


# Edinburgh International Book Festival 2016 – Malorie Blackman Goes Intergalactic\*\*\*\*

Malorie Blackman introduced a whole new retelling of  Shakespeare's *Othello*, one which involved space but it's also a tale of migrants, humans seeking refuge. Packed to the rafters with teenagers and adults, Blackman enthused her audience about her new title, *Chasing the Stars*.

With Philippa Cochrane chairing the event, and Blackman informing the audience about the new book and premise, there is an excitement in the room, which only comes from someone like Blackman, who is not only a prolific children's author who cares about her issues and readers, but also the previous Children's Laureate.

With regard to the new young adult novel, her protagonist, Olivia comes across human refugees and in her defence of humanity, rescues them. Without giving too much of the plot away, they mentioned that she falls in love with one of the refugees and is forever questioning his motives. Certainly an interesting take on the original Shakespeare. As a fan of science fiction (Blackman admitted to going to Star Trek conventions) she provided the crowd with her definition of the genre: the fiction of the possible.

When questioned about the characterisation in her novels she exclaimed, : "The things we all have in common are those emotions we share. The rest is secondary to that."

Specifically when questioned about her previous and pivotal novel, *Noughts and Crosses*, which deals with racial tensions, she highlighted, "these are based on experiences that happen

to me.”

It speaks of a society with artificial divisions, which is why she chose to call it Noughts and Crosses, as it's a game which no one ever wins. It certainly appeared that the audience were keen to question her more on these books of hers which focus racial tensions, as these titles which saw her become the Children's Laureate are what she will be remembered for.

And when we consider the Stephen Lawrence case, which recently re-emerged in the news, we cannot reiterate enough the importance of these books.

However, she also outlined, “I would never write a book which has no hope in it,” which gives her readers faith in her work, that she will never let them down but inform them through stories of tensions within society that humanity and hope are key.