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Novelist Hilary Mantel to receive Peggy V. Helmerich Award

Novelist to be in Tulsa for free public event on Dec. 8

By James D. Watts Jr. Tulsa World Mar 18, 2018 ☐ 0



Hilary Mantel has published 11 novels, two collections of short stories and an acclaimed memoir, "Giving Up the Ghost." Her work has earned praise and awards beginning with her first novel, "Every Day is Mother's Day," but it was the publication of "Wolf Hall" in 2009 that marked the beginning of her greatest success. Courtesy/Els Zweerink

Editor's Note

Read the complete interview with novelist Hilary Mantel at tulsaworld.com/blogs/scene/arts.



Hilary Mantel, whose novels "Wolf Hall" and "Bring Up the Bodies" made her the first person to win back-to-back Man Booker Prizes, is the recipient of the 2018 Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award.

Mantel will receive the award at a black-tie ceremony Dec. 7 at Tulsa's Central Library. She will also take part in a free public event, reading from her work, answering questions from the audience and signing books, on Dec. 8.

Mantel has published 11 novels, two collections of short stories and an acclaimed memoir, "Giving Up the Ghost." Her work has earned praise and awards beginning with her first novel, "Every Day is Mother's Day," but it was the publication of "Wolf Hall" in 2009 that marked the beginning of her greatest success.

"Wolf Hall" and its sequel, "Bring Up the Bodies," traces the rise of Thomas Cromwell to a position of power in the court of England's King Henry VIII, becoming the king's most trusted adviser, working behind the scenes of one of the most volatile periods of English history.

Mantel is currently working on the final novel in the trilogy, "The Mirror and the Light."

"I didn't know it would be a trilogy," Mantel said in an interview conducted via email. "But when I got into the material, I saw what opportunities it offered and how much was unexplored — in history books, as well as in fiction. So the project flowered out from the middle.

"I quickly saw that (Cromwell) was key to understanding the reign of Henry VIII," she said.

"(Though) this was well-known to historians, Cromwell was an obscure character to the general public."

Still, Mantel said, she did not think the books would receive the sort of attention and following that they have, becoming best-sellers and inspiring a TV series and stage plays.

“It wasn’t news to me that the Tudors are popular,” Mantel said. “But I didn’t think the public would take so enthusiastically to a complex, nuanced telling, which approached the material from an unfamiliar angle. The books are demanding of the reader – they need commitment and attention. I didn’t want to sell my story short. So I wrote it the way I thought it needed to be written and was astonished and gratified that readers seemed to be waiting for it.”

Mantel said she takes great pains to make sure her novels mirror the historic facts.

“I take the view that the facts are likely to be more interesting than anything you can invent, so I spend a great deal of time and energy trying to work out just what did happen, from the multiple versions that are available,” she said.

“All this is pretty much what a historian does, but then the novelist sets out to work on the unknown portions of the known life – to explore areas that were never on the record and never could be,” Mantel said. “We know what people did but not always why; we know what they said but not what they thought. So a lot of what reaches my page is not subject to verification. It’s my best guess – but I try to make that guess on the basis of the best evidence.”



The Helmerich award, presented by the Tulsa Library Trust and the Tulsa City-County Library, consists of a \$40,000 cash prize and an engraved crystal book.

Mantel, who was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 2014 in honor of

her services to literature, is the 33rd author to receive the award.

“We are so blessed to have had several international authors come to Tulsa to receive the Distinguished Author Award,” said Peggy V. Helmerich, the award’s namesake.

In addition to Mantel, the award has been presented over the years to British authors Kazuo Ishiguro, Ian McEwan and John le Carre; Australians Thomas Keneally and Geraldine Brooks; and Canadian-born writers Saul Bellow and Margaret Atwood.

“We at the library have worked really hard to make sure we are in the global community, and it’s so special to have this wonderful opportunity to bring internationally recognized authors to Tulsa to share with the community,” Helmerich said.



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