

Wednesday 21 August 2019

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than the tabloid presses of this country,” says Max Porter.**

“I cannot think of a thing that I hold in more contempt than the tabloid presses of this country,” said Max Porter, speaking today at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. The English author, who is long-listed for the 2019 Booker Prize, was speaking with festival director Nick Barley about his Booker longlisted book *Lanny*.

Comparisons were drawn between a character in *Lanny* and the history of witch hunts by tabloid newspapers against ultimately innocent people suspected of a crime.

“I am utterly happy in my time here, to be very uncomplicatedly damaging in what the tabloid presses in this country do.” Porter said. “They have utterly fucked this country up. And the fact that they do so as part of their ideology set up, that it is deliberate, it is to sell papers but more than that, it is to continue to have this stranglehold over the ideological structure of this country is not only morally indefensible but evil I think, and comparable with the great evils of history.

“If you look at the ways in which they do this work, it is exactly the same as the propaganda machines which brought Hitler to power or the gentle pollution of a populace with the idea that some people are different or dirty or deserve unkindness. I really worry about it, I think most of our current ills can be traced back to it. And most of our future antagonisms will be worsened by them.

“There is this kind of ideological blancmange mould - why would I think blancmange mould, what a weird thing to think - and into that they pour all our fears and anxieties.”

Porter argued that this extended to newspapers’ coverage of the intelligentsia, particularly in regards to women. “Certain newspapers have an undercurrent of misogyny in the way that they review books. Women writers are not allowed ideas, it must be their biography. The anti-intellectualism which is a problem for us in this country and abroad goes hand in hand with misogyny, very often, in the handling of literature and art - they’re looking for scapegoats.”

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Land and environment feature heavily in *Lanny*, and Porter explained the connection he sees between children and the landscape. “[There’s] a kind of proto-environmentalism in children of this age, usually about 10 or 11 years old. They might be learning stuff in school but generally they understand environmentalism and ecological catastrophe in a very fresh way. That’s one of the appeals of Greta Thunberg and people like that... She tells it as it is. This is planet death. So I wanted to suggest that if you were 17 or 18 thousand years old you might think like a child.”