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Annotation and Automated Classification of Dramatic Situations

Abstract: In this paper, we describe the process of annotation of dramatic situations on 52 selected play scripts. We updated the list of the original Polti's 36 situations and use 58 situations in total. We show that the task of selection and annotation of dramatic situations is not easy, as annotators often disagree. In the second part of the paper, we propose and evaluate a method of automatic detection of 5 selected dramatic situations in the play scripts.

1 Introduction

Automatic analysis and generation of literary works is a big challenge in the field of Natural Language Processing. The main problem is understanding the plot and motivations of the characters.

In the THEaiTRE project (Section 2), we aim to automatically interactively generate theater play scripts in the Czech language using an artificial intelligence system based on GPT-2 neural network. As a part of this project, we focused on identifying dramatic situations in the play scripts, as the dramatic situation is considered the building block of drama (Section 3). Our intention was to develop a generation process that operates on the level of dramatic situations instead of individual script lines.

As we have not been able to find any computationally usable data resource containing annotations of dramatic situations in scripts, we decided to create such a corpus, which could serve for the training of tools for the recognition and generation of specific dramatic situations. The theatrical experts from the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (DAMU), managed to mark dramatic situations in 52 play scripts (Section 4). Devising a list of dramatic situations to use was also an inherent part of this process. The team of annotators consisted of Marie Nováková as the lead, Klára Vosecká and Josef Doležal; each member selected plays to annotate on their own, but the repertory of situations to use was discussed and agreed upon by the whole team.

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We decided to look at the concept of a *well-made play* which derives from nineteenth century tendencies towards realism and is a traditional model of play construction in the West. The well-made play is built on the model of Aristotle's ideal Greek tragedy outlined in his Poetics, involving a tight plot and a climax that takes place close to the end of the play. Another important aspect of these works is that they are written in prose and not in verse. This eliminated a large number of works that pre-date authors such as Chekhov or Ibsen.

Subsequently, we used the resulting corpus for training models that would automatically identify dramatic situations in scripts (Section 6). Since the results are not very satisfactory, we think many more annotated plays would be necessary for successful training.

2 The THEaiTRE Project

THEaiTRE (www.theaitre.com) is an interdisciplinary project directly combining theater and computer science. The project team is led by Rudolf Rosa, an expert on computational linguistics and natural language processing; however, the team is composed of both computational linguists as well as theater experts, under the leadership of Daniel Hrbek, the director of the Švanda Theater in Prague. The goal of the project is to explore the potential of current artificial intelligence techniques to be incorporated into theater practice and to directly confront the general public with the outcome while explaining the process behind the creation of the play and thus educating the audience about the current state and capabilities of the techniques used. We found that this immersive experience can spark a lot of interest both among artificial intelligence enthusiasts as well as among people generally ignorant of the current developments in the field. Our goal is to demystify AI, to explain the rather simple basic principles behind machine learning based on textual training data, and hopefully to bring the AI closer to people so that they neither glorify it nor fear it irrationally, but rather understand its basic principles and thus set reasonable expectations and precautions, making it clear that AI should be approached with caution, but can be very useful for some tasks in practice. The project bears some similarities to the theater play *Lifestyle of the Richard and Family* (Helper 2018), the musical *Beyond the Fence* (Colton et al. 2016), the short movie *Sunspring* (Benjamin 2016) or the performances of the Improbotics theater group (Mathewson and Mirowski 2018).

3 Dramatic Situations

A dramatic situation leads characters to necessary and immediate action. For our needs, we are mostly interested in classifications and abstractions over theater play scripts or their parts. In the field of theater studies, there is a vast amount of research on the structure and interpretation of theater plays. Unfortunately, the results of such research are not made available in forms and formats that would easily allow us to use these as data and annotations in machine learning approaches.

The *Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations* by Polti ([1895] 1921),[1] originally proposed in 1895, is a classic work which is highly respected in theater studies. The author presented a supposedly ultimate list of all categories of possible dramatic situations that can occur in a theater play (e.g., "adultery" or "conflict with a god"), further subclassified into 323 situational possibilities. While being a good starting point, this list seems somewhat outdated for today's plays, as Polti based his list primarily on an analysis of classical Greek texts, as well as some classical French works.

Although not directly related to theater plays, the work of Propp ([1928] 1968) is also essential. Propp analyzed Russian folk tales and identified 31 *functions*, similar to Polti's situations but somewhat more down-to-earth (e.g., "villainy" or "wedding"), as well as 7 abstract character types (e.g., "villain" or "hero") and other abstractions.

Polti's and Propp's categorizations are sometimes used in analyzing and generating narratives, although typically not in drama. The works closest to our focus are probably that of Gervás et al. (2016) or Lombardo et al. (2018), who devised an ontology of abstractions for annotating scripts, based on both of the mentioned works, as well as on more recent plot categorization studies (Booker 2004; Tobias 2011).

There are also works producing drama analyses in the form of networks, capturing various relations between the characters in the play (Moretti 2014; Fischer et al. 2019; Horstmann 2019).

4 Annotation Process

The annotation process consisted of continual joint annotation of play scripts with dramatic situations and refinement of the repertoire of situations to use for the an-

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Thirty-Six_Dramatic_Situations.

Sean: Would you like some music – shall I put a cassette on? I've got a few cassettes? What would you like?
Sean starts looking through some cassettes in a box.
Sean: Madness. Everybody likes Madness. Do you like Madness?
Lisa: I don't know. I've never heard them before.
Sean: Never heard Madness. Everybody's heard Madness. Baggy Trousers – da da da da.
Lisa: I don't know it. Put it on if you want.
Sean: Maybe not. It's maybe a bit lively. Gary Numan.
Lisa: I really don't mind.
Lisa gets up, goes over to him.
Sean: I don't know what people like these days.
[BEGIN Interrogation]
Lisa: The woman in the photograph – on the windowsill? Who is she?
Sean: She's – my ex-wife. She's – quite a long time ago.
Lisa: Is that your boy in the picture?
Sean: Yeah. That's why I have the picture out. Because it's a picture of him.
Lisa: Do you still see them?
Sean: No.
Lisa: That's a shame.
Sean: Yeah.
Lisa: What's his name?
Sean: Conor.
[END Interrogation]

Fig. 1: An example of dramatic situation "Interrogation" in a play script.

notation. The plays were annotated by three experts on drama from the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague.

As for the selection of plays to annotate, we left it up to the annotators. They themselves chose play scripts that they knew well, or which they even authored. We justify this decision with the fact that a play script itself does not directly capture the feelings or intentions of the individual characters. Therefore, it may have many different readings, often contradictory. In addition, the plays that the authors know can be annotated much faster, and therefore much more annotations may be produced in the same time. The disadvantage is that such annotations can be heavily biased compared to annotations made by people who do not know the play well. However, such cases do not occur in our data. All the plays annotated are well-known by their annotators.

The annotators primarily chose contemporary theater or plays that provided a relatively realistic depiction of human communication. They excluded highly stylized text, verse, monologue, or absurd drama, because these work with metaphor, figurative language, puns, and complex references, involving a breakdown of words where artificial intelligence would have difficulties recognizing individual situations.

For annotation purposes, we define a dramatic situation as a continuous section of the play script. The annotators named each situation (based on a list of

situations we had previously compiled together), marking the beginning and end of each one. See the example in Figure 1.

Naturally, there may be sections of the play scripts not annotated by any dramatic situations. There are several instances in a play that are "nondramatic." This includes *didaskalia* and specific information or description of a setting or a character. A scene might be important for our understanding of a character or situation but not in and of itself dramatic. These "non-situations" are present throughout and are often necessary to ensure the rhythm of the text. If we look back at the Greeks, their plays are purely dramatic in the sense that each block of text can be identified as a dramatic situation. Polti's list of dramatic situations alone – influenced by the Greeks – isn't an adequate tool for analyzing contemporary plays.

The annotation is line-oriented, so the situations cannot begin or end in the middle of a line. In inevitable cases in which the situation changes in the middle of the line, the annotator is asked to split the line into two. Also, the situations cannot intersect each other, however, it is possible that the same section in the script may capture multiple different situations. Typically, the situation may differ from the point of view of individual characters. In these cases, annotators are allowed to annotate the block with multiple situations. However, the situation in the first position should be the most suitable one.

Dramatic situations typically do not cross scene boundaries. However, it is not forbidden and it is possible that one situation spans two scenes.[2]

The annotators didn't use any specific software. They simply got a preprocessed text file and added new lines into them marking the beginnings and the ends of situations. These added lines were formatted so that they can be automatically differentiated from the standard lines of the play scripts.

4.1 First Phase – Forming the Set of Situations

We took Polti's 36 situations as the starting point. While applying them to contemporary and realistic (well-made) theater plays, our suspicion that the list needs updating was confirmed. Not only did the list contain situations that are highly unlikely to appear in a modern dramatic text (such as *Slaying of kin unrecognized*), but it was missing a number of situations which contemporary authors use frequently (e.g., *Interrogation*).

2 The way how plays are divided into scenes varies greatly. Some plays are not structured into scenes at all, another plays are structured into a lot of very short scenes. Therefore, we decided not to tie scenes and annotated situations in any way.

Tab. 1: List of the original Polti's 36 dramatic situations and our modifications.

Supplication	~~Slaying of kin unrecognized~~
Deliverance	Self-sacrifice for an ideal
Crime pursued by vengeance	Self-sacrifice for kin
Vengeance ~~taken for kin upon kin~~	~~All sacrificed for passion~~
Pursuit	Necessity of sacrificing loved ones
Disaster	~~Rivalry of superior vs. inferior~~
Falling prey to cruelty/misfortune	Adultery
Revolt	Crimes of love
Daring enterprise	Discovery of the dishonour of a loved one
Abduction	Obstacles to love
The enigma	An enemy loved
Obtaining	Ambition
Enmity ~~of kin~~	Conflict with a god
Rivalry ~~of kin~~	~~Mistaken jealousy~~
~~Murderous adultery~~	Erroneous judgment
Madness	Remorse
~~Fatal imprudence~~	Recovery of a lost one
Involuntary crimes of love	Loss of loved ones

Tab. 2: List of added situations.

Seduction	Accusation	Breaking the taboo	Murder
Intruder	Fight	Jealousy	Curse
Interrogation	Humiliation	Reconciliation	Extortion
Revelation	Bad news	Succumb	Betrayal
Parting	Fear	Passing	Rape
Admission	Ruse-trap-fraud	Break up	Confession
Intimidation	Unfulfilled desire	Bad premonition	Capture

In the first phase of annotation, in which we annotated 19 play scripts, we removed six obsolete situations, update the list as shown in Table 1 and introduced another 28 situations (Table 2) that might not be as archetypal as Polti's, but better reflect the kind of texts we were working with.

Eventually, we arrived at a list of 58 situations. We are still perfecting the list, trying to merge some of the situations so that each situation is sufficiently supported by the annotated data. Our repertory of situations is thus based on a combination of theatrological knowledge and statistical data processing.

4.2 Evaluation and Inter-Annotator Agreement

To evaluate the quality of the annotations and agreement between the annotators, we selected two plays from the first phase to be annotated by all three annotators. The evaluation of the agreement is not straightforward, because even if the annotators agree on the type of situation for a particular part of the script, they usually differ in marking the exact place where the situation begins or ends. To mitigate these disagreements, we compute the agreement score in a line-by-line fashion: each line of the script either belongs to one specific situation or does not belong to any situation. The inter-annotator agreement is then computed as the number of lines in the script that were annotated with the same situation divided by the total number of lines.

If we measure agreement on the full set of 58 situations, the average agreement between pairs of annotators is 60 %. If we count only lines where all three annotators agreed, the score is 47 %. We also computed Fleiss' kappa for assessing the reliability of the agreement between three annotators. It reached 54 %, which may be considered a moderate agreement. Therefore, we can say that determining dramatic situations is difficult even for humans, as the annotators often could not agree with each other.

The confusion matrix of the annotated situations for the play *Věc Makropulos* is shown in Figure 2.

This analysis allowed us to see the differences between annotators' individual interpretations. We noticed that they fundamentally depend on the perspective from which the annotators had read the text or the character through whom they had viewed the situation. They often annotated a single situation under two different names: for example, "Interrogation" vs. "Admission" or "Daring Enterprise" vs. "Madness." This was not because they were unable to decide, but precisely because of the subjectiveness of interpretation through a specific character. If we read a situation in which character X asks questions and character Y answers under pressure, we can perceive it from the perspective of character X, where we describe the situation as Interrogation, or from the perspective of character Y, where we can describe it as "Admission." Other competing situations are "Interrogation" vs. "Revelation," or "Daring Enterprise" vs. "Fight" vs. "Ambition."

All of these disagreements show that developing a set of situation labels that could be clearly assigned to the situations in the play scripts is really challenging.

A possible way of dealing with this problem could be to organize the types of situations hierarchically. We leave that for future work.

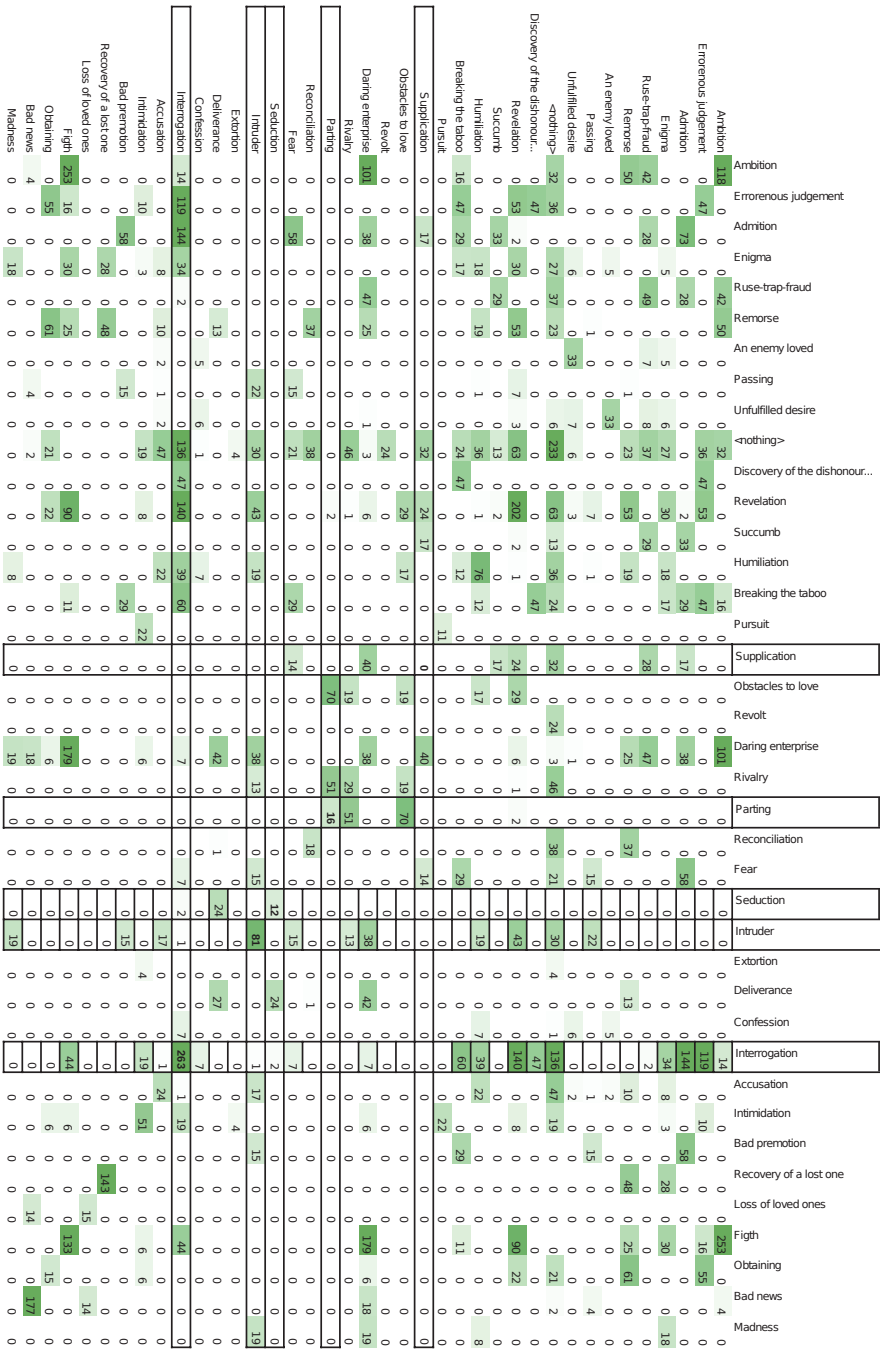

Fig. 2: Confusion matrix for the inter-annotator agreement on the play *Věc Makropulos*. The number of lines where the pair of annotators agreed/disagreed.

Tab. 3: Average pair-wise annotator agreement on the five selected situations. The percentage shows the average agreement, i.e., for example number of lines annotated by "Interrogation" by both the annotators divided by the number of lines annotated by "Interrogation" by one annotator. 100 % agreement means that all the lines annotated by one annotator were just the lines annotated by the other one.

Situation	Agreement
Interrogation	98 %
Intruder	72 %
Parting	63 %
Supplication	63 %
Seduction	59 %

4.3 Second Phase – Five Selected Situations

The play annotation phase was enormously lengthy. During the process, we understood that it is impossible to collect as much data as needed, because the analysis of one play takes several hours on average.

To make the annotations both more efficient and more useful, in the second phase, we decided to focus on a few frequent situations which we found to be the easiest to decipher in the scripts as the annotator agreement was high on them: *Supplication*, *Intruder*, *Seduction*, *Parting* and *Interrogation*. These situations appear frequently and regularly in plays and have stylistic characteristics and linguistic commonalities.

If we only measure the inter-annotator agreement on the five selected situations, the average agreement between a pair of annotators is 69.7 %; Table 3 details the annotator agreement for each of the five selected situations.

This significantly sped up the annotation work, because the annotators could only annotate plays in which they were sure this type of situation would be abundantly represented.[3] Over time we developed a manual to isolate these five situations, using typical words, scene notes, and typical dialogue structure.

We annotated another 33 play scripts with only these 5 situations; approximately 20 % of each script can be categorized into these five situations, leaving 80 % of each script unmarked on average.

The reason for a higher annotator agreement with these particular situations was that they could often be codified by either a particular word, symbol, or stage direction. An example of this could be that a situation is most likely to be an *in-*

3 For example, in Molière's *Don Juan* we would find many situations of Seduction, in Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* there would be situations of Parting, etc.

terrogation if one character is asking questions (resulting in a number of question marks) while the other is answering. *Parting* could be suggested by a character leaving, saying "farewell" or waving goodbye. This method obviously cannot be applied across the board, as dramatic situations are far more nuanced, however, it offered us a pattern that could be studied.

5 The Annotated Corpus

We eventually annotated 52 play scripts (consisting of 625 739 words in total) with a set of 58 dramatic situations. One play is written in English, all the other plays are in Czech.

The annotations were then sanitized and converted to a JSON data format so that they are easy to process and can be utilized for further experiments. Each file in the dataset includes one play script annotated by one annotator and contains the following items:

- the title of the play,
- the author of the play,
- an array of acts. Each act is an array of scenes. Each scene is an array of contents. Content may be:
  - a line described by a character (speaker) and a text,
  - a stage direction,
  - a mark showing the beginning or the end of a dramatic situation. It is structured as follows:
    - id of the situation,
    - the situation label,
    - an array of other alternative labels of this situation.
    - For some situations, we also annotated a short synopsis.

Due to copyright, it is not possible to publish the entire dataset at this time, so we are releasing only part of the annotated data. The newest release consists of nine older play scripts that can be already freely distributed and ten plays for which we succeeded to obtain a license with the right to make them publicly available for non-commercial use in artificial intelligence research only. One play released is annotated by all three annotators. You can find the statistics of the situations annotated in this portion in the last column of Table 4. The data can be downloaded from the LINDAT repository.[4]

4 http://hdl.handle.net/11234/1-4930.

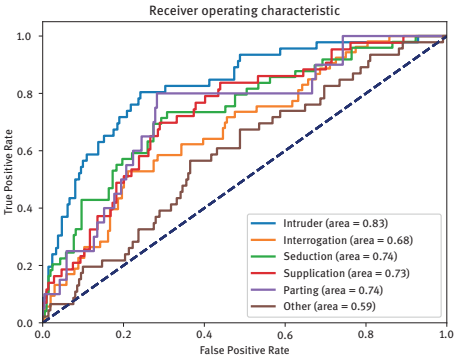

Fig. 3: ROC curves for the classifiers for particular type of situation.

6 Experiments in Predicting the Situations

The purpose of creating these annotations was to detect them automatically in a much larger set of play scripts. Such bigger datasets could be further analyzed and used for the generation of play scripts with given dramatic situations.

In preliminary experiments, we first simplified the task of detecting a dramatic situation by entering a section of the script that we know corresponds to a situation with the goal to assign it. The task is therefore simplified by skipping the search for the beginning and the end of the situation (i.e., the boundaries of the situation).

On the created data, the trivial solution (always assigning the most common type of the situation, which is *Seduction*) has an accuracy of 26 %. To solve the task, we tried to use various basic and advanced methods of data processing and machine learning (tokenization, bag of words, stopwords, anonymization, leave-one-out filtering, frequency-based filtering, TF.IDF, word embeddings, Naive Bayes, Support Vector Machine, Multilayer Perceptron, and others). We tried many variants of the procedure, but the highest accuracy we were able to achieve in this way was 42.97 % with the following pipeline: for each situation, we created a vector of word-counts (ignoring character names), the counts were weighted with TF-IDF and then classified with a linear Support Vector Machine optimized with stochastic gradient descent (weighted average precision was 47 %, recall 44 %, F1 score 0.44). The training and testing was performed as cross-validation, where for each play, the leave-out set was the situations coming from that play.

The *Intruder* situation was the easiest to classify, the area under the curve (AUC) reached 0.83. It is followed by *Seduction* and *Parting* (0.74 AUC), *Supplication* (0.73 AUC), and *Interrogation* (0.68 AUC). See Figure 3 for the ROC curves.

Such accuracy is too low, the tool thus returns the wrong answer in most cases. Moreover, it is the accuracy of an artificially simplified task with knowledge of the boundaries of the situations, which is impossible to assume for the actual data. Therefore, part of the task must also include searching for the boundaries of the situations, which would reduce the accuracy further, probably very significantly.

One of our hypotheses for the bad result was based on the observation that the annotators often characterize a relatively long section of the script as a dramatic situation. However, in such cases, a part of the marked section is rather a kind of lead-in for the given situation, from which the actual situation is not yet well recognizable, and only at the end of the situation does it gradate to such extent that it is obvious which kind of situation it is (typically, the dynamics are rising in this way, with the exception of the *Intruder* situation which, on the contrary, is usually the strongest at its beginning, when the intruder appears). That is why, together with the annotators, we carried out a further revision of the annotations, where the annotators added emphasis on the core of the situation in which it is strongest. Subsequent experiments using such enriched annotations, however, only led to a slight improvement in the results.

7 Conclusion

We believe that the task of identifying dramatic situations is considerably more difficult than we originally estimated. We relied on theatrical theories and insights which say that a play takes place in dramatic situations, that the author, the director, and the actor think in such situations, and thus it is a concept, which is well established and usually universally understood and shared. Until now, however, it has been more of a tradition based on theory and introspection, which has never been empirically verified on a larger number of scripts and methodically evaluated.

Experiments carried out by us have shown that even if limited to 5 selected situations, the paired inter-annotator agreement is only 70 %, which suggests that the concept of a dramatic situation is not nearly as straightforward and obvious as the theory claims.

Nevertheless, the experiments in the automatic identification of the situations fall far below this theoretically achievable limit. We conclude that this is mainly due to the too small amount of available training data, and we assume that for a task that proved to be so difficult, a significantly larger amount of data (certainly at least ten times, probably more than 100 times the current data) would be required, which is not feasible within this project.

We still consider the concept of dramatic situations to be substantial and potentially useful, but we believe that for any meaningful automatic work with them it would be necessary to create significantly larger annotated data.

Subsequently, we have run preliminary experiments on automatically classifying the dramatic situations in the scripts. We have trained a multi-layer perceptron classifier on the annotated data, obtaining slightly promising results.

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Appendix

Tab. 4: List of situations and their frequencies.

Situation label	Total	Phase 1	Phase 2	Release
seduction	146	37	109	62
intruder	136	50	86	51
interrogation	135	41	94	42
supplication	96	27	69	26
revelation	57	56	1	38
parting	57	18	39	23
admission	49	49	0	15
intimidation	47	44	3	14
accusation	46	37	9	26
fight	45	45	0	22
humiliation	42	42	0	22
bad news	36	36	0	18
fear	34	34	0	15
ruse-trap-fraud	31	31	0	15
enigma	30	29	1	27
unfulfilled desire	27	27	0	20
breaking the taboo	27	27	0	7
revolt	25	25	0	12
daring enterprise	25	25	0	15
remorse	23	23	0	13
jealousy	23	23	0	17
rivalry of kin	22	22	0	11
reconciliation	21	21	0	12
obtaining	20	20	0	11
madness	19	19	0	13
succumb	18	18	0	9
loss of loved ones	17	17	0	13
enmity	17	17	0	10
disaster	16	16	0	4
passing	15	15	0	5
erroneous judgment	15	15	0	8
break up	15	14	1	6
ambition	15	15	0	10
obstacles to love	13	13	0	11
deliverance	13	13	0	6
vengeance	12	12	0	3
falling prey to cruelty/misfortune	12	12	0	5
bad premonition	12	12	0	12
recovery of a lost one	11	11	0	68
pursuit	9	9	0	4
murder	9	9	0	2
conflict with a god	7	7	0	6
the necessary sacrifice of loved ones	6	6	0	4
discovery of the dishonor of a loved one	6	6	0	3
curse	6	6	0	4
extortion	5	4	1	1
betrayal	5	5	0	0
self-sacrifice for kin	4	4	0	3
an enemy loved	4	4	0	3
rape	3	3	0	1
crime pursued by vengeance	3	3	0	1
adultery	3	3	0	2
self-sacrifice for an ideal	2	2	0	1
crime of love	2	2	0	2
confession	2	2	0	2
capture	2	2	0	1
involuntary crimes of love	1	1	0	1
abduction	1	1	0	0