

THE TIMES

Hilary Mantel up for second Man Booker Prize



By Ben Hoyle
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At least eight previous Man Booker Prize winners failed to make the longlist for the 2012 award yesterday along with several of the country's best-known writers.

Instead, in what the chairman of the judges described as an “extraordinary year for fiction”, four debut novelists took their place on a list dominated by *Bring Up the Bodies* by Hilary Mantel, the sole previous winner to survive the sifting process.

Ian McEwan, Rose Tremain, Pat Barker, Howard Jacobson, John Banville, Peter Carey, Zadie Smith and the perennial Booker outcast Martin Amis were among the big names passed over.

Sam Thompson, Rachel Joyce, Jeet Thayil and Alison Moore were the first-time novelists who did make the cut. Other notable inclusions are Ned Beauman who is five years younger than any Booker winner to date at 27, Will Self, Michael Frayn and André Brink, the 77-year-old South African who was shortlisted twice before in 1976 and 1978.

Mantel's 2009 novel *Wolf Hall*, about the rise of Thomas Cromwell at the court of Henry VIII, is the second bestselling Booker winner since records began and helped to demolish lingering literary prejudices about historical fiction.

Bring Up the Bodies, which follows Cromwell up to the execution of Anne Boleyn, is its sequel and was immediately and unsurprisingly installed as the favourite by Ladbrokes and William Hill.

Guessing the minds of the Booker judges is a notoriously precarious business, however. Only three favourites have gone on to win in the past ten years.

This year's judging panel is chaired by Sir Peter Stothard, Editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* and former Editor of *The Times*. He said: "When you talk about big names you have got to remember that the Booker is a prize for novels, not novelists, that rewards texts, not reputations."

Following these principles, the panel "noticed a changing of the guard", Sir Peter added. They considered 145 titles, with particular emphasis on books that "reveal more" on a second reading.

"We did not set out to reject the old guard but, after a year of sustained critical argument by a demanding panel of judges, the new has come powering through."

His fellow panelists are Dan Stevens, the *Downton Abbey* actor, Amanda Foreman, the broadcaster and historian, Dinah Birch, the academic and literary critic, and Bharat Tandon, the academic, writer and reviewer.

Between them they not only have to work their way through a mountain of reading, they also have to deal with the fallout from last year's awards, which turned out to be memorably toxic.

The 2011 judging panel was mocked for a shortlist that literary London saw as dumbed down. Dame Stella Rimington, the chairwoman of the judges and a former Director-General of MI5, hit back in her awards night speech by accusing the critics of "patronising the judges [and] insulting the shortlisted authors" and comparing the intrigues of the publishing world to the "KGB at its height", complete with "black propaganda, destabilisation operations, plots and double agents".

So far the reaction to the 2012 panel's choices has been rather warmer.

Jonathan Ruppin of Foyles bookshops said: "This is one of the most delightful and unexpected longlists in years and it confirms 2012 as the best year for fiction for quite some time.

"The fact that thousands of readers will be trying writers like Deborah Levy, Jeet Thayil and Ned Beauman should be a genuinely thrilling prospect for all those who care about contemporary fiction."

The panel will whittle the books down to six on September 11 and name a successor to last year's winner, *The Sense of an Ending* by Julian Barnes, at Guildhall in London on October 16.