

The Man
Booker
Prize

2014

Reader's Guide



Ali Smith
how to be both

'Smith can make anything happen, which is why she is one of our most exciting writers today' *Daily Telegraph*

Other novels by Ali Smith

Free Love and Other Stories (1995)

Like (1997)

Other Stories and Other Stories (1999)

Hotel World (2001)

The Whole Story and Other Stories (2003)

The Accidental (2005)

Girl Meets Boy (2007)

The First Person and Other Stories (2008)

There But For The (2011)

How to be both Ali Smith

Hamish Hamilton

www.themanbookerprize.com

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About the author

Ali Smith was born in Inverness in August 1962. She won the Saltire First Book Award and a Scottish Arts Council Award in 1995 for her first collection of stories, *Free Love*. Her first novel, *Like*, was published in 1997 and her second collection of stories, *Other Stories and Other Stories*, in 1999.

Hotel World, her second novel, was shortlisted for the 2001 Booker Prize and the Orange Prize. *The Accidental*, was shortlisted for The Man Booker Prize in 2005.

She lives in Cambridge.

How to be both

How to be both is a novel all about art's versatility. Borrowing from painting's fresco technique to make an original literary double-take, it's a fast-moving genre-bending conversation between forms, times, truths and fictions. There's a renaissance artist of the 1460s. There's the child of a child of the 1960s. Two tales of love and injustice twist into a singular yarn where time gets timeless, structural gets playful, knowing gets mysterious, fictional gets real - and all life's givens get given a second chance.

Discussion points

How to be both can be read in two ways. Half of the books printed begin with the 'Eyes' section, and half begin with the 'Camera' section. What do you think your experience of the novel would be like if you'd read it in the opposite order? Would the ending feel different? Why do you think Ali Smith wanted readers to experience the novel in two different ways?

Discuss the significance of the two visuals: the eyes and the camera. What do these images mean to you?

Very little is known about the painter Francesco Del Cossa and it was custom during the renaissance for artists to go completely unacknowledged. How much licence does an author have to reinvent the lives of historical figures? At what point does something pass into history?

Walls feature heavily in the novel, and have psychological, artistic and technological implications: a social barrier, a fresco, a firewall. Why do you think the author has chosen to write about this in this way? Do walls have the same significance in both sections of the book?

George's parents are very relaxed and friendly towards their children, yet George recounts some very intense experiences. How much can a parent protect their child?

Themed reading

Tracy Chevalier *Girl with a Pearl Earring*
John Berger *Ways of Seeing*
Thomas Nashe *The Unfortunate Traveller*
Jackie Kay *Trumpet*

Useful links

www.themanbookerprize.com
<http://literature.britishcouncil.org/ali-smith>
www.penguin.co.uk/nf/Author/AuthorPage/0,,1000049781,00.html