

## Abstract

Applications of noncooperative game theory to novels, short stories, plays, a narrative poem, and an opera are surveyed from both an historical and a critical perspective, based in part on responses to a questionnaire. While some analyses shed light on literary issues, such as the role of emotions or the rationality of character choices that culminate in tragedy, others highlight game-theoretic issues, such as problems of coordinating choices or building reputations when information is incomplete.

Several models indicate a sophisticated understanding of plots and character motives and make use of advanced game-theoretic tools, whereas other applications are quite trivial and offer little insight into a literary work. In still other instances, game theory is misused or applied in an unpersuasive manner. Fiction writers, too, vary in the intuitive understanding of game theory that they bring to their works.

Game theory has the potential to illuminate and render coherent strategic features of a narrative, but not without delving into its textual details, which some game theorists have eschewed. It may also be used to explore new relationships, such as games played between an author and a reader that incorporate prior expectations of each player.