well as thought provoking and sometimes that. So I think it's so connected with a reassessment of our history, which at the time of national grieving, because of the pandemic, there is a sense of anticipation at a possible loss instead of seeing this as a gain and as more history and more knowledge to enrich our understanding of the past.

And as what is effectively a shared history, there is a sense of threat is being provoked by talking about these stories right now at this point in our history. So I think that this is something that, that has to be addressed.

Emily Zobel Marshall: There's also, isn't there Corinne, a real assumption about the type of guests at the country house. Because if you are, if you're a Black British, or British Asian ancestry is not going to put you off, having a nice day out to see your ancestors recognized in the narrative of the house. And I think people forget that. That it's actually it's not, off-putting, it's affirming. It's incredible. It

feels, it makes you feel included in the narrative of the country to which you feel you belong. We're going to move on to say a little bit about that backlash. And I just wanted to ask you as well, that, do you think that some of the treatment you've received has also been to do with being a female academic?

Because there are male academics in the field who have not had such, such a backlash. In the press.

Corinne Fowler: Yeah, absolutely. The treatment of me by the Daily Mail in particular, putting my picture up taking my picture from my Facebook page of me is ridiculous, I've got one picture with me with a bird on my head. You know it's just the family snap that they took from my Facebook page. And the, there is a pattern across Europe, across Australia and the US of attacking female academics in particular, but of course, academics of colour, get this much worse. And so, you know what I'm experiencing, just part of what my colleagues are experiencing, in that level of hostility, I just don't know how people cope with it because it's absolutely intense and unpleasant. They're talk about the title of my book, *Green Unpleasant Land* but yeah, I think, I still look forward to the future though, because I feel there's been a massive shift and actually all this protest against talking about this history is like shutting the door very loudly after the horse has bolted, we can't unlearn what we've all learned about country houses. We can't unlearn what we've learned from the 'Legacies of British Slave-ownership' project or the 'East India Company at Home' project.

All of this history is coming out and now you can't un-have that conversation. And so I feel that there have been seismic shifts, which are happening behind the scenes. There's been institutional organizational culture change. And once you've read things once you've reflected on things. Once you've seen them, you can't unsee them. As so many heritage professionals have said to me, I cannot walk through this country house without seeing a million things that I never saw before.

And once you start seeing things in that way, it's too late for anybody to protest, it's like King Cnut trying to put back the sea, you can't do it, sorry. You know, I keep thinking, you've asked me about children and children's voices. One of the children on my project, who's been instrumental to changing my thinking about things and to reshaping my own ideas about the future for history and everything and writing.

She said to me well look, if these people who were protesting don't want to study the history, that's their business, but they're not going to stop me. And I think that that is the voice of the future. I don't think this generation is the same as any other generation. They are, they're super diverse. They have a completely different experience of the world. They're very connected to the rest of the planet. And I just don't think that they're going to have these conversations.

Emily Zobel Marshall: Absolutely. Absolutely. They're hungry for knowledge, there's a thirst for knowledge isn't there. And as you say, in the wake of Black Lives Matter protests and the big changes that we've seen, the reviews of statues in our cities, the institutional changes and organizations over the last year, you can't put your finger in the dam anymore. So it's great to hear you speak so positively, let's just end with you outlining the next stages of your research and the 'Colonial Countryside' project.

Corinne Fowler: Well we've got some commission writing as I've mentioned, so we'll be giving inaugural readings of those pieces of writing. There's some wonderful pieces, for example, a piece called 'Diego' by Ayanna Gillian Lloyd.

And she's written about the man, the formerly enslaved African who travelled with Francis Drake on many of his voyages and had an intimate knowledge of the Spanish because he'd been enslaved by

them previously and really gave some very important knowledge to Francis Drake about where to find silver and gold that the Spanish had.

So it's, it's that they're all amazing pieces of writing about Chinese wallpaper, all kinds of things. The presence of African children in portraits across country houses. So we're going to be having readings of that work, publishing a book of that with some short historical essays to accompany them.

And then I'll carry on researching this topic for as long as I can. No, one's going to stop me.

Emily Zobel Marshall: That's good to hear. And I'm sure our audience will be just as keen as me to see those readings. I will just end by letting our audience know that they can buy Corinne's wonderful book at The Grove Bookshop.

So if you buy it at The Grove Bookshop online, then you'll be further supporting Ilkley Literature Festival. Thank you so much Corinne for a fascinating conversation and thank you to our listeners too.