

A Literary Prize of Their Own: The Branding and Reception of the Women's Prize for Fiction as a Prize Exclusively by Women

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the motto “Written by women. For everyone” of the Women’s Prize for Fiction. This will be done on the basis of the following research question: “Do the branding and reception of the Women’s Prize for Fiction support or undermine the Prize’s motto of ‘Written by women. For everyone,’ and what are the implications for the prestige and principles of the Prize?” To answer this question, this thesis is divided into two chapters focused on the branding and the reception of the Prize, respectively. The branding chapter will consider the way the Prize presents itself publicly by appraising their statements and their sponsors. The reception chapter will then analyse how those sponsors and the Prize in general are received by the public by appraising the controversies, the number of reviews that are published about the winning novels and the spaces they are published in. The expectation is that, despite the Prize’s motto, the Prize is still both branded and received as one exclusively for women, thereby undermining the prestige and principles of the Prize. The conclusion will offer an overview of the findings and a possible solution to the issues of identity the Prize is facing.

Women’s Prize for Fiction, Orange Prize for Fiction, Baileys Prize for Fiction, literary prize, literary prize studies, motto, branding, sponsors, reception, gender, feminism, book reviews, Bourdieu

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Although women read more than men and books by female authors are published in roughly the same numbers, they are vastly overlooked for prizes in comparison to male authors” (Vida 2017).

Novelist Nicola Griffith conducted a study in 2015 on the last 15 years’ winners of six prestigious literary awards in the UK. This study revealed that women writing about women win fewer awards than women writing about men, while men writing about men proved to be the most successful. The more prestigious an award, Griffith argued, the more likely the chance that novels about women do not win said Prize (Griffith 2015). Another significant fact is that women consistently buy more than two-thirds of fiction in the UK each year, but this large influence of women in the literary field is not reflected in the UK’s literary prize winners. (Merritt 2018).

It was not until the announcement of the Man Booker Prize shortlist of 1991 that a debate was sparked about the gender disparity in literary prizes. This particular year of the Man Booker namely saw a shortlist entirely made up of men, despite the fact that about 60% of novels were written by women that year. Additionally, by 1992, a mere 10 percent of novelists shortlisted for the Booker Prize had been women (“History” n.d.).¹

This controversy led to a meeting between a group of publicists, writers, journalists and other people in the literary field – both male and female – at the beginning of 1992. They discussed what could accomplish the rectification of the misbalance between male and female writers in literary prizes, and their efforts culminated in the foundation of an entirely new Prize. This Prize would acknowledge and celebrate female writers both nationally and internationally, and “have a programme of educational, literacy and research initiatives as integral to the Prize” (“History” n.d.). The early steps were taken in the consecutive years to conceptualise this idea, and eventually The Women’s Prize for Fiction was founded, known at its inception as ‘The Orange Prize for Fiction’ to refer to its first main sponsor. The Prize would be exclusively eligible for women writers writing in English with their novels being assessed by an all-female judging panel.

Instead of being branded a Prize by women *for* women, though, the motto of the

1. “History” refers to the eponymous section on the Women’s Prize for Fiction site.

Women's Prize demonstrates a different aim: "Written by women. For everyone" ("Women's Prize" n.d.). The phrase captures the nature of the Prize as one that is made by women – that is, having exclusively women as judges and eligible authors – but explicitly not *for* women.

This thesis will closely examine the implications of this motto. Since there are no previous studies on this topic when it comes to the Women's Prize for Fiction, I will start from the grounds up with researching the way Women's Prize for Fiction brands itself and how it is received by the public. I will assess the reception of the Prize in general, but in particular also its brands and a selection of winning novels from the past decade. I will try to determine whether the branding of the prize conforms to the aim expressed in its motto, and whether the reception of the prize is in accordance with its branding. I will then consider the implications of those findings for the prestige and principles of the Prize. The main question I will answer in this thesis is: "Do the branding and reception of the Women's Prize for Fiction support or undermine the Prize's motto of 'Written by women. For everyone,' and what are the implications for the prestige and principles of the Prize?"

To answer this research question, I will first establish the theoretical framework of this thesis and the methods that will be employed by approaching the topic both from the branding side and the reception side, dedicating a chapter to both of these areas.

A brand and the way it brands itself can provide a significant insight into the audience it is directed at. Using Norris' analysis (2006) of Bourdieu and Haacke's *Free Exchange* (1995) in the branding chapter, the motivations behind supporting a Prize such as the Women's Prize for Fiction are investigated. These motivations demonstrate the goals of the brand and the way the brand wants to present itself to the public.

This chapter will also contain an analysis of the perceived masculinity or femininity in the of the major sponsors' logos using Theo Lieven's approach in *Brand gender: increasing brand equity through brand personality* (2018).

In the subsequent chapter on the reception of the Prize, I will consider the reception of the Women's Prize for Fiction in general, as well as the reception of a selection of recent winning novels of the Prize from the past decade. The novels selected for the analysis are: *The Song of Achilles* (2011) by Madeline Miller, *The Glorious Heresies* (2015) by Lisa McIverney and *The Power* (2016) by Naomi Alderman, the winners of 2012, 2016 and 2017, respectively. McIverney's novel got stamped as containing 'male' subject matter by a number of reviews and being a possible 'unconventional' choice, while Alderman's novel had subject matter that clearly got labelled 'feminist' in reviews and was named a popular winner. Millers

book has divided opinions considerably between professional reviewers, consumer reviewers and other authors. All three novels may present insights into what might be seen as a 'typical' winner for the Prize, and what the implications of that may be.

Lastly, this chapter will contain the brands that sponsor or have sponsored the Prize. Drawing on English's study (2002) on the effect journalistic capital of a Prize, which Claire Squires further defined as a: "force between economic and cultural capital" (Squires 2004), has on its symbolic capital, I will discuss several controversies and how they have shaped the prestige of the Prize. Lastly, I will utilise the conclusions from the brand logo analysis in chapter 2 to determine whether there is causation between the perceived femininity/masculinity in a brand logo and how the brand in general is received in relation to branding the Women's Prize for Fiction.

In the final chapter, I will draw a general conclusion on the matter whether the Prize truly presents itself as a Prize by women for everyone, or that the branding and the reception suggest that it is still very much marketed towards women. This chapter will include a discussion of the implication of my findings and suggestions for future research in this area.

The expectation is that because of its female-oriented nature, the Prize brands itself consciously or not as a Prize aimed at a female audience and will also be received as such by the public. The implications of that could be that the prestige and principles of the Prize are put into question and that their motto, presented prominently in the centre of the home page, is not adhered to.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

I have selected a few approaches to attempt to determine the perceived identity of the brands that sponsor (or have sponsored) the Women's Prize for Fiction, and additionally, the brands' motivations for sponsoring the Prize. I will first explain Lieven's *Brand gender: increasing brand equity through brand personality* (2018) which scrutinizes the perceived masculinity and femininity of brand logos in four categories. Subsequently, I will employ the conversations on corporation sponsorship between Haacke and Bourdieu in *Free Exchange* (1995) to analyse the motivations the brands provide for choosing to sponsor the Women's Prize for Fiction and how they are publicly received. In the reception chapter I will perform a close reading of professional reviews on three recent winning novels to try to determine what makes a novel a 'typical winner' for this Prize to determine whether novels with feminine subject matter are sooner perceived as conventional winners than novels with traditionally non-feminine subject matter. Finally, I will consider the spaces that reviews of the Women's Prize for Fiction winners appear in and compare them to the winners of another UK Prize, the Man Booker.

2.1. The branding of the Women's Prize for Fiction

Theo Lieven's study describes various categories in the representation of a brand logo and what exactly makes a logo appear more feminine or masculine to the public. He has collected various studies that are concerned with the subject and based his own research on their work. He abbreviates 'perceived femininity brand personality' and 'perceived masculinity brand personality' as FBP and MBP, respectively, and I will undertake the same approach in this thesis from this point forward.

Employing Lieven's extensive research on FBP and MBP in brands, I will attempt to determine whether the Prize is sponsored exclusively by 'feminine' type of brands, as might be expected because of its female-oriented nature, or possibly also by brands that present as more neutral or even masculine in their branding.

The categories that will identify the perceived gender identity in the brand logos are the following:

- a) Brand name
- b) Type font
- c) Colour
- d) Logo shape

The first element is the brand name, which has a close connection to the area of phonology. According to Klink (2000), brand names that contain front vowels (such as i and ei) are considered more feminine than back vowels (such as o and u), which are perceived as masculine. Front vowels are, “lighter in weight and color, thinner, milder, weaker, colder, faster, bitter, softer, prettier, and friendlier” (Klink, 2000). Fricatives (*f, s, v, and z*) and stops (*p, b, t, d, k, g*) are perceived as feminine and masculine, respectively. Within these categories the consonants can be even further divided into the voiced consonants, which are perceived as more masculine, and the voiceless consonants, which are seen as more feminine.

The second element is the type of font that has been adopted in the logos with boldface and angular type fonts being perceived as masculine, and round, elegant fonts as feminine.

Colour is the third element. The association between colour and the perception is, in most cases, “assessed with regard to the sex-affiliated stereotyping of colors in the process of socialization” (Picariello et al. 1990; Pomerleau et al. 1990) and cultural factors. Lighter colours are highly associated with femininity, while darker colours are perceived as more masculine. Literature on evolutionary psychology literature also suggests that the colour red specifically is associated with femininity (Elliot and Niesta 2008; Pazda et al. 2012). Lieven concluded that the impact of colour on femininity and masculinity perceptions consist of both hue (Alexander 2003; Elliot and Niesta 2008), and brightness (Jablonski and Chaplin 2000).

Finally, there is the category of the shape of the logo. Rounder forms are correlated with femininity and angular forms with masculinity (B. H. Schmitt and Simonson 1997). This work on marketing aesthetics is based on literature on evolutionary psychology that angular body shapes are associated with masculinity and rounder curves to femininity (Horvath 1981, Singh 1993).

In addition to analysing the brand logos on perceived masculinity and femininity, I will employ *Free Exchange* (1995) as well, which is a notated and edited interview between Pierre Bourdieu and Haas Haacke. Their conversation was about politics and the arts - especially the role large corporations play in the sponsorship of the arts and the motivations they might have for doing so. From censorship to “the uses of art as a means of contesting and disrupting symbolic domination,” they explore the position of the artistic individual and the magnitude of corporations that try to influence them.

Sharon Norris has taken notes from *Free Exchange* and many other works by Bourdieu to employ a ‘Bourdiesian perspective’ on the Man Booker Prize (Norris 2006). Specifically, she applied Pierre Bourdieu’s thoughts on corporate sponsorship to this prize to “shed light on

the underlying nature of this award, and on the social, political and economic factors that have helped to shape it.” The focus of her article is on the structure rather than the shortlisted fiction, which is what this thesis will scrutinize, although her aim to discover the motivation for sponsorship and a corporate sponsorship’s characteristics are useful approaches.

2.2. The reception of the Women’s Prize for Fiction

In the reception chapter, I will consider the research of one of the most prominent figures in current literary prize research: James English. He explains his own coined concept of journalistic capital as the journalistic coverage of a Prize, which offers a Prize visibility by usage of scandals and by building a celebrity status (English 2002, 123). For this thesis, I will consider a number of scandals that have occurred surrounding the Women’s Prize for Fiction and the reception of them. These scandals will offer an insight into how people view the Prize and how they could directly contradict the claim of the Prize of being one for everyone.

Another important aspect of the reception chapter is the reception of the winning novels. The responses to these novels often generate discussions, in particular when those novels strongly divide, such as *The Song of Achilles* (winner of 2012) are unconventional and surprising such as *The Glorious Heresies* (winner of 2016) or clearly and unapologetically feminist such as *The Power* (winner of 2017). For the purposes of this thesis I will inspect reviews of these three novels from the past ten years that offer opinions on what exactly makes a novel an expected winner and when it makes it an unconventional one. The conclusions of this will offer an insight into how the winning novels and the Prize itself are perceived in general, and how it might contest the ‘for everyone’ part of the motto. If a novel has clear feminine or feminist themes and is therefore seen as a typical winner, it could jeopardize the prestige of a Prize that is already under fire for seemingly pandering exclusively to women in its branding.

Finally, there is one element that may illustrate how the Women’s Prize fits in next to other prestigious Prizes such as the Man Booker Prize: the spaces in which book reviews of Women’s Prize nominees and winners appear in and in what capacity.

Although the Man Booker Prize has reclaimed its initial name of ‘the Booker Prize’ as of the 1st of June of 2019 following the loss of sponsor Man Group (Flood 2019), I will consistently refer to the Prize as ‘Man Booker Prize’ for clarity’s sake when I mention past and recent events surrounding this Prize in this thesis.

Chapter 3: The Branding of The Women's Prize for Fiction

The Women's Prize for Fiction (WPF) was founded in 1996 with a dual purpose: both to celebrate & honour the best of fiction writing by women and to fund a range of educational, charitable and philanthropic initiatives to benefit readers. Our aims were simple: to put exceptional quality literature from all over the world into the hands of male and female readers of all ages who'd enjoy it; and to invest, nourish, support and engage with readers in order to more widely promote & foster writing of excellence. ("Charitable and Partnership Activity" n.d.)

The Women's Prize for Fiction is publicly presented as a Prize by women for everyone, as their motto demonstrates. The quote above stresses that both female and male readers are targeted when promoting literature from women all over the globe. However, this claim of the Prize being for everyone will be closely examined in this chapter and the next one, with this chapter discussing the sponsors and the branding of the Prize. I will first appraise how the Prize presents itself in general, with regard to the Prize's judging criteria and the statements from the Board and judges in news articles. Subsequently, I will focus on the brands that sponsor or have sponsored the Prize. For this purpose, I will employ Bourdieu and Haacke's opinions on corporate sponsorship, comparable to Norris' approach, to analyse the motivations the sponsors name (or not name) for sponsoring the Women's Prize for Fiction (Norris 2006, 139-158). This will be followed by an analysis of brand logos by employing Lieven's collection of studies on perceived masculinity and femininity. His and others' findings will be applied to the logos of the past and current sponsors of the Prize (Lieven 2018). The aim of this analysis is to search for correlation between the amount of FBP or MBP in a brand logo on the one hand and the manner in which these brands are received in connection to the Women's Prize for Fiction on the other hand.

3.1. The branding and rules of the Prize

From the inception of the Prize in 1996, the Board of the Prize has had to defend what the Prize stood for. There were claims of sexism because only women were eligible to enter, and in 2003, Mosse responded to this ongoing point of criticism by reassuring the public that there is no agenda and that the Prize is purely about good writing by women, regardless what audience it might be directed to. Additionally, she states that novels that do not receive much press coverage still have a chance with the Prize because it does not rely on marketing (Oakes 2003). Furthermore, she underlined in a later article in *Independent* (Guest 2008) that the Prize was set up "to get fabulous books by women to male and female readers and it continues

to be successful in doing that,” further stressing the fact the Prize is aimed at a wider audience than exclusively women.

When scrutinizing the Prize in closer detail, it becomes apparent that one of the most essential parts of this Prize, as with any other literary prize, are its rules. Each literary prize has its own rules of eligibility that restricts the type of authors that can participate. The Women’s Prize most important rule is that only women can participate, but apart from that, the novels those women submit for the Prize are obliged to be full-length stories originally written in English and are required to have been published in the United Kingdom between the 1st of April of the year before the Prize is awarded and the 31st of March of the year in which the Prize is awarded. Translations into English are not eligible, thereby severely narrowing down the eligible authors for the Prize. This particular rule works against the goal of the Prize to promote literature from all over the world, since many international authors do not or cannot write in English.

An additional rule that poses problems is the most important one: the women-only rule. The 2019 edition of the Women’s Prize for Fiction had for the first time included an author in the longlist who does not identify as female. Akwaeke Emezi, a non-binary transgender author, was put on the longlist before the judges knew about this person’s gender identity (Cain 2019). The judges, however, did not revoke the nomination afterwards. This inclusion raises questions about whether the rules of the Prize should be changed – which is exactly what is currently happening (Wood 2019) – and what it means for how the Prize presents itself in general. The decision challenged the strict women-only rule that as of the 16th of June is still listed on the Prize’s site (“Rules” n.d.).

3.2. The sponsors of the Women’s Prize for Fiction

The first sponsor of the Prize was originally Mitsubishi, but after accusations of sexism, they pulled out their support (MacDonald 1996). The replacement sponsor of the Prize became the Orange Group, which is a French multinational telecommunications corporation with a branch in, among others, the United Kingdom. Orange was the first major sponsor of the Women’s Prize for Fiction and remained so for 17 years from the foundation of the Prize in 1996 until 2012, when the Orange Group withdrew their sponsorship to focus on the film industry (Crown 2012). Together with Orange, the Prize won, “pretty much every major UK sponsorship award and Orange was widely applauded for their enormous and significant commitment to reading and literature” (“History” n.d.).

After the Orange Group's departure as the main sponsor, the Prize began a partnership with the creators and distributors of the popular Irish cream liqueur Baileys. The Prize's Board thought this sponsor to be ideal for the Prize "both because of their passion for celebrating outstanding fiction by women and for their desire to help us take exceptional novels by women to even wider audiences" (Tucker 2019).

The year of 2017 saw the Board trying to find a new sponsor for the upcoming years. A new collective sponsorship model was adopted with multiple sizable and small sponsors, partly to make room for a major change within the Prize. The Women's Prize Board namely announced in 2019 that the Prize would become a charity under the new name 'Women's Prize Trust' ("WPfF announces" 2019). However, during the prize ceremony of the 2018 edition of the Prize, attendees were told the three brands' sponsorship of the prize was not sufficient and that the Prize needed to raise more money through patronage, and so a new patronage scheme was set up so that individuals could contribute to the Prize (Cowdrey 2018c).

The initial three new sponsors, in addition to the already established Baileys, were Deloitte and NatWest - a multinational professional services network and a major commercial bank in the United Kingdom, respectively. Deloitte left as a sponsor after one year of sponsorship and a replacement was found in Fremantle, one of the biggest creators, producers, and distributors of television programming in the world.

The sponsors all vary in what services or products they provide, but all have in common that they wanted to sponsor this Prize dedicated solely to women writers. Their motivations for backing a literary prize, and the Women's Prize for Fiction in particular, will be examined in the subsequent paragraph by employing a similar 'Bourdiesian perspective' that Sharon Norris employed in her article on the branding of the Man Booker Prize.

3.3. A Bourdiesian perspective

Norris explored, among other works by Bourdieu, his and Haacke's interview in *Free Exchange* on corporate sponsorship in the cultural sector. She noted that Bourdieu dismisses the common justification offered for corporate sponsorship that it "affords beneficiaries financial security" (Norris 2006, 152). Instead, he argues and warns that it increases "material and mental dependence on economic powers and market constraints" (Bourdieu and Haacke 1995, 15). This is reflected in the new sponsorship model for the Prize that was announced in 2017 (Campbell 2017). That model would allow for multiple brands from all kinds of sectors

to sponsor the Prize. Joanna Prior, chair of the Women's Prize for Fiction Board, explained it further in a statement, saying that "working together in this collective way will offer the prize a secure platform to showcase and celebrate fiction by women and take books written by women to wider audiences than ever before" (Cowdrey 2018a). This new sponsorship plan may suggest that it has become challenging for the Prize to hold onto one main sponsor that finances everything, and that the Board is obliged to invent a new model to keep the Prize afloat. This possibility is further solidified by the fact that even this three-way sponsorship programme was called 'not enough' by Prior during the Prize ceremony of 2018, as mentioned before (Cowdrey 2018c).

This uncertainty that literary prizes have when it comes to gaining sponsorship is reflected in Bourdieu and Haacke's claim that corporate sponsorship does not necessarily have anything to do with the love of art, but rather with the wish for symbolic capital (Norris 2006, 143).

When the Orange Group were first approached for sponsorship, they were researching the possibilities of arts sponsorship. They were "attracted both by the educational and lifelong learning initiatives [of the Prize], and by the opportunity to celebrate international fiction by women" ("History" n.d.). When the Orange Group announced its departure from the sponsorship of the Prize, Steven Day, chief of brand and communications for Everything Everywhere (of which Orange is currently part of), said: "While relinquishing sponsorship of the Prize is tinged with sadness, we're hugely proud of what Orange and the Women's Prize for Fiction have achieved over the past 17 years" (Seymenliyska 2012).

Norris, however, says that literary prizes appear to be nothing more than promotional devices for companies (Norris 2006, 153). This claim is supported by a quote that Haacke shared from Alain-Dominique Perrin in *Free Exchange*. Perrin named patronage, similar to sponsorship, "a tool for the seduction of public opinion" (Bourdieu and Haacke 1995, 17-18). Steven Day of Orange demonstrates that by elaborating his statement by saying that the partnership with the Prize "has played a key part in Orange's success over the past decade and a half, taking our brand into areas that were traditionally harder to reach" (Seymenliyska 2012). He openly admits the benefits his company has had from sponsoring the Prize and that the Orange Group is now a sponsor in the areas of film and sport ("Sponsorship" n.d.).²

NatWest is another sponsor that clearly benefits considerably from backing a Prize such

2. "Sponsorship" refers to the eponymous section on the Orange Group website.

as the Women's Prize for Fiction. A recent campaign by the bank is aimed towards closing the so-called confidence gap between men and women when it comes to banks. NatWest has publicly apologised to women for the patronising way they have been spoken to in the past and promises a significant change in how they are approached. Their overall goal is to play the leading role in changing how women feel about banks and how they are treated by those institutions (Vizard 2019). A sponsorship of a Prize that is dedicated exclusively to women's talents provides the bank with credibility and a substantial amount of symbolic capital to advance their campaign. They appeal to women not only by supporting this Prize, but also by sponsoring awards for female entrepreneurs, which are quite prominently named the NatWest Everywoman Awards.

The site of Deloitte states that the Women's Prize for Fiction is the most prestigious annual book award for fiction – written by women, that is (“Women's Prize Sponsorship” n.d.). It is possibly inevitable that the ‘women’ part is often included in statements about this particular Prize, but this does indicate that the Prize somehow cannot be called eligible on its own. Deloitte then stresses their own aims of “applying creativity to better serve [their] clients” and alludes that the Prize brings a new community of diverse voices that can work together to better help their clients, while the empowering of women and promoting creativity in the workplace would improve their business and service offerings. Their aim with sponsoring the Prize is to further enthuse people to celebrate (female) creativity at work (“Women's Prize Sponsorship” n.d.).

Sarah Doole, a Director of Global Drama at Fremantle, said that they were “passionate about developing female storytellers in all their forms” and that they are proud that they have the opportunity “to support and champion creativity in women around the world” (“Fremantle Partners” n.d.).

Corporate sponsorship thus mostly is concerned with gaining symbolic capital for the corporation in exchange for financial capital for the sponsored entity, such as the Women's Prize for Fiction in this instance. The various sponsors have their own reasons for backing the Prize, but in some cases, a brand might lead to negative connotations to the Prize or vice versa. The Women's Prize Board Chair, Joanna Prior, said that without corporate sponsorship, “the work of bringing books into the lives of as many people as possible becomes ever harder,” after Man Group pulled out their support of the Man Booker Award (Flood and Cain 2019). A literary prize needs corporate sponsorship to survive, while corporations need to sponsor institutions that offer them positive publicity and symbolic capital to help them grow.

3.4. Lieven’s brand logo analysis

The reception of the brands that sponsor the Prize, and to a larger extent the winning novels and the Prize in general, will be discussed and explored in the next chapter. First of all, I will apply Lieven’s four categories on analysing brand logos for FBP and MBP.

The four categories he lists – brand name, the type of font, colour and shape of the logo – will be employed to determine whether the logos of the brands, as seen in figure 1, reflect the expected femininity of the sponsors in the reception. If there is a correlation between the perceived femininity in a brand logo and the reception of that same brand in relation to the Prize, this may indicate the brand both branding itself as a feminine brand in its logo and being perceived as such. If no correlation can be found, that will be insightful as well. In that case, the response to a brand is exclusively based on the products or services the brand offers or on the manner in which they brand themselves to the public.



Figure 1: The five major sponsors of the Women’s Prize for Fiction in the past (Orange, Deloitte) and present (Baileys, Fremantle, NatWest).

	Brand name	Type of font	Colour	Shape of logo
Orange	MBP	MBP	FBP	MBP
Baileys	MBP/FBP	MBP/FBP	MBP/FBP	MBP/FBP
Deloitte	MBP	MBP	MBP/FBP	- *
Fremantle	FBP	FBP	MBP/FBP	- *
NatWest	FBP	MBP/FBP	MBP/FBP	MBP

Figure 2: The results from Lieven’s approach on determining MBP and FBP in brand logos.

* The ‘shape of the logo’ category only applies if there is a shape present besides the text of the brand name, which is already dealt with under the ‘type of font’ category.

‘Orange’ is primarily MBP, with only the orange colour being FBP. Baileys, notoriously seen as a drink for women, reveals a strong mix of MBP and FBP in all categories. This could demonstrate that the makers of the brand try to appeal more to a male audience with darker

colours and more straightforward font types as evident in figure 1. Deloitte is largely MBP, but its successor, Fremantle, has largely FBP elements with its flowy lines and front vowels. NatWest, finally, tips the scale slightly more towards an FBP than an MBP.

3.5. Conclusion

Although the logos themselves do not provide a conclusive answer to how they might be truly perceived by the public, the reception of the brands in general will demonstrate if there is a connection between how a brand is received and the amount of FBP and MBP that is in a brand logo. Combined with the reception of other aspects of the Prize, this will provide an insight into how the Prize is received and what the implications of that might be for the validity of the Prize's motto.

Chapter 4: The Reception of the Women's Prize for Fiction

After observing the manner in which the various components of the Prize present themselves publicly, I will now discuss how these components are received. First, I will assess the brands that have sponsored or still sponsor the Prize and how they are received in relation to the Prize, and subsequently I will explain English's work on journalistic capital and how controversies are necessary to make (and keep) a Prize relevant and prestigious. I will then move on to a close reading of book reviews of three novels that have won the Prize to determine if there is a perception of a 'typical winner' of the Prize and what the implications of that might be. The chapter will conclude with an examination of the ways and places that those book reviews appear in and whether it differs from the treatment of another UK Prize, the Man Booker, receives.

4.1. Reception of the sponsors

When Baileys was announced in 2013 as the new sponsor after Orange left, journalist Brooke Magnanti (2003) was quick to react with scorn. She called Baileys the "hen weekend of booze" in "the ridiculous and needlessly gendered world of selling alcohol," while author and reviewer Jenny Diski, an outspoken critic of the Women's Prize for Fiction, called Baileys "a perfect sponsor for a demeaning fiction prize 'for women'" in an opinion article of *The Guardian* on the news of the new sponsor (Flood 2013). In the same article, Jenny Colgan demonstrated a different opinion and argued that Baileys "softens the image of the Prize" by bringing together the "great pleasures" of reading a book with a drink on the side, and that the collaboration of Baileys and the Prize would be beneficial for both sides (Flood 2013). Founder Kate Mosse attempted to ease concerns that a 'female' type of drink would further alienate male readers from the Prize. She argued that Baileys is a drink that both men and women can enjoy, to the same degree as that they can both enjoy whisky. She further solidified her defence of the sponsor by stressing Baileys is part of the Diageo group, which has a vast history of arts sponsorships with its other brands (2013).

The criticisms directed at this sponsor and the attempts to argue that both men and women can enjoy Baileys are interestingly reflected in the clear mix of FBP and MBP elements in the brand logo of Baileys, as established in the previous chapter. Even in the logo the brand struggles to appeal both to men and women, but the general reputation of the drink stubbornly remains one for women. This becomes bizarrely apparent in the recent case of a

man being arrested for homosexuality in Cameroon simply because he drank Baileys (Buchanan 2014).

NatWest notably sponsors various women-oriented Prizes and initiatives. The reasons why they would sponsor such Prizes have already been established in the branding chapter, with their attempt to remedy the confidence gap between men and women clients of their bank.

A recent development in the sponsorship world at the beginning of 2019 saw the Man Booker Prize losing Man Group as a sponsor possibly partly due to “criticism of their role as a financial institution, as well as their influence on the prize” after author Sebastian Faulks publicly branded Man Group ‘the enemy.’ As quoted in Flood and Cain’s (2019) article in *The Guardian*, Faulks stated that “Man Group are not the sort of people who should be sponsoring literary prizes. They’re the kind of people literary prizes ought to be criticising.” NatWest, while also a financial institution, has not received similar criticism directly, but Faulks could be implicitly talking about them as well.

Apart from the controversy surrounding Baileys as a sponsor for the Women’s Prize for Fiction and the indirect attack on financial institutions as sponsors of the arts, I have failed to find any positive or negative comment on the other sponsors. Fremantle, while having a logo that contained more FBP than MBP, did not generate any responses when they became a sponsor of the Women’s Prize. Their services, it should be noted, do not have any direct connection to women or femininity, although they do champion women’s creativity as the chapter on branding has demonstrated.

4.2. English’s study on journalistic capital and scandals

A brand that is already seen as feminine by the public, thus, generates protests and mocking from the public, while sponsors who have more neutral products or services generate no response in relation to the Women’s Prize for Fiction. Yet, as the case of Baileys has proven, controversies such as these mean a large number of people will talk about this subject matter and the Prize in general. In other words, controversies keep institutions such as the Women’s Prize in the news, a necessary phenomenon that scholar James English argues is needed for the generation of journalistic capital and are, in fact, a prize’s lifeblood (English 2002, 115). Scandals lead to outrage among the public, which will be primarily directed at the institution of the Prize, “which is accused of furthering the encroachments of the market place, or of politics, or of personal connections, onto the artistic field, and hence of diluting

what ought to be pure cultural capital with economic, political, or social capital” (112). In other words, whenever the artistic field gets tangled up in other affairs that undermines itself, it leads to controversy. Whenever that happens, the artistic field in question will be covered extensively in the news and will be closely scrutinized by the public.

The inauguration year of the Prize did not pass by without its controversies. One notable fact that Sage (1996) wrote down in her article was that two of the five judges criticised the poor quality of the novels and expressed “their shame, horror, etc. when faced with the quantity of bad writing some publishers saw fit to submit” (quoted in Zangen 2010, 283).

One major issue in the early days of the Women’s Prize for Fiction was the fact that exclusively women were eligible to win the Prize and to be on the judging panel. Men were quite noticeably excluded from every aspect of the Prize. This led to numerous outcries of sexism, as established earlier in this thesis.

A new chapter was recently added to this ‘women-only’ controversy with the inclusion of a transgender non-binary author, Akwaeke Emezi, on the longlist of the 2019 edition of the Prize (Cain, 2019), as already discussed in the previous chapter. The non-binary trans journalist Victoria Parsons questioned whether the judges actively chose to include a non-binary person on the list or that they just ran with it when they discovered that Emezi does not identify as a woman. They also doubted whether a non-binary author assigned male at birth would ever be considered by the judges (Parsons 2019).

Another response to this development came from the direction of *The Times*, that published an article mocking the inclusion of Emezi by joking about women with beards now being eligible too for the Prize, which led to an open letter being sent to their office by Louisa Joyner, the editorial director of Faber & Faber. She responded to the “underlying discrimination that underpins the article’s troubling tone” and denied the claim in the article that Emezi first identified themselves as a woman at the time of the novel’s publication, thereby indirectly suggesting that would have been done deliberately to trick the judges of the Women’s Prize for Fiction to be eligible for the Prize (Joyner 2019).

This new development, then, not only led to plans to broaden the women-only rule to make room for more gender identities, but it also led to a general conversation about gender identity. In English’s terms, this controversy and the initial response to the Prize in 1996 would classify as scandals that in the eyes of the public bring unwanted (gender) politics to what ought to be pure cultural capital focused on choosing the best novel.

Not only men, but women are also divided on the topic of a Prize solely for women

writers. Author Kamila Shamsie, who won the Prize in 2018 for her novel *Home Fire* (2017), is a staunch supporter. Back in 2015, she challenged book publishers to only publish work by women in 2018. This year would mark “the centenary of women over the age of 30 getting the vote in the UK” (Shamsie 2015) Ultimately, though, only one small independent book publisher, And Other Stories, rose to her challenge. Founder Stefan Tobler mentioned that banning male authors from their list in 2018 meant that his company had room to accept a significant number of new female authors they would not otherwise have had space for. The one thing he realised “more than ever is how we need to redouble our commitment to looking for great writing outside of what lands in our inbox easily, outside of the usual industry channels” (Flood 2018).

Other authors, however, have strongly opposed the Prize in the past and present. One of the most notable opponents of the Prize is Lionel Shriver, who won the Prize herself in 2005 for her novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003). She believes the Prize implies that women only have a chance of gaining recognition when men are out of the running. Although she admits that at the time she accepted the Prize and the substantial Prize money of 30,000 pounds without complaints, she said in 2016 at a panel that winning “it is not as meaningful to me (...) as say it would have been to win the Booker,” since half of the population would not be eligible for the Prize (Cowdrey 2016).

The topic of eligibility has taken on another form as well, with regard to the fees that need to be paid for a novel to be considered eligible for the Prize. In addition to the controversy surrounding non-binary trans author Emezi, the Women’s Prize faced another scandal in the 2019 with the introduction of a new fee of 1,000 pounds for publishers whose novels are chosen for the longlist of the Prize. This fee comes on top of the original 5,000 pounds that publishers are required to submit for each of their novels that end up on the shortlist (Cowdrey 2018b). This new adjustment raised concerns about whether the smaller, independent publishers could afford all these requirements. One such publisher, Galley Beggar Press, expressed their concern about this new development on Twitter and stated that if that fee had been in place a few years ago, when one of their novels won, they would not have had been able to enter that novel (Galley Beggar Press 2018).

Chair Joanna Prior and founder Kate Mosse were quick to ease those concerns by declaring they were always open to private meetings with publishers to discuss the matter and make it possible for them to enter anyway, as is also included in the Terms and Conditions of the Prize for publishers (Cowdrey 2018b).

As demonstrated above, controversies keep institutions such as literary prizes in the news, but regularly they also lead to offer valuable new insights, for example into how novels are judged differently by men and women. Consider the 2001 edition of the Women's Prize for Fiction, when an all-male panel was appointed in addition to the all-female one to choose a symbolic alternative shortlist. They judged the novels quite differently from the female ones.

This development was on the one hand a reaction to the backlash the Prize had received from its inception on its all-female nature, and on the other hand also part of a study conducted by Jenny Hartley, who was a lecturer at the University of Surrey Roehampton at the time. She was present at both panels for her study on gender differences in reading habits.

Interestingly enough, the motivations the male judges had for choosing their shortlist reveal different approaches to reviewing novels than the ones the female judges had. Novelist and critic Paul Bailey chaired the all-male judging panel and dismissed the choices the female judging panel made for the shortlist, claiming that they were too easily swayed by big names and past winners. The male panel, on the other hand, purely looked at the novels themselves and "how they matched the writers' ambitions," per Bailey's statement (Gibbons 2001). Surprisingly, the men chose novels that contained domestic subject matters while the women largely chose novels with supernatural elements in them. Usually, domestic literature is considered more suited to women's tastes while the men dominate in the readership of the sci-fi genre (Gibbons 2001). The two judging panels only agreed on one nomination on the shortlist that would eventually also win the Prize: Kate Grenville's *The Idea of Perfection* (1999).

The Prize edition of 2001 has demonstrated how differently men and women judge books. They focus on vastly different aspects and have different tastes. Hartley's study has proven that men and women both can contribute in a meaningful way to book reviewing, and that a Prize competition can truly benefit with a mixed jury. Since the Women's Prize allows exclusively women in its jury, a significant part of judging may get overlooked. Additionally, the Prize's goal to reach both men and women with the Prize could benefit, too, from a more inclusive, mixed jury.

4.3. Reception of the winning novels

It is a fact that the novels that win the Women's Prize for Fiction often generate

discussions. Comparable to any other award, not everyone will agree with the winner. With this particular award, though, there is an added element that could contribute to there being a perception in the reception that there is a ‘typical winner’ for the Prize. A Prize exclusively meant for women authors who are judged by an all-female judging panel may lead to the expectation that a winning novel is likely about feminist or feminine themes. To dive into this potential phenomenon, I will consider the reviews of three novels in particular that have provoked strong responses: *The Song of Achilles*, *The Glorious Heresies*, and *The Power*, winners of 2012, 2016 and 2017, respectively. The opinions that are expressed and where they might stem from will be discussed, with the arguments offering an insight into what elements cause a novel to be viewed as a ‘typical’ winner and what a unconventional one.

The Song of Achilles by Madeline Miller is a retelling of *The Iliad*. Sam Jordison, who organises an online reading club every month for *The Guardian*, collected the overwhelmingly negative comments from the participants of a club that discussed this novel. He noted that most of the complaints were about the almost juvenile plot, romance and writing style of the novel (Jordison 2013), even though Joanna Trollope, that year’s chair of the judging panel, commented the exact opposite by saying that the novel is a “more than worthy winner – original, passionate, inventive and uplifting. Homer would be proud of her” (“Madeline Miller wins” n.d.). Combined with the three pages of praise at the beginning of the novel (Jordison 2013), it reveals that there is a clear divide in how the general public reacted to this novel and how a large number of authors and critics responded. Noteworthy is that the general public called the novel out on its simplicity, while the critics praise its poetic language (2013).

The Glorious Heresies was the winner of 2016, and bookseller Frances Gertler from the Foyles bookshop predicted that not everyone would agree with the decision. She said it was a “brave choice ... by the least conventional and edgiest writer on the list, whose big, gritty and compelling novel about Ireland’s dark underbelly features a cast of alcoholics, drug dealers and prostitutes, leaving a trail of sex, violence and crime in their wake” (Flood 2016). Margaret Mountford, Chair of the judging panel that year, named the winner “a superbly original, compassionate novel that delivers insights into the very darkest of lives through humour and skilful storytelling” (Flood 2016). Author Lisa McInerney herself commented on her blog that when her novel was published, quite a few people told her how ‘male’ they thought the novel was, and that it was no coincidence that so many male authors put a quote on its cover. She asks the question whether

that was because the novel was perceived as too boisterous or too swear-y for women, or another reason. “Whatever it was that prompted these readers to tell me my novel had phantom testicles, it seemed that they were engaging with it first by concentrating on whether its narrative voice matched its author’s gender” (McInerney 2016).

In a later interview, she shared that she was surprised her novel was perceived as masculine despite, in her words, clear themes specific to women and motherhood. She saw it as people trying to be complimentary by praising her for stepping out of “the confines of your gender” and writing something tough (Beckerman 2017).

The Power by Naomi Alderman was already a success when it was first published, and Danuta Kean (2017a) from *The Guardian* predicted that the novel would be a popular winner because of it. Kean even suggests that this popular win could attract substantial attention to the Prize and their need for a new sponsor since Baileys wanted to stop their support as it now stood. Chair Tessa Ross said *The Power* would “put paid to recurrent accusations that writing by women is mired in the ‘domestic.’” She also stressed the diversity in settings and genres in the shortlist and that it proved that women’s writing is not just about ‘one aspect’ but could be about various themes. However, she did not believe that meant that the Prize was not necessary anymore, but should continue to exist as a celebration of women’s writing. (Kean 2017a). In Brown’s (2017) article Ross also said that all readers – both men and women, she stressed – would enjoy the novel from the very first page. In the same article, Alderman was quoted saying that prizes such as the Baileys are crucial for authors. She recalled that winning an Orange award for new writers a few years earlier was crucial for her career and that it makes a real difference for authors.

The difference in reception of these three novels reveals that a novel with clear feminist themes such as *The Power* is considered a logical and popular win, while the opposite, a ‘male’ novel such as *The Glorious Heresies*, is considered a unconventional and less popular win. *The Song of Achilles* on the other hand does not directly fall into either category and is a novel that has strongly divided opinions on its content and writing style among both professional critics and amateur ones.

4.4. The Women’s Prize for Fiction coverage

The status of the Women’s Prize for Fiction as one of the most significant literary awards in the UK is not necessarily reflected in where book reviews of the longlisted and shortlisted novels are published. A journal that includes reviews about nominated Man

Booker Prize novels for example does not necessarily include those of the Women's Prize of Fiction as well, or in the same capacity, as the analysis below will show. Another factor may be that male critics still largely outnumber female ones, as the 2017 count by Vida (2018) revealed.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will briefly consider three literary journals in the UK to determine whether reviews about Women's Prize for Fiction winners appear in them. I will check whether these spaces also include reviews of the winners of the Man Booker to compare. For the Women's Prize, I will search for reviews of the novels I discussed above. Since the Man Booker's winner of 2018, *Milkman* (2018) by Anna Burns, was also nominated for the Women's Prize for Fiction of 2019, I will skip that novel and search instead for reviews of the Man Booker Prize winners of 2017, 2016 and 2015, which are: *Lincoln in the Bardo* (2017) by George Saunders, *The Sellout* (2015) by Paul Beatty and *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (2014) by Marlon James, respectively.

The *Literary Review* was founded in 1979 and is based in London. It is published monthly and covers "the most important and interesting books published every month" ("Literary Review" n.d.), which makes the fact that all three of the Man Booker novels have a review in this journal and only Alderman as Women's Prize winner as well, sting.

The *London Review of Books* offers an even bleaker view with again all the Man Booker winners having a review in its database, but this time no reviews about the Women's Prize winners at all.

Finally, the *London Magazine* merely contains a review of Alderman's novel while all the other winners have received no consideration at all.

All magazines have in common that they are based in London and offer book reviews, but their contents vary considerably. In two journals, the Man Booker Prize winners are all represented while among the Women's Prize winners only Alderman's novel periodically represented. Although these findings are fairly limited, there is one careful conclusion that can be drawn from them: The Man Booker Prize winners are much more likely to be reviewed than Women's Prize ones. One aspect that may be considered is that of genre. Although both Prizes do not limit the eligible novels to those of a particular genre, it may be possible that literary journals only offer space for novels that fit firmly in the literary genre. This might offer an explanation for why *The Song of Achilles*, a retelling of Greek myth, is absent in these journals, but it does not justify why a novel about women gaining electrical superpowers is not viewed in the same regard.

When looking beyond the restricting scope of literary journals and magazines, it quickly becomes apparent that the Women's Prize for Fiction fares significantly better in spaces that are either specifically created for women's work or are included in an already women-focused space. The Women's Prize for Fiction novels are often discussed in online book clubs, for example in TOAST magazine and the magazine of Renegades of Chic. Both are online clothing shops for women, with TOAST having a magazine that features books reviews, recipes, travel stories and more. Almost all of the reviews there are about novels written by women, though they also review a few male authors in connection to the Man Booker Prize. Renegades of Chic, which is all about "celebrating amazing women," as the website states, has a similar magazine with book reviews. As a matter of fact, it has thus far really only reviewed one single book, which was the 2016 winner *The Power* by Naomi Alderman.

To compare, the Man Booker Prize is documented each year in the *Sewanee Review* by Merritt Moseley. He reviews the shortlisted novels and discusses all the events that have happened surrounding the Prize that year and comments on them (Moseley 2019). The Women's Prize for Fiction does not receive the same attention in any journal, neither by Moseley nor anyone else.

There is substantial evidence that the Women's Prize is more often featured in magazines and journals already focused on subjects surrounding women, as shown above. The Man Booker Prize has much broader eligibility rules, and therefore is naturally featured in more varied journals and other spaces for reviews and discussions. The Booker, therefore, appears to have significantly more symbolic capital than the Women's Prize for Fiction, but more research is needed to draw a definitive conclusion on this matter.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter in general has painted a broad picture of the reception of the Women's Prize for Fiction. From brands to controversies and book reviews, all discussed aspects illustrate that the Prize is not without its obstacles, and that the restricting women-only rule is not merely contested by the public, but now also by the Board itself. The next chapter will offer a synthesis of the findings of this thesis and an attempt to provide a solution for the Prize to strengthen its motto of 'Written by women. For everyone' and the Prize's prestige.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis set out to determine whether the Women's Prize for Fiction's motto, "Written by women. For everyone," is one that is reflected in both the branding of the Prize and its reception. The Women's Prize for Fiction appears to be under pressure from multiple sides. The choice to include a non-binary transgender author on the longlist of 2019 means that the rule of only women being eligible for the Prize has been disregarded by the Board itself. The consequence of this is that the Prize's motto of "Written by women. For Everyone" is now not only contested in the second sentence, which I have explored in this thesis, but in the first sentence as well. Another name change of the Prize could remedy the problem in one fell swoop, but either way, the fundamental principles of the Prize as one being for women writers are changed forever. As of the date of the 16th of June 2019, the rules on the Women's Prize for Fiction still state that authors are required to be female to be eligible for the Prize.

The chapters on the branding and reception of the Prize have offered various insights into the Prize. The logo analysis of the brands that sponsor or have sponsored the Women's Prize for Fiction in the past revealed a strong mix of MBP and FBP elements. The finding of Baileys having both FBP and MBP elements in all four categories appears to indicate that the brand attempting to appeal both to men and women, but it fails in doing so. Baileys is the only brand that is clearly associated with femininity by the public because of its product, indicating that its connection to the Women's Prize for Fiction undermines the Prize's aims of being a serious literary Prize aimed at 'everyone', and not exclusively women.

The motivations the sponsors name for sponsoring the Women's Prize for Fiction and their possible underlying motivations demonstrate that many of them profit considerably from the sponsorship. Economic capital for the Prize is exchanged for symbolic capital for the sponsor, and the fact that it is a Prize exclusively for women means that the sponsor can exploit that to attract more women to their brand. They can attempt to close the gap between men and women in their company as the people behind NatWest have proven with their campaign to attract more women to their bank. Their statements reflect this focus on women, and do not mention the aim of the Prize as being one for everyone.

The controversies that have emerged over the years in connection to the Women's Prize for Fiction have provided the Prize with a substantial amount of news coverage, or journalistic capital as English coined it. A substantial number of those controversies are concerned with

the women-only rule. While that specific element guarantees the Prize a great deal of attention in the news, it does show friction with the ‘for everyone’ part of their motto.

The three literary journals have demonstrated that Man Booker Prize winners are more likely to earn a review in them than Women’s Prize winners, but more research is needed to form a definitive conclusion. A tentative claim that may already be made with the findings at hand, is that the Man Booker Prize appears to have more symbolic capital than the Women’s Prize and therefore is featured in more literary journals.

The findings of these thesis support the idea that the motto of the Prize is lacking in two areas. The first area is the part of the motto that states the novels that are eligible for the Prize are ‘written by women’. This part was undermined when the judging panel included a non-binary trans author on the longlist of the 2019 edition of the Prize. The decision led to plans to change the rules of the Prize to include all gender identities except male, but this development casts doubt on the whole foundation of the Prize. As Parsons argued in her article (2019), would the Prize even consider including a person who is biologically male but identifies as non-binary?

One solution that may solve the disparity between the Prize as being one *by* women, but *for* everyone, might be to have judging panels with both male and female judges. As the 2001 edition of the Prize revealed, male and female judges simply regard novels in different manners, and their combined efforts could lead to more varied and more generally accepted longlists and shortlists. Such a jury will better represent the ‘for everyone’ part of the Prize’s motto and make it more prestigious while still maintaining the ‘written by women’ part.

There is much more to be said on the topic of the Women’s Prize for Fiction and women writers in general. The position of women in the literary field and how it has changed over the years is an interesting and rich topic to delve into – especially when the influence women-only prizes such as the Women’s Prize for Fiction have on this subject is considered. Another study, possibly a master thesis, could observe the reviews of more winning novels than the ones I have looked at. That thesis could then offer a better conclusion on there being a general perception of a ‘typical’ winner of the Prize and what the implications are for the prestige of the Prize. My initial plan was to search for such a typical winner, but the scope of the bachelor thesis did not offer enough space for that idea.

The amount of symbolic capital the Women’s Prize for Fiction has in comparison to, for

example, The Man Booker Prize, can provide further insights into how these two Prizes are received and what the implications of that are for literary prize culture in general. That research could lead to a more in-depth view than the one I could offer in this thesis.

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