



AN INTERVIEW WITH COSTA SHORTLISTED AUTHOR PATRICE LAWRENCE

Article Author:

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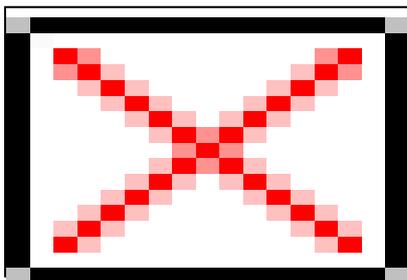
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The **Costa** shortlisted author interviewed by **Anna James**

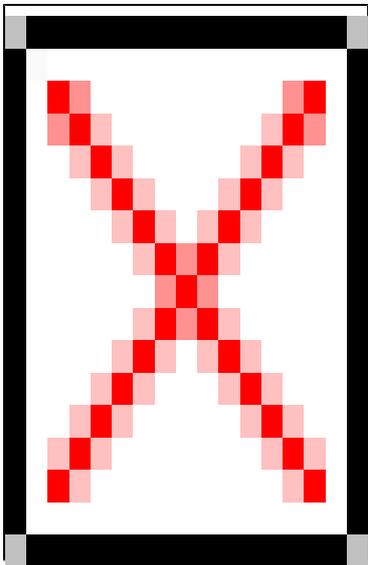
The shortlist for the [2016 Costa Book Awards](#) [3] features four novels for young people, each accomplished and very different. Patrice Lawrence's book [Orangeboy](#) [4] is described as a gripping topical thriller by a fresh new voice in children's fiction. Costa judge **Anna James** interviewed **Lawrence** for **Books for Keeps**.



In the opening chapter of **Orangeboy**, our hero Marlon is on a fairground date with a beautiful girl he has admired for a while. Patrice Lawrence compares it with her book being shortlisted for the Costa Children's Prize: 'Sonya is way above Marlon's league and this was so way above my league! You don't know you're in the running so there's no build-up - it was so unexpected!'

Contrary to Lawrence's feelings, **Orangeboy** is very much at home on this year's four-strong shortlist. Her story of 16-year-old Marlon who gets sucked into a spiral of bad decisions despite his best intentions and promises to his mum is thought-provoking, thrilling and beautifully written. Although gangs and guns do feature quite prominently, at its heart it's a family drama: 'It's been really interesting how people have said it's about guns and crime. I remember reading [Anthony McGowan](#) [5]'s **The Knife That Killed Me** which is about a young boy who gets involved with knife crime - but no one says 'Oh it's about crime!'. It's got racialised I think; there's an assumption that it's a world I know but I grew up in Haywards Heath! I had to Google it! I researched it like everyone researches their books!'

Race and diversity is being talked about a lot in publishing at the moment and Lawrence thinks it's definitely a good thing, or at least a



good start: ?It?s important to actually have these open conversations. Growing up I had friends who, with the best of intentions, would say they didn?t see my colour, and that?s great but it means that when someone yells out of a car at me I can?t talk to you about it because you?ll get embarrassed. It?s about listening and understanding what it?s like to be another type of person and how people?s lives are different. Nobody is neutral,? she explains. ?It?s about recognising when you?re in a dominant group. As a straight woman, I never really wanted to get married but then when I did I could - the world is set up for me as a straight person so I?ve never had to think about it. So you rethink.?

Lawrence blogs regularly about her publishing experience, and has nothing but praise for her publishers Hodder and in particular her editor Emma Goldhawk. Lawrence was keen to make the publishing process a little more transparent for the benefit of aspiring writers: ?There are a lot of people coming up behind you and you want to let them know how it happens, particularly for young black writers. I want to show that I?ve had a good experience of publishing and give people hope that they can tell their stories.?

The story of [Orangeboy](#) [4] was first seeded when Lawrence attended a crime writing Arvon course led by Dreda Say Mitchell and Frances Fyfield: ?I went thinking I was going to write a crime series set in 1940s Trinidad but they set us this piece of homework to hide a sentence within a paragraph and mine was about dreaming of yellow. And then I was at Hyde Park Winter Wonderland with my daughter eating hotdogs with mustard - and I suddenly got this picture of a boy getting a hotdog and a girl watching him.?

Lawrence was encouraged along the way by her writer?s group, including bestselling YA writer Jenny Downham who was the one who pointed out that she was probably writing YA, although it didn?t affect Lawrence?s plans too much: ?I cut down on the swearing. And then there has to be consequence - you can?t glamorise things. So not preaching, just showing consequences.?

Lawrence describes her own life as ?quite interesting, I suppose?. Her mum was the youngest of 12 children and came to England from Trinidad to undertake psychiatric nurse training, which was where she met Lawrence?s father: ?The psychiatric hospital was in the middle of nowhere and had a social club and there were people from all over - so lots of babies! My mum found herself pregnant quite quickly but they split up before I was born.?

From the age of four months to four Lawrence was privately fostered with a white working class family in Brighton who took her on regular trips to the library, and her mum, a big reader herself, continued the tradition. Lawrence describes a reading list of **Mary Poppins**, **Little Women** and **Swallows and Amazons** mainly discovered through the local library: ?Haywards Heath has a really good children?s section. A few weeks ago I went down to see my folks and I walked past the library for the first time in thirty years and felt I had to go in. I told them that I used to come here and that it encouraged me to write, that being a writer is a direct result of being able to use the library.?

Anna James is a writer and journalist. Her debut children?s novel book **Pages & Co** will be published in October 2017 by HarperCollins.

[Orangeboy](#) [4] is published by Hodder Children's Books.

Also shortlisted for the 2016 Costa Children's Book Award are [The Bombs that Brought Us Together](#) [6] by [Brian Conaghan](#) [7], [Monstrous Child](#) [8] by [Francesca Simon](#) [9] and [Time Travelling with a Hamster](#) [10] by Ross Welford.

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