



Tales from The Leeds Library

season 2

S2:E10: Yvonne Battle-Felton – author

Transcript

00:00:14 Molly

Hello and welcome to Tales from The Leeds Library, the Leeds Library's podcast series in which we talked to members of our extended community about their lives, their work and their relationship to books, libraries and literature. Founded in 1768, the Leeds Library is the oldest surviving subscription library of its kind in the UK and throughout this series we'll also be diving periodically into the library's rich history to find out what makes us and our Members one of the most interesting and unique cultural institutions in Leeds and the UK. I'm Molly Magrath the projects assistant at The Leeds Library and today our guest is Yvonne Battle-Felton. Yvonne Battle-Felton, author of *Remembered*, is an author academic, podcast host, creative producer, and writer. *Remembered* was longlisted for the Woman's Prize for fiction in 2019 and shortlisted for the Jhalek Prize in 2020. Winner of a Northern Writers Award in fiction in 2017, Yvonne was commended for children's writing in the Faber Andlyn BAME (FAB) Prize in 2017 and has titles in Penguin Random House's *The Ladybird Tales of Superheroes* and *The Ladybird Tales of Crowns and Thrones*. Yvonne teaches creative writing at Sheffield Hallam University, where she is a Principal Lecturer and Humanities Business Enterprise Lead. Host of *Write Your Novel* with Yvonne Battle-Felton, a write along podcast series developed with New Writing North, Yvonne creates and hosts literary and storytelling events and opportunities. She has recently completed a second novel and her first middle grade adventure.

00:01:38 Molly

Welcome, thank you so much for chatting to me today, so if it's OK with you like I want to split this episode into 2 sections. Because I've read *Remembered* and I loved it and I want to talk about it in a bit of detail. I also kind of want to discuss your and your career as a writer and your relationship to books and writing kind of yeah, separately. So you were born in Pennsylvania, and you grew up in New Jersey and lived in Maryland. Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship to writing and literature and how it first started? Were you always a bit of a writer? Were you always into reading or did it come to you later?

00:02:14 Yvonne

I would say I was actually a talker first, so I mean I could talk to anyone about anything, and I think that led to me being like, well, I want to be a writer. So, I was nonstop, like my grandmother thought I was going to be a newscaster or something because I was just like always talking. But then there was something about a story too that I absolutely have always loved. So reading has been a way that it

kind of transforms the world around you. It takes you to different places, I was always the main character in everything I read so I got to have like all these really interesting adventures. And then I got to talk to people about them. And I always I loved it. It was magical. My combination of wanting to talk and then the falling in love with books and you know seeing myself in these books. I felt like it was a combination that was all. It was inevitable. I was always wanting to be a writer and always going to be a writer, even if I was writing for myself because I could entertain myself in that way. So I think my love for books it came really, I can't say there was a defining moment. I just feel like they were always in my life and I've always loved them and always felt like they loved me back.

00:03:27 Molly

Umm, it's interesting that it's that idea of, the story is what you love and then writing is just the craft. The way to get to the story.

00:03:39 Yvonne

That's a great way to put it because I think that's exactly what it is. It's when I look at even now, like all the things that I love to do it comes down to this story and being able to touch people, for me at least, is through that story. That's also how I get to know people, and it's how I get to know places. I get lost every single place I go. But if there's a story that leads me from this place to this place, I'm going to remember that story and that journey, and that's what's going to lead me where I have to be.

00:04:05 Molly

And it's also, I think when you come to storytelling through engaging with other people and telling stories like even as a child, I remember telling stories kind of you've got that background in creating stories for an audience as well. So, it's almost kind of a natural progression into, writing?

00:04:24 Yvonne

You know what it might be exactly that because I know I talk to people all the time when they say I write, I write all the time but I just write for myself, as long as I like it, you know, and I'm going like what? Yeah, that's a diary entry. Like you know when you write your diary entry that's completely for you. No one needs to understand the connexion, not one ever needs to see it. But outside of that, as a reader who is not in your head, I'm like I'm going to need you to, you know, give me some clues and show me, but maybe that it, it's my relationship to words and talking that maybe gives me that that ability I used to be able to tell a joke. It took me 20 minutes to tell it, but uhm, I would tell the joke in my head before I told it to the person. So, I would be laughing like actually in tears cracking up because I knew what was going to happen next and it took forever but the audience would be like, oh my God like please tell me, and by audience I mean, this was like family and friends like. Thankfully I wasn't like on the stage going 'and then there's this joke' and then just cracking myself up. But there is something in story and giving it to someone and having them understand or feel something that you wanted them to feel. Or feel something you weren't expecting.

00:05:32 Molly

Yeah, absolutely. And do you, I mean, do you remember what books and or writing or, and I guess then also storytellers' kind of inspired you or really affected you at that age?

00:05:42 Yvonne

You know other than *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* was one of those books that I just, I absolutely loved it. And I can't really tell you why. It was mostly, you know, you read some books and there's a feeling that you get. There's a just some sort of magic. You feel yourself as the main character and you're slipping through the pages and *A Wrinkle in Time* was probably, actually, even before *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, I feel like *A Wrinkle in Time* was one of those books you kind of just go back to, and I could always enjoy it, especially when I was reading it with myself as a main character. It wasn't until rereading these books with my kids that I'd be like, oh, wow well, there's no Black people in it like no other people of colour, or if there is, there was uhm, I feel like it is *A Wrinkle in Time* where it was like well into the book. Like I said, I was sitting there reading with my kids going like 'I love this book and you're gonna too, it's so magical' And then it was like and so and so with the Black boy. And I'm like what? And the character wasn't, you know, like fleshed out, he actually hadn't done anything other than being Black. There was no. He had no magical qualities. In reading books to my kids when I started seeing that absence and being like wow. So the same books that I loved and the same books I imagined myself in, and I was having these adventures. I can't pass them on in that way to my kids. So, I think part of my writing, it's that love of story that love of connecting. But then also that advocacy for like, if these books don't exist for kids of colour or if my kids couldn't pick up a book and be like, yeah, I see me in it then I need to write those books.

00:07:32 Molly

Is that, uh, consideration, well, how do you think about the audience when you write them? Are you thinking both of a Black audience and a White audience so the White reader would be reading it and they would be immersed in the story and they would feel, you know that they were the main character, but they would they would also know that they weren't, and that was an experience that they couldn't relate to in the same way?

00:07:57 Yvonne

I think it is both, and I think it's beyond Black and White and you know I want everyone to be able to read it and to be able to see something of their own story in it, even if they're saying OK, this particular circumstance couldn't or didn't happen to me, but being able to relate in some way emotionally to connect their want or need or whatever to something that they see the characters want or need, their journey. I mean and for some readers who are saying wow, this is nothing about my experience at all, there's still things. Like for *Remembered* I feel like there's family. There's that mother and son relationship. There's that worry that most mothers have for their kids. There's that relationship of love, and but also even sisters like how many of us have siblings and then that relationship between loving this person but finding them the most annoying person in the world. And what that tension might be like between the two? So there are things that we want that are universal and that might be safety or love and belonging and things around identity, some of the same things we're worried about. And then sometimes it's there, it's the overarching concern might seem to be sifted by who's experiencing it, and sometimes I think for us pulling ourselves out of it is a human experience.

00:09:13 Yvonne

For me, I said I still remember when I was probably about 16 or 17 and I was in New Jersey and my mom decided she was going to move to Germany by herself. And I was kind of grappling with like all these feelings of feeling abandoned. 'cause I was a good child, like between my sister and myself I was the one that, like if you could stick it through her like I was a breeze to be a mother too. So I was like wow what's going on? And I started reading these books by Toni Morrison and Alice Walker

Maya Angelou, and I started being introduced to these characters who could do things on the page - these writers were phenomenal - and they were able to put you into a world that you know didn't recognise, I didn't recognise myself as any other characters, they were from a place that I wasn't from and they spoke in different dialects that maybe I wasn't necessarily accustomed to. But reading it was like wow OK, I can see what it might be like for people that you love to do things that you don't like and how sometimes it's not about you, it's actually about them, that person, that character. And those books I feel like made me a more empathetic person, so that's what I'd like readers to get, that I might not be in this book, it might not be about me, but I can look at this character and I can see their complexities and I can look at outside of this individual and what seems to be their choices. What are their choices with it within this context? So writing was a lot for me.

00:10:44 Molly

I mean, it's really interesting to say that because I think that in, I mean I've only read *Remembered*, but all of the characters in that, their psychology is so well thought out and their relationships and they're not always positive all the time, and these characters are so nuanced. But ultimately, it's their kind of love for each other and their relationship that you're invested in.

00:11:11 Yvonne

Thank you. Each individual character has their own story and they all have what they want and what they need and what they're willing to do to get what they want. And I think for me, writing it like I didn't know who was going to do what next time. They often surprised me. They hurt me. There were times I was crying. I was like Oh my gosh, I can't believe you would do this, and I'm going of course you would do this because what other choice do you have? And what might power look like for this character? And what might agency look like for that character. So yeah in the writing of it that's actually how I came to see how they were, and they developed this, you know, through the writing in the scenes. But you're right, the thing that that that connects them might be love or might be family and overall what they're willing to do to keep it.

00:11:55 Molly

So, I want to briefly talk a little bit about children's writing, 'cause you mentioned kind of reading books to your children, and you've written some books for children yourself. So there's *Ladybird Tales of Crowns and Thrones*, and *Ladybird Tales of Superheroes*. So, I'm curious how you find the process of writing for children as opposed to adults.

00:12:18 Yvonne

So for the *Ladybird* ones that was a completely different experience because those were rewriting myths, so they already have their own story and their own, you know origins and histories. And so what I was doing was rewriting those for a contemporary children's audience. I think initially I read and reread that brief completely wrong, like each time I read it I read something new into just the brief of it. So my first time, like the first draught was completely fantastical. Because I was going well, if no one knows that Thor said this thing, then no one knows that he didn't say this thing, so I'd be writing things that, like you know, didn't happen, or things that might have happened based on what did happen and then like the editor and she's like, you know, this is really great, this is great, but I'm you know, no. And so kind of just, you know, bringing it back to the actual myths and looking that source and rewriting it for the contemporary audience. So I think it probably took me like the second time to be like, oh OK, so a little less 'what if' and a little more like 'do this is what happened' and once I feel I kind of understood that I would, you know, get back on track and be able to it. For

me, at least, rewriting myths is a completely different monster than the other children's fiction than I do. So I was able to write a Commission for Writing on the Wall, a Liverpool writing organisation and we did writing superhero stories. It's in their anthology about superhero stories for of diverse characters. And so mine is a character who does the right thing. For the wrong reason. So he's trying to foil someone plans and it turns out he ends up doing a good thing and learning something about the person and himself in the process. Because I love writing a villain and that was a lot of fun because, you know, I mean of course kids have this imagination and they see things in different ways, so that part was fun. But then I've written my first adventure manuscript, which is a bit more challenging because I wanted it to be for middle grade readers. That's because I had a book club for middle grade readers. And so I wanted to write something kind of like, well, what might they enjoy reading? And for this manuscript it was a lot of handholding. More just to, I couldn't leave as much up to nuance or as much up to, uh, they'll figure this out, because really, what point of reference would they have had? So that part was harder. Not speaking down to them or anything like that, but just making sure there were a lot more bread crumbs for them to follow to lead them to some of the solutions and then remembering not to be...because I also like murder mysteries

00:15:19 Molly

No way, I didn't know that!

00:15:24 Yvonne

That's how I fell in love with them. I guess as an adult I felt like I was reading definitely more murder mysteries, like after reading Alice Walker I started reading more murder mysteries and so I think writing, I thought I was going to write murder mysteries.

00:15:38 Molly

That's so interesting. I mean I can see how, not all of it, but elements of that maybe tie into *Remembered* because there is this kind of question of what happens the whole way through which you know? Yeah, I don't want to give too much away, actually. I was going to say something about that but ...

00:15:59 Yvonne

Yeah, I think that at the heart of it, I might be returning back to mystery when I look at. Yeah, what I'm writing now and well, 'cause my manuscript, this the superhero one is finished and I'm going to start sending that out to agents and like kind of see what happens, and for the next one that I want to write is a teen mystery theory set in New Jersey. But set in this place called Sweetwater which is I want to say where I grew up but I feel like I grew up in so many parts of New Jersey. So one of the places I grew up. And it's beautiful and it's one of those lovely places that you could return back to. I haven't been back, but one of those places you could return back to, but I always think of it like wow, what a great place for a murder and aha.. we put that in the brochure.

00:16:46 Molly

It's an interesting thing to think of your childhood home.

00:16:51 Yvonne

I think they'd love to hear it that, no. I think we need a slogan for a sign, like I have one. But in case they don't take that up, I'm writing a mystery about it.

00:17:00 Molly

Well, I mean, Speaking of New Jersey and, well you lived in Maryland as an adult, but I kind of wonder how you find the literary scene in the UK differs to the literary scene in America?

00:17:16 Yvonne

It's funny because I can't say that I was all that active in it, so let's see. We moved here in 2013 and in 2009, I think that was when I finished my MA and I did that in writing fiction and creative nonfiction, so a dual concentration. And one thing I really learned from that programme was about community. The writing community, and so like through my undergrad and through most of my masters, I went through just like going to campus, going to class, going to the library, even like coming home and mom-ing, or going to work 'cause I was doing all that while I was working full time and so I really didn't do much on campus at all. And you know they have events, they have like societies, they have all these groups. I didn't know about any of them. 'cause it was like do I have a class there? No? OK like as if I didn't even know it existed, so it wasn't even like I was prioritising one thing over the other. I just had no idea about all these community things going on. And then with my masters for the first part of it, I was doing fiction and I was doing the same thing. I had classes in Baltimore and classes in DC and I was travelling too, and we lived outside of Baltimore. I would go to like work in Baltimore and then get a class or work in DC but it was like I was there so briefly, just during the class. I took the kids on a Saturday we'd go to the library and get my stuff, but even then it was kind of like the trip across the campus to the library but not like, oh let's look at this and look at that. And then they had, toward the end of my degree or what would have been toward the end of my degree they had a class in Florence. It was a nine day intensive class and they could only go if you took a class there that you hadn't taken yet. And of their list, the only one that I wanted to take that I hadn't taken, was creative nonfiction. And so I was like, yeah, like you know, I hadn't been in Italy and so this was the perfect opportunity. So I went and it was such an experience because it was all about that the community building. So, we had workshops, I don't know why but it was different in Florence than it was or on campus, we did a lot of writing together, we walked through this beautiful cemetery. And it was like taking notes and wondering and asking questions. And then there's talks and you're going into museums and experiencing them as a writer with a, you know, a group of other writers, and you're sharing problems and challenges and the writing and celebrating it. And it was like, Oh my Gosh, I want more of this. Where is this been all my life? and they're like, yeah, right here. And I ended up adding creative nonfiction to my degree, so that that's why I have a dual concentration and for me it was that start of something. It was also for me, a way of looking at ... so sometimes when I'm facing a challenge I go through and look at it as if I was a main character. What do I want? What's standing in the way? What am I willing to do to get it? And it helps me to kind of plot out different scenarios because I don't plot in a book or in a story, but in life I'm like oh wait a minute okay. And it also reminds me that the people in my life, if I consider them characters, there's things that they want, and sometimes those things aren't the same as what I want, so it was a nice way for me to kind of go back to the idea. Like OK, wait a minute, what do I want? Like I went through the longest time of when people would ask me what kind of music do you like? And I'm like, oh, I like motocross. I'm like wait a minute do I? My older son liked motocross so I was taking him to motocross and they'll be doing that and I'm like do I personally like it like? Yeah for me that trip was like it was a return to myself and then when there's all this stuff going on around me with all these people who can help you and you're supporting one another, so that love for that writing community for me like started in Florence and it's just burst ever since.

00:21:19 Molly

Yeah, it feels like a very main character move to decide you're going to move halfway across the world. What do you think? Do you think that came of that mindset or was it the course that drew you? What was it – why did you decide to move?

00:21:41 Yvonne

You know, so I should say that also when I moved from New Jersey to Maryland it was because I was reading a lot of books that were set in Maryland and I convinced a friend that we just had to move to Maryland. I think to this day I don't think she ever asked why. And I don't know if I had said 'have you read this book?' if she would have said 'it's fiction?'. So there's a precedent. But it started with Maryland because of me moving because of words or stories or whatever. So moving to the UK was because there was a creative writing PhD and at that point like after Hopkins, I was a director of Public relations at a small company, and that was a lot of fun because it meant you know, creating experiences and writing about. But I but I felt like I wanted to do it a little bit different. I wanted to make a shift and I was given an opportunity to teach at a university that I had gone, to teach adjunct so like you know, part time, and I started doing it and I was like, oh actually I quite like this and then I started doing it at another school, at a Community College that I had gone to and then I was like, oh, actually, I really like this. So I started doing more and more of that and then less than most of the PR work and I ended up like just doing more of the teaching. But I knew that at least to get a full time faculty position there I needed a PhD. And we were living on the East Coast and the courses that I saw were on the West Coast, so it would have meant moving the kids anyway. And then one of my colleagues was doing a degree at Lancaster. And I think I thought she was doing a PhD, and I think I thought she was doing it online. She was doing it online, but when I applied I do remember joking with the kids and saying like wouldn't it be funny if you know if it was in England and hahaha and they're like yeah hahaha and then I applied and when I was accepted it was like 'to study in Lancaster'. And I was like wow, what? Is that what you meant? You know I was thinking is that how they say online there? And they were like yeah you know you're writing about slavery, we just assumed you'd want to do it here. And it had never crossed my mind to do it in England. Part of that, though I think it's because slavery always feels like this US, you know institution, this UK thing and you forget that we didn't invent that.

00:24:00 Molly

Yeah, absolutely.

00:24:02 Yvonne

I mean so coming here, I wouldn't have done it without my kids. So I spoke to them and asked each one like would you be OK with moving? And I thought my oldest was going to be the hardest because she was going into her final year of US high school. She wanted to go to US university. maybe 'cause it was like that was the thing moving here would have meant like either year 13 for her, which we don't have. We stop at 12th grade. So I offered that I could defer my place and then that way she could finish in the US and then kind of start university before the boys and I moved and she was like no, let's do it because she was like people don't just move to other countries for for what they want. And I'm like wow, first like who knew that she thought there were limits to what people can do. And so since she was like, let's do it like we did it.

00:24:59 Molly

That's so brave. I wouldn't have been that brave at that age.

00:25:01 Yvonne

I know. I'd like to think that I would have because like that was around the age where my mom was deciding that she was moving to a different country and if she had asked, I feel like I would have been like of course, you know, I'll come with you 'cause I wouldn't have thought like, oh yeah, I'll stay here and you know and I'll just do whatever. I had at that time I think a very clear idea of what I was going to do and like I was going to go to university and I was going to do all these things. But then her moving kind of just shifted my plans and so I knew that I couldn't come here without my kids being like, yeah, I want to do it. I wouldn't have done it otherwise, really.

00:25:42 Molly

Did that, did that feel like sort of a full circle moment then that move?

00:25:48 Yvonne

It definitely did, like being able to bring them along. The first round of applications for visas. They weren't approved. My daughter was approved, the boys weren't approved and I was like Oh my God. And then, like you could appeal it from, you know from here which would have been me coming and essentially with my daughter, and doing it with my boys over there and she was like I'll stay with the while you go to the UK and do it. And then ultimately we ended up reapplying. And she was phenomenal, she still is phenomenal, and she paid for the boys for their new application. But it all went through and everybody was able to come but it would have been such a different journey. I know that people study and sometimes they they're not able to bring their kids. And for me, I just feel like the reason that I wouldn't have done it was because I knew for me what that felt like.

00:26:38 Molly

It sounds like, ultimately, that this kind of this decision that your mother made in your childhood, which kind of knocked you off course, has actually meant that life doesn't have to be this linear path, or you don't have to have it all planned out. You kind of embrace every opportunity as it comes, even if it's not quite as you expected.

00:26:54 Yvonne

I think that's what I've had to do yeah.

00:26:57 Molly

And ultimately, that makes better stories, I think you know where it's not, certainly with this, with murder mysteries you want something that's not expected. You want that twist, don't you? Maybe that's too tenuous of a link. But I want to talk about creative writing in universities. So you completed your PhD whilst raising three kids. And as you said your journey into university wasn't straightforward or how you necessarily expected it, and so I'm curious from your perspective as a student and now also as a teacher what do you think that you can learn through writing in universities that you can't from life and vice versa? So, what does life experience give you that you know a university education doesn't necessarily?

00:27:54 Yvonne

I think from me 'cause I can only speak from my framework, so what they gave me. The PhD helped me to centre myself and my writing in a way that I hadn't been doing, so after my masters I was teaching writing, but I wasn't actually doing a lot of writing. The writing I was submitting was from my thesis, but as far as writing new things, I really kind of didn't make the time to do it. And so doing the PhD, of course meant that I had time to do it. I had to make time to do it. I had to make it a

priority which at that time it was something I hadn't been doing a lot of, making myself a priority. Making what I want a priority, and so the PhD I always feel like it was my selfish pursuit of me and I'm so glad I did it. And so it meant like you know, making a schedule where writing was part of the day and then the other research that goes into the writing was a part of the day. And when was I going to be doing the teaching part of my day? And kind of building everything so it was around mom-ing. My schedule was really good while I was here especially at Lancaster, so that I could take my son to school, go with him, and then come back and either teach or research or do whatever I had to do and then also pick him up from school. There's things in your day that you really value and for me that was what I really valued so it was really nice to be able to craft my day around those things. But having that structure where you have deadlines, I'm deadline driven, and so you had deadlines and it gave me that. But also I knew from day one that I was doing my PhD differently than I had done undergrad, and then I had done my MA. So I had a radio show while I was there through a society, I joined the radio show. Because you know, I like talking and so I had a chance to develop my own show. So I interviewed writers about how they make a living with their words so that I could look at how I can make a living with my words, and then I did all these the business related things which was great because I was looking at so what am I going to do with my degree? And also, I come from like my grandmother owned four houses because she has four kids and so like I come from a line of, you know people who are, or a line of women who are preparers and you know doers. So it was like So what am I going to do and how am I going to do it so? I was going to all the enterprise meetings and teams things and stuff like that which is great because they ended up sponsoring my visa when I completed my PhD. I convinced a friend to help me to launch a literary salon, so we had a monthly literary event where we have people gathering, writers reading to us with food and music. I needed these things. I needed that sense of community. And then also a two Story open mic night, because I get to know people through their stories. So I started cantering my need for stories and it was such an important part of my life and my research and my writing an just who I am in my core. And if I hadn't done my PhD I don't know how or when I would have come to that realisation that like, OK, you know what? There's something that's missing that you need, and actually you need to create it yourself. So I might have gone around looking for those things and waiting, you know, hoping to find an event that felt like this, or an event that did that. Whereas now I'm like, why would I wait if it's not there? I can't wait for someone to say I know exactly what you need and then you know for them to be right and then wait for them to put it together and then I'm going to go, no. So now I'm more likely to do things. I wouldn't have come to the same conclusion at that time. I also know that my writing wouldn't have been as strong because after I did my MA, I wasn't sharing my writing with anyone. Whereas during the PhD I 100%, like I Jen Ashworth and she has been like such a wonderful mentor and in supervisor, so it's the writing, but then also my writing life, she shared contacts and information and you see her doing so many things you're like I want to do those things and kind of follow that path. So, for me I wouldn't have been the same writer, I don't think and I wouldn't have seen how much of a community I can influence on my own. Yeah, so that's the difference, at least for me and I think vice versa, that's it's going to be the same thing.

00:32:20 Molly

Yeah, I think it forces you to take yourself and your work seriously, doing a quote, unquote creative degree, I think it's similar for and across a range of creative degrees, because people often wish they could be a writer and it's a hobby but actually if you don't go all in and you don't take yourself really seriously you don't improve. I think you have to really commit to yourself, and I think that's the great benefit of doing a creative degree.

00:32:52 Yvonne

I think so. I think people who already know how to commit to themselves and know how to make it so that they're like this is my craft this is what I do, writing is writing and writing is a business, and I'm writing and doing all those things. Then they don't necessarily have to go to a degree if they already have those networks of people who can read their work and give them constructive feedback then maybe they don't need all those other different things from this I agree. I know what I needed and I feel like I got is just knowing where to get those other things. If you do need it without that degree, so how can you cobble that experience together so that you're going, yeah, I'm still getting feedback. I'm still learning and growing and developing. I'm engaging with other writers, I'm a literary citizen.

00:33:39 Molly

And it and it really supports people who maybe they are fully committed to themselves and their dream of being writer but that realistically they can't, because maybe you know, like you, they're a working mother. They need kind of almost permission to give yourself time and space and resources to write.

00:33:57 Yvonne

I know for me at least at that stage at that time in my life I had lost touch who I was and what I wanted. What was important to just me and it was kind of, I guess I was kind of wrapped up in all these roles of like you know, providing for everyone else and making sure everyone else's needs were met, that I actually like the me of probably 40 years ago would have been surprised to ever have seen that there was a me, version of me, that didn't centre myself like even like that would have been a dystopian future for her. I could see what she means though. So like it would be in some sort of balance. You know she'd be also surprised to realise that the universe does not in fact, you know revolve around her. But like some sort of balance between things that I want that are different than you know, independent of what other people in my own family might want. And how can I do the things that I want with standing in the way and still be the sort of mom that I want to be and still be the kind of person that I want to be? For me, yeah, like if I didn't do the degree, I don't know that I would have centred me.

00:35:07 Molly

Do you think that that's a gendered thing? Do you think women are much better at working to external deadlines than you know? If they have other responsibilities?

00:35:17 Yvonne

I don't know, like I know from me, I like deadlines. I'm deadline driven there, but it's also because I like rewards somehow, I'm reward driven. If I meet a deadline and I usually do then I reward myself for doing it so I don't know if that's like it could be my personality. It could just be like the level of my rewards might be like a creamy cup of coffee or like ordering out. Because this, like flavoured cream is not a thing in the UK.

00:35:47 Molly

Right? I've been so curious about it.

00:35:50 Yvonne

Ah, it's like a little editor in the cup.

00:35:54 Molly

Yeah, creamer is that what it's called?

00:35:54 Yvonne

It just makes me so happy. This one's French vanilla Creamer and so I have hazelnut coffee, French vanilla cream and it makes me a happier person. Yeah, so find that thing that makes you happy.

00:36:10 Molly

Well, I mean so another institution of writing and literature, but also another massive reward, is a prize. I wanted to kind of ask you about prizes. Fast forward after your degree you received a lot of success and Remembered has garnered a lot of success since its publication. So among many other accolades, you won the Northern Writers Award in 2017 and Remembered was longlisted for the woman's prize for fiction in 2019 and shortlisted for the Jhalek Prize in 2020. And I know you've been on the judging panel for prizes as well, so I kind of I wanted to ask you how important do you think prizes are for writers at the start of their career or later on in their career as well?

00:36:58 Yvonne

I think they can be one of those things where and you get more readers than you would have otherwise maybe received, and readers outside who may be readers who wouldn't have read the book otherwise. So in that respect with the more people reading it, it's definitely a good thing. I feel like with the women's prize, I mean there was a whole bunch of people who wouldn't have otherwise have found Remembered in the places that maybe marketing was looking for them. And so they stumbled across it. Or they, you know it was advertised and it was like wow, you know I have to read this book and then they read it. Even judging contests though there were books that like came across that I hadn't read before and they were, you know, had been out for almost a year or in some cases, like two years and I hadn't read them and that had nothing to do with the quality of the book, it was just that, you know I hadn't read it, so I wouldn't have read it if I hadn't been in position to judge it. And then being able to say like in a meeting with other people in that panel, to champion this book and to say like but you know what about the themes? And what about the character? all those different things that I might love about a book and having those conversations. And so as judges we're also readers. And that means that we're, you know, we're also reading the book. And then we're, you know, recommending the book, and so even if you don't, if a prize isn't awarded for the book, it's more and more readers and more and more that your audience kind of grows and it's more people who can support you and rally up behind you so I think they can actually be a really good thing even if you know don't win. I think there's a danger, I guess, of writing a book solely because you want to win like a certain prize, because there aren't one, there's so many different prizes around the world and you know, of course, different ones value different things, so you might say, like, oh, I'm going to win the next Pulitzer Prize winning book, which of course was, you know, is always a goal. And but you might write that book for another competition that's like we really want a sense of place, and then for another book maybe the theme is something and you're going wow like I don't think I ever wrote where that place was and so it's automatically not going to win this other one. And then there's another one saying we really want a book that advocates for this particular issue and you're going wow like my book doesn't do that, and then another one going. We really want something set in 1933 and you're like what? so it's kind of writing the book that you know you want to read and there's so many different ways to reach audiences, so prizes I think are a great way to reach audiences, but certainly not the only way.

00:39:44 Molly

And I think certainly in the last few years, prizes have become more, there's more of an awareness you know, not just in literature but in film as well. I'm thinking of the, you know, the kind of Oscars so white a few years ago. More of an awareness that prizes are, who they awarded by and why they are awarded. I think. But obviously it's still not a perfect institution.

00:40:16 Yvonne

No, I don't think it is, but I think from the work that they do, it's finding ways to replicate that. So part of it is getting, I think at the end of the day, if we want our books in the hands of more readers like I was saying, and mathematically, my math is wrong, every day I'm reminded that trillions of people have not read my books. And that's you know, longlisted, shortlisted or not, they don't even know it exists. So it's not like they're going 'No, I'm not going to read that' They're going to Remembered? I don't know about that. And so it's kind of like how can I get my book into the hands of a reader that I'm going you need to read this book. Like 'you're going through these things and it feels like they're all very new but did you know that these same things are things we've been grappling with for, you know centuries and the way that you feel isolated because your family treats you a certain way, this book might help you with that isolation. You know so how can I get it into the hands of those people? And so yeah, prizes are, I think, a good way to do it. But then also, there's gotta be other ways to do it. And if we look at the prizes and say there are so many people getting access to these prizes like I love Sunny for the Jhalek prize for saying, OK, you know what? There's if black and brown people are not being awarded these prizes, I'm going to set up my own prize. And the more people do that, the more communities say you know what? I'm not represented in that, I'm going to set this thing up and I'm going to do it wonderfully, I'm going to do a great job of setting this thing up, and maybe the more and more we start doing that, the other prizes are going to have to take notice and say OK, so who have we been ignoring and who have we been, just, you know, completely dismissing. I know that there's things that people will say like Oh well, this community doesn't read or this community.... , and actually, that's never been true. Maybe that that community doesn't see themselves represented in the things that you're publishing and so that community doesn't read you.

00:42:21 Molly

Yeah, absolutely. I mean and other ways to get writers known and talking about their work and that kind of thing have sprung up. And one of those is podcasting. And you have your own podcast called Write Your Novel. So, what was your original idea? I mean, you actually talked a bit about your radio work at the university, so I I'm imagining that kind of fed into starting a podcast. Is that the case?

00:42:52 Yvonne

It is so the radio show, I absolutely loved doing it. But then of course with the PhD and with the other events, and then I was coming to the end of my PhD I needed to give something up and so it was the radio show. I had a friend who was doing podcasts and interested in radio so we created a team of other journalists who could kind of go out and do that work, and I could just say, OK, goodbye. And I felt like while I said goodbye to it I was still like 'I just love radio' and that whole audio thing. So then when this opportunity came up it was kind of like .. I knew I wanted, especially with the pandemic everything was, you know either online or online and it was kind of like, how can I keep doing some of the things that I'm doing around the events and around community. So some of it was doing events on Facebook or on zoom and kind of broadcasting them out, but probably also because I can't edit video but I can edit audio I went to say, well, what can I do this audio only? and

of course it was a podcast. Working with new writing North we devised a podcast where I would talk to writers about like a particular book. They would read to me, which I absolutely love, and then we could talk about a technique in that book that was really well crafted. And so it meant talking to award-winning authors about either like setting or description or dialogue or character structure. Like all these different things that you know as a novelist we're grappling with at any given time in any given project, and it was absolutely amazing because they were so generous, even more generous than I would have hoped for. And at the end of it I offered a writing exercise inspired by the book. And so it was a lovely way, I think, to encourage people to either try that technique or try something new in their own writing. But when I think about it, it was going to probably be one of those things that you know how we do things and then later you're going well.... So I also have a column with Miss Lexia by breaking the mould where I get to read a book by a woman author. It has to be contemporary and then I get to look at a technique or something that seems to be done really well but also, that's a bit unique, and so breaking the mould, and then I get to read the book and then write a brief summary of like, so this is what happens, and this is also how they do this thing that's so wonderful about what they're doing. And then I create an exercise to inspire and empower people to try that in their own writing. So like all these different things, kind of tie together. So I love empowering people to, you know, to find the heart of their own story, but also just to it, to do the writing and do the trying. So I think the podcast was kind of like that natural progression. But I'm also devising a podcast now, which is no surprise, for writers reading from their books. So it's going to be super sort. It's 30 minutes and they're going to read in that time. They get three times to read. But it's also going to be 3 questions, so I just ask three questions. They read three times. They tell us where to find the book. But at the heart of it it's because, yeah, I love being read too, but then also so many wonderful books are out here and there's so many readers looking for them, but we're missing each other. So I'm thinking this could be a way for us, to, you know meet at the same place.

00:46:23 Molly

Yeah, exactly, and I find that with this podcast talking to people who are, maybe they're authors, maybe they're booksellers. Maybe they're publishers, people in literature adjacent jobs and roles. You get to find out so many interesting facts, you find out what each person's values are and how that industry works. And it's so fascinating. And actually, I hope kind of demystifying as well if you may be kind of curious about either working with a bookseller or becoming one. So yeah, I love podcasts, obviously. And yours sounds fantastic, I'll have to give them a listen. And also I'm surprised that you say that you don't plot. You're not a plotter necessarily with your novels, because you sound to me like you were obsessed with technicality and writing and kind of the mechanics of how it all works. Is that true to say?

00:47:20 Yvonne

I don't know that I'd say obsessed, but I do like a good list but that's another thing. I love organising events. And I love when you know you have the plan of it and then you get to experience it and like the fruits of all of that. But in the book I write it for a different reason. So I write character driven prose and I don't know where it's going to end up. I don't know who's going to live at the end of it and I like that. It keeps me curious, it keeps me asking questions and returning to the page. If I know what's going to happen, then I feel like I've done that and that was great, but I don't necessarily feel like I need to write it then, so I'm writing to figure out what's going to happen and getting to know the characters, which is always, you know, a lot of fun. Like wow they did what and you know I didn't see that coming. I that's I feel like for me that's what keeps me coming back to any project. It's being like what's going to happen next. What are these characters going to do, who are they going to hurt and why? So, all those questions. That's what I'm writing to figure out.

00:48:27 Molly

Well and I suppose the technicality as well, the actual writing of language is about the process. It's not you know, you can't do it until you do it. You know you can't say OK, I'm going to use this specific metaphor on this page, beforehand can you? It is about the process.

00:48:43 Yvonne

Yeah, I feel like I couldn't do that. So when I write I write out loud first, so that's kind of hearing it because I like the rhythms or like the silence. Or like the pacing and the tension and I can hear that, and so I might like, speak a scene as if I was that character, and then I can go down and I can type it. Now also, so after I've done the draft or written the scene, then I might go back and kind of reverse outline like. So what happened and why? And it helps me to find like oh wait, a minute this one wasn't set up or actually that character is dead and you know, and I completely missed it or something like that. So I don't do it forward but I might do it backward. Really only if I get stuck and then the structure can come to it once I get it on the page, sometimes during the writing of it you're like, oh, you know what actually this is going to be all one day or this is going to be only through the month of October and so I might not know that sitting down, but it might come to me later.

00:49:43 Molly

So I want to talk a bit about Remembered, which I've read and really enjoyed, and it really lingers with you, I think. After I finished it, I couldn't stop thinking about it and I think because it's quite intense, and it's intense in a lot of different ways at different times. And so my kind of brief description of it. And I always hate doing this 'cause I want to be like but it's about this and it's about this and it's also about this and it's also about this. But briefly, in 1910 in Philadelphia a woman, Spring, finds her son in hospital injured from a Streetcar accident, which may or may not have been his fault, and that's kind of the first level of the story which anchors the other sections of the narrative. And the rest of it is about, well it centres around the story of how both Spring and Edward came to be, Edwards her son. It's a story of capture and enslavement, emancipation and reconstruction, told through three generations. So, my first question is, I guess what was the genesis of the story? Where did the ideas start forming in your head, and how?

00:50:52 Yvonne

So, I would say I wanted to know before, so you know when you're doing the pH, the application and all of that and you have to kind of look at the questions you might write. I knew that I was interested in the emancipation in the US and what happened after. I wanted to know about families reconnecting. Because I felt like, as a mom, that's one of those things that if I don't know where my kids are like at the end of the day, I'm, you know I would be worried. I always want my kids to know I love them, and so every day I remind them. And what is that like for a mother who doesn't get that chance, whose child was taken away from her when they were a baby, maybe a little bit older? And what happens if they do get to reunite? But that could be, you know, thirty, forty, fifty years later, and what does that look like and how do you recognise that person? But then even if you recognise them physically, even if you know what about that all that time lost? How is that repaired and who does that work? So, I felt like I wasn't reading a lot about what that might look like, there's a lot about reconstruction, but they don't really talk about the reconstruction of families, just the reconstruction of the country. I was interested on that family level, and I know there's a lot like I would be talking to my mom about it and she would say like, Oh yeah, of course. You know, most people find each other and I'm like 'how do you know that?' like how is that even possible? and that to me, sounds like it's one of those things that we might tell ourselves because we need to believe it,

or, you know no one, I would think, wants to think of a whole bunch of families, like millions of people displaced, millions of people never able to find one another. What that costs, what that looks like. And then there's this idea like oh, people just kind of got on with it and moved on. Actually, no, like on paper maybe, and it was probably easier for people who weren't experiencing it to feel like yeah I'm just going to – you know 'you should just move on, my gosh, it's been like a week'. But when you're feeling that, when you're the one whose child is gone and you know you're never going to see this person again when you're scanning faces for that familiarity. What might that be like and how haunting that could be so for me Remembered was kind of like a bit of a Horror Story, yeah? And so that that's what that was, the original seed was around what might it be like for families to find each other, how they might become families again what that forgiveness might look like, what that journey might look like. But also around how families might have cobbled together based on a whole bunch of people looking for a place to go.

00:53:36 Molly

And it does. I mean, structurally it does that because you have the 1st first 2/3 of the novel are kind of pre-emancipation in the enslavement times and then the emancipation kind of period is so fast paced and overwhelming, and as a reader, you feel exhausted at the end of it. And you know the character kind of goes through all this very quick. All of these things that happened to her are almost a bit surreal and then at the end with the kind of reconstruction period, and it kind of brings it up to the present, it kind of slows down again, but you get this sense of heaviness and you think, Oh my gosh, because you know, you have this kind of history in your head of like civil rights and the 60s and even up until the present day. And you think, Oh my gosh. You're left with this great sense of heaviness, I think, which is wonderfully written.

00:54:37 Yvonne

Oh, thank you, but I think you're right. I think for me there's obvious parallels between kind of the life that we're living and the life that you know has been lived, and I know it was important to kind of show those parallels for me while I was writing it. So I raised my kids. My children were born in hospitals in Baltimore. We lived not far from there and I worked in Baltimore when I was working for the PR company. Well, I did PR for them. So we have a connexion to Baltimore. We have family still there, friends still there, and while we were living in the UK, the police in Baltimore killed Freddie Grey. And it was like, knowing that that was the world that we could go back to was just a bit crushing. So my kids have, you know, been on these streets or near these streets. You know all these different possibilities going through. And it was like, I need to write about that as well, I need to show some of that tension because we're still living that legacy. And so a lot of things, I think from life, kind of came into the book in ways that maybe I wasn't expecting at that time. I knew in the beginning that Edward was going to be beaten by police. I knew it was going to be for a crime. I wasn't going to be clear, like in the first draught and through most of my PhD I wasn't going to say whether he did it or not. 'cause I always felt like that wasn't the focus for me. The focus was here he was, they thought he had done this crime, but there was no evidence or you know, very limited evidence. But there wasn't a trial there. There was no jury, no. And what would be the consequence for the crime? Whereas if he hadn't been a black man, would he have been going to gaol and being sentenced. But because he was, he was beaten by police. And so, for me, I wanted to explore that on the page and I wanted to kind of bring attention to that on the page. Because at the end of the day we need to really see people as people. And we need to recognise that people have these different stories these different journeys outside of how we might expect it to be, and so for me, it's kind of. It's a form of that advocacy, and how I might advocate for change that I want and we need to see.

00:57:01 Molly

You say in your acknowledgments that Remembered began with a series of questions which you then explored through practise-based research. Can you tell me a bit about that process? What that means?

00:57:14 Yvonne

So, the practise-based research is the writing, and the reading as writing, and the writing as writing, and other research that goes kind of into the book into the time period and the laws and other things. And it was really looking to the past to look at like 1. How can we make sure we learn from the past? I think it's a question that we are always asking and always exploring. I don't have the answers to how can we not do these things. The writing of it gave me a chance to explore I guess the problem in these different ways and to look at more questions and even more, it also helped me to answer questions I didn't even know I had like around mothering. So a question I think I ended up asking while I was writing it is kind of what are the limits? What will a mother do to protect her child. Even with all these different definitions of what protecting your child might be, what might you do if pushed to it? And each character has certain different things that they're willing to do, and for me that was really fascinating. But it also helped me look at like my own relationship with my mother and also my relationship with my daughter. So what kind of mother am I and what things am I willing to do to keep my children safe, and so the practice based research I think it implies is going to be one answer when there's you know just lots of different answers that open up to lots of different questions as well.

00:58:47 Molly

And so the first 2/3 of the novel don't shy away from the brutality of slavery and its legacy and some scenes are really harrowing to read. But throughout the novel, the language also is often really strikingly beautiful and poetic, and most noticeably when it depicts the bonds between characters, but also the landscape and the changing times of day and the way characters move or look at each other and you kind of weave these styles together really fantastically, and I think it's maybe the wrong question to ask, which do you prefer? But probably which do you find more challenging?

00:59:32 Yvonne

I'm sorry which in terms of the language or?

00:59:34 Molly

So in terms of writing so there are these episodes where you're maybe writing about like a river or characters kind of positive relationships, and they're really very poetic and beautiful, so I suppose do you find it more challenging to write language that is, is beautiful and depicts really positive things or the kind of the really harrowing graphic violent scenes?

01:00:06 Yvonne

It's interesting, so I don't know that I consciously differentiate between the language that I use. It's not something that I consciously do like I think it's that the writing sort of happens. I act it out loud as if I was that character so that I can hear it and then that's kind of how I write it, and so it could be that when the lens is on one character looking at another character or thinking through their relationship with another character, it could be that that poetic sort of language comes through, because that's the way that that character might be like thinking it or experiencing it. And then when

it becomes less poetic but more like harrowing it could either be that that's the lens of that narrator, that third person narrator, more removed, or even that first person narrator. But, considering like so, this is where I'm at right now, this is how much time I have. What I need to say like that sort of thing? But yeah, I haven't consciously thought about it. So it's a really interesting question. Yeah, and I don't actually have an answer.

01:01:26 Molly

That's really interesting. I suppose as a reader it's different because you're coming to these scenes for the first time whereas for you you're probably thinking about them, you're working on them for a long period, so I suppose it's more about slotting them together, and the technicalities and depicting it.

01:01:48 Yvonne

Yeah, I do love when people read your work and then they see something different in it. It's like Oh yeah, that great. I remember someone asking me about the relationship of water and kind of like how my relationship with water was, an I'm like really?

01:02:09 Molly

It is a very elemental book. There's water and there's fire and I really liked that. And I mean in the novel there's a lot of stuff to do with memory and it's really about memory, but memory, particularly in the form of spoken language. And it's been really interesting to hear you talk about the way that you write, and actually the way that you came to writing, which is through talking. And through narrating verbally and I really liked the section kind of immediate post emancipation, where all of these people were trying to find each other and the way that they did that was through telling stories and creating this kind of verbal method of finding each other. So yeah, this section where Spring that the main character kind of quickly realises that just saying a woman whose this high blah blah blah is not is not going to work. It's kind of getting to their essence and describing that really briefly, I really liked that, and it made me think like of course language becomes important when you don't have the means to write when you don't have the means to communicate in any other way. And so I wonder what your considerations were before you started writing the novel in that so much of it is about verbally communicating. And why you chose to tell the story in the form of a novel and how you kind of nodded to this tradition of African American verbal storytelling, which was once integral or was once vital and is still integral.

01:03:57 Yvonne

I think for me it was always going to be a novel, and because I love reading the books and I love being read through, so it was always going to be a novel. And then for the stories it's interesting to me because the original title was letters to Edward and it was going to be tied around these letters that Tempe had written to him before he was born, and had never gotten the chance to deliver to him. And so someone else would have had to carry them. And when I was writing it started to be like well who taught Tempe how to read, and then when did Edward learn how to read and then who's holding onto these letters? And it's not that I couldn't figure it out. So even though it was illegal to teach a slave to read. I feel like it was also immoral to keep slaves. So the sort of people who would keep a person as a slave. I would imagine they're you know, fine with breaking laws and doing whatever, and if they were thinking well, this is going to benefit me in some way. Then you know they would do that thing anyway. So it wasn't necessarily teaching her to read, but then it was kind of getting so who taught Edward? When did he learn and? And like all those different cogs started

taking the novel and in a way weighing it down because it was that and also because I knew Edward had been beaten by police, but I wanted him to have this some sort of medical condition where they wanted to figure out what it was so that they could find out what he knew about something else so it wasn't really about saving his life for the sake of his life, but it was saving his life because they wanted they needed something from him. And so, by the time I finished, like weighing it down with all these like artificial weights on it and I was on a medical board so that I could find out about so what kind of medical condition would have had in 1910?

And also I wanted him to have something hereditary that had been passed down through Agnes, all these different what ifs and on the medical board they were like you're a writer can't you make it up? And I'm like yes, but I wanted it to be like, you true. And not that I wanted people to try this this herb and, you know, have the consequences that it was going to have, but I wanted it to do what I kind of said it was going to do. Yeah, so there was that, but once they said that it was like OK, one I'm the only one who cares about that thing but also they were saying that what I was aiming for in 1910 wouldn't have been what they thought about. Because in 1910 Philadelphia he was a black man and they would have assumed he had, I can't remember what they would have assumed he had, but they would have assumed this one condition. And it was never about that. So, it was like, OK, yeah, they wouldn't have done anything with DNA because it wasn't a thing in 1910 for them. So I was like OK, take that away and then the letters though they still had this kind of weight. And then Jen was like why don't you change the title and I'm like what? and when she said that it was like it freed up the novel but the stories of course would still be there and it was kind of, what else do you give to someone when you have nothing else to give? and it was the stories and so they became more and more important. So there's the part you're talking about and then also when like after that when they're travelling to Philadelphia and when they're kind of in this truck, this stories you know people get in and they leave their stories behind. And for me it was like, yeah, like what else do they do if they want to be remembered by someone and someone says I'm keeping this in this book. And then that's what you give you. Give your stories in whatever form, and you tell them. It might actually be a rock, but you tell the story about this rock and then you give it to this person and in a way they're inheriting this story.

01:07:54 Molly

I think the way that you honour that in the novel is through these supernatural elements, through the power of like this ghost, and yeah, that it becomes so important this remembering this telling the story that it kind of physically manifests almost.

01:08:14 Yvonne

It felt like Tempe, she was my first character, she was the first one that I came to or that came to me and like her name, my great grandmother's name is Tempe. I never got to meet her, and she wasn't enslaved. There was something to me about using real people's names for some of the characters that meant that I was going to write them in a bit more human way and be more tender, and I felt like I needed that and I wanted that and so, like Tempe's name is from my great grandmother. There was an Agnes in the family there was an Edward in the family and yeah, for me it was just a way to be like, OK, I'm going to treat this character with some tenderness. I'm also going to make them complex.

01:09:01 Molly

In the way that you can only see your family really as. That equal frustration and love.

01:09:09 Yvonne

Yeah, that's right.

01:09:14 Molly

But there are so many wonderfully drawn male characters but actually are they seem, they're sort of supporting all of these female characters? And was that a conscious decision for you before you started writing the novel?

01:09:29 Yvonne

Yeah, I knew that Edward would, well actually I knew his ending before I started, and I also knew that he wasn't going to be able to speak much in the novel. I didn't want there to be a lot of scenes with him in it. And I was going to say this something, but I thought that would have been a spoiler for the whole thing, so I felt like he was always going to be limited. Walker, I didn't want him to be able to say much of anything, so I was really like for him He doesn't, I think ever get to say more than a sentence. And I think visually it was meant to be like one line, maybe at the most 2 and that silence was so that, because I feel like there's so many other books that look at the enslavers view of slavery, or even abolitionists, their view of it. But in this book, I wanted it to be the people who had been enslaved. And I wanted it to be their story, their books, I wanted them to have definitely the most time on the page we had the most access to them. We get to see Walker, we get to see his father, even Edward. We get to see them, but the story is not kind of told through them, but we get to see their impact as well. But yeah, so that was a conscious decision about who gets so to speak. For my PhD, for the thesis, I was able to do a chapter that was inspired by what it would look like if we did a literary salon where I was talking about my book, reading from my book, and my characters were in the audience. It was interesting to me like I was going to let a Walker speak for it and then I was like Nope. So it felt like it feels empowering to me.

01:11:21 Molly

Absolutely, but it also it mirrors lots of novels and art and TV and films that are set during that period but have no acknowledgement to slavery. You know that, uh, it's a full white cast and it's never acknowledged that that was a thing at that time. And actually, in order for characters to live lives of wealth and ease and privilege, which is often what these novels and films are about, it's not acknowledged that that's off the back of slavery often.

01:11:56 Yvonne

No, you're right, and it's always interesting to me the conversations people want to have around, like oh we should, let's stop talking about slavery, we should get over that. But nobody says let's stop talking about, you know, like these, these grand mansions and how people got them all that money that legacy that they were able to achieve because they were enslaving other people and they want to still keep that they want to still keep, that name that they acquired. When they talk about well, we don't still have that money, but you still have that property. And actually, that money, it's that value and that legacy of that that you know you still have your title. You still have all of these different things, so you still have how you've benefited. You've just been able to draw on that benefit, you know for contemporary times, and invested in different ways or whatever. But they don't say well you know what. actually anything that I've gained through it I'm just going to give that up now because since we're all getting over it, I'm also going to get over the things that I've acquired. Nobody says that they only want you to stop talking about the things that make them uncomfortable.

01:12:58 Molly

It's really interesting actually, because I think for a lot of people their knowledge of American history is like it's slavery and then it jumps straight to kind of like 60s civil rights, right? And there is not a huge amount of media in the kind of the intervening years, so it kind of you miss out that whole that bridge connecting it and makes it easier to in your mind, gloss over it I think and forget that the kind of the difficulty and actually these are not two separate time periods, they're connected, they're on a continuum. The legacy of slavery hasn't just disappeared you know.

01:13:41 Yvonne

I think that's exactly what it is, and I feel like that's the thing that empowered me to write Remembered as well because I have no idea if any of my family had been enslaved, but I felt like I have inherited the legacy of slavery. So yeah, I was going to write about it, and if people are going, oh I don't want to read another slavery book or whatever, then maybe this isn't the book for you. But actually maybe you're reading about it in different ways, so you're reading about characters being enslaved, and maybe they're not set in the US it's set, you know, somewhere. It always amazes me if you know how when you look at like science fiction movies and horror movies and they're like what if something came from another planet or like another country and they come, they enslaved us and you know, we had to work and we weren't, you know paid or anything and we were beaten and our children were sold from us and this would be horrible. Yeah, it happened everywhere. What if like there's whole nations where this is exactly what's happened and there's more in this legacy so it's only someone else's horror when it's not them, so it's really like all of that. This is so interesting to me.

01:14:56 Molly

No, absolutely, and there's a whole like the US military has these weird like Connexions with Hollywood, doesn't it? That's why you have all these like military movies with aliens where the military is like depicted as they're brave and like against this evil, but it's propaganda, basically.

01:15:15 Yvonne

It does crack me up because it's like when you go to the movie and when you look at some of the things that they're talking about and you're going well like this is, you know a history lesson right here. But even that idea of getting people to kind of like now suddenly everybody is everybody, right? And so it's like, oh we're going to save everyone and we need everyone's help and you go actually we need everyone help for what? Like you're asking everyone to save everyone else like everyone who has been oppressing them, everyone who's been you know, racist to them with all these different things so you're asking other people to save them now, although through generations you know had not saved them so you're saying it now? how can we selectively be all in it together? And then even if we all are into it together, if we you know defeat whatever is attacking us we're defeating that so that we can go back to how things were here? I think I want to see a movie where something comes from somewhere else and they're going, oh, they're going to do this thing to us. And then actually that something comes and actually things are better than they were before.

01:16:27 Molly

Yeah, that's really interesting actually. Talking to Susan Watkins, a few episodes of this podcast before about women's dystopian fiction, she was saying women are less invested in the current status quo. So actually it's really interesting to look at what their science fiction says about envisioning a world that maybe is better than it could be, you know. Anyway, that's very off topic,

but we've actually been talking for almost an hour and a half so I probably should wrap it up there, but thank you so much for being so generous with your time and I've really enjoyed this conversation.

01:17:06 Yvonne

Oh, thanks for having me.

01:17:09 Molly

How can we find out more about you?

01:17:12 Yvonne

There's a couple of ways, so one is I'm on social media. So I'm on Twitter at just @YBattleFelton. I'm on Instagram as @whylwritebattleFelton, and there is a Y Battle Felton on Instagram. It is me. I don't know what my password is for that one was. I cannot access it, so it's why I write.

01:17:31 Molly

We've all been there.

01:17:32 Yvonne

There's gotta be a way to unlock it I just don't know what it is. Or people can join me on Saturday, May 28th to write with me, we're going to be writing about a swiftly tilting planet, and it's fine if they haven't read the book. But we're going to be using some of the themes and some of the writing for advocacies so they can write about a 'cause they care about. They can write about science fiction as well, so we'll be using time travel to start, but they can use anything else that they want to finish with, but it's going to be some time to write and to reflect and to write together. So I think that's a great way to get to know me and what I'm about.

01:18:15 Molly

And you can book tickets through that through Eventbrite or through the library website. And yeah, I really, really, really recommend that. I really recommend Remembered and if you are a member we have a copy here at the library. So do come and check it out if you're interested. Yvonne thank you so much for chatting today.

01:18:38 Yvonne

Oh Molly, thank you and thank you for your questions.

01:18:41 Molly

I super enjoyed writing them. It's always nice when I get to read a book for this. Actually, it's one of the best things about it.

01:18:49 Molly

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