

Preface

This is a romance, *written* through the lexicon of trashy romance novels. This particular novel is just one of an endless edition of variations. Being the pulp of an algorithmic process, each edition is unique, different, but born of the same underlying procedure. Importantly, this writing is not intended to be *read*, as such. It is a structure, or a lense, through which to read language, to read genre.

The source material of this book is the top ten romances of some month in 2015 (according to iTunes ratings, of course). The individual sources are not important—at least in that authorial sense—and that is kind of the point. I mean, the I is a collective fiction, right? It's something that we have made up together. That sits between us, and is held together by our language. Think about those times when someone else's words come unexpectedly out of your mouth. An unexpected haunting. You might have been hanging out with a friend intensely, spending too much time with a book, or a TV series, your favourite actor, lecturer, or whomever. They ooze into you. And, when proximal, you ooze into them. Language is the material by which meaning is collectively made, while simultaneously the collective striving for meaning gives birth to Language. I care very little whether you want

to say that Language gives form to the World, or alternatively, that there is a World, pre-existing, which Language attempts to describe. In all instances language is the in-between; it is undulating, pulsing, oozing, chimerical, at times solid, later gas, pounding vibrations, thick in the ear, stuck in the throat.

Sometimes words are employed intentionally, thoughtfully, like these ones here, wanting you to understand some meaning. At other times the same words are used purely perfunctorily, in the most banal and unthoughtful way to simply fill the air. The awkward silence in an elevator. The same words could be cut out of a newspaper and collaged into some avantgarde poem, or papier-mâché into a political effigy to be burnt at a protest next to other words painted on placards, spray painted on the facade of a bank, or in the fine print on the package of some pain killers.

There is something here in the impartiality of words which serve an intent to communicate. Compare words born of intention to those mechanically colliding, or even those uttered out of habit. *How are you? I'm good, how are you? Yeah great thanks.* Words as little rocks, forming shapes, eroded by wind and rain, becoming mountains. You are a mountain. Chance collisions, cut ups, AI generated scripts, auto-generated inspirational quotes, all give us a sometimes unsettling glimpse at how language is imbued with a power external to us. It is not within our control. It's not wholly ours. Your voice is not yours, there are other things speaking through you, using you.

Back to the book in your hands: it is made from the voices of authors. All words are direct quotations. A corpus has been built from all phrases that are

common to a least three or more of the source romance novels. The words selected have no single attributable source; they are authored by all. Once removed from their original context, they no longer belong to a singular authorial voice. This new voice could be the voice of a genre.

The common structure of this novel has been derived from the source material too. How many chapters does a romance novel have on average? How many paragraphs to a chapter? How many sentences in the average paragraph? How long are those sentences? Cheap statistical analysis forms the backbone of this particular novel. The chapters are the average. The paragraphs and sentences all reflect the distributions of the source material. This statistical skeleton has been woven with threads from the corpus of de-authored language.

To do this, the corpus of common phrases is further broken down into beginnings, middles and ends, as well as those that are complete. The beginnings are crudely determined by those starting with capital letters; the ends, are those which conclude with fullstops, exclamations, or question marks; while the middles are those remaining, neither beginnings nor ends; complete fragments are those that are both beginnings and ends. Sentences of specific length are then formed by selecting a random beginning, then iteratively finding fragments which overlap with the previously selected fragment. The italics in what follows indicates where fragments overlap. Once nearing the desired length of the sentence, an ending fragment is selected. If, at any point, no fragment is found that intersects with the currently written sentence, a word is erased from the end of the current sentence, and the process of stitching begins again. If the process to find a continuing fragment fails

repeatedly, an em dash is appended and a new random fragment started. If the desired sentence length can be satisfied by an already complete fragment, one of those is randomly selected.

This process of writing continues until a paragraph is completed, and then another and another, until a chapter is complete, until a novel has been written. It takes roughly a twenty seconds of computation to generate a new novel.

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benjamin@benjamin: /Development/romances-v2$ time node index.js
start chapter 0 of 23
start chapter 1 of 23
start chapter 2 of 23
start chapter 3 of 23
start chapter 4 of 23
start chapter 5 of 23
start chapter 6 of 23
start chapter 7 of 23
start chapter 8 of 23
start chapter 9 of 23
start chapter 10 of 23
start chapter 11 of 23
start chapter 12 of 23
start chapter 13 of 23
start chapter 14 of 23
start chapter 15 of 23
start chapter 16 of 23
start chapter 17 of 23
start chapter 18 of 23
start chapter 19 of 23
start chapter 20 of 23
start chapter 21 of 23
start chapter 22 of 23
done
real    0m17.618s
user    0m18.108s
sys     0m0.182s
```