

# The speed of plot

## Narrative acceleration and deceleration

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When characters travel 'at the speed of plot', they need to arrive at the conclusion of the story by the time the narrative comes to its end on the page. This article develops the popular notion of 'plot speed' into a conceptual contribution to the study of time in narrative. 'Plot speed' is the conceptual velocity of movement through plot events, and it can be rooted in the physical speed of the storyworld (where characters are in a rush) or the discourse speed (where the written form of the narrative indicates chapters, instalments, and so on). I investigate configurations of plot speed through Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*, its precursor Courtilz de Sandras's *Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan*, and the manuscripts in which Dumas collaborated with Auguste Maquet, thus arguing for narratological investigations that are situated in contexts of literary history and media changes.

### KEYWORDS

Alexandre Dumas, Auguste Maquet, narrative speed, plot, situated narratology, *The Three Musketeers*

## 1 |

Narrative organises our experience of time. Paul Ricoeur (1984–1988) has argued that it 'emplots' our pre-conscious sense of time in an Aristotelian sequence of beginnings, middles and endings, creating a secondary mimesis. Narrative reorganises the original sequence of story, the fabula, jumping backwards (and sometimes forwards) in time, telling the same events several times from different perspectives, and generally playing fast and loose with

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temporal sequence. These temporal distortions in literary narrative allow Viktor Shklovsky to call *Tristram Shandy* 'the most typical novel in world literature' ([1925] Shklovsky, 2015b, 170). The organisation of time in narrative and its reorganisation in (especially literary) narrative has however relatively little to say about a fundamental way in which we experience time, namely, speed.

The thematic relevance of acceleration has been time and again discussed in literary criticism through the enhanced speed of machines, trains and means of communication in the modern period, or through the current acceleration of information in the digitised world. We seem to be moving ever faster, and similarly, our narratives can be understood as testimonies to the increased pace of life or, indeed, as moments of retardation and retreat from the onslaught of speed. In this article, I shall propose an analytical model of narrative acceleration and deceleration through the notion of plot speed. While narratology traditionally considers speed as a trade-off between story time and discourse time, I suggest that plot, the term at the root of Ricoeur's notion for how narrative configures time and of Shklovsky's notion for how narrative reorganises time, can provide the critical model. Plot, however, is considered here not through the venerable traditions of Aristotle (as in Ricoeur) or Russian formalism, but through the popular notion of travelling 'at the speed of plot, where the speed of movement of characters is coordinated with the speed of the mediation, such as the episode in a television series.

The article will move towards a definition of plot speed as the conceptual speed with which the basic predictions underlining the narrative change. Then, I shall discuss how plot speed is rooted in both (1) the speed with which characters move in the fictional world (that is, storyworld speed) and (2) the speed and pacing that is indicated by the written form of the narrative (that is, discourse speed). The model allows narratological discussions of narrative acceleration and deceleration to be related to historical developments in narrative design and to the changing formats of literary texts in the media ecology of their time. The organisation and reorganisation of time comes to be integrated into narrative's general need for speed.

## 2 |

Narrative is traditionally conceived in terms of time. It unfolds across time, as readers are told about a particular stretch of events in the storyworld (that is, story time) and as the narration itself extends itself through time, word following word and sentence following sentence (that is, discourse time). Despite the importance of time and despite the fact that narratives are often described as 'fast-paced' or 'slow-moving', however, the notion of speed in narrative has not been theorised to any significant extent.

Perhaps the most detailed account of narrative speed is Kathryn Hume's article 'Narrative speed in contemporary fiction' (2005) and the shared response she wrote together with Baetens & Hume (2006). Hume distinguishes between four traditional approaches to narrative speed: (1) 'descriptions' of physical speed; (2) retardation, connected to Viktor Shklovsky's notion of 'defamiliarisation' (Shklovsky [1917] 2015a); (3) Genette's (2007) relation between the time passed in the storyworld and the number of pages turned; and (4) reflections and thematisations on cultural speed, for example, in connection with contemporary notions of 'acceleration' or in the modernist admiration for technologically generated speed. Hume herself proposes to think of narrative speed as a 'feeling of excessive rapidity' and 'a sense of *the narrative being accelerated beyond safe comprehension-limit*' (Hume, 2005, 105–106, emphasis in original). Speed for Hume relates to a loss of sense of readerly control, which she considers typical of contemporary fiction (see also Hume, 2016).

She develops an account of narrative techniques for creating such a sense of speed in the shared response with Baetens. On the story level, speed refers to 'all phenomena of speed that are mentioned evoked or described', largely relating to Hume's first category of descriptions of physical speed. On the discourse level, speed refers to 'copying' speed 'by verbal means', such as leaving out function words in the syntax (Baetens & Hume, 2006, 351). Finally, on what they call the level of narration, there might be 'performances' of speed in hand-written, digital and orally presented texts. Hume and Baetens develop more general implications of speed for reading and the cultural

relevance of literature, but their definition remains that they conceive of 'speed effects in terms of feeling lost (through an excess of disjoint information)' (p. 352).

Generally speaking, there appear to be two problems with their account. First, speed is exclusively defined in terms of acceleration (and not deceleration or an even speed). Second, narrative speed implies readers' loss of comprehension. If we move away from the corpus of novels of 'aggressive literature' assaulting the reader that Hume (2016) is investigating and towards the kinds of texts that would be more commonly described as 'fast-paced narratives', it seems counter-intuitive that narrative speed should be conceived exclusively as disorienting and destabilising. Readers can feel carried along by the speed of the narrative, and their comprehension might be paced by accelerations and decelerations that create an effect similar to a 'flow' state (see Csikszentmihaly, 1980). Narrative speed might therefore very well contribute to comprehension rather than work against it. It is necessary, in other words, to develop an account of narrative speed that leaves room for a multiplicity of possible effects.

We find an attempt at such an account in Gérard Genette's discussion of 'duration' in *Discours du récit* (1972). When Ricoeur discusses speed briefly in *Time and Narrative* (Ricoeur, 1984–1988, 2.71–87), he takes up Genette. Indeed, in the follow-up volume *Nouveau discours du récit*, Genette remarks that he should have called the phenomenon he discussed in terms of 'duration' rather 'vitesse', that is, 'speed' (Genette, 2007, 314). He defines narrative speed in *Discours du récit* as follows: '[la vitesse est] le rapport entre une mesure temporelle et une mesure spatiale [...] la vitesse du récit se définira par le rapport entre une durée, celle de l'histoire, mesurée en secondes, minutes, heures, jours, mois et années, et une longueur, celle du texte mesurée en lignes et en pages' (p. 83).<sup>1</sup>

For Genette, narrative speed is the relationship between the duration of the time that passes in the storyworld (conceived as 'une mesure temporelle') and the duration of the text on the level of the discourse (conceived as 'une mesure spatiale'). He underlines that he prefers to speak of the spatial extension of the text rather than the time it takes to read the narrative, because it is not possible to fix the latter. Different readers have different reading speeds, and even the same reader might speed up or slow down when re-reading the same text (Genette, 2007, 81). If speed is to be an objective property of the text, as Genette proposes, it needs to be tied to the objective measure of the number of lines and pages. Genette conceives of the relationship between story time and discourse length as an abstract ratio. Indeed, when Stephan Packard revisits Genette's model, he visualises narrative speed as a two-dimensional 'storytelling graph' (Packard, 2008, 55–67).<sup>2</sup>

Speed, however, also has an embodied dimension. It also refers to the experience of an object or a body hurtling through space, accelerating and decelerating, rather than just the abstract progress of time that Genette works with (admittedly his main interest in *Discours du récit*). Speed, one could say, is 'time plus bodies'. Characters move physically through the storyworld and readers turn pages. When it comes to issues of narrative speed, acceleration and deceleration, I therefore propose to rethink these narratological categories and to talk about 'storyworld speed' and 'discourse speed' rather than 'story time' and 'discourse time' when discussing issues of narrative acceleration and deceleration. 'Storyworld speed' is not the same as the time that objectively passes in the narrative (which, as Genette himself admits, is often not exactly measured). It relates rather to the ways in which speed is indicated in motion verbs, tenses and other embodied elements of the text itself. Are characters rushing, trains running, and so on? 'Storyworld speed' refers to the impression of speed in the storyworld that arises from its embodied language. While the markers of 'story time' are often not explicitly mentioned in literary texts, much less remembered by readers, story speed registers easily in reading.

'Discourse speed', in turn, refers to readers' sense of how swiftly they get through a stretch of narrative in relation to its perceived length in terms of mediation. When Jane Austen speaks of the 'tell-tale compression of the pages' at the end of *Northanger Abbey*, making readers expect the happy ending to come soon, she addresses the discourse speed of the novel. This speed is again not precisely measurable. It correlates, however, roughly to the number of pages covered and the complexity or smoothness of the syntax, and so on, that might give resistance or buoyancy to readers' pursuit of the text's meaning or invite re-readings. Raphaël Baroni's (2007) notion of 'narrative tension' is relevant, too, in so far as it concerns readers' sense of movement through the pages of a narrative in serialisation and cliffhangers. Discourse time therefore links to Hume and Baetens's speed on the level

of discourse but does not presuppose disorientation and information overload as the only means to achieve the effect. 'Storyworld speed' and 'discourse speed' can both accelerate and decelerate and give readers a feel for the speed of the narrative. Their relationship, however, is not that of a simple ratio.

### 3 |

How can we connect storyworld speed and discourse speed? Genette proposed to link story time and discourse time through their ratio, leading to slowness (through a longer discourse time) and speed (through a longer story time). Since the measures of storyworld speed and discourse speed as I have introduced them here, however, cannot be calculated as precisely as Genette's measures, another mode to conceptualise the relationship has to be found. I propose to make use of the central notion in Ricoeur's organisation of time and in Shklovsky's reorganisation of time: plot, which, as I am going to argue, comes with its own plot speed.

In popular discourse narrative speed, acceleration and deceleration are usually connected to plot. The website *TV Tropes*, for example, has an entry titled 'Travelling at the speed of plot' and prefaces it with a quotation from the satirical web series *Yu-Gi-Oh! The Abridged Series*: 'According to the computer, it should take us exactly one episode to reach our destination.' The arrangement of narrative actions, in other words, the plot, has its own pace and timing. It coordinates characters' movement in the storyworld (or, their storyworld speed) with the progress of the narrative itself (or, the discourse speed). When the narrative ends, the movement of characters also concludes, and in badly constructed plots they have to rush to make it to their ending in time. Plot speed, I would argue, however is not just bait for satire but a useful critical concept that allows us to relate storyworld speed and discourse speed and to conceptualise narrative speed in general more fully and more consistently.

Let me start our discussion of plot speed by looking at the novel *The Three Musketeers*, more specifically, the chapter entitled 'The shoulder of Athos, the baldric of Porthos and the handkerchief of Aramis'. We are still at the beginning of the novel, and d'Artagnan has just realised that the mysterious Rochefort stole his letter of recommendation. While waiting for his audience with Tréville, the head of the Musketeers, he notices none other than Rochefort himself walking outside on the street. D'Artagnan sets out in pursuit. And on the stairs, he immediately bumps into Athos, or, rather into the shoulder where the latter had been recently wounded. "'Excusez-moi," dit d'Artagnan en essayant de reprendre sa course, "excusez-moi, mais je suis pressé' (Dumas, [1844] 2001, 46).<sup>3</sup> His excuses are lacking, however, and Athos challenges him to a duel. As d'Artagnan continues his pursuit of Rochefort, he also gets entangled in the baldric of Porthos and returns a handkerchief to Aramis in an inopportune fashion, and therefore finds himself with three duels by the end of the chapter.

We have great speed in terms of 'storyworld speed' here, since d'Artagnan is pretty much running through the entire chapter. What about plot speed? And how can we conceptualise plot speed in relation to storyworld speed? Plot can be understood as a sequence of unexpected events, or prediction errors, that change readers' expectations as to how the narrative will develop further. The probabilities of the narrative get revised with each plot event, building a trajectory of prediction errors where the ending increases—steadily or suddenly—in probability (Kukkonen, 2014). We can analyse the chapter in *The Three Musketeers* from this perspective as follows: d'Artagnan has good expectations of getting accepted into the Musketeers with his letter of recommendation to Tréville. Indeed, he expects to follow the path of Tréville who had arrived, similarly penniless, from Gascony in Paris 20 years earlier. It is in this double sense that d'Artagnan 'comptait sur cette lettre pour faire son chemin à la cour' (Dumas, 2001, 20).<sup>4</sup> When the letter is stolen, however, the probability of that expectation diminishes. Rochefort's theft is a plot event because it changes the probabilities of the narrative going forward. The challenges to the three duels then make d'Artagnan's recruitment even more unlikely: even if he were to survive the duels against three highly trained fighters, he would have killed or severely wounded three musketeers, which is hardly going to recommend him to Tréville. Athos—Porthos—Aramis, each of these encounters is a plot event that makes it less likely

that d'Artagnan will attain his goal. The great 'storyworld speed', then, is matched by a much slower 'plot speed'. Indeed, the irony of the scene lies in the fact that d'Artagnan retards the plot *because* he is running too fast.

As d'Artagnan and the three musketeers meet for their duels, and get ready to fight, another plot event intervenes with the Cardinal's guards, who have come to arrest the musketeers for illegal duelling.

Ce seul moment suffit à d'Artagnan pour prendre son parti : c'était là un de ces événements qui décident de la vie d'un homme [...]

'Messieurs,' dit-il, 'je reprendrai, s'il vous plaît, quelque chose à vos paroles. Vous avez dit que vous n'étiez que trois, mais il me semble, à moi, que nous sommes quatre.'

(Dumas, 2001, 61–62)<sup>5</sup>

This is the moment when d'Artagnan actually becomes a musketeer. He joins Athos, Porthos and Aramis and fights the Cardinal's guards. And, as he revises Athos's earlier 'nous ne sommes que trois', into 'nous sommes quatre', also the probability of his becoming a musketeer is completely transformed. This is a major plot event. Not only does the fight with the Cardinal's guards realise d'Artagnan's ambition, it also reveals that the three previous plot events, that seemed to delay his goal, actually turned out to expedite it. The three duels brought all four friends to the same place at the same time, with a shared cause to fight for (that is, not getting arrested by the Cardinal's guards); a much faster course of recruitment than the usual procedure to be sure. Plot events, in other words, generate plot speed, when they make a projected outcome more likely (acceleration) or less likely (deceleration).

Genette's ratio between story time and discourse time gives rise to a range of types of 'duration' (Genette, 2007, 91): scene (story time equals discourse time), summary (story time larger than discourse time), pause (story time stops, discourse time progresses) and ellipsis (story time progresses, discourse time stops). Genette underlines that narratives alternate between these different relations, postulating however that novels tend to establish a particular rhythm between these types of duration. 'Le vrai rythme du canon romanesque, encore très perceptible dans *Bovary*, est donc alternance des sommaires non-dramatiques à fonction d'attente et de liaison, et de scènes dramatiques dont le rôle dans l'action est décisif' (p. 107).<sup>6</sup> Plot speed, as we have seen it in *The Three Musketeers*, however, not only contributes to a general rhythm between summaries and scenes, but also connects speed to the overall coherence and trajectory of a narrative, because, as the narrative progresses, plot speed can be re-evaluated. The fight between the musketeers, d'Artagnan and the Cardinal's guards, for example, can be understood (1) as a first-order plot event, transforming the overall probabilities for the progress of the narrative, accelerating plot speed, and (2) as a second-order plot event that leads readers to reinterpret several previous plot events and the way in which they generate plot speed, turning them from decelerations into accelerations. More generally, then, we can define plot speed as the time and movement between plot events in the probability design of the text. Probability designs are constantly reconfigured as the narrative progresses (see Kukkonen, 2014), and therefore what might appear as a deceleration of the narrative at first can also come to be reinterpreted as an actual acceleration later on.

#### 4 |

To discuss more fully how plot speed coordinates storyworld speed and discourse speed, I propose to go further back in the textual history of *The Three Musketeers*. The novel is based on an older one: *Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan*, written by Gatien Courtilz de Sandras and published in three volumes in 1700. Dumas mentions the *Mémoires* in his preface, and says that he came across the text as part of his historical research into the time of Louis XIV (Dumas, [1844] 2001, 3). Courtilz de Sandras writes in the *Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan* about a historical person and historical events (most notably the power struggle of the Fronde, which is taken up in the continuation of *The*

*Three Musketeers*, called *Vingt ans après*. True to the *mémoire* tradition of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, however, *Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan* straddles history and fiction, and chooses to reconfigure historical events with the flourishes of adventure literature and glimpses of fictional minds.<sup>7</sup> Courtilz de Sandras's narrative, in other words, can be considered primarily a literary narrative; an early modern novel that establishes its own narrative speed independently of the actual course of history.

Especially in the beginning of the novel, the narrative of *The Three Musketeers* is very closely matched to the narrative of *Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan*. On the way to Paris, d'Artagnan's letter of recommendation is stolen, and it is through a duel with the Cardinal's guards that he establishes his close relation to Athos, Porthos and Aramis (who already have these names in Courtilz de Sandras). The way in which this duel is brought about, however, differs significantly from *The Three Musketeers*. In *Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan*, Porthos strikes up a conversation with d'Artagnan while he waits for Tréville at the Musketeers' headquarters, and when d'Artagnan hot-headedly proposes to take a disagreement outside, a different course of events ensues. Porthos asks d'Artagnan to follow him to an inn, where he tells a person called Jussac that they need a 'fourth man' against whom d'Artagnan can prove himself ('un quatrième pour que je me pusse éprouver contre lui' [Courtilz de Sandras, 1700, 1.17]<sup>8</sup>) in what turns out to be a pre-arranged duel between Porthos, Athos, Aramis and several of the Cardinal's guards. D'Artagnan, needless to say, distinguishes himself in this duel also.

The mere events are relatively similar in the two novels (d'Artagnan's ambition, a challenge, a duel, etc.), however, the speed of these narratives differs significantly. While *The Three Musketeers* unfolds through moments of acceleration along the plot trajectory, *Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan* develops at a much more steady pace. We can conceptualise this difference through the way in which plot speed is related to storyworld speed in the text. In *The Three Musketeers*, d'Artagnan's speed in the storyworld at first glance seems to work against the acceleration of plot speed only then to be revealed as accelerating. In *Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan*, on the other hand, storyworld speed corresponds very closely to plot speed, as Porthos literally walks d'Artagnan from plot event to plot event. Indeed, the correspondence between plot speed and storyworld speed is explicitly thematised in Courtilz de Sandras when Porthos responds to d'Artagnan's plans:

Il se prit à rire, m'entendant parler de la sorte, et me dit que quoi qu'en allant vite, on fit d'ordinaire beaucoup de chemin, je ne scavois peut-être pas encore qu'on se heurtoit aussi le pied souvent, à vouloir trop avancer.

(Courtilz de Sandras, 1700, 1.15–16)<sup>9</sup>

The physical speed expressed in the storyworld will determine the progress of d'Artagnan's desires (and thereby his narrative). When trying to move too quickly, you often hurt your foot, Porthos says, and similarly d'Artagnan's hot-headedness will often get in the way of his narrative progress. This is the same in *The Three Musketeers*, where it is realised in the narrative dynamics itself when d'Artagnan's need for speed in the storyworld gets in the way of the plot speed. In *Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan*, Porthos expresses it as a kind of life-wisdom, and plot speed matches storyworld speed very closely. In the case of *Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan*, storyworld speed and plot speed are tightly coordinated, but usually, the relationship between the two speeds develops independently. Storyworld speed, generated by the movements and the embodied experience of characters, can propel, impede or trail plot speed.

Note that these temporal accelerations and decelerations in *The Three Musketeers* have nothing to do with flashforwards or flashbacks. Not only for Genette is 'order' a very different category from 'duration' (or 'speed'). A short sequence about what happened before the current train of events, for example, when a character remembers her youth, does not strictly speaking delay the speed of the narrative, because flashbacks too include plot events. The probabilities of narrative development can often change significantly as the result of a flashback (or analepsis), but thereby, plot speed can easily be maintained while the narrative moves into the past. The case of prolepsis is similar in that the flashforward does not determine particular changes in plot speed. Plot speed can

be maintained, increased or decreased, depending on the nature of the plot event that is placed in the view to the future. Plot speed, as I define it here, depends on the distance between plot events in the conceptual space of the narrative, and on the re-evaluations of plot speed they might give rise to, not on where in the overall time of the narrative they are placed.

## 5 |

Porthos's comment takes up the old metaphor of the narrative as a 'path' across the storyworld, which also informed the poetics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (see Kukkonen, 2017). This metaphor has been more recently discussed again by Hilary Dannenberg in *Coincidence and Counterfactuality* (2008). According to Dannenberg, when 'plotting time and space in narrative', we conceive of the plot as a trail across the face of the storyworld. Such a 'spatialisation' of plot is then related to conceptual metaphors such as 'life is a journey' and 'time is a path' (Dannenberg, 2008, 67), which closely link to the deep, embodied meaning-making units that Mark Johnson (1990) calls 'image schemata'. These conceptual metaphors map physical speed and movement onto conceptual speed and movement, and they work as a handy way for thinking about plot and its dynamics in an intuitive and immersive fashion. However, while Dumas's d'Artagnan also speaks of 'faire son chemin', the general metaphor relating physical to conceptual speed plays out very differently from Courtitz de Sandras's novel as we have seen. Dannenberg develops an account of coincidence through the notion of the spatialisation of plot and traces carefully how constellations of coincidence change across the course of literary history in English. A similar historical approach, tracing how *The Three Musketeers* changes the plotting in *Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan*, however, reveals that when it comes to discussing plot speed, a straightforward metaphorical mapping is not enough.

Genette discusses an example of parallel time, which will help me work out the differences and underline the relevance of plot speed as conceptual speed. 'Il n'y a donc dans la scène dialoguée qu'une sorte d'égalité *conventionnelle* entre temps du récit et temps de l'histoire' (Genette, 2007, 82, emphasis in the original).<sup>10</sup> The ratio between story time and discourse time is considered equivalent for the exchange of direct speech in a dialogue between characters. The storyworld speed of characters' movements can correspond to the discourse speed of the narrative text, without the measure of direct speech forcing a (more or less) exact isochrony. Courtitz de Sandras achieves the correspondence by having one character guide the other to the relevant plot events, thereby aligning the *physical* speed of the movement of characters with the *conceptual* speed of the movement of plot. It is relatively unusual in narratives after the early modern period that storyworld speed is as closely coordinated with plot speed as in *Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan*. A match between the duration of events in the storyworld and the duration of discourse, as in Genette's 'scenes', giving the impression that the narrative develops in 'real time', is much more common (see, for example, Baetens's [2015, 20] comments on 'realism-as-evenness'). Also mapping physical space onto conceptual space, say, when a character's physical movement through the storyworld places reflects their social and intellectual development, is something that contemporary readers will not find unfamiliar.

Plot speed, however, as the example of the two d'Artagnans shows, is different from the isochrony of the scene (and therefore, I think, Genette was right to call the phenomenon 'duration' rather than speed) and from links between physical and conceptual spatialisation. The conceptual speed at stake in plot speed is to do with how swiftly certain predictions and expectations have to be revised. D'Artagnan moves through very different social spaces in *The Three Musketeers* (the headquarters of the Musketeers, his lodgings at M. Bonacieux's, the courts of France and Britain, etc.), but the rate at which he moves is not relevant for plot speed unless it relates to a significant plot event. Plot speed can then be defined as the time and movement between plot events in the probability design of the text, and it is a conceptual kind of speed that gets rooted in the physical speed of the storyworld and/or discourse. The speed with which you rethink the plot is usually not very tightly coordinated with shifts in conceptual spaces, which is a matter of storyworld speed.

However, the ways in which the conceptual speed of plot relates to the physical speed of characters moving in the storyworld, as my discussion of Genette and Dannenberg shows, could be used to trace historical developments in narrative. The coordination of storyworld speed and plot speed, and the foregrounding of first-order chains of plot events, is typical for the picaresque narrative, where readers follow the travels of a protagonist. It appears that in Courtilz de Sandras a gesture common in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *mémoire* genre, namely, the moments when the first-person narrator points forward in time,<sup>11</sup> fulfils a similar function to that of the second-order plot events in Dumas's more modern narrative in that they force a reassessment of speed. The organisation and reorganisation of experience in literary narrative, then, seems to include a growing number of re-evaluations of plot speed tied to second-order plot events, as narrative design develops toward the current day, rather than an overall acceleration. This observation is of course subject to a larger historical study, tracing a number of historically diverse treatments of the same narrative materials. It goes far beyond what I can achieve in this conceptual outline. However, this observation indicates how contemporary narratives might provide both accelerations and decelerations. If narratives do not accelerate (or mirror an accelerating pace of life) but provide more plot events that lead to a re-evaluation of plot speed, then they can lead to mounting acceleration (namely, if all these re-evaluations make readers realise that what seemed to be a deceleration is actually an acceleration) or to deceleration (namely, if only some of the re-evaluations lead to the perception of acceleration, whereas others lead to a sense of deceleration).

## 6 |

Plot speed can not only be related to storyworld speed through the embodied dimension of literary narrative. It can also be coordinated with another embodied and experiential measure of speed, namely, discourse speed. Discourse speed refers to the speed with which the text expects to be read. This includes stylistic smoothness and qualities pertaining to 'flow', but also publication-related conventions, such as how far we are from the beginning of the ending of book, the length of chapters, and so on, which is closely related to how fast readers experience moving through the text.

In order to investigate this dimension further, I propose to look at the way in which *The Three Musketeers* was written and published. The novel was originally serialised in the newspaper *Le Siècle* between March and July 1844. What appears as a chapter in the book version of the novel was an instalment in its earlier feuilleton version. Serialisation, as a publication practice, however, does not only shape the actual length of the instalment but also the ways in which its speed is rooted in discourse. The classical example of this coordination of discourse speed with plot speed is the cliffhanger, where plot events are placed just at the ending of a particular instalment (or, indeed, where they are indicated at the ending of an instalment and then realised in the following instalment). However, other configurations are also possible, and these come to the fore when we look into the manuscripts behind *The Three Musketeers*.

One year after the publication of *The Three Musketeers*, a pamphlet appeared, entitled *Fabrique des romans: Alexandre Dumas et Cie* (1845), in which the journalist Eugène de Mirecourt reveals that many of the highly popular novels that are published under the name of Alexandre Dumas are actually collaborations with a number of other authors. *The Three Musketeers* was written together with Auguste Maquet, a novelist and playwright in his own right. Unfortunately, many of the manuscripts related to *The Three Musketeers* have been destroyed, probably in response to de Mirecourt's pamphlet and in the context of legal battles between Dumas and Maquet that were to come in 1857–1858. The only substantial document that remains of the collaboration on *The Three Musketeers* is a manuscript in the hand of Maquet which outlines several chapters from the final novel, but which, we can assume, Dumas transformed into their final state.<sup>12</sup>

The changes between the manuscript and the final novel reconfigure the relationship between plot speed and discourse speed in the narrative. The final two chapters in the manuscript ('L'exécution' and 'Le cardinal') can be



mapped relatively closely onto the final two chapters in the novel ('L'exécution' and 'Un messenger du cardinal'). They narrate the conclusion to the narrative with the execution of Milady, the end of the siege of La Rochelle and d'Artagnan's final encounter with Rochefort and Cardinal Richelieu. In the manuscript, the execution of Milady is immediately followed by the appearance of Rochefort who is supposed to take d'Artagnan to the Cardinal. The musketeers promise to take d'Artagnan themselves, and Rochefort accepts. The chapter drafts ends with 'Et ils partirent silensieusement' (NAF, MS 11944, fol. 356, in Dumas [1844] 1991, 1332).<sup>13</sup> In the finalised novel, Rochefort does not appear until the next chapter begins. Dumas does not bring him in before the musketeers have returned to Paris from the execution. The plot events in the penultimate chapter are entirely devoted to the execution of Milady and Athos (who had turned out to be Milady's former husband). Athos's narrative is brought to an end with the death of Milady, while Rochefort's return is linked to d'Artagnan's future that will be the subject of the next chapter. Arguably, Dumas moves him there in order to keep the plotlines and the key event separated according to the logic of instalments. The final plot event of the penultimate chapter is not unrelated to the plot events in the last chapter, because Athos needed to close his story with Milady before he could retire from the Musketeers. However, if it had not been for the serialisation, postponing the arrival of Rochefort would not have been necessary. Several of Dumas's changes to Maquet's chapter outlines have this effect, and as we shall see in a moment, it is as central for the pacing of plot speed as the cliffhanger.

In the next chapter in *The Three Musketeers*, Rochefort appears as the Cardinal's messenger and d'Artagnan comes face to face with Richelieu. In the manuscript version, he informs Richelieu about the death of Milady and presents a pardon, written in Richelieu's own hand, to the Cardinal. We read:

Artagnan tira ce papier précieux, qu'Athos avait repris à Milady dans l'auberge; ce papier qui contenait l'approbation de tout ce que ferait l'Anglaise en Angleterre. Richelieu lut attentivement et tomba dans une rêverie profonde. Il ne rendit pas le papier à d'Artagnan.

(NAF, MS 11944, fol. 360, in Dumas, 1991, 1334)<sup>14</sup>

In the final novel, the scene unfolds differently:

Et d'Artagnan présenta au cardinal le précieux papier qu'Athos avait arraché à Milady, et qu'il avait donné à d'Artagnan pour lui servir de sauvegarde. Son Éminence prit le papier et lut d'une voix lente et en appuyant sur chaque syllabe:

« C'est par mon ordre et pour le bien de l'État que le porteur du présent a fait ce qu'il fait.

5 aout 1628 Richelieu »

Le cardinal, après avoir lu ces deux lignes, tomba dans une rêverie profonde, mais il ne rendit pas le papier à d'Artagnan.<sup>15</sup>

(Dumas, 2001, 696)

Several typical changes between the manuscript and the finalised novel appear here. Dumas keeps the focus of interest squarely on d'Artagnan and Richelieu. Instead of an abstract description of what the note contains ('une approbation de tout ce que ferait l'Anglaise en Angleterre'), the finalised novel presents the note itself verbatim to readers. And instead of the description that the Cardinal reads it 'attentivement', we get a precise account of *how* the cardinal reads ('d'une voix lente et en appuyant sur chaque syllabe'). Dumas establishes almost something like a Genettian 'scene' here, where the time during which the action unfolds and the space of the text on the page have the same length.

He does this, I would argue, in order to highlight the set-up for the final plot event in the novel. After reading the note, the Cardinal will decide to offer the position of captain of the Musketeers to d'Artagnan. Instead of punishing him, he decides to put 'son activité, son courage et son esprit' into his own service, not least since he also knows that the skills of Milady are lost to him now (Dumas, 2001, 696).<sup>16</sup> The plot event forces d'Artagnan, his friends who were waiting outside the door, and also readers to revise their expectation of what is the likely outcome of this encounter, which is, given the 'tell-tale compression of the pages', the last in this novel. Dumas prepares the final sequence of plot events, where d'Artagnan receives a letter of promotion from Richelieu, which like the pardon comes with no name. D'Artagnan decides to offer the promotion to Athos, Porthos and Aramis first, before he will accept it himself. In this series of encounters, Dumas mirrors the challenges to the duel at the beginning of the narrative; however, with an important difference. Here, at the end of the novel, the three encounters decelerate plot speed and delay the ending which we can already see at the beginning of the instalment, namely, that the three musketeers retire from active duty and that d'Artagnan will have to accept the Cardinal's offer. The swiftly narrated encounters would have high speed in Genette's model, but in my take they add nothing to the conceptual plot speed and therefore decelerate narrative speed in an almost tragic inversion of the beginning. Representing the text of the original pardon and letting the Cardinal read it out loud underlines that, despite the seeming triumph of the musketeer, Richelieu retains control. His letter of appointment without a name sets d'Artagnan off asking his friends to accept the commission, but there is no plot event forthcoming that will relieve him from service to the Cardinal.

Dumas's coordination of plot speed with discourse speed is then largely due to the mediated form of the feuilleton novel. His changes to Maquet's chapter outlines coordinate plot speed with discourse speed. Plot events in a single strand of plot are kept to an individual instalment, while plot events from another strand are moved into a different instalment. In the final instalment, the ending mirrors the beginning in a series of decelerating plot events which are no longer re-evaluated. Plot speed is here rooted predominantly in discourse speed because of the requirements of this mediated genre. In the printed novel, this is then realised in the chapter breaks. In Courtlitz de Sandras, conversely, we have not a single chapter break in three volumes of about 600 pages each. While Dumas coordinates plot speed primarily with discourse speed (and only through the re-evaluations with storyworld speed), Courtlitz de Sandras coordinates plot speed primarily with storyworld speed.

## 7 |

Narrative unfolds not only through time, but also through the ways in which it manages speed. It is, however, not only a question of the relationship between length of text and time of story (as Genette proposes), but of how the different kinds of speed in storyworld movement, discourse length and breakdown, and the conceptual speed in plot events are coordinated with each other. Narrative, I have argued, operates through multiple modes of speed that are not precisely measurable. Storyworld movement relates to the speed emerging from the embodied language of the text and the ways in which it evokes characters' movements. The machine movements of the hurtling train in Zola's *La bête humaine* (1890) and other speeding devices, which are often addressed in discussions of how the nineteenth-century novel treats the acceleration of communication, travel and work (see Bell, 2004), also fall under the category of storyworld speed. Discourse speed relates to the ways in which discourse is paced through publication conventions but also the fluency of the written language. It indicates how swiftly readers get through a section of the text. The serialisation of the feuilleton novel, for example, accelerates discourse speed, even though the actual text of the narrative remains rather long, as *The Three Musketeers* testify. Plot speed, the sequence of transformative plot events, needs to be coordinated with storyworld speed and/or discourse speed. Narrative has a need for speed, but it allows for rather flexible constellations.

For the narratological discussion of speed, the model I propose allows for a consideration of difference of narrative speed in history and in changing media ecologies. The importance of the development of communication

technologies for how narratives are configured has been well documented, for example, through discussions of literacy, hand-written and machine-written texts (Debray, 1995; Ong, 2013) and the invention of the telegraph (Kittler, 2003), the cinema (Stiegler, 2001), and also the more recent effects of digitisation (Hansen, 2009). These technological reconfigurations of what it means to think of 'speed' have so far played almost no role in the narratological discussion, because 'the narrative text' is taken as a given. However, especially for the consideration of narrative speed, it appears to be central and can be included in narratological discussions through the notion of discourse speed. Also the historical changes between different modes of narrative, in the projects of diachronic and historical narratology, have so far paid little attention to issues of narrative speed. At the same time, however, literary history (and to a lesser extent literary theory) often emphasises the importance of different temporal regimes, from the increased 'pace' of modern life and the resistance of modernism's epiphanies (Gingrich, 2018), to an apocalyptic orientation to the end (Kermode, 1967) and to postmodern multiplications of temporalities (Heise, 1997).

Arguably, narrative speed extends beyond thematic relevance and into the ways in which the narrative itself is designed. The organisation and reorganisation of time in narrative traces historical changes, and these changes can be described by paying attention to the ways in which the conceptual speed of plot coordinates itself with the physical speeds of storyworld and discourse. My mini-study of *The Three Musketeers*, its manuscript stages and the *Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan* indicates how narratology could move into an investigation of narrative speed informed by history and media studies.<sup>17</sup> In conversation with the richness of discussion in literary history and media-conscious literary studies, such an investigation of narrative speed could be pursued across longer stretches of time and through texts that have a less 'classical' design than *The Three Musketeers*.

Mark Currie (2007) argues that time in reading novels is organised largely as the 'untensed' time of what philosophy calls the B series. With the written text, he argues, we are not following the moving window of the present, as we do in the A series (that underlies everyday thought), but 'events in the future are already written and awaiting my arrival' (Currie, 2007, 143). Through fictional narrative bound in a book, says Currie, the B series is articulated in terms of the A series. We can think of the different narrative speeds in a similar constellation. Storyworld speed, with its embodied aspects, relates very closely to the A series and its emphasis on the tensed now. Discourse speed, with its links to the mediated nature of the text with its chapters, instalments, and so on, in turn, relates to the B series where all time is present in an untensed fashion. As plot speed navigates and coordinates with storyworld speed and discourse speed, it opens both these temporal experiences to readers. The media possibilities linked to discourse time, however, undergo profound changes in the digital world, as tablets and e-readers come to replace printed books and as new forms of electronic literature emerge. Exactly how digitisation is going to affect narrative speed is a topic for further research. However, multiple configurations between discourse speed and plot speed can be articulated within the model proposed here.

Through the links to the A series in storyworld speed, literary narrative participates in the basic narrative organisation of experience as Ricoeur discusses it. Through the links to the B series, flaunted, as Currie points out, through jumps into the future in prolepsis, literary narrative also participates in the reorganisation of experience as we find it in discussions by Shklovsky and others. Plot speed might appear ridiculous as the narrative's need to arrive at its conclusion by the end of the instalment, but, upon closer inspection, it emerges as a key to discuss how narrative across different historical periods has articulated and reflected the experience of time.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> In English: [Speed is] the ratio between a temporal and a spatial measure [...] the speed of narrative is defined through the ration between a duration, namely the duration of the story, measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months and years, and a length, namely the length of the text measured in lines and pages. (All translations are mine, KK.)

- <sup>2</sup> Packard also argues that Genette's abstract definition of story time in terms of duration in the storyworld and discourse time in terms of pages covered is insufficient. He proposes, referring to Hume (2005), rather to consider repetitions (indicating several things happening at the same time), and grammatical markers for the discussion of speed in narrative.
- <sup>3</sup> In English: 'My apologies,' said d'Artagnan, trying to continue in his course, 'apologies, but I'm in a rush.'
- <sup>4</sup> In English: [d'Artagnan] counted on this letter for making his way at the court.
- <sup>5</sup> In English: This single instant was enough for d'Artagnan to take his side: here was one of those events that decide the life of a man [...] 'Sirs,' he said, 'let me correct, please, a detail in your speech. You said that you were no more than three, but it seems to me that we are four.'
- <sup>6</sup> In English: The true rhythm of the canonical novel, still perceptible in *Madame Bovary*, is thus an alternation between non-dramatic summaries for suspense and linking and dramatic scenes where the action takes a decisive role.
- <sup>7</sup> In other words, Courtilz de Sandras creates a plot from the chronological events ('en leur donnant quelque liaison'). Titze (1991) provides a detailed account of how Courtilz de Sandras's narrative can be related to its historical backdrop. For the ways in which the novel contributes to the development towards the first-person narration in Lesage, Marivaux and Prévost, see Démoris (1975) and Lombard (1980). *Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan* is not the only text by Courtilz de Sandras drawn on by *The Three Musketeers*. As Gilbert Sigaux notes and other critical literature details further, Courtilz de Sandras's *Mémoires de M. de B\*\*\*, secrétaire du M L C D R* [Monsieur le Cardinal de Richelieu] (2 vols., 1711), La Rochefoucauld's *Mémoires* (1662) and La Fayette's *Histoire de Madame Henriette d'Angleterre* (1720) also found their way into *The Three Musketeers* (see Sigaux, 1962). I focus on *Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan* here, because it offers the direct comparison to the duel scene we discussed above.
- <sup>8</sup> In English: a fourth man so that I can proof myself against him.
- <sup>9</sup> In English: He started to laugh, when he heard me speak of my goals, and told me that sometimes by going very fast, one covers a lot of ground, but maybe one also stubs one's foot many times, by trying to advance too quickly.
- <sup>10</sup> In English: In the dialogic scene there is therefore only a conventional kind of identity between story time and discourse time.
- <sup>11</sup> For example, 'Si j'en trouvai le commencement assez passable, la suite ne me le parut gueres' (Courtilz de Sandras, 1700, 1.8; in English: If I thought the beginning to be rather passable, this was not at all the case in what followed) or 'Cela m'arrivera la première fois entre Bois et Orléans' (p. 5; in English: This will happen to me for the first time between Bois and Orleans).
- <sup>12</sup> Assumptions vary about the share that Maquet and Dumas, respectively, can claim for *The Three Musketeers*. Gustave Simon ([1919] 2010) suggests that Maquet was responsible for most of *The Three Musketeers*, *The Count of Monte-Cristo* and *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*, since we have plans for the plots of these novels in Maquet's hand. More recent editors of *The Three Musketeers*, however, argue that these plot outlines were rather a record of the ongoing collaboration than Maquet's original contribution (see the prefaces in Sigaux, 1962, and by Schopp in Alexandre Dumas, *Les trois mousquetaires / Vingt ans après* [1844] 1991). I think their assessment is correct and will follow this assumption in my analysis of the manuscript evidence.
- <sup>13</sup> In English: And they left without speaking. The reference is here to the signature of the manuscript at the Bibliothèque nationale (NAF, MS 11944), followed by the folio page. A full transcript of the manuscript has been reprinted in Charles Schopp's edition of *The Three Musketeers* (Dumas [1844] 1991).
- <sup>14</sup> In English: D'Artagnan pulled out the precious paper that Athos had taken from Milady at the inn; the paper that contained the pardon for everything that the Englishwoman was going to do in England. Richelieu read attentively and fell into a profound reverie. He did not return the paper to d'Artagnan.
- <sup>15</sup> In English: And d'Artagnan presented to Richelieu the precious paper that he had snatched from Milady, and that he had given to d'Artagnan as a safeguard. His eminence took the paper and read with a leisurely voice, laying emphasis on every syllable: 'It is by my order and for the good of the state that the bearer has done what he has done. August, 5<sup>th</sup>, 1628.' After having read these two lines, the Cardinal fell into a profound reverie, but he did not return the paper to d'Artagnan.
- <sup>16</sup> In English: his energy, his courage and his spirit.
- <sup>17</sup> My proposal is therefore very different from James Phelan's (2017) discussion of narrative speed. Phelan also suggests that narrative speed is to do with 'instabilities and complications' and 'readerly judgements', but he does not distinguish between the levels of plot, story (world) and discourse in his discussion, nor does he take into account historical developments and differences in mediation.

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