

BOOKS

## Hilary Mantel and Will Self head Man Booker shortlist



Critics praise 'fresh and innovative' list, but the favourites are familiar names

By Anna McKie  
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HILARY MANTEL and Will Self have been installed as favourites to win the Man Booker Prize after the shortlist was announced today. In stark contrast to the outrage directed at last year's judges for "pandering to popularity", the 2012 judges have earned praised for favouring smaller publishers and including two debut novels.

The shortlist of six comprises *The Garden of Evening Mists* by Tan Twan Eng, *Swimming Home* by Deborah Levy, *The Lighthouse* by Alison Moore, *Narcopolis* by Jeet Thayil, *Bring up the Bodies* by Hilary Mantel and *Umbrella* by Will Self.

The panel of judges, chaired by Peter Stothard, editor of the Times Literary Supplement, features literary critic Dinah Birch, historian Amanda Foreman, Downton Abbey actor Dan Stevens and academic Bharat Tandon. They said that the choice of novels came down to their "pure power of prose", and favoured "novels not novelists".

Ella Funge in the New Statesman notes 2012's list "may be a nod to correcting the controversy that seemed to follow last year's prize" when judges were criticised for focusing too heavily on "readability" - and it seems to have worked. Channel 4's Matthew Cain said "their list is unapologetically highbrow - and one of the most intelligent of recent years". Jonathan Ruppin at Foyles called the selection "a huge vote of confidence for the novel as an artform".

Hilary Mantel, who won the £50,000 prize in 2009 for *Wolf Hall*, to which *Bring up the Bodies* is a sequel, is currently the bookies' favourite. A second win would be unprecedented but many are confident she can pull it off. Jon Howells at Waterstones said: "Given the praise *Bringing Up the Bodies* has received, I think she must be the favourite."

First time nominee Will Self's *Umbrella* is also hotly tipped to win. Funge notes that choosing the "conceptually challenging" *Umbrella* would "be the perfect way of signalling that the prize is ready to take itself seriously again".

However, Ruppin told the Guardian he believes Alison Moore's "moody and exquisite" *The Lighthouse* will take the prize, though admitted "you can never discount Hilary Mantel".

Despite some earlier disappointment at the omission of big names such as Martin Amis and Zadie Smith in the longlist, the shortlist has been praised for featuring two debut novels and favouring independent publishers, Funge observed. "A renewed interest in the fresh and innovative appears to mark out the shortlist this year."

*The Garden of Evening Mists* (Myrmidon Books), *Swimming Home (And Other Stories)* and *The Lighthouse* (Salt) are all published by small houses, leading Howell to remark: "It is independent publishing that is the winner today."

The winner will be announced on the 16 October.