Anna Auguscik

PRIZING DEBATE
The Fourth Decade of the Booker Prize and the Contemporary Novel in the UK
From:

Anna Auguscik

Prizing Debate
The Fourth Decade of the Booker Prize
and the Contemporary Novel in the UK

June 2017, 400 p., 44.99 €, ISBN 978-3-8376-3853-0

This book offers a study of the literary marketplace in the early 2000s. Focusing on the Man Booker Prize and its impact on a novel’s media attention, Anna Auguscik analyses the mechanisms by which the Prize both recognises books that trigger debates and itself becomes the object of such debates. Based on case studies of six novels (by Aravind Adiga, Margaret Atwood, Sebastian Barry, Mark Haddon, DBC Pierre, Zadie Smith) and their attention profiles, this work describes the Booker as a ‘problem-driven attention-generating mechanism’, the influence of which can only be understood in relation to other participants in literary interaction.

Anna Auguscik teaches English Literature at the University of Oldenburg, Germany. She is a postdoctoral fellow in the Fiction Meets Science research group. Her research interests include the novel in the literary marketplace, the history and current state of reviewing and criticism, and the relationship between literature and science.

For further information:
www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-8376-3853-0

© 2017 transcript Verlag, Bielefeld
Contents

Acknowledgements | 7

Introduction | 9
Situating the Booker Prize in the Context of Literary Interaction | 10
Aims, Questions, Methodological Choices | 13
Structure, Scope, Selection of Texts | 18

PART I: CONTEXTS, OR DEBATING THE PRIZE

1. The Booker Prize as Problem under Academic Scrutiny | 25
1.1 From Footnotes to Full Studies:
   Early Prize Commentary and the Sociology of Literature | 26
1.2 The Booker Prize as Inclusionary or Exclusionary Mechanism | 29
1.3 Bourdieu and Beyond: A New Objectivity in the 21st Century? | 35
1.4 Booker Prize Research:
   Examining Prize Culture in Context of Literary Interaction | 40

2. Attention and Participants’ Perspectives on Literary Interaction | 49
2.1 Judging a Book by Its Cover: The Reader’s Perspective | 50
2.2 Creating a Buzz for Retailers and Editors:
   The “Advance Reader’s” Perspective | 57
2.3 The Economy of Attention: Literary Prizes and other Multipliers | 66
2.4 Media Presence: Public Attention Profiles for Contemporary Literary Fiction in the UK | 74

3. The Booker and Public Attention: The History of the Booker as a History of Problems | 81
3.1 The Booker’s Intricate ‘Problematicness’, or How the Booker Garners Attention by Generating Problems | 83
3.2 The Booker and Literary Value, or the Prize as Short- and Long-Term Indicator of Quality | 92
3.3 Analytical Approaches for Case Studies: Positioning the Booker in a Novel’s Public and Critical Attention Profile | 100
# PART II: CASE STUDIES, OR PRIZING DEBATE

4. **Leading the Booker Prize into the New Millennium** | 119  
4.1 Booker by Concession: Margaret Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin* | 123  
4.2 Winning by Not Winning: Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* | 142  
4.3 “Long service, good conduct”? The 2000 Booker Prize | 167

5. **Literary Outsiders and Odd Titles:**  
   A New Era of the Booker Prize | 179  
5.1 Feigning Fiction? DBC Pierre’s *Vernon God Little* | 183  
5.2 A Crossover “Grand Slam”: Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* | 206  
5.3 “A rite of passage”: The 2003 Man Booker Prize for Fiction | 230

6. **40 Years of Booker Choice:**  
   Between “Freshness” and “Literary Magic” | 245  
6.1 A Rags-to-Riches Story: Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* | 249  
6.2 The Secret Flaw: Sebastian Barry’s *The Secret Scripture* | 281  
6.3 “Does it knock my socks off?”  
   The 2008 Man Booker Prize for Fiction | 300

7. **Beyond “the end of its natural ‘front list’ life”:**  
   The Booker and the Afterlife of Novels | 311  
7.2 Quality as a Question of Use: DBC Pierre’s *Vernon God Little* and Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident* (2003) | 315  
7.3 History, or Which Novel Can Pass the Test of Time: Margaret Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin* and Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000) | 319

**Conclusion** | 327

**Appendix** | 335

**Works Cited: Academic Criticism** | 359

**Works Cited: Journalistic and Other Sources** | 367
After winning the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 2009 and repeating this rare feat in 2012, English writer Hilary Mantel was transformed from a quietly respected author with moderate sales to a literary star, one of *TIME* magazine’s 100 most influential people in the world. The Man Booker Prize, rewarded for the best novel of the year, was an immense catalyst in her career, her novels became international bestsellers and her name would henceforth appear alongside the likes of J.M. Coetzee and Salman Rushdie. The success of her books led to a renewed interest in historical novels – so much so that critics coined the term the “Mantel effect” to describe the recent buzz around historical fiction.¹

Despite the sudden hype, however, it really took Mantel over 20 years to become an ‘overnight success’. This journey involved and required the cooperation and the efforts of many institutions and their representatives. After the publication of her first two novels in the mid-1980s, she became a critic and reviewer for *The Spectator* and other papers. By the end of the 1990s, Mantel was an author of eight novels, some of which were recognised with due praise by critics and prize juries. She was awarded the Cheltenham Prize for Literature in 1990, the Sunday Express Book of the Year in 1992, and UK’s oldest literary award, the Hawthornden Prize in 1996. In 2006, after the publication of a memoir, a collection of short stories, and another novel, Mantel was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize and the Orange Prize for Fiction. That same year she was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE). When she was announced as the winner of the 2009 Man Booker Prize for Fiction for the first part of the historical trilogy set at the court of King Henry VIII, Mantel was far from an unknown entity to the literary establishment. By the time she was nominated in 2012, the betting agencies handled her as the clear favourite, and

when she finally triumphed, she became the first female writer and only one of four authors in total to be awarded the Man Booker twice.

The Booker is not alone in ‘making authors’ and not all the impact it has on winners and nominees can be measured or predicted. The effect of the Booker Prize, as it was called from 1969 (the year it was first awarded) until 2002 when Man Group took over sponsorship, and as it continues to be known in literary circles, is both quantifiable and unquantifiable. On its website, the Booker promises “fortune”: sales, reprints of backlists, international rights, spin-offs and book tours. It also claims to guarantee “fame”: wide publicity, including TV coverage, radio broadcast and leading articles in daily newspapers and weekly magazines, both in news and books sections. But, as Booker history shows, all books involved are different, and the ensuing stories on them vary in relation to the assets later proclaimed indispensable to their success. Sometimes the decisive element is actions taken by a committed agent or an influential reviewer; at other times it is an innovative marketing strategy, the spiralling effect of word-of-mouth or a topical theme which hooks the desired audience at the right time. Looking back at a winner’s story, it is difficult to determine for sure how much a winning title owes its success to the Prize or to any particular individual and institutional backing it received. Indeed, and this shall be the premise of this book, it seems to be the mix of all involved that leads to a text’s ideal – if desired and even then rarely achieved – journey from manuscript to award-winning, critically acclaimed bestseller. The Booker’s impact, then, only seems ‘guaranteed’ when all the participants in the process cooperate – authors, agents, publishers, booksellers, critics, and readers alike.

SITUATING THE BOOKER PRIZE IN THE CONTEXT OF LITERARY INTERACTION

The history of the Booker Prize has been written – not least by its own makers – as a history of individuals who created it and have fought for it since the mid-1960’s, or alternatively, as a history of institutions and their representatives which were involved in its founding and rise to “the Commonwealth’s premier literary award”. I propose to understand the Booker Prize as a double entity, or one situated on two levels: while it acts and is called upon as one among other

---

participants in ‘literary interaction’, it also consists of individual representatives of these participants.

On one level, the Booker functions as a participant in a range of discussions and, perhaps most easily detectably, on diverse written documents. It can be part of a book’s final layout as a strapline or sticker. In this function, it becomes one of many lures which draw the reader’s attention to the book as well as to themselves (similarly, the author’s name, for example, is visible on a book’s cover in both functions). But the Booker can also be visible on advance reader’s copies as one of many drawcards that publishers use to attract the attention of ‘advanced readers’, i.e. retailers and reviewers. Finally, and most crucially, it is part of the discourse on books which can be traced in the media. It is via these documents that the Booker is understood to be acting as an agent, as taking part in literary interaction. And it is via these documents that I propose to understand the Booker’s particular position in this interaction: it is through the act of addressing that the Prize becomes a participant.

On the second level, the Booker consists of various interrelated components which, in turn, interact and draw on other participants. The administration of the Booker can be divided in three arms – a management body, an advisory body, and the annually changing body of judges – and each of them consists of figures with a mixture of personalities and of functions in literary interaction: publishers, booksellers, librarians, authors, critics and academics sit on these panels alongside politicians, businessmen and other public figures, and come to what is known as the Booker’s decisions. It is a crucial characteristic of the Prize that it combines the realm of finances and political networks with literary expertise, unites participants who are commonly viewed as part of literary communication (authors and critics), those who can be considered part of it (publishers, booksellers and librarians), and those who will be generally perceived to be on the outside (businessmen and politicians). This particular framework, paradoxically, makes for both the Booker’s perceived ‘problematicness’ and is what enables it to interact in debate as one participant alongside others.

The Booker’s relationships with other participants in literary interaction have been problematic and, not rarely, have become the object of debate. Some decisions taken by the Booker have been interpreted as pandering to retailers, and its titles then perceived as being too conformist, too commercial. In other years, or just according to differing standards, the lists were described as too elitist, too scholarly, aimed too much at the ivory tower of critics in search of unreadable, if fashionable chic. Some authors – mostly the chosen few but others as well – have spoken out in its favour for the way it promotes fiction, triggers careers and recognises talent. Others have criticised it – and sometimes changed their minds
when they were finally chosen in later years – for bringing too much attention to those who had already been in the limelight, for creating competition in a realm where the sports-like designation of winners and losers is not desired or even possible. Small publishers have been scathing towards the Booker for favouring the big conglomerates, while established publishers have complained that they could only send in two titles when several of the authors on their lists would easily have been eligible. The Prize has been pronounced too powerful, declared to exert too much pressure on the authors and the industry – even labelled to drive everyone “mad”.\textsuperscript{3} But every so often it is also judged to have lost its charm, to have become less influential, with new prizes allegedly taking its place as annual attention catalysts.\textsuperscript{4}

The Booker’s predominance and its financial power, in particular, have been criticized, but its problematic relationships are nonetheless actively cultivated. Authors write novels which are eligible for this “best novel of the year” prize.\textsuperscript{5} Once nominated, they have to bear with the procedure of a competitive event while cameras are rolling and everyone reacts to winning or losing. Publishers send their ‘best’ books for judgment, and they are also required to invest further in the books they have already promoted. On top of their own marketing strategies, each participating publisher is asked “to contribute £5,000 towards general publicity if the book reaches the shortlist”, another £5,000 if they win, and have “no fewer than 1,000 copies of that title available in stock within 10 days of the announcement of the longlist”.\textsuperscript{6} Booksellers provide shop-window space, shelves and bargain-bins. They make 3-for-2 offers, install point-of-sale material and have staff wear promotional T-shirts. Journalists and critics cover the occasion of the dinner ceremony and accompany the annual process from the selection of the judges to the narrowing down of nominees into a longlist, shortlist and a final winner with interviews, reviews and features on TV and radio and in regional, national and international papers as well as in magazines and scholarly publications. Making the Booker shortlist serves as more than a ‘double publication’: the chosen books enjoy another wave of attention in the media and their discussion is extended to a debate about the Prize. Readers take interest in the Booker – as a consumer guide, as a measure of quality and as a topic for dinner parties.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{6} “Entering the Awards”, \textit{The Man Booker Prizes}.
\end{flushleft}
They can even participate actively in the process by placing bets on their favourite authors and novels.

All these participants are united by an interest in literature and interact with others to forward their own, as well as the interest of literature itself (though what that might imply will, of course, differ). The Booker seems to make debate valuable and to lend itself to use by other participants who can combine their interests with those of the Prize.

AIMS, QUESTIONS, METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

Literary interaction is based on debate, and the Booker Prize offers itself for discussion as much as it calls for conversation about the chosen novels by presenting itself as a problem. For my analysis of the Booker’s double role as object and subject of debate, I chose a discourse analytical approach. The interdependence among the participants and their diverse but co-existing perspectives on the Booker becomes the focus of attention when one specifically asks who invests (money, prestige, attention) in Booker-eligible novels and how and in what ways these investments function. It is the aim of the present study to look closely at exactly these negotiations, those who participate in them, and the contexts in which they take place. In other words: this inquiry asks how the Prize and its influence on a particular novel or on literature in general are discussed with regard to both the speaker’s position as an author, a publisher, a reviewer, an academic or a prize judge and the particular settings in which these people make their observations: at a book reading, on the book’s cover, in a review or critical essay, or in a laudation at the gala ceremony.

My conceptualisation of the different perspectives on the Booker as ‘subject positions’ and the interest in ‘the setting in which subjects speak’ is informed by and based on a particular understanding of what is commonly referred to as ‘discourse analysis’ in the sense of Michel Foucault, who provides a theoretical and terminological framework which lends itself for the evaluation of statements made in debates on the Booker Prize. In his Archaeology of Knowledge, Foucault argues that, in order to understand any form of statement, “we must first discover the law operating behind” it and “the place from which [it] come[s]”.7 First we have to ask “who is speaking”, secondly we “must also describe the institutional sites” from which discourse is made, and thirdly we must bear in mind

that “[t]he positions of the subject are also defined by the situation that it is possible for him to occupy in relation to the various domains or groups of objects”. According to Foucault, then, discourse analysis not only entails finding out what is spoken about but also who speaks, in which subject position, and in which setting.

Based on a range of case studies, I examine the influence the Booker has on the chosen novels, or, to be more precise, on how these novels are spoken about in the documents mentioned above with an emphasis on their media coverage in national newspapers, literary, trade and other specialist magazines, as well as academic journals. For this, I draw on the four principles of reversal, discontinuity, specificity and exteriority that Foucault outlined in his 1972 inaugural lecture, *L’ordre du discours*.

The distribution of attention in the various media constitutes what I call a novel’s ‘public and critical profiles’, i.e. the sum of statements made in a novel’s media coverage in chronological order. The creation of a novel’s profile – a list of who says what and in which context about this particular novel – facilitates an analysis of their presence in the debate according to the four principles and helps understand the changes and adjustments to the discussion during a book’s ‘life cycle’. Novels are spoken about in different settings and need to be understood in the context in which they are given attention (exteriority). Each novel and its profile are thus highly specific, and neither the public’s reaction to Booker-winning books nor the Prize’s influence on a novel’s further trajectory is the

8 Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 54-58.
9 I have chosen a methodological strategy – discourse analysis – that has been understood in various ways in academic discourse, cf. Anton Kirchhofer, “The Foucault Complex: A Review of Foucauldian Approaches in Literary Studies”, *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 45.4 (1997). It has been accepted for a long time that Foucault himself not only gave different definitions of the approach in his writing but also did not stick to one homogenous method throughout his oeuvre, cf. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983): xi. The focus of my analysis of discourses about the Booker and the Prize’s influence on literary interaction rests on a particular understanding of discourse analysis and the mechanics of power. For the purposes of this study, I will depend mostly upon Michel Foucault’s reflections in *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* for the latter and *The Order of Discourse* for the interest in the former.
same (specificity). A novel presents itself differently to an informed reader before or after it has been honoured with a prize (discontinuity). In fact, a book which was awarded the Booker is not the same book it was before it was thus distinguished: instead, it becomes a Booker book. To exaggerate the point and to employ what Foucault has spoken of as the principle of reversal: the Booker Prize is not awarded to the “best novel” – it creates a “best novel” by facilitating a space for debate.

In each case study, therefore, the media coverage of the selected title, an analysis of which is the basis for the creation of its individual profile, is organised according to the different publications that enable participants to speak about the novel. I distinguish between statements made in journalistic (general, trade and specific newspapers and magazines), essayistic (literary magazines) and academic criticism (journals and other academic publications). When speakers make publically available observations about the Booker or a Booker book – for example, in an interview or comment in a newspaper – they will be aware of that publication’s readership. This knowledge informs the statements made in general newspapers, literary journals or specialist magazines.

Such statements made by the different speakers are part of a series of events, but they need to be considered as discontinuous depending on when they are made in the chronology of a book’s profile. They are also specific insofar as they could be read differently in different contexts. This means that when reading a piece of criticism, one needs to understand at which moment of the novel’s ‘life cycle’ it is made, at which moment it joins the debate about that novel, and how it positions itself in contrast to or in accord with other statements about the novel. For example, UK reviewers will encounter a debut novel published in the UK as a relatively unknown quantity, but if the same novel wins a major prize (say, the Booker) and is then published in the US, the US reviewers will have a different novel at hand: no longer a dark horse, it will be treated with all its newly-acquired importance as a distinguished book from across the Atlantic. Thus any statement made about this book will have to be viewed in light of when it was made and which other statement it follows. Finally, the criteria under which a novel is evaluated also need to be considered according to their discontinuity and specificity: which questions are directed at the object of a given statement and which reasons are given for speaking about it?

Similarly, before one can consider the Booker’s influence on the novels’ profiles, and in accordance with Foucault’s principles, the Prize itself will have to be described from ‘without’, not confined to available histories but from the various conflicting perspectives that contribute to it, its rules and its subject positions. The respective Booker years will be considered as separate instances given
all their discontinuities (for example, the annually changing jury), while the relationships between a year’s nominated titles will have to be considered in their specific degree of comparability and rivalry.

The choice in favour of discourse analysis differentiates this study from most previous scholarship on literary prizes, which largely draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological approach and his theory of the literary field. The heuristic decision to consult a discourse analytical approach is in no way a rejection of Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of agents, their social position, and their diverse forms of capital. In fact, prize research is almost unthinkable without Bourdieu’s concepts, particularly the different forms of capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) and their conversions, as well as the idea of exerting power through symbolic violence. His reflections on ‘the field of cultural production’, ‘the market of symbolic goods’ and ‘the rules of art’ create the basis for what is the most influential approach to the interdisciplinary study of literary prizes and other instruments of literary consecration.

The comparably young sub-field of Booker Prize research includes perspectives from sociologists, economists, political theorists, postcolonial and Marxist scholars, as well as researchers in publishing studies and the history of the book. Bourdieu’s theories inform almost all academic studies on the Booker Prize, including those combining his perspective with a criticism of the market and/or that borrow from his concepts but add other ideas, stating the need to adapt his theories so that they might fit a more contemporary (rather than nineteenth-century), Anglophone (rather than Francophone) field. Yet although so many of these existing studies use Bourdieu’s concepts, not all of them do, and in order to incorporate those that do and those that do not, in order to describe the ‘constellation’ of different but co-existing perspectives, including non-academic perspectives by publishers, booksellers, reviewers, politicians etc., the methodological tool which most effectively allows me to describe this constellation of speakers, their subject positions, the settings in which they speak, which terms they use, and what it is that they say about the novels and the Booker’s involvement in the books’ life cycles is discourse analysis.

My choice of methodology is further motivated by an advantage it provides beyond the ability to focus my analysis on the Booker’s position among other participants and their respective subject positions. It also enables an analysis that does not proceed on the assumption of the top-bottom idea of power.11 In the

first volume of the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault defines “power relations as both intentional and nonsubjective”.\(^{12}\) This reflection seems particularly crucial in a study of a subject position which is – as mentioned above – no homogenous subject: the Booker, while it is often designated as a fellow participant, is also the sum of many speakers, some of whom accompany the administration of the Prize for years or decades, while others change with each Booker year. Moreover, they come from a variety of backgrounds and represent a rich mix of personalities and functions, and although they may be part of one cause at a particular moment, they will also have their own agendas.\(^{13}\)

Earlier studies, adopting a sociological approach with a ‘top-down’ notion of power, provide an important foundation for understanding much of the critique of literary prizes.\(^{14}\) However, later Booker scholarship has begun to question the top-bottom idea of power and welcomed the notion of interdependent relationships with other participants. These studies have used Bourdieu’s concept of the literary field and, extending Bourdieu’s question of how meaning enters the work of art as cultural capital, they have coined specific terms describing the media’s interest or academia’s investment.\(^{15}\) Recent scholars have also added other theories and models to suit a contemporary twentieth-century context and to combine their specific interests, such as the position of literature in a period of globalisation or the marketing of literature, with Bourdieu’s theory. I am indebted to these later accounts, as they understand the Booker’s involvement in liter-

---

\(^{12}\) Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. 94.

\(^{13}\) I follow the established practice of treating the Booker as a quasi-subject but, to be consistent with my method, I will depict the mechanisms of local tactics and “antagonism of strategies”, cf. Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, 2nd ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983): 211.


\(^{15}\) Cf. James F. English’s coinage of the term “journalistic capital” and Claire Squires’s concept of “scholarly capital” (cf. also chapter 1.4).
ary interaction as a relationship of interdependence rather than as a hierarchical process. Through my analysis, what emerges is a situation where each individual involved in the process has the choice to acknowledge or resist the Booker’s decision but that they take a risk if they do not participate. Their negligence can prove risky if as critics they do not discuss the Prize; if as publishers they do not put forward their titles; or if as readers they miss out on taking part in a potentially historical debate. Individual participants risk irrelevance in a system which is (potentially) productive: a system of appreciation which raises the reputation of anyone who risks joining. By building on previous research of the Booker and its interdependent relationships with other participants, therefore, and by focusing on the mechanisms of debate, I hope to capture the process of participation in these institutional constellations of power.

**Structure, Scope, Selection of Texts**

The methodological approach depicted above gives rise to a two-part structure. In the first part, based on written accounts by industry experts and prize theoreticians, this study explores the functions of each participant in literary debates, their particular perspectives and their relationships with other, at times competing individuals and institutions, and the role of the Booker in this interaction: as problem calling for reactions. In the second part, based on individual case studies of six books in three selected years of the first decade of the twenty-first century (2000, 2003 and 2008), this study asks how novels come to be part of public debate; and how their public and critical profile is changed by the attention which is bestowed upon them with the nomination and selection for the Booker, and as a consequence of the consideration of literary editors, reviewers and critics. In short, this study examines the interplay between nomination and awarding of the Booker Prize, on the one hand, and the presence of novels on a ‘market of debates’ on the other.

The first part of the study, then, provides three different kinds of contexts for this study of the Booker Prize in its fourth decade of existence: (1) it embeds this study of the Booker Prize and its impact on a novel’s media presence in an already existing academic discourse on the problems presented by literary prizes in general and the Booker in particular; (2) it considers the Booker Prize as an agent in literary interaction in terms of interconnected effects with other active participants such as authors, publishers, retailers, critics and readers, all of whose subject positions and settings are exemplified by means of different materials which they use for their communication; (3) it provides a short history of the
Booker Prize and reconstructs its particular subject positions which will then serve as a background for the case studies in the second part of the study. This last section also demonstrates the way the Prize produces problems that entice public participation and transform discussions of literary quality (short-term), thus having an impact on literary history as a whole (long-term).

The first chapter looks at literary awards and the Booker Prize in particular as an object of study in academia. It asks how scholars discuss the Prize – in which subject positions and in which settings – and argues in favour of considering academic responses as part of literary interaction rather than something outside of it. Since the late 1980s, the Prize has been taken seriously and examined as a central agent in the sociology, economy, and politics of literature as well as in cultural and literary studies. Four main phases of prize research can be identified: early commentary up to the 1980s, sociological studies with a peak in the mid- to late-1980s, a problematisation of prizes, including the Booker, by literary and cultural studies from the mid-1990s, and an objectification and quantification of the Booker in the twenty-first century. This study’s preliminary agenda is an analysis of the Prize’s relationship with other participants in literary interaction, mainly those involved in literary criticism. It focuses on the issues of problems, quality and history. These are based on questions which have been posed by other researchers in the field of literary studies: the Booker’s relationship with the media or criticism and its potential for scandal (problems), its participation in debates of literary value (quality), and its role in canon formation (history).

The second chapter describes the territory in which the participants act, communicate and represent their varied interests. It depicts the different positions these participants take and their awareness of other, at times competing, agents. It also shows how certain decisions are influenced by the presence and actions of others. While it is true that a novel as a material product has to undergo a certain linear process of production, distribution and reception, this chapter takes the complex network of participants and their role in ‘building a novel’ as a starting point in order to portray their form of interaction as neither linear nor circular, but interwoven. Most of all, the chapter’s aim is to test the notion of a flexible field which presents itself differently to different participants through their perspectives.

The third chapter develops the notion of participants who are reciprocally aware of and observe each other and focuses on the historical development of the Booker’s relationships with other instances of literary interaction. The state of mutual observation leads to cycles of attention. Attention from other participants is best triggered by offering them problems, which they do not necessarily have
to solve, but which they can debate, and which they can ideally combine with their own agendas. Participants need to raise, partake in, and enhance debates which will then be taken up by others. This chapter presents the Booker as a particularly well-adapted subject position in instigating debates, even controversies, as its history, and its success can be traced to a continuous production of problems and sometimes ‘precarious alliances’. It also tests two particular kinds of problems which the Booker has less triggered than used for debates about literary fiction: (1) quality – from the different definitions of literary value to the different sorts of use which certain representatives of other institutions find for the Booker and its titles; and (2) history – from the Booker’s interest in writing its own history to its influence on future literary history, i.e. canon formation. The Prize participates in the definition and construction of literary vs. genre fiction, and it further participates in a competition for legitimacy to predict which novels, authors, and debates will win the test of time, or be relevant in the next 5, 10 or 50 years. Lastly, the reflections on the Booker’s relationships with other participants and its role in settling questions of literary value and the literary canon will form a basis for discussing questions of the Booker and its power to exert influence.

The second part of the study asks what difference the Booker Prize makes in the public and critical attention pattern of selected novels and in their debates. It consists of case studies which gauge the short- and long-term profiles of six novels which were chosen bearing in mind the aspect of competition in literary interaction and the status of the authors. The main two categories of writers consist of established authors on the one hand and debut authors on the other, though this division is not exhaustive since there is also a third category of what I will call ‘odd’ writers who challenge the other two with their mostly one-off success stories. Each chapter of the case studies for the years 2000, 2003 and 2008 presents both the respective winner of the Booker Prize and a rival which was discussed in the course of media coverage and subsequently played a decisive role in the media’s interest for the Whitbread (Costa) Book Awards – itself a rival institution to the Booker Prize. Chapter four describes the competition between an established and a newcomer author and their two millennial novels: Margaret Atwood’s Booker-winning *The Blind Assassin* and Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, a Whitbread First Novel book. Chapter five traces the profiles of a pair which was more explicitly treated as a couple of rivals in media coverage. In 2003, DBC Pierre’s *Vernon God Little* and Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog*

16 The criteria for the selection of novels – relationships of rivalry and status in the marketplace – will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.3.
in the Night-Time first competed for the Booker Prize and later for the Whitbread Book Awards. Chapter six revisits the established vs. newcomer constellation in reversed order. In 2008, Sebastian Barry’s The Secret Scripture came second in the race for the Booker behind Aravind Adiga’s The White Tiger, but was then ‘consoled’ with the title of Costa (former Whitbread) Book of the Year in 2009.

Each case study describes the specific profiles of the given novels, contrasts their respective rivals in their ability to offer problems for debate, and then re-evaluates that particular year from the perspective of the Booker Prize. The profiles can be organised into several phases of critical and public attention. The intensity of the phase of Booker-induced coverage will depend on the length and dynamic of the other phases. In addition to changing the profile of a novel, the Booker also exerts influence on the quality of the discussion and the issues which are raised in relation to a novel. Problems of authenticity, legitimacy and literary value become particularly vital when the novels are discussed as Booker winners, nominees or even as novels which missed out on that year’s Prize cycle. The individual mix of questions which the novels offer for debate, the Booker’s current situation, and the narratives which can be added to the discussion based on former winners, decisions and problems, creates the specific short- and long-term attention profile of the novels. The three longer case studies in chapters 4, 5 and 6 take a short-term perspective and focus on the first 1-2 years of the novel’s ‘life cycle’ and how it is mediated in the press, while the seventh chapter gives a first glance at what a long-term perspective might look like and what happens when academic criticism enters the debate.

In Prizing Debate in Literary Interaction: The Fourth Decade of the Booker Prize and the Contemporary Novel in the UK I have chosen to use a focused and specific period in the Prize’s history to highlight its relationships with other participants and to analyse the mechanisms by which it becomes the object of debates (Part I: Contexts, or Debating the Prize) and through which it recognises novels triggering debates (Part II: Case Studies, or Prizing Debate). By using discourse analysis as a method, this study places the focus on the waves and patterns of public attention directed at contemporary novels published in the UK in the first decade of the twenty-first century in order to examine both the Booker’s impact on these reactions and the relationships with other participants in literary interaction which allow the Prize to exert such influence. Together, the two parts offer different perspectives on the functions of the Booker Prize in literary interaction: (1) which difference does the Booker make for novels that were rewarded, nominated or simply discussed in relation to the Prize, and (2) what is the relationship between (a) the discussion of this influence which the Prize exerts and (b) the critical debate on these novels?