

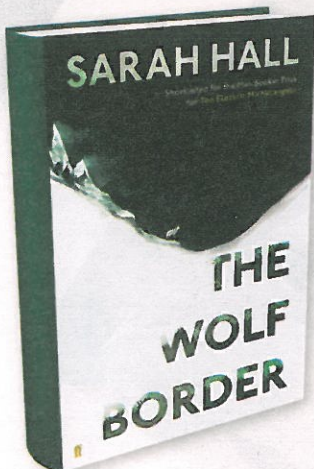
## BOOK WARS

TWO NOVELS EXPLORE  
THE LIE OF THE LANDTHE WOLF BORDER VS  
THE SHORE*Home is where the heart is in both this week's titles, but which will have a place on your bedside table?*THE WOLF  
BORDER**Stylist's deputy  
production  
editor Amy  
Adams fights  
for *The Wolf******Border* by Sarah Hall (£17.99,  
Faber & Faber), out now**

In the interest of transparency, I'll come straight out with it: I'm from the Lake District, so I might be a little biased when it comes to favouring fellow Cumbrian Sarah Hall's fascinating tale of re-introducing grey wolves to the region. But equally, I could be a harsh critic were she to describe a place that was unfamiliar or a little too Beatrix Potter. She doesn't, I'm pleased to report. As Rachel – Hall's lead character and another Lakeland native – remarks on her return: "Moorland, peat, ferns, water... Cumbria's signature aroma is immediately recognisable."

Rachel, a zoologist, has been summoned home from Idaho by the Earl of Annerdale, keen to recruit her for his controversial passion project – releasing a pair of "level five predators" into a vast enclosure on his estate. But leading the new scheme means facing up to the family disputes that have kept her away from the Lakes for a decade.

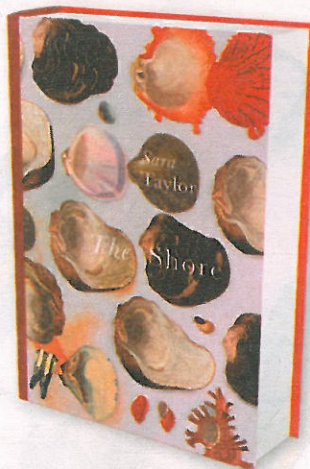
As she makes her choice, the tentative settling of the wolves mirrors Rachel's own, both slowly adjusting and building new lives for themselves. But as the controversy around the



wolves rages, and the project takes a dramatic turn, so Rachel too finds her life disrupted in unexpected ways. And always, in the background, lies the Lake District – both beautiful and bleak, tamed and wild.

In *The Shore*, it's the eponymous coastline that draws the characters home no matter how hard they try to leave. But here, Sara Taylor swaps a linear narrative for one that leaps from 1876 to 2143, and narrators whose lives interlink in complex, sometimes befuddling ways. Taylor's stories are savage yet poetic and it's a worthy choice for the Bailey's Women's Prize for Fiction longlist, but just opening the pages of Hall's original and evocative novel whisked me back to the Lakes (far cheaper than Virgin Trains). And for that, it wins the day.

★★★★☆



## THE SHORE

**Stylist  
contributor  
Rosy Edwards  
backs Sara  
Taylor's *The*  
*Shore* (£12.99,  
William Heinemann), out now**

In theory, it shouldn't work: a dizzying assortment of characters, a story that leaps through time and a series of cliff hangers that defy resolution? This is the type of complex, unorthodox storytelling usually relished by David Mitchell fans. But just as *Cloud Atlas* went on to worldwide acclaim, so Sara Taylor's debut novel also disproves the prejudice.

Set in a cluster of islands off the coast of Virginia, *The Shore* follows the lives of its residents over 270 years. Taylor's vivid descriptions of searing heat,

desolate vistas and swathes of marsh, mountains and forest, make the landscape a character in its own right – one reflecting the harsh, impoverished lives led by the people that live there.

With so many different narrators, it can be hard to keep track of who's who, but Taylor works hard to give each character their own, distinct voice, immediately drawing you into their world. From 13-year-old Chloe, who clutches an oozing bag of chicken necks as she listens to the details of a gruesome murder, to Medora, a powerful matriarch with a grudge to bear, the characters are constantly challenged, but never helpless, and all are bound together by their island home.

In contrast, Sarah Hall's *The Wolf Border* can sometimes feel monotonous, thanks to its rigid focus on Rachel, a woman as cold as a Cumbrian winter. Hall does an excellent job of harnessing the landscape to mirror Rachel's journey, but it leaves little room for other characters and some feel under-developed as a result. *The Shore*, with its themes of death, poverty and abuse, may not be an especially cheerful read but it is never lacking in drama.

These books are separated by more than just geography, but setting is at the heart of them both. For me, it was the ethereal twists that gave Taylor's debut the edge. The brutal beauty of *The Shore* is well worth a visit.

★★★★☆

## THE VERDICT: THE WOLF BORDER TAKES FIRST PLACE

The mantra, "Location, location, location," applies to both this week's books, where the setting is a character in itself. *The Shore*'s collection of islands is a savage but seductive wilderness for its inhabitants (and the Bailey's Women's Prize For Fiction panel) but twice Booker-nominated Hall paints such a vivid picture of the Lake District in *The Wolf Border*, you're right there with the wolves.

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