The Art of Perseverance with Courttia Newland

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**SPEAKERS**

Courttia Newland, Nelima Begum

**Nelima Begum**

Welcome to the Being A Writer podcast Courttia, how are you doing?

**Courttia Newland**

I'm good thank you. Yeah, yeah. Really I'm pretty good at my job. Very very very busy but yeah I'm always really good.

**Nelima Begum**

Lovely to have you on. Thank you for joining us. The title of this podcast is one that's quite interesting to me especially because this episode looks more at the attitude towards writing and writing disciplines as well, and how you approach your craft. So, quite interesting that it's all about perseverance in particular. Do you think perseverance is something that can be mastered, have you honed your level of perseverance, over time, and what's been the biggest lesson for you in doing so?

**Courttia Newland**

I don't know, if perseverance can be something that's mastered or mistressed, or whatever you want to, you know, how you want to define it. Yeah, yeah, I don't think that's possible because the goalposts are always shifting and your level of perseverance is reflective of where you're at, you know, so so, what, like something like doing interviews for example we were talking about this earlier, something I do in interviews for me, you know, when it been a big deal at the beginning of my career but now it's something that I can kind of like more or less in my stride, depending on what the interview is you know, but but then there are other things that are bigger challenges now that I face, or, say, you know, wondering if I would do something really major they'd say, potentially, I'm putting this into being, if it was an interview for the Oscars or something like that and maybe that's... let me, let me put it out there. Yeah, but then I've maybe I'd have a bit more nervous or have a bit more trepidation about about doing something like that, you know, so, so, yeah, perseverance is similar in that sense you know like, like, you learn to persevere with some things and then later on down the line there were other challenges which you face, which you have to kind of reevaluate your level of perseverance, and I suppose for me to think one of those things is just, just like, you know, learning to manage my time and persevere in that sense, you know, manage, managing to move between lots of different projects they're all brilliant, you know, perseverance in the sense of, you know, still habits and negotiate with that I'm still going to be rejected. Even though, you know, I've had like quite a bit of success in the last year or so, you know, still, some things will remain the same, you know, and it doesn't mean that blanket, all of your work is, is going to be allowed in, so to speak or to is going to get me, you know, so, yeah, the goalposts shift a little bit. Definitely, I think there's something to be said about confidence as well and how you deal with things so as you mentioned earlier, there are a lot of things that you now take in your stride whereas they might have required a bit more patience than you normally would have had. Yeah and it's the benefit of experience, you know, the experience that comes with having done it for a certain amount of time but also just age, you know, you've had these things happen to you. Now I'm kind of more, more likely to say 'ah that's happened to me before', whereas, you know, in a situation where it hadn't, you know, and also you know, it's easy to say once things have changed for you - okay, now I understand what how that works, you know is if you've had to persevere and persevere and persevere for 20 years and nothing's changed then that would be a bit more difficult but, so, but but I think for me, perseverance has been mainly about, okay, digging into what's most important to me, you know, and leaving behind the things that aren't and the most important thing to me is doing the work and being able to do the work of doing it in the way that I want. So I think for me when, you know, when I wasn't getting the attention that I felt I deserved that was what was sustaining me and my ability to be able to do that and I could say yes I am doing the work I want. And actually, by the time, things turned around and things started to get better. I come to accept the fact that it didn't get better I'd come to the fact that I was still doing what I believe was my best work at the time.

**Nelima Begum**

That's brilliant. So there's something there about being able to adapt to changing situations because, as you said the goalposts move sometimes. Yeah. Rejection before which I find quite interesting. I know it, you know, it stinks for every writer and anyone who's experienced, do you think, as you said, with experienced, do you think it gets somewhat easier to handle.

**Courttia Newland**

Um, I don't know if it gets, it gets a little bit easier. I don't know. I think that sting doesn't ever really go away. Yeah. And, yeah, like I said it's happened very, very recently with things that you wouldn't believe sometimes you know so yeah it's still it's still has that being a frustration, I suppose. Yeah, being able to be able to, again, lean back on that before that okay but but based off of work wasn't rejected you know that that's really helpful, but like I said as well, before that it was like, well, but this other work is good. And I just feel grateful. But for me mentally I'd got to that point where I could be like, even if this work doesn't come out I still think is good, I still think it does what he was supposed to do. And ironically, you know that work, I'm particularly thinking of in my head right now it was a short film script that short film script has never been produced, you know, but I know I did my best work with that script and it served a purpose for me, basically, which was, without being too coy about it. It was one of the scripts that I gave that got me the job with Small Axe once more that so it didn't ever get produced, but I know I put my heart and soul into it, and it was a stepping stone to get an answer where another script, you know, so so, things, if you do your best work I feel things tend to work themselves out but they might not work so that in the way that you imagined they would.

**Nelima Begum**

That's such a brilliant way of looking at it. The door might not open the way you want it to, but eventually, it will lead to something else.

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah, and that's always worthwhile and that's what keeps me, I think persevering, that's what kept me persevering that dream that belief and then it actually did work out in that way. So it's like okay, well, I want to keep on this so you know now when I get rejected I fall back on that, you know, can I do the work.

**Nelima Begum**

Oh that's such a fantastic outlook to have. Onto our next question, what is one thing that you're currently doing well at persevering with, and one thing that you're persevering with less well, and it can be writing, life or anything really.

**Courttia Newland**

One thing I'm doing well with persevering with is, I think just a number of projects, you know, a number of projects that are not going in the way that I thought they would go, you know, I've got a number of film scripts that I'm trying to get off the ground, well film and TV scripts to try and get off the ground, and they haven't been taken up in the way that I thought they wouldn't be taken up. You know, they haven't been commissioned and given the green light, things like that so yeah I think I'm persevering with those because I hadn't lost the faith in those projects, you know, and it's like you know two or three projects, you know, so so I haven't lost the faith in those at all. The thing I'm persevering less well where I think is just, you know, we've lockdown life.

**Nelima Begum**

I completely understand. You know you'd think we would have adjusted after a year and a bit but it's still really difficult for a lot of people.

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah, and I'm getting to the end of my tether, and I know I don't really, yeah I don't, I'm not one of these people is like you know freedom now! Even so I'm still a bit like, okay, now it's gonna be a fun 16 months or so, okay, now I need to at least go out a little bit and be amongst people a little bit, you know, and you realize how much you need people so I think persevering with adjusting to COVID. It's been a difficult thing, not that I think I've done badly I just know that my patience, started to wear thin with that. So it's not really a work-related thing, it's more like a general life thing but I think everyone can relate to that.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, that's fine. I was just about to say I think that's something that most of us can relate to, I mean, it's difficult as you said, it requires a lot of patience, still and there's only so many Netflix binges you can do in a day.

**Courttia Newland**

But then I realized how much am I going out with surrounded with - about work, you know, so now I'm not going out to work so much and have meetings and stuff I'm finding myself indoors and found myself indoors, a lot more and have to think about okay you know I really have to plan, when I'm going out and what I'm doing and things like that and even that is a bit of a chore whereas before, I'd be like okay well I'm going out to do this and while I do this I can do this that and the other you know but that just doesn't happen anymore.

**Nelima Begum**

It's a job in itself to get ready to go out and do something now because you've become so accustomed to living your whole life in one area basically, of your house.

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah, that's been a bit that's been a bit tough, but yeah, we've worked. I mean, the thing is we've writing is that, you know, a great chunk of it is just perseverance in so many different ways. You know you're persevering with the fact that you're going to write things especially if it's a film script or if it's a novel, you know, you've just got to persevere with writing, you got to persevere when it goes out, you know you've got persevere when you're getting feedback and when you're working on the proofs you know you've got to persevere with that like, I'm proofing for a new collection of short stories and you know, just having to read it over and over and over again that's a that's a level of perseverance as well. You got to persevere when it's going out there and you're getting reviews and you might not, you might get some reviews that you see that you don't particularly like, you know that's perseverance again you know like, to, to kind of just take it on and be like okay I'm not gonna let that affect me. So the whole writing process is about perseverance, the different types.

**Nelima Begum**

I like that you've like looked at it in different stages like the whole journey of how each stage requires a different level of perseverance and in what way as well. So you're screenwriter as well as a novelist, what do you turn to for inspiration when throwing yourself into the screenwriting project because I know you've mentioned, just in this conversation alone that you're working on quite a few things you have worked on quite a few things.

**Courttia Newland**

Watch stuff first and foremost, you know, just watch everything I can, like you just said that around about that Netflix bingeing and stuff and I am. I'm struggling now to really, really get into I just watched Underground Railroad which blew me away. After that I haven't found anything new for a while. Yeah, but I'm yeah yeah I just I just watched things mainly, and sometimes if I'm in this situation now where I can't find anything I'll watch old things, which means things that I missed that came up and I didn't get to see. So it's not like just on into just the new, latest freshest thing. Go back a little bit or maybe I'll watch classics, you know, I went to NFT the other day to see a classic film, black and white film. Yeah and it was really impressive you know so so yeah yeah I just watched that, that's the first thing I'll do is just watch and watch and watch a whole lot of stuff and try and get excited about it and try and see if it sparks ideas or gets me thinking. And then the second thing would be just being around people really interesting. Again, you know, going back to lockdown and bringing out and about, you know, and just like seeing what's going on in the world, and that really inspires me.

**Nelima Begum**

So are your creative processes for screenwriting and novels different, and if so how?

**Courttia Newland**

I don't think my creative process is for those things are. I'm really bad at these questions you know because I tend not to. I don't really differentiate between the two of them in a way that I think otherwise approach. Yeah.

**Nelima Begum**

That's really interesting.

**Courttia Newland**

No, no I never have and even when I was teaching, like I'm well known in my teaching to - people get annoyed with me because I'll be in a novel class and I'll be showing them films. Everyone is like 'why are we watching film?', I'll be getting them to draw diagrams about their structure, like okay can you visualize your structure, can you do this in a visual way and they do that. One guy got really annoyed once and was like 'this is not an art class'. It's like no no I draw inspiration from everywhere I use every medium. I don't care what the medium is anything can inspire me and it's about being open to that. So yeah, I use playwriting exercises in my novel class from a book on playwright in development, because I work in the different mediums I tend to see the similarities between those mediums rather than trying to compartmentalize them. And when I'm starting, I might do things in a different way, but I generally do the same things, so I'll do a chapter by chapter summary sometimes for a novel if I think I need that. And for film scripts I do a beat sheet, or an outline, you know, but but my outline for A River Called Time, the novel that's out now - pretty much reads like an outline for a film script, you know, I didn't really do it any different, but it's just I knew that it was going to be prose and character development, you know, if it's the same things I'll do it exactly the same way most of the time, you know, like maybe 50 words on each character. I'll do the same thing for for for the film scripts, and my notes, and pretty much written the same way as well, you know, write notes into my phone. And yeah, kind of work it like that so so yeah I don't really I just tend to have the same process in development. And then for me the difference is in, then what you do with that. When you go onto the page. So, the way the language that you use is different you know focusing on film it's more visual and prose it's more interior, you know, and you know, short stories, you know, you've got to be very concise. Yeah, yeah, so I'm aware of the different, different formats. But in the actual process of developing them, I just I just tend to do the same things.

**Nelima Begum**

Okay, that's really interesting I quite like that you said that you take inspiration in any and every medium, working across these different formats you've kind of always got that bigger picture in your head and see. It's not that you compartmentalize but you can kind of see across the different formats, rather than trying to stick them in different boxes.

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah, yeah, especially like you know when I started doing theater. I started out doing, obviously, novels, and I'd do short stories and I was doing screenplays at that time but I was just wasn't very good. And then when I got into theater that really helped my screenplay writing, but also my novel writing and weirdly enough, I think, actually doing a PhD. I was writing a PhD thesis, a few years ago, and I think that really impacted on my prose writing as well, and teaching and doing things TLC and stuff that really helps to expand you to think, kind of more outside of my own writing practice about what it is I'm doing.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah sometimes distance when you're writing and jumping in with other projects can actually help flesh out or develop what you're working on in the long run.

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah, exactly and then also seing it from a different angle when you're working in different mediums I think, you get to see, okay, you get to see the similarities as well but you can also say I take this little trick from this and use it in that, you know, and, yeah, I don't really like the idea as well, of like, you know novelists do this a lot, I think I think less so in theater, as well a little bit in theater actually but necessarily maybe in screenwriting if this idea that novels should behave a certain way. And, theater should behave a certain way, and just do that thing that everybody else has done before you and you just stick to that. For me, I'm like, I'm much more interested in exploration, and how can I might be a bit, and I know that annoys people sometimes because you're not behaving properly, you know, I mean, but I think that's where the exciting thing happens and you can see again with Small Axe and stuff, blurring the line between film and television, and all of those things were really exciting to me even beforehand, before I met Steve, and Steve obviously had the same ideas as well.

**Nelima Begum**

I agree with you that writing doesn't have, like, a uniform. Yeah, should be able to do what you want with it, because it's yours, and you've got conviction in the idea of the project. So it should really just echo you. You mentioned your novel earlier A River Called Time, I was just wondering what writing that was like and what inspired the work?

**Courttia Newland**

I was inspired by the fact that I had an out of body experience and it's astro projection, just after I'd written my first novel, and that's when I got the initial idea for it, and I had the out of body experience, it was really trippy and it was just like, it could in the in the in the book. And, yeah, after that I just thought it'd be really cool to write about that kind of thing, it's never really been done before, you know, people have written about time travel and various things, but they've, they've not ever looked at it from that perspective, you know, and, you know in a lot of traditional cultures, that's a big, that plays a big part in, in, you know, quantum physics and being able to see different times and things like that so I just thought, okay, you know, what if I took this approach really sorry, what was your first question again?

**Nelima Begum**

Oh, I just wanted to ask you what writing, it was like, the process of writing.

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah it was great. It was a really great process, it was a very long process again talking about perseverance. Well I started, I started it in. It was about, I think it was 2002/2003. And, uh, yeah, I finished part one in 2004, and then I didn't go back to write it again until 2019.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, this has been a long time coming.

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah, it took me like 20 years to write basically. So, yeah, so so so yeah that was a real big thing and perseverance and actually by the time it came to kicking out I was talking to Hannah Knowles at Canongate about it,and I talked to Crystal Mahey Morgan and only about it, you know, I've kind of been like okay, well, you know, it's probably not gonna happen. I'm more or less like putting a shell but, you know, this book is just not gonna it's not gonna ever come out, you know, but at the time I tried for a number of years to try and get like a deal for it, and it didn't happen but every time I wrote it and every time I was on it, it just seemed like it's just so amazing and I could really get into it and I really, I was really connected to it, and the writing process, when I started writing now again I definitely just finished Small Axe and scripts switch with Steve for Small Axe, and then before the next thing I had to do, and I was a little bit worried, you know, because we've been so long away from it but I just got straight into it, and it just literally poured out I mean, it's so crazy. So the writing process is super super fun. Yeah, I was a bit daunted by the whole by the whole thing but then once I got brilliant.

**Nelima Begum**

I'm glad that you've mentioned that you didn't, that you didn't leave it and that you kept pouring yourself into it every now and then because you know it's something that gave you joy and really excites you, because it brings us really nicely on to our next question quite often with writing it's really as you said, it's really easy to hit a wall and feel as though you might need to shelve the project or start something new, entirely. How do you differentiate between knowing when it's time to let something go and when to be patient and just carry on with it no matter how long it might take?

**Courttia Newland**

I'm just, I suppose it depends really. I mean, I'm, I'm quite a, I can put things down. And of course with River. In the end I was just like, look, that was a money. I was worrying about money, you know I was like, There's no way I can keep trying to write this book I don't have the money to cut to continue it so I had Arts Council funding to write the first part of the book, but I didn't have, you know, I didn't have Arts Council funding for the rest of it so that was one of the reasons I stopped and when I couldn't get a deal for it either I just couldn't afford to me to write this book. So I went on to other things, other times it's more creative, like there's a story in Cosmogramma - the short stories collection I'm working on, and it's called Seed, and I just got stuck. No, I got stuck on one part of it. And generally when that happens, yeah I tend to put it down. And I think I put things down for years, to be honest. Like I worked on other stories, the ones that were immediately grabbing me by the throat and demanded to be written, I wrote those instead. And every now and then I would come back and look at Seed and I still couldn't work out how to do it. And then one day I just picked it up and looked at it and I knew, I was like, 'oh, that's what you have to do'. And I think I've written a bit of it, that didn't quite work so I deleted that and I went back to the point where or I wasn't in trouble. And then I carried on writing from there again knowing what I had to do, and Seed is quite a tricky structure, because it takes place over, you know, something like 19 days or so, but it's not linear, so it jumps like you start with the first day and then you're jumped to day four, and then it'll be day seven, and those are marked out by the by the different scenes that you see. So I think that was just how do I keep getting back here and it's quite fragmented and stop-start-y, you know, tricky. Yeah I think with that, I just felt a little bit like yeah what points, am I going to choose, am I choosing the right points, how do I how do I do this thing. And, yeah, I just, I just wasn't sure how to do that. There was a couple of stories in that collection that happened like that where I stopped partway through, I think maybe Nominal was another one where I stopped partway through and then continued right in it later on down the line. But I think the thing is, for me, the, the thing always is, is to get to the end. At some point, and there are a couple of stories that didn't make it into Cosmogramma because I never got to the end, but I started them and I wasn't entirely happy with the way it started. And so I just never, never, continue those stories but for the most part, it was just like, even if I was feeling a little bit like this isn't quite right. I would carry on to the end. And then I could get it right and revisions.

**Nelima Begum**

Okay, so again it's like that, that issue of distance sometimes that you just need to walk away from it for a bit and then come back. Walk away and come back as many times as you need to, did it feel like a eureka moment when you just knew what had to be done to be able to finish it?

**Courttia Newland**

No, it was more like, it was actually much more mundane than that it was more like, 'why didn't you see that before'?. It's so simple.

**Nelima Begum**

Did you look at yourself and say 'well it took you long enough!'?

**Courttia Newland**

It took me all that time to come up with a really simple solution, but it's good because the simple solutions and usually the best ones, you know, and I think the problem had been, I was trying to make it too complicated when I came back to Seed, you know, and when I, when I was like, h, it's just a really simple scene you just need to put in, you know at this point here, you know, and it works really well like it's one of my favorite scenes now in the book in the in the story theory but like, at the time I was just like I just didn't know what to do. And another story is Dark Matters in Cosmagramma. Every time I wrote it I, I just, every time I revised it I mean I wrote it and I was just never happy with it, it was fine. I've got beginning middle and end, I wrote the whole thing, and I wasn't happy with it. I kept revising it and writing it I think, I can't remember how many years I revised it, but it was a long time. I've been writing this collection since about 2011 something like that. So, I mean, that's when I wrote the first story in the collection. So, and by 2014 I was more or less ready I had all the stories there so since then I've always been revising and revising revising them, and, and then one day I just looked at it and I was like it works like and I don't, I don't know how to happen. I'd corrected it you know we got even then it felt like, it's just like fluid, you know, like I hadn't done any work which was really great. And I think also, I read John Updike, My Father's Fears And Other Stories, and there was a validation in one of those stories because he started the story a little bit like how I started Dark Matters. And, I think I felt better about it then it was a very weird awkward story in the beginning, the way I started because it was kind of off topic, but then I saw John Updike had done the same thing, and I was like, okay, that's, that's all right, something that changed.

**Nelima Begum**

Oh cool. So we're actually on the topic of your short stories already and you're like previewing all of my questions. So with Cosmogramma, did you, again, it's kind of similar to what I asked you before but do you feel like short story required a different kind of creative discipline? Or was it a similar process of mapping out and planning and outlining the way you did with screenwriting projects and your novels?

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah no I don't tend to map out short stories. Yeah, I kind of generally hold them in my head. Although sometimes that gets me into trouble like with Seed. I just didn't know what I was going to do next, I had that kind of idea in my head but I didn't know for sure, but generally I tend to go more instinctively with short stories, and just try to write them. And I will know I've got notes I've got notes on my phone. The most of the stories in Cosmogramma, or at least, you know, I'll say, this story is gonna be about this, this may be about this you know like two or three sentences about the story, and then things that I want to put in, I want to remember. I'll place them in the notes as well. But generally, and I might write a beginning paragraph, if I get, like, you know, I get that in my head, I might be like oh that that feels really good let me just write that down and I written that in my phone or what we're now on the computer just to open interest and see how it feels and play around with it. And then, you know, just the slices of ideas, but generally I don't outline them very much, any more than like slightly like little sentences simple sentences.

**Nelima Begum**

Okay cool, so you're just, you'll just steam ahead with them and have like a holding pen of ideas and things that you could potentially put in.

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah, yeah, yeah but I generally try to map it out in my head, and have it all in my head, and then just just go for it and see what comes out

**Nelima Begum**

You or a speculative fiction, with the loss of your writing crosses genre boundaries which takes a huge amount of imagination. Even so, barriers to creativity are to do with how large the imagination is, what are the everyday things, if any, that can get in the way and how do you deal with them and find balance?

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah, kids! Well I mean, even just talking to you my son just walked in. I mean he had to go and leave you know so, yeah. Yeah, he was just doing a talk and again, like, yeah just everyday things just having my kids in school drop off some pickups and yeah, just, you know, my mom calling, you know, stuff like that.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, finding time for everyone in your life, that can be, can be tricky sometimes.

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah, yeah, and other work commitments you know like, maybe your agent wants to speak to you, or you've got a meet in or you've got other work that you're supposed to be doing while you're doing this work, which is my problem at the minute, but for your different three different things to do one I'm proofing. So it kind of tends to push you back sometimes and then, you know, getting a job doesn't help either feeling not feeling good for a day. So just you know just normal everyday life gets in the way of writing all the time, you know, but I tend not to beat myself up about that. And that's gonna happen.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah of course - life just happens and sometimes you have to just roll with the punches.

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah and I try not to get upset about it. I mean I do get a bit grotty about it sometimes if it's a lot of stuff. I need to work. But yeah, but that's generally try not to. And you know like the regular things of everyday life, like, really make good fiction as well. So, so I don't separate them especially not from speculative fiction and try and incorporate the things I like. I like grounded speculative fiction I like fiction that actually feels like it's rooted in some kind of reality, even when it's far, far away so I'm always putting stuff in that I've seen in our contemporary world.

**Nelima Begum**

That's a really interesting way to look at it to just weave in things that are familiar.

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah, it's really important. It might be just the smallest details, you know, but just things that people can see around them I think is important and I've been writing a lot of stuff that in Cosmogramma alien invasion story set in Stratford, you know, and, you know, like a kind of semi zombie story saying Shepherds Bush, you know, so just really trying to - it's always about America. These things always happen in America. Yeah, a bit more, you know like, things that places that we're familiar with, you know.

**Nelima Begum**

Oh, that's great. Do you - just coming off the topic off balance, do you have like any rituals or affirmations or coping mechanisms even that you turn to when you feel that you need to persevere or push yourself over the finishing line for the project that you know that you might be finding tricky or it doesn't want to conclude itself? Like, is there anything that kind of just helps you get in the zone?

**Courttia Newland**

really you know give me I'll just, like, back away from ways I'm trying to be like just be like you shouldn't really force it. I just then, then go and lie down on something, trying to take my mind off it, you know, might go for a walk. Yeah, I might read, I don't generally have any rituals, I'm not. I'm very suspicious of rituals, to be honest, in writing, I feel like if there's ever anything that, that, that, you get used to needing to have in order to write and then don't have it. That can be a problem. So I remember when I first started I was like okay I'm going to make sure when I'm doing British Council gigs and stuff. So when I'm in Prague and stuff I have to make sure I can write in Prague in a hotel room. I mean I can write in any place I can write in a cafe, I can write in a youth center, I can write anywhere, so that. Yeah and I made sure I did it in those spaces so that I wouldn't need to have this optimum condition in order to be able to write because that really scared me.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, just keep yourself open and fluid and let things be organic.

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah yeah it should be able to happen anywhere, anytime you know if I get the idea. I can start working on this, you know, so, so yeah, so the ritual things been something I've always resisted.

**Nelima Begum**

Okay, cool. Which part of the writing process for you is the hardest and do you ever find yourself suffering from writer's block or a critical inner voice?

**Courttia Newland**

What part of it is the hardest for me, I think the challenge for me is always about trying to write things that don't conform to other people's expectations of what writing should do. And then the response when that happens, like I'm always trying to do something else in the meaning reviews and stuff no and for the most part I get great reviews but there's always a few reviews where it's slightly completely misconstrued what you're doing. I find that difficult because I'm like, obviously trying to do different things here. I'm trying to. So I find I find that hard, Like, yeah, is trying to see you know that that's what's going on, but it doesn't really worry me too much, but just at that point in time, you know, I kind of had that that knee jerk reaction of course you know because it's dealing with your own work, you know, then I try and get over it - what was the other question, sorry?

**Nelima Begum**

Do you ever find yourself suffering from writer's block or a critical inner voice that reviews but is there anything within you?

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah, no, my, my, my inner voice is very critical. I suppose like everybody else's you know and I'm always having to go at myself about stuff but I think my, my inner voice has got more compassionate my inner voice knows what will get me working, rather than trying to stop me from working. And I think the kind of - 'who you trying to fool?' inner voice you know like, no, you're not really built for this in other words, kind of like faded now like it takes a different approach now it's like 'okay you know you can do this, but you're not doing it right now.' You know?

**Nelima Begum**

It's a lot more understanding.

**Courttia Newland**

A lot more understanding. Yeah so so yeah my inner voice is very much like okay, you know how to make this work to make this work. And so that's really great for me. And I, you know, I always said I don't believe in writer's block. And that's true to a degree. I mean, obviously, it happens. And like I said with Seed, stuff it happened to me, but for me the, the, it's always about like not having worked out something yet. And that thing that you have to work out, can take, you know, a long time or it can take a little bit of time, and that's all it is. So, I don't believe that writer's block is, is a non negotiable state of being. Now, I think it can be fixed, it's something to get around yeah like my thing to get around it always is like to just to stop. Don't force it, you know, step away from it, made it happen. Like when you're trying to remember something, you know and you stop thinking about the thing you're trying to remember it pops back into your head. I think that's, that's what I'm waiting for really so I don't believe in that sense I just think it's just a part of the process that happens sometimes. And we just got to wait to get over.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah. Going back to you inner voice really quickly because I know you mentioned that now it's a lot more compassionate, would you say that you've kind of taught yourself to be a lot kinder to yourself over the years, with regards to writing and your craft, and how much you're putting in?

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah, definitely. Because in the beginning it was more like come on and prove it to me prove to me. You're going to be a writer. You show me that you can be a writer and yeah you haven't, you haven't got anything yet you know so yeah that was in the days of the scholar, and society there and then you know even snakeskin is like, yeah. Oh, you've got to do it correctly every time and you've got to get it 100% right every time, and I just don't feel that way anymore. You know, and everything is an ongoing experiment or process, you know, and, and then you know, getting it right, whose criteria is that by, you know, and more or more it's by my own criteria. So yeah, I've got really to the point where, you know, I know my own failings I might know my own successors and that's really what matters. And I think yeah definitely having, having a number of years where we're, you know stuff wasn't going so well, and stuff wasn't getting published and and like I say still being able to write and produce, I think that's just done it really where I'm not really, yeah, I'm not really concerned with the outside voice the inner voice has been like okay we proved it, or you've done these things and, you know, even when it looked like we weren't right to everybody else, it turned out they were right. So, yeah, yeah, I feel much more comfortable, I think, again, that age thing as well.

**Nelima Begum**

Definitely I agree with you. I think it's more of a comfort now just because you know that you have done it. And so, it will happen again.

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah, exactly, exactly. But yeah, It's also states just drive into something different. And yeah, being accepting of the type of writer you are, I think, you know, and I've also found imprints of the type of writer I am and other writers that I really admire, and just understanding what your lane is as well, you know, saying okay well I don't do that kind of thing over there so therefore you're not going to have that kind of response you know those things really like are encouraging for me.

**Nelima Begum**

So you've given plenty of brilliant advice in this episode so far but what do you recommend to writers who are finding it hard to persevere, and how can they re inspire themselves?

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah, just like going back to what I said before, I think the best way to get inspired is to not not have anxiety of influence, you know, and just to be. Go and see things that really make you feel alive and connected and think it's the best word you've seen, and, and then, and then also be compassionate with yourself. Again, just be, be aware that as long as you're doing your best, that's totally fine. And you'll get, you'll get to the worse the level of the worst in you admire so much by just relaxing and just being yourself, you know, and everything is a process everything takes time. So yeah, just just just try and be inspired and be yourself to the best of your ability.

**Nelima Begum**

I love that. What's the best piece of writing advice you've ever been given?

**Courttia Newland**

Just both my, my writing mentors, they just it's all about the work. Yeah, and that's really what he said you know it's all about the work don't know be caught up in any of these other things, you know, that might distract you don't get caught up in the glamour of it don't get caught in the ego or the fame or any other things, that's not the important thing. The important thing is the work. And if I hadn't. If I hadn't taken that advice on I think yeah it would have been really really difficult to persevere and get to the other side.

**Nelima Begum**

Okay. So outside of literature is there anything that you've watched, or listened to or done lately that has inspired you? And it can be absolutely anything.

**Courttia Newland**

I mean, going to the countryside, I have been going through lockdown quite regularly and yeah going doing that and just don't go out and be amongst nature is really inspiring. That really worked for me. Not in a sense that oh, now I'm going to write about the countryside or anything like that but just being in the right mood in the right frame of mind and that's also a thing for writers, get yourself in the mood where you feel like you're, you're relaxed and you feel good about yourself and stuff is really important. Now just go to the places and find the thing that makes you feel comfortable, you know, yeah there's that and just yeah just watching great things, you know, I think, just always makes me buzz, and can feel like getting back into the work again.

**Nelima Begum**

Right, I'm gonna ask you for Netflix recommendations after this. What are you reading at the moment?

**Courttia Newland**

I am reading The Upper World by Femi Fadugba but I think, but I don't know if I'm pronouncing the surname right. I'm reading it anyway.

**Nelima Begum**

And the sneak preview, are you able to tell us what you're writing right now, or is it under wraps?

**Courttia Newland**

I'm not really writing anything right now. Yeah, yeah, no I'm not writing two reasons I'm not writing one I'm not in that part of the process with any of my projects. I've written stuff or I'm waiting to write stuff, too. I've got like a frozen shoulder, so I'm trying not to write for now I think would be too much right and two or three years or so yeah I finished my PhD thesis I wrote Small Axe, A River Called Time and a number of other scripts as well.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah you've got a lot under your belt, to have like earned a rest of this point.

**Courttia Newland**

Yeah but I mean it's not it's not intentional, I mean, probably, like, you know, had things worked out in a different way, I wouldn't be writing and it just so happens that I'm researching for new projects and and developing at the minute, so, so yeah, I just, I will be writing, pretty soon.

**Nelima Begum**

Great stuff, we're looking forward to it. Thank you so much for joining me Courttia, this was a brilliant episode and was really lovely to speak to you about all this because I feel really inspired and I'm sure audiences will be inspired to write.

**Courttia Newland**

Thank you, thank you so much. It's great. I really enjoyed it. Thank you.