

Title	Structure over style: collaborative authorship and the revival of literary capitalism
Authors	Fuller, Simon;O'Sullivan, James
Publication date	2017
Original Citation	Fuller, S. and O'Sullivan, J. (2017) 'Structure over Style: Collaborative Authorship and the Revival of Literary Capitalism', Digital Humanities Quarterly, 11 (1). http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/11/1/000286/000286.html
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/11/1/000286/000286.html
Rights	© 2017 The Authors, Published by The Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations, Affiliated with: Literary and Linguistic Computing. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. - https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/
Download date	2026-08-28 23:52:24
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/4269

DHQ: Digital Humanities Quarterly

Preview

2017

Volume 11 Number 1

Structure over Style: Collaborative Authorship and the Revival of Literary Capitalism

Simon Fuller <simonfuller9_at_gmail_dot_com>, National University of Ireland, MaynoothJames O'Sullivan <j_dot_c_dot_osullivan_at_sheffield_dot_ac_dot_uk>, University of Sheffield

Abstract

James Patterson is the world's best-selling living author, but his approach to writing is heavily criticised for being too commercially driven — in many respects, he is considered the master of the airport novel, a highly-productive source of commuter fiction. A former marketing professional, Patterson uses his business acumen to drive sales of his novels, which are largely written in conjunction with lesser-known co-authors. Using stylometry, this paper analyses the extent to which Patterson actually contributes to the writing of his novels, situating his process within the context of literary capitalism and the novel as a force of modernity.

Introduction

James Patterson is among the world's best-selling living authors, but his approach to literature is often derided. Patrick Anderson of *The Washington Post* labels his work as "sick, sexist, sadistic and subliterate", while Stephen King describes Patterson, quite frankly, as "a terrible writer" [Mahler 2010]. Patterson's background is in marketing, and indeed he makes unapologetic use of advertising techniques to increase sales. His writing style is largely considered to be simplistic; his subject matter excessively emotive. Moreover, he hires collaborators, who, according to our analysis, complete much of the actual writing. However, as we will describe in this paper, it is in such a context that we can situate Patterson as working within structures of literary production indissociable from the capitalist forces which drive most literary production. His re-discovery and refinement of the novel's popular traditions is accompanied by a choice of style and subject matter that make his works exemplary of the experience of leisure-time in late capitalism. Patterson's particular achievement is to be both author and producer; creator, brand, and corporation. Patterson is, in many respects, as much a trademark as he is a writer. His name is a stamp of approval. What does this mean for our constructions of "the author"? Does Patterson's name on the cover mean that a particular novel is written *by* Patterson, or that it has been *approved* by Patterson? Is his name an indicator of the style of a novel, or a gesture towards its structure and content? In our stylometric analyses, we examine the extent to which Patterson actively collaborates on the writing of his novels, exploring his approach in the context of the wider culture industry and its capitalist modes of literary production. Patterson appropriates and manipulates the economic, social, and industrial forces which have shaped the form and content of the novel since its ascent in the eighteenth-century. Informing our discussion with computer-assisted analyses, the focus of which is Patterson, we problematise the relationship between the novel and style.

1

Defining the Novel

There is disagreement on the precise origins of the novel, with some suggesting its roots be traced back some two thousand years [Doody 1997]. Typically, however, scholars accept Ian Watt's assertion that the novel is an eighteenth-century literary form, emerging as a response to romantic prose. It is worth noting that while much of the literature we reference focuses on the evolution of the British novel, wherein other scholars discuss the form

2

as a more global genre, we see little distinction, in the context of this study, between the novels of American writers like Patterson and those of French authors such as Dumas. Watt connects the rise of the novel to the forces of modernity, particularly the emergence of the "commercial and industrial classes" [Watt 2001, 61], as well as an increase in secular thinking and individualism. John Richetti agrees, commenting in *The English Novel in History*, that early fiction marks "an important stage in the fashioning and a key tool for the understanding of this evolving entity, the socially constructed self" [Richetti 1999, 4]. Richetti further notes that the "expectations for narrative that came to dominate the minds of readers in those years, as well as the popularity of such narratives, may be related to larger intellectual and social changes" [Richetti 2002, 2]. J. Paul Hunter presents early readers of the novel as being young, a product of most novels being "about young people on the verge of making important life decisions about love or career or both" [Hunter 2002, 20]. Crucial to this study, Hunter outlines how "novelists repeatedly set themselves the task of addressing situations in which large numbers of readers had a vital interest" [Hunter 2002, 20]. A dominant caricature was present at the time, Samuel Johnson describing readers of the form as young, ignorant, idle time wasters [Hunter 2002, 20–21], "not traditionally educated" [Hunter 2002, 20], a contention that Hunter refutes: "The time to read had to be stolen from somewhere when life was lived under such difficult and precarious conditions" [Hunter 2002, 21]. This tendency reverberates in the popular contemporary novel, where the primary objective for authors is often the provision of entertainment. Hunter attributes the eighteenth-century rise of the novel to readers' need for "pleasure":

... the joy of escape from drudgery or routine; the pleasure of a story well told and a plot carefully built; satisfaction in seeing outcomes (and even solutions) in the recognizable situations of daily life; identification with characters who faced (and often mastered) difficult situations; and, perhaps, the recognition of a part of oneself in a fictional other who might take a different course or come to a different end — as well as the more traditional pleasures (carried over from romances) of compensatory fantasy in contemplating people quite unlike oneself. [Hunter 2002, 22]

The power of this fantasy emanates from the "combination of romance and formal realism", a feat which the novel accomplished "more insidiously than any previous fiction" [Watt 2001, 205]. Further growth in commerce led to an increased market for print, but by the same token, enhanced capacity for production: "Instead of a luxury affordable only by the privileged and educated few, books and especially novels were part of the revolution in the availability of consumer goods that changed the nature of daily life for a large part of the population in Britain as the eighteenth century progressed" [Richetti 2002, 6]. While access to the form has increased exponentially, its core traits have remained intact: "the popular demand in fiction is always for a mixed form, a romantic novel just romantic enough for the reader to project his libido on the hero and his anima on the heroine, and just novel enough to keep these projections in a familiar world" [Frye 2006, 99]. As the novel became increasingly saturated by theory, and influenced by social movements, each generation saw varying transformations to the form. As Marthe Robert aptly notes, "its boundaries fluctuate in all directions" [Robert 2000, 58]. What has remained a constant throughout is the continued democratisation of reading, a movement which has often been connected to a perceived deterioration in literary quality. This is where one of the primary concerns of our examination takes hold, upon the tension between plot and style, and whether or not, in such a context, style tells us little more than who completed the actual writing, as opposed to who devised the narrative framework into which such words are poured. It is difficult to argue which activity is more essential without falling into the largely unhelpful binary of "substance over style". Saying this, and adages aside, the novel has always been about plot, about reader-driven content designed to obscure social realities under romantic elements and sensational details. Privileging style is the exception, not the rule, and is limited to specific literary epochs, such as high modernism. Patterson, as we will see, takes the contrary position to the stylists — not only do his novels privilege fast-paced plot over character and situational development, but his writing method seems to have been reduced down to providing an overview of the plot which someone else, to whatever little extent, then fleshes out. The relationship between plot and style has undergone increased strain as a product of contemporary writing practices, more susceptible to capitalist modes of production than ever before.

3

Brand-managed authors

The main subject of this study is James Patterson. At the time of writing, he is the world's most successful living author, outselling J. K. Rowling, Dan Brown, and John Grisham combined [Wood 2009]. Between 2006 and 2010, one in every seventeen novels sold in the United States was authored by Patterson [Mahler 2010]. He has achieved this feat by publishing copious numbers of reasonably successful novels rather than a select few blockbusters. His most successful release, 1993's *Along Came A Spider*, only reached number two on the bestseller charts. Its five million print-run is small compared to that of say, Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*; however, by 2014 he had published in excess of 100 novels.

4

Patterson wrote his first thriller in 1976, but before the 1990s his main employment and source of income lay in marketing. He worked at J. Walter Thompson, where he became its youngest ever creative director and eventually chief executive of North American operations [Mahler 2010]. His marketing continues to inform his approach to promotion and writing. In fact, the two processes, Patterson's writing and his marketing, are somewhat indistinguishable. For *Along Came A Spider*, he took the unusual step of using television advertising [Wroe 2013], paying for it out of his own pocket [Deighton 2006, 8]. Since then, he has taken control of his own marketing from his publisher, Little, Brown and Co., a division of Hachette [Mahler 2010]. Two editors and three full-time Hachette employees, plus assistants, work exclusively for Patterson. According to Michael Pietsch, his editor and publisher, "Jim is at the very least co-publisher of his own books" [Deighton 2006, 5]. Patterson, in this sense, is bigger than his publisher. In outranking his publisher, he differs significantly from many forms of commercial fiction. Mills and Boon, for instance, employ writers to create romance novels that conform to a limited horizon of reader expectation. Watt describes how in the eighteenth-century, the bookseller-publishers of Grub street used to employ writers, often paying by the word, to churn out novels and translate works from French [Watt 2001, 55]. Commercial fiction has always been driven by the demands of its readership. What makes Patterson different, is that he exerts personal control over the publishing apparatus which seek to match literary content to the market. Patterson brings a new level of rigour to marketing within the publishing industry. This is acknowledged by Larry Kirschbaum, former head of Little, Brown: "Until the last 15 years or so, the thought that you could mass-merchandise authors had always been resisted... Jim was at the forefront of changing that" [Mahler 2010].

5

What Patterson shares with the writers of Mills and Boon novels, the forgotten eighteenth-century hack pieces, and the dime novels and penny dreadfuls of the nineteenth-century, is that he writes simple, populist works with no pretensions of academic literary quality, designed to sell. But, like the publishers of Grub Street, he has a greater number and variety of books to sell than most authors can produce. As we will discuss, he achieves this in part by hiring collaborators. Patterson therefore has properties of the traditional popular author, properties of the publishing house, as well as those of the modern marketing executive. If the development of the form and content of popular fiction is explainable to a large extent by the socio-economic factors that drive its production,^[1] then Patterson is in the unusual position of possessing an overview of these factors, and writing and commissioning fiction accordingly. As such, economic forces do not simply shape his work externally or deterministically, but are put to play by him from the outset to determine a written product that will be popular, marketable, and replicable. It is said of Dumas, père, to whom we will return, that he "did not exist at all, he was only a myth, a trademark invented by a syndicate of editors to dupe the public" [Lucas-Dubreton n.d.]. As already noted, Patterson is himself a trademark, a stamp of approval that is more indicative of a novel's structure than it is its style.

6

Reader-Driven Content

In an effort to broaden his following, Patterson has commissioned his own studies into the demographics of his audience [Deighton 2006, 5]. Such research has even directly influenced the content of his work — in one case, in order to make up for a lag of sales on the West coast of the United States, where John Grisham was the dominant author, he decided to locate his second thriller series, *The Women's Murder Club*, in San Francisco [Mahler 2010]. In a generally complimentary assessment, Jonathan Mahler says of Patterson's TV campaign for his breakthrough work, *Along Came A Spider*: "It's entirely possible, even quite likely, that without those ads, *Along Came a Spider* never would have made the bestseller list, and that James Patterson would now be just another thriller writer" [Mahler 2010]. The problem with such an appraisal is not that it ascribes Patterson's success to his marketing alone, but that it considers Patterson's literary work and the surrounding marketing as

7

separate in the first place. Rather, the literary and commercial facets of his work reinforce each other to the point where, as in the case of his choice of location for *The Women's Murder Club* series, they are indistinct.

When producing a novel, Patterson uses about a dozen readers as a soundboard for the work in progress, making alterations as they point to the "weaker" elements of a story [Deighton 2006, 5]. His writing is designed to arrest readers' attention, and to encourage them to buy into a series of novels, typically based around a primary, re-occurring character or characters. As Nicholas Wroe explains: "His prose is doggedly functional with short sentences and chapters relentlessly working to propel the plot" [Wroe 2013]. His use of short chapters, says Mahler, "creates a lot of half-blank pages; his books are, in a very literal sense, page-turners" [Mahler 2010]. The development of this approach is premeditated. Patterson himself describes how, after his earlier, less successful works, he is "less interested in sentences now and more interested in stories" [Mahler 2010]. Of his first work, *The Thomas Berryman Number*, he says that he "couldn't have supported [himself] on that kind of book", and that his writing is now "very self-consciously commercial" [Wood 2009]. In developing a formula that has seen him become the world's most successful writer, Patterson's new releases often do not receive press reviews, but they attract a large number of reader reviews across online media. Here, it is quickly apparent that his works are praised by readers for the qualities he has intentionally fostered. An excerpt from an Amazon review for *I, Alex Cross* reads: "This is well written — using Patterson's usual quick and easy chapters," evidently equating brevity with quality. Another review for the same work concludes: "The thriller is written in short chapters, which I like, and the font is large enough to make reading enjoyable. The prose is clear, succinct, and paints a picture of full-blown evil and terror. A fast read."^[2]

That Patterson should let the reader instruct the form and content of his work is not a perversion of the proper order of literary creation. Rather, it seems to be constitutive of the rise to prominence of the novel in the modern era. For Watt, the relative democratisation of readership in the eighteenth-century encouraged writers to write "very explicitly and even tautologically" for the audience, while also, as we will see with Patterson, writing quickly in order to increase business throughput [Watt 2001, 56]. Thus, a simplification of writing form was a defining characteristic of the development of the modern, popular novel. Patterson also seems to be drawing from contemporary cinema and television. The cinematic narrative is constructed in the editor's lab out of a patchwork of sounds and images; for Walter Benjamin, the screen actor's performance, and her experience of it, "is assembled from many individual performances" [Benjamin 2002c, 112]. This mosaic-like structure is echoed in Patterson's short paragraphs and chapters which lurch the protagonist from crisis to crisis. As such, he has further simplified the reading process by bringing its narrative presentation into line with a reader whose attention is shaped by film and television, and the truncated and informal writing style of the Internet.

In a short early article on a genre of German nineteenth-century literature, Benjamin asks: "Chambermaid's romances? Since when are works of art categorized according to the class which consumes them? Unfortunately, they are not, or all too seldom" [Benjamin 2005, 225]. Rather than being classified otherwise, such works have generally not received any attention at all: "this entire body of literature has been despised for as long as the superstitious belief in 'absolute art' has existed" [Benjamin 2005, 225]. For Watt, appraising perhaps the first modern instance of the novel's dominance in eighteenth-century England, this profession, which "in the eighteenth century probably constituted the largest single occupational group" [Watt 2001, 47], also shaped the content of the contemporaneous literature, most famously in the eponymous heroine of *Pamela*. Indeed, he goes on to argue, the long dominant, and still prescient, themes of courtship, and marrying above class, have their origin in the preponderance of women readers of the novel, particularly from the lower, middle, and servant classes [Watt 2001, 148–149, 154, 163–164]. Patterson's novels, also with a predominantly female readership [Deighton 2006, 5], span many genres, but largely consist of a standard thriller formula, for instance serial-killers and their opposing crime fighters, the latter juggling, usually successfully, their work with their family commitments, weaving contemporary problems of conflicting work-family demands with wider social fears about terror and criminality — for an example, see *Along Came a Spider*.

The *form* of his novels also appears to be moulded by contemporary experience. In particular, his work is perhaps best described as "commuter fiction". Nicholas Paumgarten describes how the average time for a commute has significantly increased [Paumgarten 2007]. As a result, reading has increasingly become one of those pursuits that can pass the time of a commute. For example, a truck driver describes how "he had never

8

9

10

11

read any of Patterson's books but that he had listened to every single one of them on the road" [Mahler 2010]. A number of online reader reviews also describe Patterson's writing in terms of their commutes. One such reviewer of Patterson's *The Postcard Killers* directly relates the writing style to the realities of modern transitional life: "As a consequence of such short chapters I whizzed through this book in under two hours and it was a fairly decent thriller and a good way to spend time commuting to work."^[3] With large print, and chapters of two or three pages, Patterson's works are constructed to fit between the stops on a metro line.

We believe that, here, Patterson again exemplifies traits characteristic of the rise of the novel. Disposable, leisurely art is, for Benjamin, the dominant aesthetic form of late modernity: "Just as the art of the Greeks was geared toward lasting, so the art of the present is geared toward being worn out" [Benjamin 2002d, 142]. To greatly summarise Benjamin's position regarding the novel, this disposability has its origins in the isolation of the subject, who no longer has access to the continuity of communal experience. The novelist and reader are exemplary for Benjamin of the crisis in experience that is symptomatic of late modernity. The novelist, for their part, "... has secluded himself. The birthplace of the novel is the individual in isolation ..." [Benjamin 2002b, 146]. The reader of the novel is also "isolated, more so than any other reader ... In this solitude of his ... he destroys, swallows up the material as a fire devours a log in a fireplace" [Benjamin 2002d, 156]. Benjamin suggests that this reflects a wholesale "change in the structure of their experience", as evidenced in the experience of navigating a city, which he directly describes in terms of Marx's theory of alienation of the worker in industrial production [Benjamin 2003a, 314]. The pedestrian navigates through the city "in a series of shocks and collisions", corresponding their movements to the dictates of cars and traffic lights. They are thus subjected by technology to "a complex kind of training" [Benjamin 2003a, 328]. Modern subjects have "adapted themselves to machines" to the extent that their experience is primarily that of "a reaction to shocks" [Benjamin 2003a, 329]. Traversing the city, the subject is isolated from others, as well as alienated from herself. Benjamin cites George Simmel on public transport: "Before the development of buses, railroads, and trams in the nineteenth century, people had never been in situations where they had to look at one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one another" [Benjamin 2003b, 20].

In advanced technological society, shared, enduring experience (*Erfahrung*) gives way to "shock experience", whether that of the "passerby in the crowd", "the isolated 'experiences' of the worker at his machine" [Benjamin 2003a, 329], or the film actor, whose performance is split "into a series of episodes capable of being assembled" in the editing room [Benjamin 2002c, 113]. Film is thus seen as giving modernity aesthetic form: "in film, perception conditioned by shock was established as a formal principle" [Benjamin 2003a, 328]. We have discussed how Patterson aligns his work to the aesthetic expectations of the subject in the age of television and cinema. But Patterson's work also responds directly to the shock experience of modernity which was formalised in cinema. In their short segments, his books are shaped to the disruptive punctuations of urban passage which they reflect and constitute.

By understanding the pervading social forces of occidental late capitalism, and by anticipating the nature of everyday human experience within this network of systems, Patterson produces novels which have the phantasms of modern life inscribed upon their pages, and the fractured reality of modern experience carved out as their form.

Collaboration & the Absence of Style

A much-noted aspect of Patterson's approach is his use of collaborators for his novels. In 2000 he published three books, all of which were successful, and this prompted him to focus upon collaboration in order to dominate the market [Wroe 2013]. As a result of this process, he produced 13 distinct publications in 2012 and the same number in 2013. The co-authors are directly employed by Patterson, assigned to a particular genre or series, and paid out of Patterson's own pocket [Mahler 2010] at what is rumoured to be a flat rate with bonuses and no royalties [Wood 2009]. For many, such as Gross and De Jonge who feature in our stylometric analysis, it has provided a launching pad for their solo careers. While Patterson does not like the term "boss", he concedes that he is the senior figure in any collaboration, and defends his position by way of employee satisfaction: "nobody quits" [Beard 2012], and "nobody asks for a raise" [Blum 2012]. Indeed, he primarily assumes a managerial role in the creative process itself: "I write an outline for a book. The outlines are very

12

13

14

15

specific about what each scene is supposed to accomplish. I get pages from [the collaborator] every two weeks, and then I re-write them. That's the way everything works. Sometimes I'll just give notes..." [Blum 2012]. Patterson appears to be part creator, part editor, and also part guarantor of satisfaction — a sort of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* stamp of quality. In his own words: "my name on the cover is the assurance of a good read" [Deighton 2006, 2].

Defending his process, Patterson points out that collaboration has also been used in other creative outlets, such as television [Wroe 2013], newspapers, cinema, and even the masonic guilds behind the medieval cathedrals [Beard 2012]. In employing collaborative methods, Patterson has in fact aligned novel writing with the creative norm in contemporary culture. As Hobsbawm says of the late twentieth-century: "Creation was now essentially cooperative rather than individual, technological rather than manual" [Hobsbawm 1994, 519]. A crucial juncture in the establishment of this modern paradigm, and of its rise in the field of professional writing, was the introduction of the producer system in early Hollywood cinema, wherein the producer takes precedence over the director, overseeing a process in which labour is divided along lines established in heavy industry, with the same goals of increased efficiency and profit. The task of screenwriting is further sub-divided along these lines: "By the early teens, American studios not only had writing departments but also sub-specialties within those departments" [Thompson 1993, 387].

16

Some commentators have described Patterson's successful application of these methods to novel writing as unprecedented. Mahler, for instance, states:

17

Books, at least in their traditional conception, are the product of one person's imagination and sensibility, rendered in a singular, unreproducible style and voice. Some novelists have tried using co-authors, usually with limited success. Certainly none have taken collaboration to the level Patterson has... [Mahler 2010]

But Patterson's approach is not as new as Mahler claims. Division of labour was in fact adopted in literature from at least the mid-nineteenth-century. Benjamin frequently discusses the growing application of industrial methods on nineteenth-century French literature as the commercial returns for literature increased. As such, the French novel, for Benjamin, appears to build upon the commercial origin of the British novel, industrializing the already commercial form. The most commercially successful writers of the era included Sue, Scribe, and Dumas, each of which employed collaborators in order to increase output [Benjamin 2003c, 14–15]. Benjamin cites Kreysig, who describes the playwright Eugene Scribe in terms which mirror accounts of Patterson's method:

18

...he transferred the principle of division of labour from the workshops of tailors, cabinet makers, and manufacturers of pen nibs to the ateliers of the dramatic artists... Scribe chose the subject, sketched out the main lines of the plot ... and his apprentices would compose the appropriate dialogue or verses. ...their name would appear on the title page (next to that of the firm) as a just recompense, until the best would break away and begin turning out dramatical works of their own invention, perhaps also in their turn recruiting new assistants. [Benjamin 2003b, 671–672]

Dumas took simultaneous contracts for serialised novels from different journals [Benjamin 2003b, 585], once occupying "almost simultaneously, with three of his novels, the feuilleton sections of *La Presse*, *Le Constitutionnel*, and *Le Journal des débats*" [Benjamin 2003b, 760]. He designated the writing task to others in order to keep up with demand. As a caricature puts it: "It was said that Dumas employed a whole army of poor writers in his cellars" while he drank champagne with actresses [Benjamin 2003b, 15]. He was accused by de Mirecourt of running "a factory of novels" and the *Revue des Mondes* questioned whether he even knew the names of all the titles published in his name [Benjamin 2003c, 15]. De Mirecourt writes: "his novels are by Maquet, Fiorention, Meurice, Malefille, or Paul Lacroix ... [he] dares, monster that he is, to sign his name alone." As a consequence of this criticism, Dumas was obliged to publicly recognise Maquet and others as collaborators [Lucas-Dubreton n.d.]. In his defence, Dumas sought credit for providing so much employment: "In twenty years, he said, he had written 400 novels and 35 plays. He had created jobs for 8160 people — proofreaders, typesetters, machinists, wardrobe mistresses" [Benjamin 2002a, 276].

19

Marx and Engels, in a certain sense, approved of Dumas and Scribe, in that they saw their adoption of industry techniques as formally aligning popular culture with the modes of production. In *The German Ideology*, they favourably compare French popular fiction to the German, paying particular attention to the latter's appropriation of the division of labour:

20

In proclaiming the uniqueness of work in science and art, Stirner adopts a position far inferior to that of the bourgeoisie. At the present time it has already been found necessary to organize this 'unique' activity. Horace Vernet would not have had time to paint even a tenth of his pictures if he regarded them as works which 'only this Unique person is capable of producing'. In Paris, the great demand for vaudevilles and novels brought about the organization of work for their production, organisation which at any rate yields something better than its 'unique' competitors in Germany. [Marx & Engels 2001, 108]

Thus, by employing collaborators and dividing the writing process in order to increase profit, Patterson re-establishes techniques which dominated popular fiction in nineteenth-century Paris. While these writers were often derided for this, Marx and Engels perceived that, by employing the principles of division of labour which defined working existence, the collaborative approach generated mass entertainment that was pleasurable, disposable, and efficient to create. The culturally dominant forms of mass entertainment were thence increasingly those which adopted the principle of division of labour: in cinema, and then television, in the publisher-brand Mills and Boon novels in which the individual authors were expendable and interchangeable, and then in Patterson, who has become one of the world's most commercially successful authors by using hierarchical collaboration to launch multiple bestsellers each year. By drawing on established cinematic archetypes of plot to write the kind of suspense which people expect, and by employing a simple, punchy format, Patterson has devised a commodity which is amenable to replication. As such, he displays the primary motivation which has driven the production of the novel since the eighteenth-century Grub Street booksellers began employing writers to fashion *Pamela*-esque romances — the drive to meet commercial demand [Watt 2001, 47].

21

Stylometric Analysis

Gaby Wood comments in *The Guardian* that the sentences in Patterson's novel "are not designed to be lingered over" "they are more or less all plot", she argues [Wood 2009]. To his credit, Patterson has been very open in describing how his novels are produced. This paper seeks to further elaborate on this process, using computational stylistics to produce statistically valid indicators of the amount of actual writing that Patterson contributes before deeming a novel worthy of his brand. This information will allow us to better understand the role of brand-managed authors like Patterson in the creative process, and indeed, how they are situated within the context of the novel as a form of literary capitalism.

22

We evaluate the relative contributions of Patterson and two of his collaborators using versions of Burrow's Delta, a widely-used lexical measure for English texts [Burrows 2002]. We selected the collaborators Peter de Jonge and Andrew Gross for this investigation, largely as a consequence of access to appropriate single-author samples. Patterson, by his own accounts, allocates most of the actual writing to his junior partners. We formed the working hypothesis that the collaborative novels would be stylometrically more similar to texts written primarily by Patterson's co-authors, rather than to any of the novels attributed to Patterson alone. This study is based on the premise that the lexical features we have selected are effective in distinguishing the sentence writer over the architect of the plot. This correlates with much of the field's existing research. Patrick Juola, for instance, demonstrates that in attempted forgeries, the lexical signature of the forger overrides the semantic content which might associate it with the impersonated party [Juola 2013]. Our second hypothesis was that Patterson's contribution would be strongest at critical moments in the text. Given the plot-driven genre, we believed that these would typically be present at the beginning and end of the novels.

22

To test our first hypothesis, we employ a "Bootstrap Consensus Tree" cluster analysis over maximum frequency words ranging from 100 to 1000, in intervals of 100, with the Burrow's Delta metric, using the *Stylo* package for R [Eder & Rybicki 2013] [Eder, Kestemont, & Rybicki 2013]. We use a consensus strength of 0.5, meaning that we formed a tree showing proximity wherever this occurred in 50% or more of the 10 maximum frequency

24

clusterings described [Wilkinson 1996]. For our second hypothesis, we use the Rolling Delta technique [Rybicki, Kestemont, & Hoover 2013] [van Dalen-Oskam & van Zundert 2007] [Hoover 2011]. To provide a general intuitive description of this method, Burrow's Delta distances are measured between the collaborative text and single-author texts for each participating author. However, distances are measured to "windows" of the collaborative text, allowing for estimation as to which sections carry the stylistic fingerprint of one contributor over another. Sample single-author tests are then plotted over the baseline of the collaborative text, where greater proximity to the baseline indicates greater stylistic similarity, as defined by the Delta distance metric.

A more robust study of this topic would need to assess Patterson's contribution to the abstract entity which is the plot of the works we have examined. We did make an attempt at this, computationally measuring the frequency of action verbs across a text.^[4] The expectation was, considering the genre, that there would be significant spikes at particular points in the novel. Our hope was there would be some noticeable trends, which did occur, across some of the Patterson only novels, as opposed to the co-authored texts, which presented far more variation. This would suggest that there is something significant in our results, yet, we are not in a position to reasonably conclude that we are detecting an authorial fingerprint, rather than just structures common to this particular genre. It would be interesting, however, to return to this aspect of our analysis at a further point with a more conclusive methodology.

In this paper, we examine the following collaborative texts:

Patterson & De Jonge:

Beach House (2003)

Beach Road (2006)

Patterson & Gross:

2nd Chance (2002)

3rd Degree (2004)

Judge and Jury (2006)

Patterson & Karp:

Kill Me If You Can (2011)

NYPD Red (2012)

Our solo texts, by author, are as follows:

DeJonge:

Shadows Still Remain (2009)

Buried On Avenue B (2012)

Gross:

The Dark Tide (2008)

Don't Look Twice (2009)

Killing Hour (2011)

15 Seconds (2012)

No Way Back 2013)

For Patterson, we used this fixed set of nine solo works:

First to Die (2001)

Four Blind Mice (2002)

The Lake House (2003)

London Bridges (2004)

Maximum Ride: The Angel Experiment (2005)

Maximum Ride: Saving The World And Other Extreme Sports (2007)

I, Alex Cross (2009)
Fang (2010)
Nevermore (2012)

The following visualisation displays our bootstrap consensus tree over the entire dataset:

34

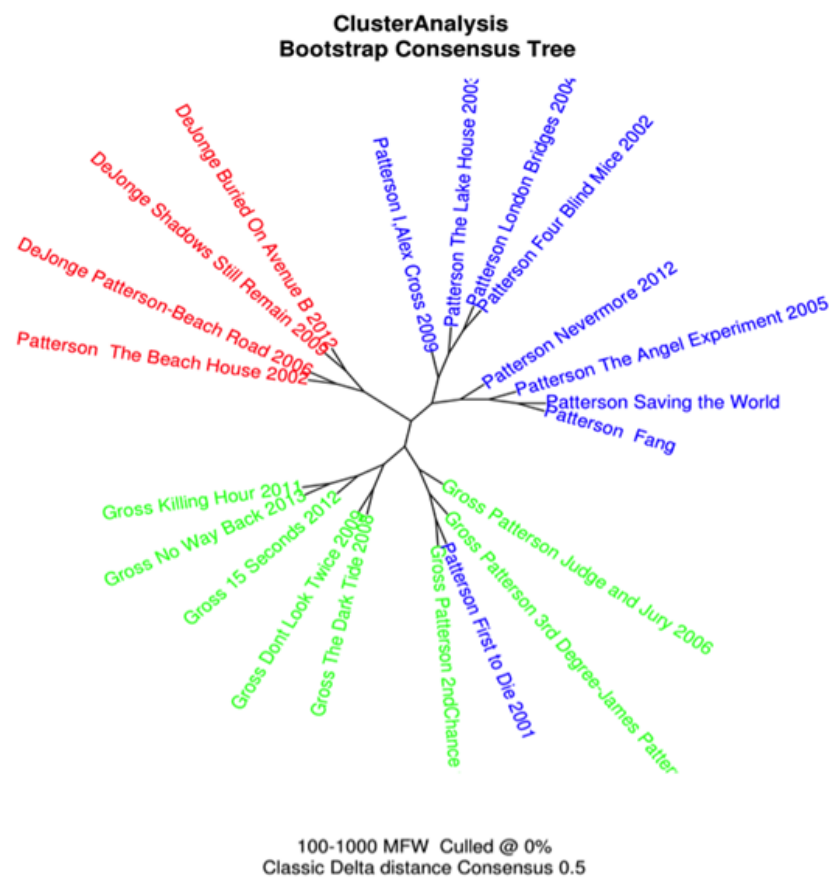


Figure 1.

As predicted, the collaborative works all cluster with the respective junior writer. Within both the De Jonge and Gross clusters, the collaborative works form a distinct sub-cluster. Within the Patterson cluster, the *Maximum Ride* series of novels are separated from another cluster consisting of Alex Cross novels and the Patterson novel, *The Lake House*. One surprise result is that *First to Die*, a solo Patterson text, is clustered with the subsequent works in *The Women's Murder Club* series, which he wrote with Andrew Gross. This could simply represent a limitation of the Delta metric over these texts, or alternatively, it could indicate that Gross was so influenced by the particular style that Patterson manifested in this work that he imitated it more exactly than Patterson managed in any of the other works under examination. A third possibility is that the new collaborative series, *The Women's Murder Club*, opened with a purported solo Patterson work, when it was in fact a co-authored novel.

35

Our full study comprised Rolling Deltas for all collaborative texts, under a number of different settings. For the purpose of this abstract we include just two Rolling Delta studies, *First to Die* and its sequel in the series, *Second Chance*:

36

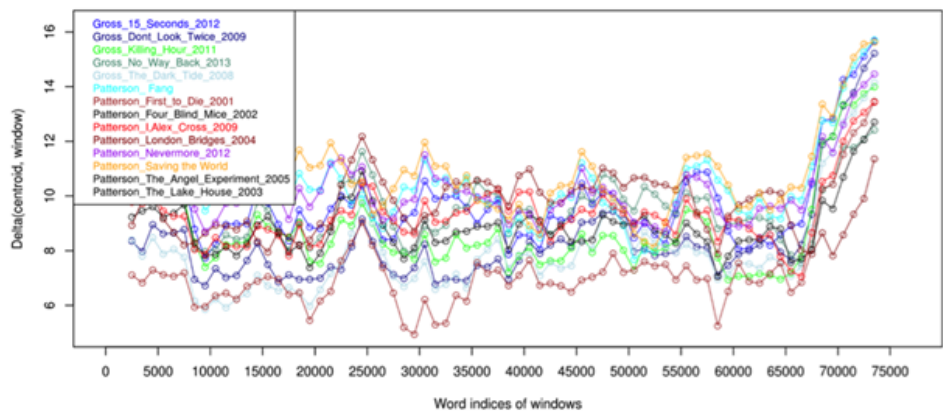


Figure 2.

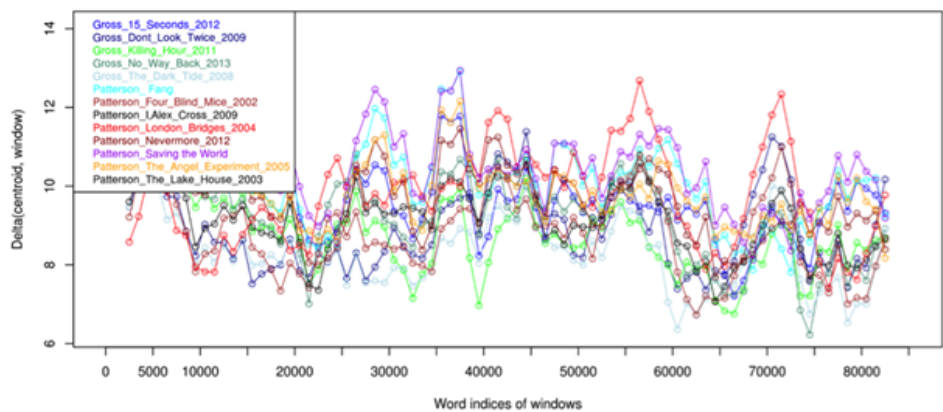


Figure 3.

For *Second Chance*, Gross’ texts are closest throughout, apart from *First to Die*, which, as we have already discussed, is attributed solely to Patterson. *First to Die*’s model is more interesting, as the work presents itself as we would expect a true collaboration in which the authors have shared the task of writing passages or sentences with Patterson intervening at critical junctures. This seems to add plausibility to the conjecture that the work might in fact have been written by Gross and Patterson, rather than Patterson alone, as is officially stated. One might ultimately discount such a possibility, and explain this anomaly as an artifact caused by the limitations of stylometric analysis in its current stage of development. However, were we to accept these results at face value, they might indicate an interesting situation in commercial fiction: namely, a junior writer, Andrew Gross, having his name erased from a book he co-wrote in order to increase the commercial value and status of that book as a product.

37

Conclusions

The quantitative data suggests that Patterson’s collaborators perform the vast majority of the actual writing. Our results demonstrate that Patterson, like Dumas, has commodified his reputation as an author and met demand through delegation. However, it appears that Patterson has generally been transparent regarding his collaborative process, and has offered sufficient accreditation, tutelage, opportunity, and financial reward to those with whom he works.

38

The novel has always been a commercial form. Its rise was a product of the rise of the bourgeoisie. But Patterson has perhaps brought the novel to its logical conclusion. In a certain sense, Patterson’s works are not

39

reducible to their socio-economic context. Rather, wresting marketing control from his publisher, hiring his own soundboard readers, and employing subsidiary writers, Patterson generates pulp far more concentratedly than the vagaries of traditional historical materialism would generally allow. While we might see "high literature" as irreducible to its immediate socio-economic context because the author is in a kind of dialogue with the whole literary and even metaphysical canon, Patterson's work is irreducible in the sense that he creates his fiction in accordance with his own manipulations of its economic base.

As Patterson says: "above all my brand stands for story. I became successful when I stopped writing sentences and started writing stories. Editors think it's about style. It's not. It's all story" [Deighton 2006, 5]. On the one hand, we note that for Patterson, this is just as well, as our analysis shows that his stylometric fingerprint is sometimes weak, even in his solo works. To keep things in perspective, we recall Aristotle's assertion that plot (μῦθος) is the "arrangement of the incidents (ἡ τῶν πραγμάτων σύστασις)" [Aristotle 1932]. Is plot, then, what makes an author? These findings demonstrate how style is very much privileged across particular literary aesthetics, and that it is, in many respects, relegated to an afterthought within contemporary popular fiction. Style remains a powerful measurement in experiments of this kind, but as a literary device, it is not always present within a form that has long held strong ties with the forces of late capitalism. When we see the name Patterson, Dumas, or Hitchcock, is that an indication of reliability rather than authenticity; substance rather than style?

40

Acknowledgements

Part of this research was generously funded by the Higher Education Authority, under the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions, Cycle 5, and under the Irish Research Council's EMBARK Initiative.

41

Earlier incarnations of this study have been presented at the following conferences:

42

Fuller, Simon, and James O'Sullivan. "‘More or less all plot’: A Rolling Delta Analysis of the Commodification of Collaboration." *Canadian Society for Digital Humanities Annual Conference, Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Brock University, Saint Catharine's, 26 May 2014.

43

Fuller, Simon, and James O'Sullivan. "Beyond Style: Literary Capitalism and the Publishing Industry." *Digital Humanities*, Lausanne, 10 July 2014.

44

Notes

[1]"High art" — though we resist certain facets of the dichotomy this term suggests — is somewhat different in that it tends to engage with the literary and metaphysical tradition, and is therefore less reducible to local socio-economic factors.

[2]These reviews taken from Amazon.com's page for *I, Alex Cross*, where they were both posted on November 16, 2009. They are attributed to "Tina" and "B. Davis". Accessed on July 2, 2014.

[3]This review was posted on Amazon.co.uk by "Nicola F", December 2011. Access on July 2, 2014.

[4]With thanks to Geoffrey Rockwell for his suggestions on this topic during discussions at the annual gathering of the Canadian Society for Digital Humanities / Société canadienne des humanités numériques, May 2014.

Works Cited

Aristotle 1932 Aristotle. *Poetics*. [Online]. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, Harvard University Press; William Heinemann. Available from: www.perseus.tufts.edu (1932) [Accessed: 16 October 2013].

Beard 2012 Beard, A. "Life's Work: James Patterson". *Harvard Business Review Magazine*. [Online]. Available from: <https://hbr.org/product/lifes-work-james-patterson/R1203T-PDF-ENG> (2012) [Accessed: 1 July 2014].

Benjamin 2002a Benjamin, W. "Edward Fuchs, Collector and Historian". In: Howard Eiland & Michael W. Jennings (eds.). *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935-1938*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2002a): 260–302.

Benjamin 2002b Benjamin, W. "The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov". In: Howard Eiland

& Michael W. Jennings (eds.). *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935-1938*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2002b): 143–166.

Benjamin 2002c Benjamin, W. "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility". In: Howard Eiland & Michael W. Jennings (eds.). *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935-1938*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2002c): 101–133.

Benjamin 2002d Benjamin, W. "Theory of Distraction". In: Howard Eiland & Michael W. Jennings (eds.). *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935-1938*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2002d): 141–142.

Benjamin 2003a Benjamin, W. "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire". In: Howard Eiland & Michael W. Jennings (eds.). *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2003a): 313–354.

Benjamin 2003b Benjamin, W. *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland & Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2003b).

Benjamin 2003c Benjamin, W. "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire". In: Howard Eiland & Michael W. Jennings (eds.). *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2003c): 3–92.

Benjamin 2005 Benjamin, W. "Chambermaid's Romances of the Past Century". In: Howard Eiland & Michael W. Jennings, and Gary Smith (eds.). *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings: Volume 2, part 1, 1927-1930*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2005): 225-231.

Blum 2012 Blum, L.S. "James Patterson Explains Why His Books Sell Like Crazy". *Wall Street Journal*. [Online]. Available from: <http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2012/03/30/james-patterson-explains-his-why-his-books-sell-like-crazy/> (2012) [Accessed: 23 January 2017].

Burrows 2002 Burrows, J. "'Delta': A Measure of Stylistic Difference and a Guide to Likely Authorship". *Literary and Linguistic Computing*. 17.3 (2002): 267–287.

Deighton 2006 Deighton, J. "Marketing James Patterson". *Harvard Business Review*. [Online]. Available from: http://hbr.org/product/a/an/505029-PDF-ENG?cm_sp=doi_-_case_-_505029-PDF-ENG&referral=00103 (2006) [Accessed: 24 August 2013].

Doody 1997 Doody, M.A. *The True Story of the Novel*. New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press (1997).

Eder & Rybicki 2013 Eder, M. & Rybicki, J. "Do birds of a feather really flock together, or how to choose training samples for authorship attribution". *Literary and Linguistic Computing*. 28.2 (2013): 229–236.

Eder, Kestemont, & Rybicki 2013 Eder, M., Kestemont, M. & Rybicki, J. "Stylometry with R: a suite of tools". In: *Digital Humanities 2013: Conference Abstracts*. University of Nebraska–Lincoln (2013): 487–489.

Frye 2006 Frye, N. "Anatomy of Criticism". In: Dorothy J. Hale (ed.). *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*. Malden, Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishing (2006): 97-106.

Hobsbawm 1994 Hobsbawm, E. *The Age of Extremes: The Short 20th Century*. London, Abacus (1994).

Hoover 2011 Hoover, D. L. "The Tutor's Story: a case study of mixed authorship". In: *Digital Humanities 2011: Conference Abstracts*. Stanford (2011): 149–151.

Hunter 2002 Hunter, J. P. "The novel and social/cultural history". In: John Richetti (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press (2002): 9-40.

Juola 2013 Juola, P. *Stylometric Report - Heartland Institute Memo*. [Online]. Available from: <https://wattsupwiththat.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/memoreport.pdf> (2013) [Accessed: 23 January 2017].

Lucas-Dubreton n.d. Lucas-Dubreton, J. *The Fourth Musketeer: The Life of Alexander Dumas*. [Online]. Le site web Alexandre Dumas père / The Alexandre Dumas père Web Site. Available from: http://www.cadytech.com/dumas/related/fourth_musketeer.php (n.d.) [Accessed: 24 October 2013].

Mahler 2010 Mahler, J. "James Patterson Inc". *The New York Times Magazine*. [Online] 24 January 2010. Available from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/24/magazine/24patterson-t.html> [Accessed: 14 August 2013].

Marx & Engels 2001 Marx, K. & Engels, F. *German Ideology, Part 1 and Selections from Parts 2 and 3*.

Christopher John Arthur (ed.). New York, International Publishers (2001).

Paumgarten 2007 Paumgarten, N. "There and Back Again: The Soul of the Commuter". [Online]. 16 April 2007. *The New Yorker*. Available from: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/04/16/there-and-back-again> [Accessed: 1 July 2014].

Richetti 1999 Richetti, J. *The English Novel in History 1700-1780*. London, Routledge (1999).

Richetti 2002 Richetti, J. "Introduction". In: John Richetti (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press (2002): 1–8.

Robert 2000 Robert, M. "From Origins of the Novel". In: Michael McKeon (ed.). *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press (2000): 57–69.

Rybicki, Kestemont, & Hoover 2013 Rybicki, J., Kestemont, M. & Hoover, D.L. "Collaborative authorship: Conrad, Ford and rolling delta". In: *Digital Humanities 2013: Conference Abstracts*. University of Nebraska–Lincoln (2013): 368–371.

Thompson 1993 Thompson, K. "Early Alternatives to the Hollywood Mode of Production: Implications for Europe's Avant-Gardes". *Film History*. 5.4 (1993): 386–404.

Watt 2001 Watt, I. *The Rise of the Novel*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press (2001).

Wilkinson 1996 Wilkinson, M. "Majority-rule reduced consensus trees and their use in bootstrapping". *Molecular Biology and Evolution*. 13.3 (1996): 437–444.

Wood 2009 Wood, G. "The world's no 1 bestseller". [Online]. 5 April 2009. *The Guardian*. Available from: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/apr/05/james-patterson-author-bestseller> [Accessed: 17 August 2013].

Wroe 2013 Wroe, N. "James Patterson: a life in writing". [Online]. 11 May 2013. *The Guardian*. Available from: <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/may/11/james-patterson-life-in-writing> [Accessed: 19 August 2013].

van Dalen-Oskam & van Zundert 2007 van Dalen-Oskam, K. & Zundert, J. van. "Delta for Middle Dutch — Author and Copyist Distinction in Walewein". *Literary and Linguistic Computing*. 22.3 (2007): 345–362.