

# The pragmatics of emotion in fiction

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## Abstract

Emotions are an essential part of our daily lives. They are part of our everyday interactions in our private lives, at work and during our leisure activities. They are part of the news media, which often seem to maximise the emotional impact of their news stories. And they are also part of the many fictional worlds around us, be it in the form of movies or television series, novels or theatre plays. However, in spite of their pervasiveness, they are remarkably elusive to any empirical investigation. They are, by their very nature, fuzzy and indeterminate, and, therefore, difficult to pinpoint. In the context of fictional texts, the problem is exacerbated because the emotions experienced by the reader or viewer may either converge or diverge, sometimes even radically, from the emotions experienced by the depicted characters. Moreover, it is one of the paradoxes of fiction that it may arouse very strong emotions in spite of the fact that readers or viewers are generally aware of the fictitious nature of the depicted events.

In this presentation, I want to explore a number of different inroads that pragmatics has to offer to explore emotions in fictional contexts. In a first step, I will show how the complex participation framework of fictional artefacts frames and influences reader or viewer emotions. In the case of written fiction, for instance, it is not only the text itself that stands between the author and the reader, but the communication is embedded within a larger communicative context that includes also, for instance, the complexities of reader reviews, rankings, categorizations, lists of similar books and so on, on the website of an online bookseller, or lists of hashtags, classifications and reader responses on fan fiction websites. In a second step, I will explore the emotion vocabulary of the fictional artefacts themselves. This includes both terms that are used to express emotions and terms that are used to describe emotions. Here I will show how a corpus-based study of such items can be used to trace diachronic developments, e.g. in the Fiction section of the *Corpus of Historical American English*, in the *Movie Corpus* or in the *TV Corpus*.