

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

## Rebecca F. John



Rebecca is the author of the short story collection *Clown's Shoes* (Parthian 2015) and her first novel, *The Haunting of Henry Twist* (Serpent's Tail 2017) was shortlisted for the 2017 Costa First Novel Award. Her short stories have been broadcast on BBC Radio 4 and BBC Radio 4Extra. In 2015, her short story *The Glove Maker's Numbers* was shortlisted for the Sunday Times EFG Short Story Award. She is the winner of the PEN International New Voices Award 2015, and the British participant of the 2016 Scrittura Giovani project. In 2017, she was named on Hay Festival's 'The Hay 30' list.

### Summary:

*The Shadow Order* is a thrilling middle-grade adventure from Costa-award shortlisted author Rebecca F. John.

One year on from the day the shadows shifted and began to show, not people's shapes but their truest selves, teenage friends Teddy, Betsy and Effie plan to risk all and watch the winter sun rise over Copperwell, in defiance of the Shadow Order. But from their hidden vantage point the three shocked friends witness a mysterious woman shouting a dire warning, before being arrested, beaten and dragged away in handcuffs. The event leads them on an extraordinary series of dangerous adventures as they discover more about the disturbance in the natural world surrounding Copperwell, battle to save their city and start to recognise their truest selves.



### What inspired you to write *The Shadow Order*?

There were a number of elements which came together to inspire this book, but it began with my dogs. I had three dogs when I started thinking about the novel – Betsy, Teddy, and Effie – and I was walking them along the beach one morning and enjoying their antics, when I started to think about our shadows, which were stretched out and distorted by the rising sun. That made me think about the ways in which other people's perceptions of us are so often influenced by things we lack any control over, and how difficult it can be to reveal your true self. *The Shadow Order* grew out of that idea on that walk, and I suppose that's why the dogs became so tied into it. The characters of Betsy, Teddy, and Effie in the novel share not only the dogs' names, but their personalities, too, which made writing it a lot of fun.

### Where do you draw writing inspiration from?

Everything and anything. In truth, I've never really sought out a story or thought about seeking inspiration from any particular source. I just hear or read or catch a glimpse of something – an image, a sound, a snippet of text – and the way that information settles in my mind is as story. It's almost as though it's an act of translation, as though that's the way my brain processes the material. It's a difficult process to describe, but it feels entirely natural to me. Stories and character rattle around my brain constantly, even when they're pushed into the background by other things. They're how I look at the world, I suppose. And once they're embedded in my mind, I don't know what to do with them except write them down. If I can't write for any reason, I don't feel like myself.

### What books inspired you as a young reader?

I talk a lot about the influence Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* had on me as a young reader. I read that book when it was first released, when I was about ten, and I was so enthralled by Lyra and her world – and of course Pantalaimon and Iorek Byrnison – that I decided that I would write an adventure story of my own. Twenty-five years, and four adult books, later I think I've just come closest to fulfilling that dream with my first children's book, *The Shadow Order*.



[fireflypress.co.uk](http://fireflypress.co.uk)



... more Q&As  
on the website [libraries.wales](http://libraries.wales)