

Each month we will focus on an inspiring author based in or writing about Wales! You'll have an introduction to their latest book, what inspires them to write, and any advice they have for young writers!

Get to know

Philippa Holloway

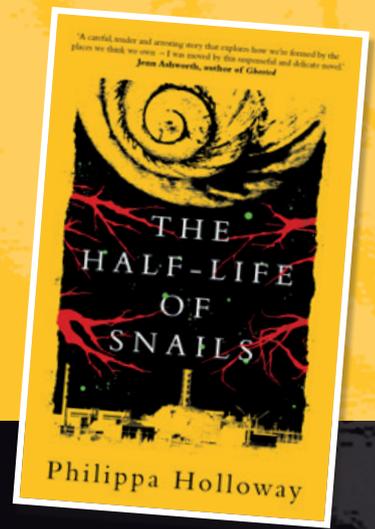


Philippa Holloway is a writer and academic, living in England but with her heart still at home in Wales. Her short fiction is published on four continents. She has won prizes in literary awards including the Fish Publishing Prize, The Scythe Prize, and the Writers & Artists Working Class Writer's Prize. She is co-editor of the collection *100 Words of Solitude: Global Voices in Lockdown 2020* (Rare Swan Press), and a senior lecturer at Staffordshire University.

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Summary:

When Helen, a self-taught prepper and single mother, leaves her young son Jack with her sister for a few days so she can visit Chernobyl's Exclusion Zone, they both know the situation will be tense. Helen opposes plans for a new power station on the coast of Anglesey that will take over the family's farmland, and Jennifer works for the nuclear industry and welcomes the plans for the good of the economy. But blood is thicker than heavy water, and both want to reconnect somehow, with Jack perhaps the key to a new understanding of one another.

Tell us a little about *The Half-life of Snails*...

The story begins with a single parent and farmer leaving her son with her sister while she travels to Chernobyl. The sisters both have opposing views of nuclear power, one is resisting the plans for new power station that will take family farmland, the other works for Wylfa. The narrative then splits to show how each sister's perceptions are challenged and tested, with the small boy caught between their anxieties. It's set during the Euromaidan revolution, so while one sister is slowly discovering her nephew is perhaps a little different from other children his age but that his anxieties might be founded in truth, the other is getting caught up in political riots and having to test her survival skills to find a way back home to her son. There are resonances between the two landscapes, too, as the sisters learn about themselves in these tense and contrary places.

What comes first for you – the plot or the characters – and why?

I usually start with a problem, a situation, and then create a character for whom the circumstances fit and who is interesting to me. Plot develops from there, as a scaffold for the story to play out. The characters are the most interesting part, how they respond, what they feel and think, and therefore what they do. I become emotionally attached to them all, even though they are often so different to me, they each have their own reasons for what they do, and their own logic.

Do you have suggestions of how to encourage children and young people to read more for pleasure?

Start early, sharing picture books, reading and telling stories. Listen to their stories and encouraging them to draw, write or speak them aloud. Read in front of them, show them that reading is not a chore, but a pleasure. Fill the house with books if you can, second-hand or borrowed, and let them feel at home in a library. Don't judge how they engage with stories – it may be online, TV or film, just listen to what they love and share what you love. Gift books. Don't force them, but lead them to it. Teenagers often drift away from reading, but then rediscover books later: so long as you've built in them a love for a library, they'll find a way home to it.

... more Q&As
on the website libraries.wales