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Booker prize

This Booker longlist might just be the most enjoyable of recent years

Lisa Allardice



No Sally Rooney, one clear favourite and a novel set in space - this is a longlist of unexpected discoveries and big ideas

● Three British novelists make Booker 2024 longlist among 'cohort of global voices'

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It is 10 years since the Booker prize expanded its remit to include American novelists. The [naysayers' fears](#) would appear to be borne out by this year's longlist in which six of the 13 novels are by Americans, with just three British writers, Samantha Harvey, Sarah Perry and American-born, British-Libyan novelist Hisham Matar. Last year both the long and shortlists were dominated by Irish writers (and people called Paul), but only County Mayo's Colin Barrett makes it this year. This means that the most feverishly anticipated novel of the year - Sally Rooney's *Intermezzo*, due out in September - didn't make the cut (she was longlisted for *Normal People* in 2018). It also leaves off Irish heavyweights Colm Tóibín with his sequel to *Brooklyn* (longlisted in 2009), former Booker winner Roddy Doyle and Kevin Barry. Other high-profile names missing include the three-times shortlisted Anita Desai, Rachel Cusk and David Nicholls, who proved that popularity isn't always a curse when he was longlisted in 2014.

Quick Guide

The Booker prize 2024 longlist

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So who are this year's Booker 13? Leading the pack is Percival Everett with [James](#), a retelling of *Huckleberry Finn* from the perspective of Huck's enslaved companion, Jim. The author of 24 novels and described as "a giant of American letters", Everett has suddenly gained a much wider audience after [The Trees](#) was shortlisted for the Booker in 2022 and his 2001 novel *Erasure* was adapted into the film [American Fiction](#) last year. Long before it was published, anyone who had read a proof was proclaiming *James* the novel of 2024 (one writer assured me it was bound to "win every prize going"), with critics duly pronouncing it "a masterpiece" and a "modern classic". Shocking, funny, compellingly readable, *James* is the magnificent culmination of 40 years' writing.

James is not the only novel with urgent things to say about race and American history. Tommy Orange is the first Native American to be longlisted for the prize. [Wandering Stars](#), a follow-up to his first novel *There There* (one of [Barack Obama's books of the year](#) and winner of the American Book Award) ranges from a massacre in Sand Creek in 1864 to present-day Oakland and deals with inherited trauma, addiction, gaming and grief. "Hyperbole be damned," [declared Guardian reviewer Yagnishsing Dawoor](#). "Orange's work feels, to me, as vital as air."

Displacement is also the subject of Hisham Matar's [My Friends](#), which revolves around the 1984 Libyan embassy siege and three young Libyans (the friends of the title) whose lives are changed forever after they attend the demonstrations that day. New Yorker critic James Wood [described the narrator Khaled](#) as "Matar's most touching and provoking creation: out of time, but of our time."

Rachel Kushner, author of [The Mars Room](#), and one of eight women on the list, looks much further back to ancient history with *Creation Lake*, set in the caves of south-western France. A former FBI operative who goes by the name of Sadie Smith infiltrates a group of eco-terrorists in a novel of ideas about nothing less than civilisation itself, delivered in the guise of a thriller - the result is profound and wickedly entertaining. Claire Messud turned to her French-Algerian family as inspiration for [This Strange Eventful History](#), which begins in June 1940 as Paris falls to the Germans and goes on to span continents and generations. Previously longlisted for *The Emperor's Children* in 2006, Messud elegantly combines epic storytelling with a miniaturist's eye for detail.

Environmentalism is at the heart of Richard Powers' panoramic fiction, and with *Playground*, partly set on the tiny French Polynesian island of Makatea, he does for the Pacific Ocean what he did for the Californian redwood forests in *The Overstory*, shortlisted in 2018. Climate grief shadows Australian author Charlotte Wood's [Stone Yard Devotional](#), in which a conservationist leaves her job and marriage in Sydney to take refuge in an isolated convent in New South Wales. This spare, contemplative novel makes the reader pay attention to small moments and the biggest questions.

Another rapt observer of the natural world, British writer Samantha Harvey (longlisted in 2009 for her debut *The Wilderness*), takes us to even further isolation in [Orbital](#) to record a day in the life of six astronauts aboard the International Space Station - where morning arrives every 90 minutes, the sun going "up-down-up-down like a mechanical toy". Full of hope and wonder for our planet of "miraculous and bizarre loveliness", *Orbital* is itself a rare and lovely thing.

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Described by the Guardian as "a genteel novel of inner space" and "cosmic strangeness" the characters in Sarah Perry's [Enlightenment](#) look at the stars from the other end of the telescope as it focuses on the arrival of the Hale-Bopp comet. Set in a small town in 1990s Essex (a fictionalised version of where the author of the bestselling *The Essex Serpent* grew up), this broad-ranging novel is an exploration of love, faith and physics.

Another novel orbiting around love and science is Canadian poet Anne Michaels' intensely lyrical [Held](#). Some 27 years after Michaels' first novel *Fugitive Pieces*, about survivors of the Holocaust (voted one of the BBC's [100 novels that shaped our world](#)) in 1997, *Held* is only her third novel. Written in the short bursts of a poet, looping from the beginning of the 19th century to the near future, it defies easy classification. As fellow Canadian Margaret Atwood has it, "Through luminous moments of chance, change, and even grace, Michaels shows us our humanity - its depths and shadows."

The three debut novelists have already made their mark on the literary scene. Crowned "[a doyen of the sentence](#)" by the Oprah Daily, Colin Barrett has won many prizes, including [the Guardian first book award](#) for his short stories. His first novel *Wild Houses*, about a bunch of wannabe gangsters in small-town Ireland, more than delivers. A "heartbreaker of a debut novel", according to the New York Times. With *The Safekeep*, Yael van der Wouden is the first Dutch author to be longlisted. Isabel and Eva, two very different women, find themselves thrust together one summer in an isolated country house in the Netherlands in the 1960s. The war is not as long ago as it seems. This artfully plotted, tender novel is both a suspenseful mystery and erotic love story. *Headshot*, by another short story writer Rita Bullwinkel, editor of hip US literary magazine *McSweeney's*, must be the first novel about female boxing to make the Booker longlist. Eight teenage girls, two days in Bob's Boxing Place in Nevada, slick with lipgloss, lefthooks and black eyes, *Headshot* is a knockout.

A list of unexpected discoveries and big ideas, and perhaps one of the most enjoyable in recent years.

- To explore all the books on the Booker prize 2024 longlist, visit guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.
- This article was changed on 30 July to correct the spelling of doyen

This is what we're up against

Bad actors spreading disinformation online to fuel intolerance.

Teams of lawyers from the rich and powerful trying to stop us publishing stories they don't want you to see.

Lobby groups with opaque funding who are determined to undermine facts about the climate emergency and other established science.

Authoritarian states with no regard for the freedom of the press.

But we have something powerful on our side.

We've got you.