

Prize-winning Networks: Investigating Network Connections behind Booker Prize Winning Texts

Petra Balássy

Abstract

The aim of my article is to prove that there are existing network-like patterns behind Booker Prize winning (along with long- and shortlisted) texts and that these patterns can be explored, examined and described with the help of network theory. My research focuses on literary works from the late 20th and early 21st centuries that have achieved considerable success among critiques and readers and have become ‘phenomena’. Using the technical vocabulary of network and graph theory, it can be stated that these texts represent the nodes in the network mentioned above. My hypothesis is that the edges connecting these nodes are complex and dynamically changing concepts that are influenced and shaped by intra- and extratextual factors. Among these, I would like to pay particular attention to the effect of literary prizes, more precisely the Booker Prize, as an example of extra-textual factors. However tempting it may be to apply Franco Moretti’s distant reading theory, by working with a corpus as large as possible, I have started to work with a more accessible corpus: specifically texts that won the Booker Prize between 2000 and 2020. By doing so it will be possible to combine the results of data analysis and stylometric exploration while still being able to take a closer and more detailed look at the texts themselves.

Keywords: literary networks, Booker Prize, contemporary anglophone literature, stylometry, cultural phenomena

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Introduction

The turn of the millennium brought along a shift in the field of academia. The “network turn” as Ruth Ahnert et. al. (3) have labelled the phenomenon meant that network theory started its interdisciplinary journey, reaching the field of literature as well. In line with the general principles of network theory, the aim of my research is to demonstrate that there are distinct patterns and dynamics connecting selected works of contemporary anglophone literature and they can be explored, examined and described with the help of network theory. I focus on contemporary literary works that achieved considerable success among critics as well as readers and have become ‘phenomena’. Using the technical vocabulary of network and graph theory, I will argue that these texts represent the *nodes* or *vertices* in the network and that the

edges connecting these nodes are complex and dynamically changing concepts that are influenced and shaped by intra- and extratextual factors. For, as Douglas Lanier points it out, it is quite clear that there is a constantly (re)evolving, moving network that links certain literary works, influenced by factors both inside and outside the text (29). Within the scope of this paper, I am only able to examine and present two segments of this complex system, by focusing on one extra-textual and one intra-textual factor: the canonizing role of literary awards combined with a quantitative digital analysis of stylistic similarities.

I use stylometry or computational stylistics to process the selected corpus, a tool that combines the two key aspects mentioned above and are described in detail later: it examines literary texts and presents their connections through the visual framework of network theory. In the present study, the stylistic similarities detected by the application of stylometry can be considered as the edges connecting the nodes (i.e. the texts forming the corpus). And although stylometry has its limitations, by identifying recurring lexical and syntactic patterns and by presenting these in a complex but easily comprehensible way that clearly exposes the connections, it can create a solid ground for further critical observation.

My corpus includes texts that won the Booker Prize between 2000 and 2020, that is 22 novels and 20 authors in total. As this study is considered to be the first step of a more complex, multi-stage research project, it is evident that at this point there are numerous opportunities for expanding both the corpus and the methodological framework. Franco Moretti's distant reading theory may seem to be one of the most tempting options, as bigger data could lead to more precise results. Another possible direction would be to include not only winning but also the shortlisted texts, in hope of producing richer network dynamics and a larger base for the arguments presented. However, these solutions would significantly exceed the current formal and conceptual scope. Hence as a first step I have started to work with a more accessible corpus. It is my strong belief that by doing so it will also become possible to combine quantitative and qualitative means of data analysis, and, when needed, to take a closer and more detailed look at the texts themselves.

James F. English dates back the “the modern ascendancy of cultural prizes” (28) to as early as 1901, naming the Nobel Prize for Literature “perhaps the oldest prize that strikes us as fully contemporary” (28). Following a similar argument, Anna Auguscik contends that although “the invention of modern literary prizes can be traced back to the early twentieth century, academic responses to this global phenomenon have been comparatively scarce until the early twenty-first century” (25). She subsequently lists four phases of doing research on literary prizes:

- (1) early descriptions debating the pros and cons of prizes (until the 1980s),
- (2) sociological studies of the literary field and its participants including literary prizes (mostly in the 1980s),
- (3) research which problematizes prizes from diverse perspectives such as postcolonial, gender, Marxist (from the mid-1990s),
- and (4) research which seeks to provide insights to prizes based on sociological studies while focusing on the specifics of prize culture (from the turn of the century on). (25)

This list, I believe can be complemented by network theory, especially after the turn of the millennium, and because visual representation in the field adapted “graphical traditions associated with the study of social networks developed in the first half of the twentieth century” (Ahnert et al. 1), such as sociometry.

In addition to the role of prizes, it is also worth mentioning that the turn of the millennium brought along the phenomenon of “famous readers” as well, i.e. public figures without any professional background in literature, who, thanks to their fame and their significant (social) media presence, are able to quickly and effectively influence the contemporary literary scene. It is not uncommon for actors, politicians or even Camilla, Queen of England¹ to regularly recommend reading material to their online followers via book clubs or annual lists. R. Mark Hall even uses the expression “Oprahfication” (646) when he describes the role of the book club started by one of the most well-known grand dames of American media. It is apparent that book clubs tend to focus predominantly on very recent works that reflect on current social problems and that they give further boost to the selected works by their recommendations. While book clubs have been around since the 19th century, social media platforms made books people read and their related thoughts more visible. One example for the intersection of “famous readers” and literary prizes is the 2025 Booker panel of judge Sarah Jessica Parker, who – although known to most as a star of television series and films – has been using her personal platforms for years to talk about the authors she reads and now represents as a publisher. These authors, for the most part, are from minority groups and/or are committed advocates of social causes. This choice, as we will see later on as well, underlines the fact that the Booker Prize does not draw a sharp dividing line between popular and high-brow and is consciously seeking a well-identifiable middle ground.

Being defined to our methodological framework, I also provide a brief overview of network theory and its development in the decades following the turn of the millennium, thus illustrating how it came in contact with literary theory.

The Booker Prize

In his study, *How the Booker Prize Won the Prize*, Merritt Moseley echoes the opinion of several other cited authors by stating that the Booker Prize is “neither the oldest, nor the richest award given for novels in English, nevertheless (...) sometimes it is called “the most significant”, sometimes “the most famous”, or even the internationally realized “world’s top fiction prize”(206). At any rate, the Booker by now has become one of the leading literary prizes in the English-speaking world², emerging as the winner in a competition that included – among others – the Somerset Maugham

1 While she was still known as the Duchess of Cornwall, she attended more than one Booker award ceremonies.

2 The Booker-prize has a sister-prize, originally established in 2005 as the bi-annual Man Booker International Prize. Since 2015 it has been awarded yearly to a single book written in another language and translated to English. The prize is shared evenly by the author and the translator.

Award, the *Guardian* Fiction Prize and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. Moseley attributes this outstanding status of the Booker to three factors: “Publicity”, that is a skillfully managed public image not afraid of scandals – as we will see later, “Flexibility”, as in embracing the constantly changing set of judges and the capability to react and respond to occasional challenges, and “Product Placement”, that entails a skillfully curated position between the high art and readable popular fiction. (206)

If we take a historical approach, we may observe that the Booker Prize was founded in 1969 and was originally and explicitly modelled on the Prix Goncourt, but unlike its French counterpart, it works with an annually changing board of judges, and it is possible for an author to win the prize more than once. As we can see in the corpus, Margaret Atwood and Hilary Mantel, for example, both won the prize twice in the time-period, Mantel for two parts of the same historical fiction series. According to the official Booker website the idea of the prize is based on “a simple belief – great fiction not only brings joy to millions, it has the power to change the way we think about the world”³. The prize is awarded each year to the “best (...) eligible work of long-form fiction written originally in English by an author of any nationality and published in the UK and/or Ireland.”⁴ Each year the long list is announced in July, the shortlist in September, followed by an often-criticized award ceremony in November.

As it is publishers who submit the works they published, it usually means that in the first round judges must work with more than 150 texts at the beginning and then must re-read some of these over the prize season as the long and short lists are being drawn up. Most of the judges approach this demanding task with discipline and a tight reading schedule. Sarah Collins, a member of the 2024 board of judges swears by “treating it like work to be done at appointed times and giving it priority”⁵. Or as Chris Power, one of the 2025 Booker-judges has put it: one has to make the time for reading, even if it manifests itself in the form of an early morning wake-up alarm.⁶ Interestingly, it seems to be a shared experience of the judges that the task itself, however daunting it may seem at first, is manageable, Chris Power even adds that he even had “too much time for doomscrolling on his phone”⁷. The impressive financial benefits⁸ resulting from the “guaranteed global readership and the (...) dramatic increase of book sales”⁹ makes the Booker especially popular among all the stakeholders in the book industry. As Anna Auguscik sums it up:

3 <https://thebookerprizes.com/booker-prize/about-the-booker-prize> (Last accessed: 26 January 2025)

4 <https://thebookerprizes.com/booker-prize/entering-the-booker-prizes> (Last accessed: 26 January 2025)

5 <https://thebookerprizes.com/the-booker-library/features/meet-the-booker-prize-2024-judges> (Last accessed: 12 September 2025)

6 <https://thebookerprizes.com/the-booker-library/features/meet-the-booker-prize-2025-judges-chris-power> (Last accessed: 12 September 2025)

7 <https://thebookerprizes.com/the-booker-library/features/meet-the-booker-prize-2025-judges-chris-power> (Last accessed: 12 September 2025)

8 The winner receives £50,000, the shortlisted authors £2,500 each.

9 <https://thebookerprizes.com/booker-prize/about-the-booker-prize> (Last accessed: 26 January 2025)

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). (11)

As stated above, my research focuses on Booker-prize-winning texts between 2000 and 2020 covering 22 books by 20 authors in total. A full list of the titles, along with their short descriptions can be found on the official Booker website.¹⁰ The texts themselves are very varied, written about diverse topics in different styles, reflecting on a wide range of social, cultural and political issues. Altogether, according to the official Booker website, almost 80 nominees (i.e. long- or shortlisted texts) and 18 winners were adapted to film since the 1969 birth of the prize, out of these 11 are part of the corpus, with two titles in development phase.¹¹

Some of them were awarded as visual adaptations as well: Thomas Keneally's 1982 Booker-winner *Schindler's Ark* for example won the Oscar, the Golden Globe and the BAFTA for the best film in 1994, when it was adapted to the silver screen as *Schindler's List*, directed by Steven Spielberg. As well as Yann Martel's the *Life of Pi*, the film adaptation of which was directed by Ang Lee, was nominated 134 times for major prizes and won 81 times, including four Oscars. Another well-known example is Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, the 1992 Booker Prize-winning novel, whose film version directed by Anthony Minghella won both the Oscar and the Golden Globe for best film in 1997.

Interestingly enough, one of the most tangible proofs of the interaction between text and visual adaptation is when the success of the film version leads to a renewed demand for the book, but the new editions are published with the cover of the images taken from the film. Or, as in case of the Hungarian version of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (winning the Booker Prize in 1989), even the title of the translated novel changed from the original to the one used for the movie, following the success of its film adaptation in 1993.¹²

However, it is also important to note that awards won by a text do not guarantee that a work will achieve the same or even similar success in the form of a visual adaptation. In many cases, "Booker-films" have received modest critical and audience response, even if they featured well-known actors and actresses. Just to mention one example from the corpus of the study: the film adaptation of John Banville's *The Sea*, whose screenplay was written by the author himself and was directed by Stephen

¹⁰ <https://thebookerprizes.com>

¹¹ <https://thebookerprizes.com/the-booker-library/features/booker-prize-books-that-have-been-adapted-for-film-and-television> (Last accessed: 9 August 2025) Although there is a slight difference between the figures provided on the official website and the list we have compiled for the corpus, which is probably due to the fact that the official website's summary was finalized at an earlier date, the order of magnitude is clearly evident from the data.

¹² The original *A főkormányik szabadsága* changed to *Napok romjai* following the highly successful adaptation.

Brown, was described by Mike McCahill as “glum psychodrama” that is reduced to “jumbled pound-shop Proustisms” and was even used as a precaution against “authors adapting their own works”¹³ or, as in case of Sheri Linden’s Los Angeles Times review, it was simply labelled as a film that “struggles with its own literary roots.”¹⁴

The prize has a strong post-colonial connection – a motif that appears both in the selection of long- and shortlisted texts and in the academic reception of the works themselves. When the prize was established by Tom Maschler and Graham C. Greene, they were sponsored by Booker McConnell, a sugar company and food distributor who had plantations worked by slaves before its abolition in Guyana. Graham Huggan uses David Dabydeen’s 1994 poem, *Song of the Creole Gang Women* to illustrate this long-standing connection and George Booker’s role as the merciless and exploiting plantation-owner:

Wuk, nuttin bu wuk
 Maan noon an night nuttin bu wuk Booker own me patacake
 Booker own me pickni.
 Pain, nuttin bu pain
 Waan million tous’ne acre cane (17)

Huggan also adds that the “footnote to the poem reads, simply enough: ‘Booker: British sugar company that owned Guyana’. Booker, it would appear, has a history in contradiction with its current reputation as a postcolonial literary patron” (106). This connection and contradiction has led to one of the greatest and most reported scandals in the history of the Booker Prize: in 1972 John Berger won the Prize for his experimental novel, *G.*, a text that caused enough frenzy in itself, but while accepting the money that comes with the Prize, Berger claimed that he was going to donate half of the sum to the London branch of the Black Panther movement as a consolation prize.

As English states in his article, *Winning the Culture Game: Prizes, Awards, and the Rules of Art*, scandals did not harm the reputation of the prize, but on the contrary: they saved the prize from an “early exit (...) and just a decade after its near collapse, the Booker outstripped all other British literary prizes combined in terms of the sheer volume of publicity, renown, and book sales it could generate for its winner” (114).

It seems, however, that in the period in the focus of my research, inclusion and diversity played an important role when it came to the long and short lists as well. One of the most dedicated chroniclers of Booker’s history, Merritt Moseley claims that as a part of “gradual and unofficial” changes “a more equitable consideration of female and ethnic minority authors and those from outside the UK has been perceptible.” He also adds, that although “submissions still favor the bigger and more established publishing companies, small and obscure publishers have made their way

13 <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/apr/16/the-sea-review-john-banville-film-adaptation> Last accessed: 9 August 2025

14 See: <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-mini-the-sea-review-20170708-story.html> Last accessed 18 August 2025

into the short list.” (2) These were also the operative concepts behind one of the biggest stir ups not connected to the award ceremony or the winners themselves. As a matter of fact, up to 2014 only citizens from Commonwealth countries or Ireland were allowed to participate in the selection process. Only a few years after a new regulation was introduced and authors from the United States were also included, thirty publishers signed a letter stating that they were afraid that the new rules will lead to a “homogenised literary future”, as Guardian’s books site editor Sian Cain sums it up: “the letter, which was intended to be private and has been seen by the Guardian, argues that the rule change to allow any writer writing in English and published in the UK to enter has restricted the diversity of the prize and led to the domination of American authors”¹⁵. Although the full list of signatories was not made public, Mark Richards, a publisher associated with John Murray Press, the Scottish publishing company that published the 1975 Booker-winner novel, *Heat and Dust* by Ruth Praver Jhabvala, was admittedly among those who signed it. He expressed his hope that the document would start a “constructive discussion with the Booker Foundation.”¹⁶ The foundation behind the prize responded with a statement, claiming the new regulation was not introduced to specifically include American writers, but to “allow writers of any nationality, regardless of geography, to enter the prize providing that they are writing in English and published in the UK.”¹⁷

Although the selection process of the judges is strictly confidential, if we take a closer look at the list of the winning texts over the past decade, we can claim that the initial fear of American dominance of those thirty publishers was not confirmed. Since 2014 two US authors have won the Booker Prize: Paul Beatty in 2016 for *The Sellout* and George Saunders in 2017 for *Lincoln in the Bardo*. If we look at the complete corpus, we can conclude that between 2000 and 2020 authors from nine countries were awarded: the United Kingdom with seven titles, Canada and Australia with three titles each, Ireland, India and the United States with two titles each and Scotland, Jamaica, New Zealand with one each.

Network Theory

Networks have been representing fundamental parts of our lives, especially since the beginning of the 21st century, and network theory is one of the most dynamically developing scientific fields of our time. With the help of networks, and especially with the help of their visual representations, we are able to explore relationships that were previously unknown. Recognizing these networks helps us identify regularities and trends – and by doing so, we eventually restructure the way we approach certain subjects and matters. As Ahnert and her colleagues sum it up: “networks represent

15 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/feb/02/publishers-call-on-man-booker-prize-to-drop-american-authors>. (Last accessed: 12 September 2025)

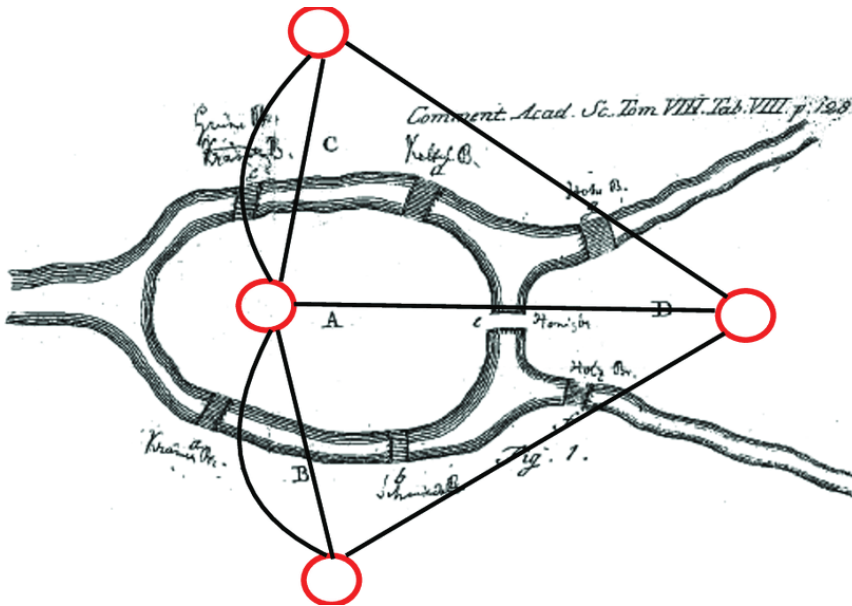
16 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/feb/02/publishers-call-on-man-booker-prize-to-drop-american-authors>. (Last accessed: 12 September 2025)

17 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/feb/02/publishers-call-on-man-booker-prize-to-drop-american-authors>. (Last accessed: 12 September 2025)

more than a scientific method; they are a mindset shaped by a rich conceptual and visual history. To fully harness the analytical power of networks, we must first attend to the way these histories frame observable systems and phenomena in the world, shaping, limiting, opening, and reorienting the questions we ask” (11). In order to understand how networks operate and what they are capable of, it is important to observe their historical roots and how they have evolved over time. Network theory – as part of the mathematical concept of graph theory – is one of the few scientific theories that have an exact date of origin. In 1735, Swiss scientist Leonhard Euler laid the foundation of graph theory by describing the problem of the bridges of Königsberg and claiming that the problem was unsolvable. A very simple and easy-to-grasp explanation of the problem is as follows:

The city of Königsberg in Prussia (now Kaliningrad, Russia) was set on both sides of the Pregel River, and included two large islands—Kneiphof and Lomse—which were connected to each other, and to the two mainland portions of the city, by seven bridges. The problem was to devise a walk through the city that would cross each of those bridges once and only once.¹⁸

Even though Euler had come to the conclusion that it was not possible to do so, the visual presentation he used to explain the problem became the basis of graph and network theory, as he used the early version of nodes or vertices and edges as illustrations.



1. Figure Euler's solution to the Königsberg problem (Source: researchgate.net)

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Bridges_of_Königsberg (last accessed: 27 January 2025)

From then on nodes and edges have been present in the field of natural sciences, especially in physics and mathematics, they have been used to build models of complex systems and explore their workings in a quantitative way: nodes represent discrete entities, and edges represent measurable relations between them, such as connections. For humanities and social sciences on the other hand, the biggest additional value of the method was its ability to visualize previously unseen dimensions of connectedness. Once again quoting Ahnert et al.: “artists and humanities scholars have been engaging with network-analytic approaches for at least sixty years. However, these threads have visibly come together only in the past twenty years” (4) Barabási also claims that “the twenty-first century is the century of networks. (...) And it was only in this century that we have truly come to understand the fundamental importance of connectedness – the way in which networks shape our lives. The science of networks has emerged as a response to this understanding” (Bello et al. 42). This is particularly interesting from the perspective that the corpus in the center of this study can be viewed as the literary imprint of these exact decades.

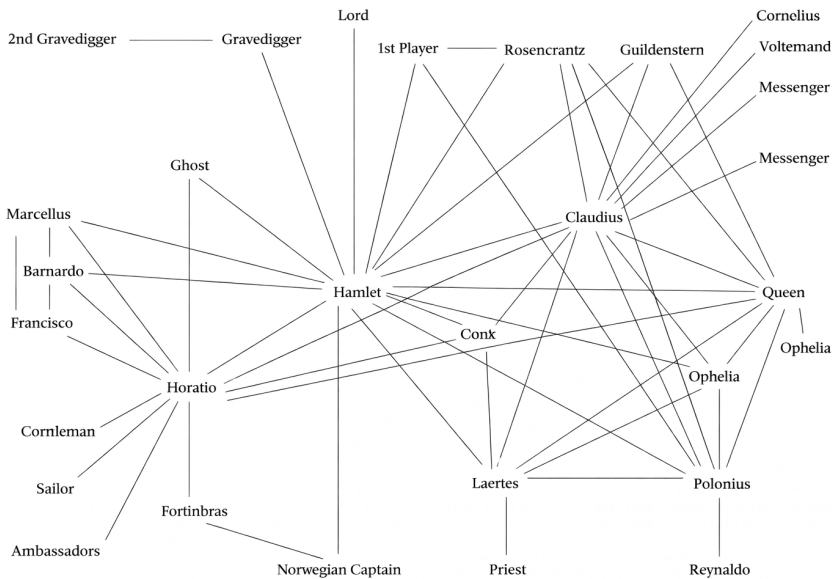
In addition to this Albert-László Barabási and Réka Albert also published their pivotal article in *Science* in 1999. In this fundamental study they introduced one of the most important features of modern network theory, namely that “a common property of many large-scale networks is that the vertex connectivities follow a scale-free power-law distribution. This feature was found to be a consequence of two generic mechanisms: (i) networks expand continuously by addition of new vertices, and (ii) new vertices attach preferentially to sites that are already well connected” (509). The second finding will be especially important regarding the corpus in focus.

Arts closely follow science when it comes to networks. As stated in the introduction of *Hidden Patterns – Visualizing Networks at Barabási Lab*, a book that accompanies the exhibition of the same title¹⁹ that was on display in the Ludwig Museum in Budapest in 2020-21, Barabási states that “As soon as we started to study networks, I began appropriating concepts from the art world – not only to visualize networks, but also to think about them” (Bello et al. 43). It also must be added here that one of the most well-known visual network presentations also comes from an artist, namely Mark Lombardi, whose 1996 drawing *BCCI-ICIC & FAB, 1972-91 (4th version)* is a web-like image (that) comprises a meticulously researched diagram of individuals and groups with ties to a money-laundering organisation that operated under the name of the Bank of Commerce and Credit International (BCCI), which included Osama bin Laden and others associated with al-Qaeda. (...) In other words, in black and red ink, Lombardi traced a terrorist network that reached the centres of government. He had grasped the power of the network perspective to reveal conspiracy, adapting graphical traditions associated with the study of social networks developed in the first half of the twentieth century (Ahnert et al. 1).

When it comes to art and science, using network theory in literature is not a new concept either. Franco Moretti, as one of the most significant researchers in the field of digital humanities and literary networks, claims that visualization is the key when it comes to the added values of network theory. In his much-debated work

¹⁹ More precisely, the exhibition was subtitled: The Language of Network Thinking

Network Theory, Plot Analysis he states that by using network theory we are able to “turn time into space”, as in a network “nothing ever disappears” (27). Moretti talks about a network that is made up by the dialogues of the characters in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, nevertheless his important remark about visual representation of networks is something much more general and applicable in a much broader sense. I also believe it to be one of the most important additional values of network theory, since with the help of visualizing connections, whether spatial or temporal, we are able to see connections – if any – in black and white.



2. Figure Moretti's *Hamlet-network* (source: newleftreview.org)

A few words about methodology and results

Having gained insight into the sociocultural background of the corpus, as well as into the scope provided by the tools of network theory, I would like to briefly discuss the specific methodological approach behind the present research. To observe one of the intra-textual factors that contribute to the network formation in the corpus, I rely upon the findings of stylometry or computational stylistics: the quantitative study of writing style and linguistic features in texts, using statistical methods and algorithms. Stylometry was originally used for authorship verification, as it works with features of writing style such as word usage, sentence structure, vocabulary, rhythm and other stylistic elements, and identifies the personal characteristics of writing style by detecting similarities and differences between texts. Or as Eder, Rybicki and Kestemont have put it: “stylometry tries to expand the scope of inquiry in the humanities” (108). Also, it “comprises distinct knowledge domains, in which the affordances of the digital (method, medium)

and the statistical interact with the epistemic to produce new knowledge at the analytic levels” (Hermann et al. 451), or as Ahnert and colleagues summed it up: it “can lead to the creation of the new knowledge. (...) It makes it possible to measure the relationships (...) in multiple ways, allowing a rich, multidimensional reading of complex systems never possible before” (7).

The stylometric analysis process of the texts – also applied to the corpus of this study – is a so-called multi-stage pipeline, and is usually divided into four main sections: preprocessing, feature extraction, statistical analysis, and the presentation of results (Eder et al. 108). The software stylo (‘Stylometry with R’)²⁰, developed by the authors cited here, is particularly innovative because after a few basic but easy-to-manage settings by the user it performs the last three steps of the process practically automatically. These are related – but not limited – to the number of the most frequently used words that should be examined, the size of the n-gram, words to omit in the analysis, distances (i.e.: how similarities should be measured), the way of sampling and type of output. In our case visual representation and the graphical outputs are of utmost importance as, thanks to the Graphical User Interfaces used by stylo, we are able to withdraw clear network layouts as a result of the analysis. (See: Figure 3.)

The nodes or vertices are dedicated to the novels of the corpus, the adjoining lines, the edges represent the connection between them – the thicker the line, the stronger the connection. As stated previously, the edges in this case represent stylistic similarities explored by the stylometric analysis.



3. Figure Results of the stylometric examination of the corpus (bootstrap consensus network Cosine Delta distance, 100-500 MFW, colours indicate communities detected by the Louvain algorithm with modularity 3)

There are also clearly identifiable *clusters* in the network, sets of nodes that tend to appear close to each other, forming a certain pattern as a result of a predefined logic.

²⁰ <https://computationalstylistics.github.io> Last accessed: 18 August 2025

To help the identifying process, different colours have been used in the process based on the algorithm applied.

If we examine this diagram focusing on the nodes, we can see that a significant proportion of the texts examined are located on the left side of the visualization, marked in green. Slightly separated from these, moving towards the centre of the diagram, we can see a smaller cluster consisting of four nodes marked in yellow. Even more towards the centre of the diagram, relatively separated from the other texts, we find Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries*, which took the prize in 2013 and with its 823 pages is the longest Booker Prize-winning novel to date. The most distinctive part of the diagram, however, is undoubtedly the pink cluster located on the right-hand side of the visualization, clearly and distinctly separated from the rest of the texts, containing a total of five novels connected by thick lines suggesting significant stylistic similarities. If we take a closer look, we can see that this includes Margaret Atwood's two novels, *The Blind Assassin*, that is the earliest examined text in our corpus, as it won the prize in 2000, and one of her more recent works, the 2019 winner *The Testaments*. Naturally, these two appear close to each other, as they share the same author, whose style is observed to have been consistent over the course of her career. The same closeness can be observed in case of Hilary Mantel's two pieces of her historical trilogy: *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*, in the yellow cluster of the figure. And while these texts are linked with two others, namely Peter Carey's *The True History of the Kelly Gang* and George Saunders' *Lincoln in the Bardo*, that can be labelled as historical fiction in terms of theme and genre. When it comes to the pink cluster, no similar clear common ground can be detected.

Along with the two Atwood novels, the cluster contains Howard Jacobson's *The Finkler Question*, Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending* and *The Milkman* by Anna Burns. And while all three novels explore the question of identity and its place in micro- and macro-society, they are thematically quite different. *The Finkler Question* revolves around Jewish identity and the nature of male friendships, while *The Sense of an Ending* deals with the personal and therefore subjective and constantly changing nature of memories. *Milkman* is the story of an unnamed young woman, known only as "Middle Sister" set against the backdrop of the political turmoil in Northern Ireland. The novel explores how identity can be altered by social observation and political pressure.

If we examine the complete figure from a chronological perspective, it is evident that no clear, identifiable pattern can be detected. Regardless of their date of publication, the texts are scattered across different parts of the figure. However, it is worth noting that the pink cluster we focus on contains two pairs of texts that were awarded (and published) in consecutive years: 2010 and 2011, and 2018 and 2019. The last year on this list is especially noteworthy because it was the year when, despite the explicit rule²¹, there were not just one but two winning books. However, the work

21 Prior to 2019 there were two years when the Booker-judges could not decide on one winner and the prize was shared. In 1974 Nadine Gordimer and Stanley Middleton, in 1992 Michael Ondaatje and Barry Unsworth were the joint winners. After the second case in 1992, the Booker organizers introduced a rule that forbade joint winners. The judges chose to ignore this rule in 2019, making it the first shared prize in 27 years.

that won the award alongside Atwood, Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*, is located at the opposite end of our network, so it might be concluded that we cannot speak of a tangible, identifiable style dictated by the zeitgeist of the late 2010s. Not even if their themes are very similar, as both texts deal with gender-related issues and explore various female roles.

Conclusion

As the visual illustration resulting from the stylometric analysis shows, along with the exploration of the broader historical, sociopolitical, and cultural contexts of the Booker Prize: the chosen corpus of this study is not merely a randomly selected group of critically acclaimed texts, but can be viewed as a dynamic literary network shaped by institutional and critical recognition as well as stylistic affinities. Beyond its undeniable canonizing role, the Booker Prize is clearly capable of linking together different actors of the literary field as well as exploring different levels of interpretation and reception of the examined texts. The stylometric analysis complements this perspective by revealing textual proximities and clusters that would not have otherwise been visible. And by doing so, it also highlights the potential of network theory to uncover new, often unexpected patterns of literary relatedness, just as it can be seen in our corpus. While some connections align with preliminary expectations like shared authorship or genre, others demonstrate more subtle linking forces. And although understanding the exact nature of these forces – if at all possible – draws on the genre and scope of a different type of scientific work, where observing a larger corpus that includes long- and shortlisted works in an even broader theoretical framework, might lead to a larger system of networks, it is important to see that the connections whose existence we merely assumed in the introductory section of the study are indeed visible and verifiable.

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