

# Outline

Stories

References

## Emotional and meaning arcs of stories

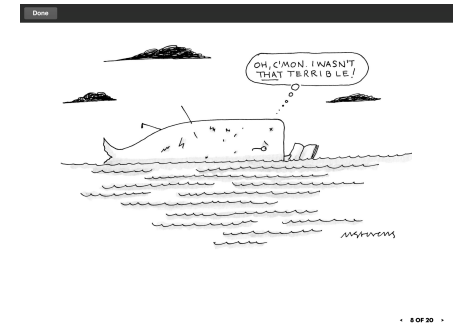
Last updated: 2025/09/30, 09:09:37 EDT

Principles of Complex Systems,  
Vols. 1, 2, 3D, 4 Fourever, V for Vendetta

Prof. Peter Sheridan Dodds

Computational Story Lab | Vermont Complex Systems Institute  
University of Vermont | Santa Fe Institute

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The New Yorker, December 16, 2013, p. 56.

Aside: From a 2013 Believer Magazine interview with Maurice Sendak

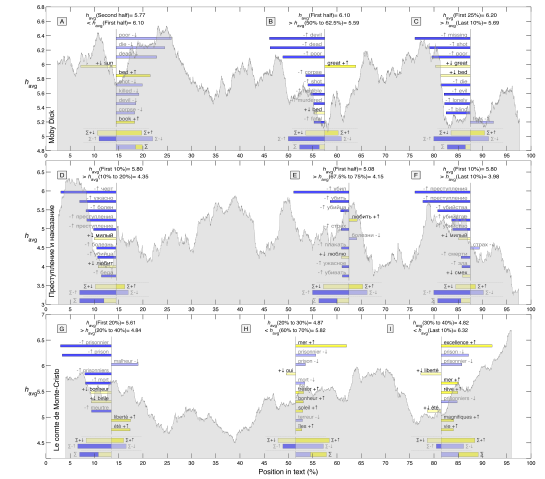
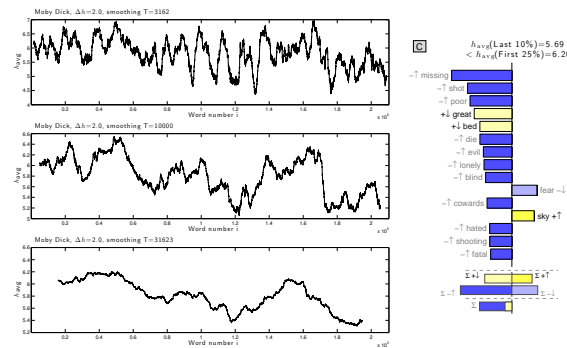
BLVR: Did the success of Where the Wild Things Are ever feel like an albatross?

MS: It's a nice book. It's perfectly nice. I can't complain about it. I remember Herman Melville said, "When I die no one is going to mention Moby-Dick. They're all going to talk about my first book, about forking maidens in Tahiti." He was right. No mention of Moby-Dick then. Everyone wanted another Tahitian book, a beach book. But then he kept writing deeper and deeper and then came Moby-Dick and people hated it. The only ones who liked it were Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Hawthorne. Moby-Dick didn't get famous until 1930.

Sendak named his dog Herman.

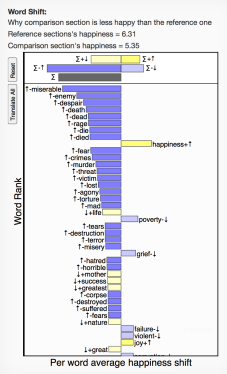
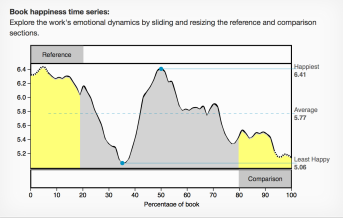
The essential (true) Colbert interview:  
Pt. 1 and Pt. 2

## The emotional shapes of stories—Moby Dick:



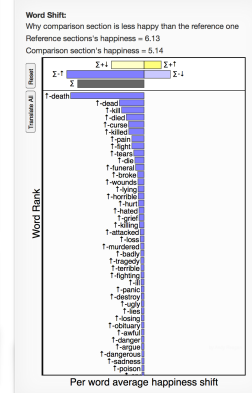
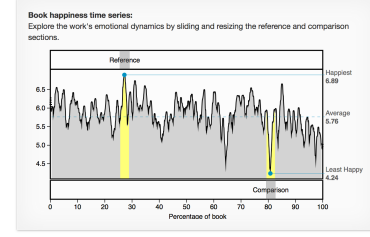
Online, interactive Emotional Shapes of Stories for 10,000+ books:

Frankenstein; Or the Modern Prometheus (wik) | Search Gutenberg Corpus | by Title | Classics | Harry Potter | Random



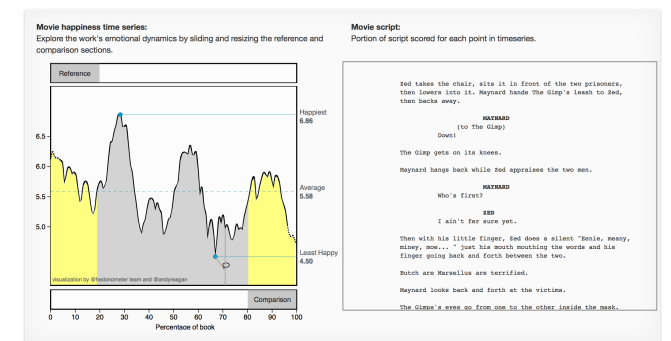
Online, interactive Emotional Shapes of Stories for 10,000+ books:

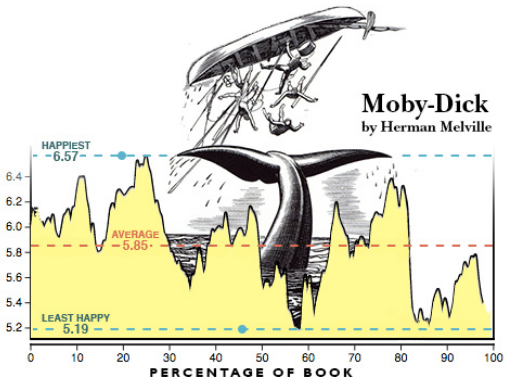
Harry Potter (all books together) | Search Gutenberg Corpus | by Title | Classics | Harry Potter | Random



Online, interactive Emotional Shapes of Stories for 1,000+ movie scripts:

Pulp Fiction | Search Movies | Classics | Team Picks | Random



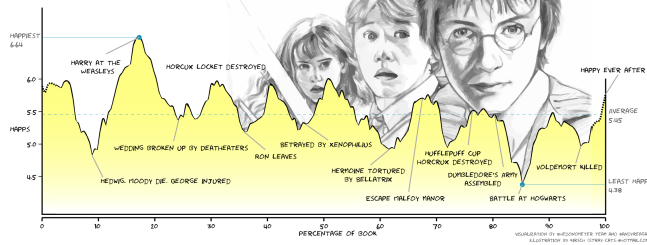


Moby-Dick illustration by Rockwell Kent, 1930

<http://whyfiles.org/2015/in-10-languages-happy-words-beat-sad-ones/>

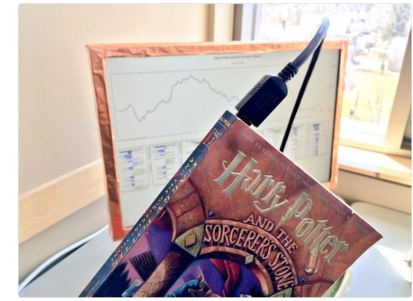
### Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

by J.K. Rowling



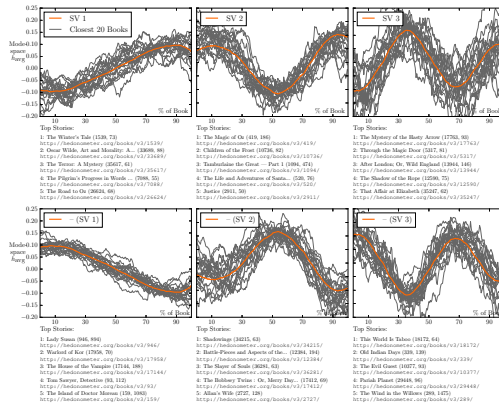
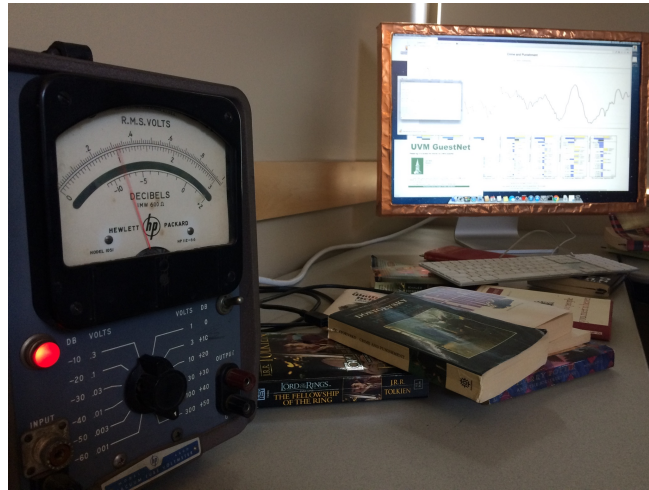
“The emotional arcs of stories are dominated by six basic shapes”  
Reagan, Mitchell, Danforth, and Dodds.  
EPJ Data Science, 5, 31, 2016. [1]

USB in a book? What is this wizardry? Check it out at the Student Research Conference creative lounge. #uvmresearch



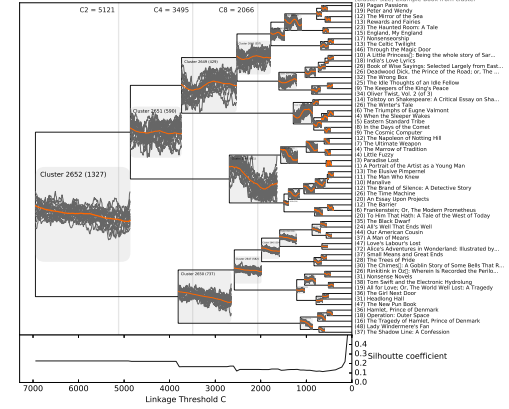
RETWEETS 8 LIKES 14

9:30 AM - 28 Apr 2016



Six basic shapes: Rags-to-Riches, Man-in-a-hole, Cinderella, Tragedy, Icarus, Oedipus.

### Emotional arcs for 1748 books from [gutenberg.org](http://gutenberg.org)

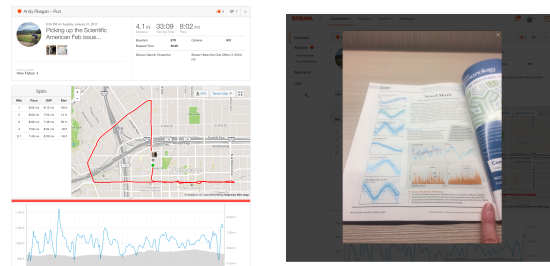


### Stories with a few ups and downs now downloaded:

Mode	Mode Arc	$N_m$	$N_m/N$	DL Median	DL Mean	DL Variance	Download Distribution
SV 1		263	15.1%	295.0	644.3	2207201	
SV 2		422	25.3%	337.5	636.0	913464	
SV 3		230	13.2%	630.3	630.3	1058916	
SV 4		169	9.7%	296.0	569.1	780365	
SV 5		104	6.0%	298.0	7826797	2517822	
SV 6		108	6.2%	298.0	748.7	2517822	
SV 7		108	6.2%	316.0	848.8	2763060	
SV 8		50	2.9%	292.0	770.7	1546202	
SV 9		48	2.7%	280.0	421.7	182443	
SV 10		48	2.7%	263.5	462.0	211259	

FIG. 6: Download statistics for SVD Modes with more than 2.5% of books. Modes SV 3 through SV 4 (both polarities of modes 3 and 4) exhibit a higher average number of downloads and more variance than the rest.

### Another Great Moment in being Andy Reagan:



“So, in writing, there are six basic plots, and their sequels and derivative franchises.”

- [1] A. J. Reagan, L. Mitchell, C. M. Danforth, and P. S. Dodds.  
The emotional arcs of stories are dominated by six basic shapes.

[EPJ Data Science](#), 5:31, 2016.

Available at <https://arxiv.org/abs/1606.06820>. pdf 

