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The Man Booker Prize and the Emerging Canon of Contemporary British Fiction

Abstract

The article sets out to consider the tentative shape of the canon of contemporary British fiction and to examine the extent to which it has been influenced by the most prestigious of British literary prizes – the Booker. An overview of the Prize’s history and a summary of its rules and regulations (eligibility, the jury, the selection process) is followed by an assessment of its legacy, positive and negative, in promoting literary fiction in Britain. The second part of the article investigates the problematic nature of the notion of “contemporary British fiction” and considers several aspects of canonicity as well as the essential factors involved in the formation of the canon. The last part provides some empirical data arranged into four tables. It juxtaposes the results of two surveys on the teaching canon of contemporary British fiction (carried out by Bentley, and by Tew and Addis) with the information about the recognition which the canonical authors and novels have received from the Booker juries. Two of the tables seek to illustrate the prominence of British writers in critical surveys of contemporary literature and on the shortlists of the Booker. The conclusions point to the Prize’s greater potential for influencing the critical rather than the teaching canon, while conceding that there are numerous examples of authors and texts that have their place in either canon despite their lack of any Booker success.

Keywords: The Man Booker Prize, Prize’s history, Emerging Canon, British writers, Contemporary British fiction.

Britain has no shortage of literary prizes. The Man Booker Prize, The James Tait Black Memorial Prize, Costa Book Awards (previously Whitbread), Baileys Women’s Prize (previously Orange), Somerset Maugham Award, The David Cohen Prize and the recently established Folio Prize – to name only the most prestigious ones. The assertion that there are more prizes than books in the UK has become a journalistic cliché.¹ It is evident that all literary prizes vary in different respects – in their critical resonance, in their commercial potential (the actual in-

¹ J.F. English, J. Frow, *Literary Authorship and Celebrity Culture*, [in:] J.F. English, *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*, Malden 2006, p. 47.

fluence they exert on the sales of winning novels) and in the extent to which they are capable of generating a wider media interest. There appears to be a broad consensus that the prize which has been the most successful in all of those categories is the Man Booker Prize. Much has been written on the commercial potential of the prize,² which can easily be demonstrated with the use of pre- and post-award sales figures. The Booker's hint of Oscar-like glamour manifests itself in the enormous attention that the prize commands worldwide, turning its winners – in most cases – into international literary stars virtually overnight.³ What remains more elusive is the effect that the prize has on the critical status of the winning (or shortlisted) novels. Do Booker-winning books (or authors) gain automatic entry into the canon of contemporary British literature? Can we even speak of such a thing as “the canon of contemporary British fiction”? In this article I wish to consider these questions and provide tentative answers, supported by the data obtained from Philip Tew and Mark Addis's *Survey on Teaching Contemporary British Fiction* and from my own research. I shall begin by introducing briefly the history and current importance of the Man Booker Prize. In the second section, I will discuss the notions of the canon and of “contemporary British fiction” as well as the basic mechanisms of canon-formation. The last two sections will be concerned with analysing the data which focuses on the authors and novels most frequently featuring on university courses of contemporary literature and in critical surveys of contemporary British fiction. I must add at this point that the scope of this article precludes the possibility of providing incontrovertible evidence for the Prize's effect on the canon; what I set out to do is indicate that there definitely exists a correlation between the two.

The Booker Prize was established in the late 1960s, when the chairmen of the publishing house Jonathan Cape persuaded Booker PLC, a large frozen-food conglomerate, to sponsor a literary prize whose prestige would rival the French Prix Goncourt.⁴ The Prize was awarded for the first time in 1969 (the winner was Percy H. Newby's novel *Something to Answer for*). In 2001 Booker PLC was taken over by another frozen-food giant Iceland, which was not interested in continuing the sponsorship. After several months of intense speculation and media debate about the Prize's uncertain future, a “saviour” came along in the form of Man Group PLC, an international London-based alternative investment management company, which offered to sponsor what came to be known as the Man Booker Prize. The new owner announced that the sum of money to be received by the winner was going to be increased from twenty-one thousand pounds to fifty.⁵ The first novel to be awarded the Prize in the new formula was Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* in 2002. Throughout the history of the prize, there have been several experiments with the number of shortlisted novels: six in the first years, two in the mid-70s,

² Most notably Richard Todd's *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and the Fiction in Britain Today* (1996).

³ M. Goff, *Prize Writing*, London 1989, p. 22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1214.

⁵ M. Moseley, *The Booker Prizes for 2001 and 2002: Cool Young Authors and Old Codgers*, “The Sewanee Review” 2003, vol. 111: 1, p. 157–158.

then back to six since 1982.⁶ In 2001 the longlist was also introduced, the number of items on which has varied from twelve in the recent years to as many as twentythree in 2003.

As regards eligibility, the writers contending for the prize need to be citizens of the Commonwealth of Nations, which is composed of fifty-three states with the joint population of over 2.3 billion inhabitants. The only notable Englishspeaking country that used to be effectively excluded from contention was the United States, but that restriction has been lifted this year. Even though writers from countries such as Canada, India or Nigeria had been eligible from 1968, the Booker remained very Anglo-centric until the beginning of the 1980s, which marks a watershed moment in the history of the Prize. The process of the Booker's opening up to Britain's former colonies began with the win of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1981. Authors from other nations soon followed suit: Australian Thomas Keneally in 1982, South African J.M. Coetzee in 1983 (and then again in 1999), New Zealander Keri Hulme in 1985, Nigerian Ben Okri in 1991 and Canadian Michael Ondaatje in 1992. The number of native English winners of the prize since 1981 amounts to roughly one third, compared to as many as two thirds beforehand.⁷

Before the advent of the Booker, argues Richard Todd, literary prizes in Britain had had little resonance beyond narrow literary circles and had not provided their winners with a noticeable boost in sales.⁸ Booker's capacity for bringing commercial success to the awarded novels – known as the “Booker effect” – did not appear right away, either; its emergence could be traced also to the 1980s – the decade of the Prize's shift towards greater internationalisation. The first novels to experience the prize-related commercial boost were *Midnight's Children*, Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K.* (1983) and Anita Brookner's *Hotel du Lac* (1984), whose sales soared from four to fifty thousand by the end of the year.⁹ Among the best-selling Booker-winners to date have been Keneally's *Schindler's Ark* (1982), Roddy Doyle's *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (1994), *Life of Pi* (2002)¹⁰ and Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* (2009).¹¹ The commercial success of the winner, however, cannot be taken for granted, as there have been novels whose sales do not seem to have benefited from the Prize – such as, most notably, James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late* (1994), which Todd describes as a “catastrophic flop.”¹² In *Literature, Politics and Intellectual Crisis in Britain Today*, Clive Bloom notes that the commercial opportunities offered by literary prizes such as the Booker

⁶ R. Todd, *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and the Fiction in Britain Today*, London 1996, p. 65.

⁷ James F. English, *Introduction: British Fiction in a Global Frame*, [in:] J.F. English, *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*, Malden 2006, p. 5–6.

⁸ R. Todd, op. cit., p. 55–56.

⁹ Ibid., 107.

¹⁰ In the case of Keneally's and Mantel's novels, their sales were greatly increased thanks to the release of their highly popular film adaptations by Steven Spielberg and Ang Lee, respectively.

¹¹ R. Todd, op. cit., p. 109; *The Man Booker Effect*, <http://www.themanbookerprize.com/feature/man-booker-effect> [access: 1.12.2014].

¹² R. Todd, op. cit., p. 20.

have made a discernible impact on British fiction and encouraged the rise of a new “middle- to highbrow” literary genre aiming to “reconcile opposites: good taste and commercial success.”¹³

Bloom’s remark paves the way for the criticism of the Booker for compromising the quality of literary fiction in Britain by bringing the notion of accessibility (or readability) into the equation. It might therefore serve as a good starting point for a brief discussion of the various critical assessments of the Man Booker’s importance to the British literary world. Besides the recurrent complaint about the Prize’s preference for middle-brow fiction, particular juries have been accused of tokenism – demonstrating bias towards male novelists despite the official pretence of gender impartiality. The Booker was most strongly criticised for announcing all-male shortlists in 1976 and 1991 as well as for awarding the prize to the only male author¹⁴ on the shortlist in 1973.¹⁵ The charges of racial and gender bias have become less common as the Man Booker’s shortlists over the last decade have been very thoughtful in both respects.¹⁶ A sizeable proportion of critical voices against the Booker have been concerned with what has been termed as its “neoimperialist” or “neocolonial” practices. Arguably the most resonant critique of the Booker in this respect has been Graham Huggan’s *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. Huggan argues that the Booker’s policy of “prizing otherness” and thus constructing a certain canon of postcolonial writing in English is not an altogether desirable cultural practice. His main charge is the Prize’s part in actually narrowing (rather than expanding, as it purports to do) the awareness of non-British literature in English to a restricted set of postcolonial authors, whose politics are not radically distinct from those of its sponsor, a company with a notoriously colonial past, which used to own plantations in British Guiana and the West Indies. Huggan sees the Prize’s policy in terms of the Jamesonian notion of “strategies of containment”, which operate “as mechanisms for the management of subversive political tendencies, and for the redirecting of oppositional energies into the mainstream of Western metropolitan cultural thought.”¹⁷

Other critics, more positively inclined towards the Prize, have praised it for the commercial opportunities it creates for British authors and for its capacity to form “a particular kind of literary canon,”¹⁸ its share in “fashioning public taste” and in “encouraging publishers to support the serious novel” at a time of crisis, and its ability to inspire public discussions on literary topics.¹⁹ The fact that the Booker has been capable of provoking prolonged media debates over subjects that are rarely discussed outside university walls deserves appreciation. In 1991, for in-

¹³ C. Bloom, *Literature, Politics and Intellectual Crisis in Britain Today*, Abingdon 2000, p. 91–92.

¹⁴ The fact that J.G. Farrell’s *The Siege of Krishnapur* went on to be shortlisted for the Best of the Booker competition as one of the best novels ever to be awarded the Prize appears to have exonerated the jury chaired by Karl Miller from the charge of a male bias.

¹⁵ R. Todd, op. cit., p. 83.

¹⁶ To give an example, the 2013 shortlist contains two novels by male authors and four by women writers. Only one of the shortlisted authors is English.

¹⁷ G. Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, Abingdon 2001, p. 118–119.

¹⁸ R. Todd, op. cit., p. 95.

¹⁹ D. Head, *The State of the Novel: Britain and Beyond*, Oxford 2008, p. 54–62.

stance, the controversy over one member of the jury quitting the panel generated a discussion on the status and relevance of the novel of ideas in contemporary Britain.²⁰ In 2010, in turn, numerous writers and critics debated in the press whether “readability” is a valid criterion for literary prizes such as the Man Booker. While acknowledging certain questionable effects that the Prize may have exerted over the last few decades, Dominic Head gives a positive assessment of its role in *The State of the Novel*: “The importance of the Booker Prize to the novel in Britain – and, indeed, to the health of the novel in English more widely – has become an established fact of literary history.”²¹

Having introduced a selection of salient facts about the history and status of the Man Booker Prize, I now wish to turn to the notion of the canon of contemporary British literature in order to lay the groundwork for examining the influence of the former on the latter. The very concept of the canon received a lot of attention in the 1980s and 90s, as the so called “canon wars” swept through the United States and Britain. In “Developing the Canon”, Nick Bentley sums up the American debate as a conflict between the conservatives (represented by Harold Bloom), who insisted on the primacy of aesthetic over ideological criteria in the literary canon, and the revisionists, who called for a rethinking of the canon in the light of the current political and social concerns and values. In Britain, Bentley argues, the debate was dominated by Terry Eagleton and Frank Kermode, who disagreed about the possibility of a non-ideological, objective assessment of literary value. The debates on either side of the Atlantic were concerned with the mere concept of the literary canon and thus did not result in any consensus about the make-up of the canon of contemporary British (or American) fiction.²²

“Contemporary British Fiction” (CBF) is a problematic term which requires a brief introduction. The word “contemporary” – unlike “Victorian” or “postwar” – does not offer a precise time reference and may be understood differently in different contexts. In his *Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction* (2006), James F. English traces the shift of the CBF’s denotation across the last decades from synonymous with “postwar” British fiction (or, in other words, literature “since the death of Woolf”) to a more nuanced notion taking into account not only the chronology but also many other factors, including the ethnicity and thematic concerns of the authors. English argues that in the early 90s the term “contemporary” began to designate a literary scene radically different from that dominated by such postwar giants as Graham Greene, Anthony Burgess, William Golding and Iris Murdoch, namely “the immigrant and postcolonial writers [...] the Scottish and Welsh New Waves, the brash new celebrity authors who won Booker prizes and appeared in *Granta* magazine’s ‘Best of the Young British Novelists.’” It has become a value-laden term, denoting “something radically new and decisively more important and vigorous than what had come before.”²³

²⁰ Ibid., p. 57.

²¹ Ibid., p. 62.

²² N. Bentley, *Developing the Canon: Teaching Contemporary British Fiction*, [in:] S. Barfield, A. Muller-Wood, Ph. Tew, *Teaching Contemporary British Fiction*, Heidelberg 2007, p. 29–33.

²³ J.F. English, op. cit., p. 1–2.

Jago Morrison adds that the word “contemporary” – when applied to British and American literature – also entails a preoccupation with a specific set of questions centring around “ethnicity, gender and sexuality.”²⁴

As a result, the notion of CBF – when applied by critics from the 1990s onwards – has come to refer to the work of novelists whose major works date back no earlier than to the early 80s. These authors include Salman Rushdie (whose Booker victory in 1981 is often perceived as a turning point for British literature), Martin Amis, Julian Barnes, Ian McEwan, Graham Swift and Jeanette Winterson, to name only a few. Most of these writers featured in the much publicised and hugely influential lists of “Best of Young British Novelists” published by *Granta* first in 1983 and then every ten years. Incidentally, *Granta* also famously located the birth of CBF in 1979, when it announced in its inaugural issue “the end of the English novel [and] the beginning of British fiction.”²⁵ The shift from “English” to “British” was meant to hail the advent of a more globally-oriented literature in the place of the insularity and parochialism associated with the Hampstead novel. Alongside the launch of *Granta* in 1979 and its 1983 list (devised at behest of the reinvigorated British Book Marketing Council), other important factors marking a sea change in British fiction have been the rise in importance of literary prizes (the earlier highlighted commercial and critical impact of the Booker), the rapid process of internationalisation of the novel (fuelled by the media’s interest in discovering what Kazuo Ishiguro has called “other Rushdies”)²⁶ and a “renaissance in mainstream cultural criticism” brought about by the establishment of the *London Review of Books*.²⁷

Contemporary British fiction, unlike most other periods of literary history, has not yet developed a definitive set of canonical works. It is well known that canonformation is a complex process that requires many decades – it is too early to indicate or predict which works will stand the test of time. I have therefore decided to examine the canon in the making. There are several factors which are particularly important to the process of canon-formation. James F. English and John Frow identify the most significant institutions that make up what they refer to as the “literary value industry” – the establishments which form “the reputations and status positions of contemporary works and authors, situating them on various scales of worth.”²⁸ They argue that the most influential parts of the value industry are universities, academic journals coupled with literary magazines, mainstream book reviews and literary prizes. It is book awards which they single out as playing the pivotal role in shaping the value judgements of CBF.²⁹

²⁴ J. Morrison, *Contemporary Fiction*, London 2003, p. 6–7.

²⁵ J.F. English, op. cit., p. 3.

²⁶ In an interview with Allan Vorda and Kim Herzinger, Ishiguro talks about the end of “provincialism” in British literature: “*The big milestone was the Booker Prize going to Salman Rushdie in 1981 for *Midnight’s Children*. He had previously been a completely unknown writer. That was a really symbolic moment and then everyone was suddenly looking for other Rushdies*” (in: *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, eds. B.W. Shaffer, C.F. Wong, Jackson 2008, p. 69–70).

²⁷ J.F. English, J. Frow, op. cit., p. 46.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46–47.

In the remaining part of the article, I shall attempt to examine the extent to which the Man Booker Prize has influenced the shape of the emerging canon of the contemporary British novel. This task would be impossible to undertake without first establishing a tentative make-up of that canon. I have decided to concentrate on two aspects of the canon – the prominence of given novels in the syllabi of university courses devoted to contemporary British literature and the prominence of particular authors in book-length critical surveys of CBF. Regarding the first aspect, I have been drawing on two sources: Philip Tew and Mark Addis's *Final Report: Survey on Teaching Contemporary British Fiction* (2007) and the findings of *The Contemporary Canons Database* as summarised in Nick Bentley's article. Tew and Addis's survey was carried out between June 2005 and December 2006, while Bentley's was done between September 2002 and June 2004. Both studies restricted their scope to the courses offered by English departments at British Universities.

Since the interval between the two studies was very short, there is a considerable overlap between their results. Nine writers feature in both surveys' lists of most popular writers, which include (in alphabetical order): Martin Amis, Pat Barker, Julian Barnes, Angela Carter, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie, Zadie Smith, Graham Swift and Jeanette Winterson. In his commentary on the results of the earlier survey, Bentley notes that when one considers the works of the above-mentioned authors, several similar themes and preoccupations begin to emerge, such as self-reflexivity, fusing high and popular culture, investigating the relationship between history and fiction, and examining experiences of the marginalised and the excluded.³⁰ These themes, as might be expected, correspond very closely to the ones put forward by Morrison as the defining concerns of contemporary fiction at large. Bentley's other noteworthy observation is that seven out of twelve of the most popular writers are women.³¹ Female authors' dominance over men is confirmed by Tew and Addis's survey, in which they make up eight out of fifteen most prominent writers. Therefore, it seems no overstatement to declare that the canon of contemporary British fiction may be the first canon of any given period of English literature where male authors are in the minority.

Moving on to the question of the Man Booker's part in shaping that canon, I wish to present two tables, which I have compiled on the basis of the results of Tew and Addis's more comprehensive survey.³²

As for Table 1, the immediate observation to be made is that Angela Carter, the undisputedly most frequently discussed author of CBF (eighteen instances ahead of Rushdie), has never been shortlisted for the Booker, even though the vast majority of her novels (written between 1966 and 1991) were eligible for the Prize. Carter is surely among the finest British authors never to have been recognised by the Booker committees; that group of entirely overlooked novelists

³⁰ N. Bentley, *op. cit.*, p. 36–37.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³² Tew and Addis's survey does not arrange its results into tables or lists. Instead, the appendix to the report contains several pages of raw data, which I have arranged in the form of an author-centred and a text-centred table.

Table 1. The prominence of authors in the syllabi of CBF courses on the basis of the data provided in Philip Tew and Mark Addis's *Final Report: Survey on Teaching Contemporary British Fiction* (2007). The authors in bold are winners of the (Man) Booker Prize by 2006, whereas the asterisk marks the authors who have been shortlisted at least once by that time

	Author	Instances	Annotations
1.	Angela Carter	50	never shortlisted
2.	Salman Rushdie	32	winner once, three times only shortlisted by 2006; winner of the Booker of Bookers in 1993 and the Best of the Booker in 2008 (both for <i>Midnight's Children</i>)
3.	Jeanette Winterson	21	never shortlisted
4.	Ian McEwan	18	winner once, three times only shortlisted by 2006; shortlisted for the fourth time in 2007
5.	John Fowles	15	never shortlisted
	Muriel Spark*	15	shortlisted twice by 2006; shortlisted for the third time in 2010 as part of the Lost Man Booker competition
7.	A.S. Byatt	14	winner once; once only shortlisted in 2009
	Hanif Kureishi	14	never shortlisted
9.	Martin Amis*	13	shortlisted once
10.	Jean Rhys	12	never shortlisted, but her major work predates the Booker
	Zadie Smith*	12	shortlisted once
12.	Graham Swift	11	winner once, once only shortlisted
	Pat Barker	11	winner once; shortlisted for the Best of the Booker in 2008
	Julian Barnes*	11	shortlisted three times by 2006; winner in 2011
15.	Jamaica Kincaid	10	never shortlisted

also includes Jeanette Winterson, Hanif Kureishi and Jamaica Kincaid, none of whom has ever found themselves on the shortlist. The list of fifteen most popular authors on university syllabi contains five writers who have been awarded the (Man) Booker Prize and another four who have been shortlisted at least once. That appears to be a fair proportion, which, however, cannot in itself be interpreted as evidence of the Booker's canon-forming capacity. What remains to be considered is the extent to which the novelists in question owe their place in the canon to the Prize. In the case of Rushdie, the influence of the Booker awarded to his second novel cannot be overestimated. As a result of the Booker-related publicity, this 34-year-old writer became a literary celebrity enjoying high sales and a tremendous critical interest that persisted until the mid-90s. Rushdie's three consecutive novels were shortlisted for the Prize, which further enhanced his literary reputation. The influence of the Booker on the critical standing and academic currency of the rest of the Prize-winning authors in Table 1 has been less conspicuous. Ian McEwan, Graham Swift and Pat Barker had all been recognised as the "Best of the Young British Novelists" by *Granta* in 1983. Their wins in 1998, 1996 and 1995, respectively, came at the time when they had all developed a fine reputation (McEwan and Swift had been shortlisted before), which, as a consequence,

Table 2. The prominence of books in the syllabi of CBF courses on the basis of the data provided in Philip Tew and Mark Addis's *Final Report: Survey on Teaching Contemporary British Fiction* (2007). The titles in bold represent the winners of the (Man) Booker Prize, whereas the asterisk marks the novels that have only been shortlisted for the Prize

	Title of the book	Author	Inst.	Annotations
1.	<i>Midnight's Children</i>	Salman Rushdie	16	winner in 1981, also winner of the Booker of Bookers in 1993 and the Best of the Booker in 2008
2.	<i>Nights at the Circus</i>	Angela Carter	14	
3.	<i>The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories</i>	Angela Carter	12	a collection of short stories and therefore ineligible for the Booker
	<i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i>	Jean Rhys	12	published in 1966 and therefore ineligible for the Booker
	<i>White Teeth</i>	Zadie Smith	12	
6.	<i>Possession: A Romance</i>	A.S. Byatt	11	winner in 1990
	<i>The Passion of New Eve</i>	Angela Carter	11	
8.	<i>The French Lieutenant's Woman</i>	John Fowles	10	
9.	<i>The Buddha of Suburbia</i>	Hanif Kureshi	9	
10.	<i>Brick Lane</i> *	Monica Ali	8	shortlisted in 2003
	<i>Waterland</i> *	Graham Swift	8	shortlisted in 1983
12.	<i>Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit</i>	Jeanette Winterson	7	
13.	<i>Shame</i> *	Salman Rushdie	6	shortlisted in 1983

received a significant boost. A.S. Byatt was awarded the Prize at a fairly late stage of her career; still, the Booker brought her novel a remarkable commercial success on an international scale.³³

Table 2, which is concerned with individual texts, contains only two novels (out of fourteen) that have won the Booker – *Midnight's Children* and *Possession*. In the case of those novels – both model examples of “the Booker effect” – the influence of the Prize has been essential to their critical popularity and commercial success. It is apparent, however, that two out of fourteen is far from a significant proportion, which may be interpreted as proof that the (Man) Booker is not the most vital factor behind the selection of set texts for university courses. The fact that – besides the winners – only three other novels found themselves on the shortlist validates that observation. The Prize may occasionally give its winner an enormous boost, but in most cases (such as several mid-80s winners including *Hotel du Lac*, Kingsley Amis's *The Old Devils* and Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger*) it cannot secure them a place in the broader canon of CBF. It may be

³³ The full extent of the Booker's influence on the sales and critical success of *Possession* is examined in great detail in Todd's *Consuming Fictions*, in the chapter entitled “A.S. Byatt's *Possession*: An International Literary Success.”

Table 3. The prominence of authors in critical surveys of CBF published between 2003 and 2012. The authors in bold are winners of the (Man) Booker Prize, whereas the asterisk marks the authors who have been shortlisted at least once

	Author	Inst.	Annotations
1.	Hanif Kureishi	7	never shortlisted
	Jeanette Winterson	7	never shortlisted
3.	Ian McEwan	6	winner once, four times only shortlisted
	Salman Rushdie	6	winner once, three times only shortlisted; winner of the Booker of Bookers and the Best of the Booker
5.	Martin Amis*	5	shortlisted once
	Pat Barker	5	winner once
	Julian Barnes	5	winner once, three times only shortlisted
	Angela Carter	5	never shortlisted
	Graham Swift	5	winner once, once only shortlisted
10.	Kazuo Ishiguro	4	winner once, three times only shortlisted
	A.L. Kennedy	4	never shortlisted
	Iain Sinclair	4	never shortlisted
	Zadie Smith*	4	shortlisted once
	Irvine Welsh	4	never shortlisted
15.	A.S. Byatt	3	winner once, once only shortlisted

tremendously helpful but it is by no means a necessary condition for inclusion in the canon, as demonstrated by the examples of Carter's novels and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, to name but a few.³⁴

After outlining the Booker's relationship with what might be termed as the teaching canon of CBF, I now wish to turn to the prominence of the awarded authors in the tentative canon of academic research. It has to be noted at this point that a proper investigation of the subject of the most researched writers of CBF would require a far more detailed and comprehensive study, whose scope would need to include other academic monographs as well as a large sample of journal

³⁴ If literary prizes are not a key factor in constructing university syllabi, then what is? Providing a comprehensive answer to this question is beyond the scope of this essay, but I wish only to quote a longer excerpt from Leigh Wilson's article "Teaching Contemporary British Fiction: Some Preliminary Considerations", which affords a perceptive insight into the issue of the formation of academic canons: "[N]ovels are chosen which seem to speak to us academics in a language we recognise, which seem themselves structured around the subsections of current academic interest and therefore of the curricula – the postcolonial, the queer, the feminist, and so on. Novels are chosen which seem to reflect back to us our own concerns, which justify them and make them seem self-evident. Our orthodoxies remain unchallenged, and are passed on to students as such via the very novels we ask them to read... [O]ne result of this may be that novels simply become bridges between the academy and our students, the means by which we teach our theories, rather than works which themselves are seen as critiquing and challenging critical orthodoxies, or which we can critique" (in: S. Barfield, A. Muller-Wood, Ph. Tew, *Teaching Contemporary British Fiction*, Heidelberg 2007, p. 19–20).

articles. What I have undertaken is merely a calculation of the number of times that authors of CBF feature in eight of the widely available academic book-length studies surveying contemporary British fiction, which were published in Britain between 2003 and 2012.³⁵ The results are presented in Table 3.

The first observation to be made is that the two writers who feature most prominently in the surveys of CBF (Kureishi and Winterson) are authors who have never even been shortlisted for the Booker. Even so, it must be noted that the overall proportion of Prize-winners among the most often discussed novelists is seven out of sixteen, which seems quite high. If one considers all the shortlisted authors, then the proportion amounts to ten out of sixteen. The prominence of Booker-winning and shortlisted authors is slightly higher in the critical than in the teaching canon (winners: 7/16 to 5/15, shortlisted writers: 10/16 to 9/15), which warrants the conclusion that the Prize has a slightly smaller capacity for influencing the syllabi of academic courses than for securing their winners a place in the surveys of CBF.³⁶ It is also interesting to note that the authors most frequently discussed in those publications constitute a high percentage of the writers topping the list of the Booker's most recognised British novelists (Table 4).

Table 4. British authors with the highest number of (Man) Booker Prize wins and places on the shortlist (excluding the year when they were awarded the Prize). The writers in bold are the ones who also feature in Table 3. The asterisk singles out the authors whose major works were published in or after the 1980s and who are therefore usually associated with CBF³⁷

	Author	Wins	Shortlists
1.	Hilary Mantel*	2	0
	J. G. Farrell ³⁷	2	0
2.	Iris Murdoch	1	5
3.	Ian McEwan*	1	4
4.	Julian Barnes*	1	3
	Penelope Fitzgerald	1	3
	Kazuo Ishiguro*	1	3

³⁵ These surveys include Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham and Philip Tew's *Contemporary British Fiction* (2003), Nick Bentley's *Contemporary British Fiction* (2008), James Acheson and Sarah C.E. Ross's *The Contemporary British Novel Since 1980* (2005), Jago Morrison's *Contemporary Fiction* (2003), Nick Bentley's *British Fiction of the 1990s* (2005), Peter Childs's *Contemporary Novelists: British Fiction since 1970* (2nd edition) (2012) and Nick Rennison's *Contemporary British Novelists* (2005).

³⁶ Another observation that could be offered is that certain authors (like Carter, Byatt and, particularly, the older writers, such as Fowles, Rhys and Spark) are more prominent in the teaching canon than in the critical one, whereas others (like Ishiguro, Kureishi and Barnes) are more recognised in the critical surveys than in university syllabi.

³⁷ J.G. Farrell won his first Booker in 1973 for *The Siege of Krishnapur*. In 2010 he was awarded the Lost Man Booker Prize for his novel *Troubles* published in 1970 (the year when the Booker was not awarded at all because of a change in the procedure). The only other (non-British) writers to have won the Booker twice have been Peter Carey and J.M. Coetzee.

	Salman Rushdie*	1	3
8.	Barry Unsworth*	1	2
	Penelope Lively*	1	2
	Kingsley Amis	1	2

Four out of seven contemporary British authors with the highest number of Booker wins and places on the shortlists are also among the most commonly discussed authors in critical surveys of CBF, which reinforces the argument about the Prize's share in shaping the critical canon. Mantel, whose two Booker wins are very recent, appears bound to join that malleable canon in the upcoming survey publications.

It can safely be concluded that the Man Booker Prize exerts a strong influence on contemporary British literature. Its multiple roles encompass securing high sales figures for literary fiction, generating public interest in authors and novels that would not otherwise ever have the chance to receive such media exposure and influencing the shape of the emerging canon of the contemporary British novel. As the data examined in this article indicate, the Booker-awarded writers and texts feature prominently on the lists of the most popular authors and novels to be discussed during university courses and in surveys of contemporary fiction. The results lend a degree of credence to English and Frow's intuition that literary prizes in Britain (and the Booker in particular) have a significant share in the "literary value industry." It has been noted that some of the most frequently studied novelists (Carter, Kureishi) have never been shortlisted for the Prize and that some of the most generously awarded by the Booker (Fitzgerald, Unsworth) can rarely be found on the reading lists of CBF courses or in the tables of contents of critical surveys. The Booker success is definitely not a necessary condition for achieving a canonical status, yet it can be of immense help, as the examples of *Midnight's Children* and *Possession* demonstrate. The Prize's canon-shaping capacity appears slightly greater in the area of critical publications than university syllabi. Whereas the present and past influence of the Man Booker Prize on contemporary British literature is – as Head has announced – "an established fact," its future importance is threatened by the much-debated and violently opposed decision of the Prize's administrators to open it up to American contenders. The next few years will verify the validity of the British literary establishment's recently voiced concerns that British literary fiction will lose its chief promoter, which will turn into "a minor American prize."³⁸

³⁸ Ph. Hensher, *Well, That's the End of the Booker Prize, Then*, "The Guardian", <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/sep/18/booker-prize-us-writers-end> [access: 1.12.2014].