

Suspense as a literary device in English literature

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ABSTRACT

As being the oldest and most widely used genres of oral literature, proverbs are expressions of the ethical, spiritual, moral, and social expression of the people, which have been tested in centuries-old life experiences, and the wise conclusions of the people, which provide accurate and accurate solutions to life issues.

Key words: proverb, literature, English, transition.

1. INTRODUCTION

Suspense is the intense feeling that an audience goes through while waiting for the outcome of certain events. It basically leaves the reader holding their breath and wanting more information. The amount of intensity in a suspenseful moment is why it is hard to put a book down. Without suspense, a reader would lose interest quickly in any story because there is nothing that is making the reader ask, “What’s going to happen next?” In writing, there has to be a series of events that leads to a climax that captivates the audience and makes them tense and anxious to know what is going to happen. Suspense is a literary device that authors use to keep their readers’ interest alive throughout the work. It is a feeling of anticipation that something risky or dangerous is about to happen. The purpose of using this type of anxiety in literature is to make readers more concerned about the characters, and to form sympathetic association with them. Therefore, authors create scenarios that could force readers to understand, and to want to read on to see what their beloved characters face the next.¹

2. ANALYSIS

Mystery and suspense are interrelated. Sometimes it becomes difficult to differentiate between them. For example, the author exposes the same information for his readers in the mystery narrative that a detective may know. In a suspense narrative, on the other hand, the protagonist gradually becomes aware of the peril and dangers, which readers already know. Secondly, in a mystery, a major event such as a murder or robbery happens at first and then the protagonist solves it, whereas in a suspense story, a major event occurs at the end, and various events unfold, twist, turn, and surprise the readers prior to that event. Suspense ensures the interest of readers by putting them on the edges of their seats, waiting for what’s next. If an author does this well, suspense continues to increase gradually until the climax, or the turning point, and final confrontation is reached.²

Suspense is created by withholding something – whether it be critical plot turns and twists or information about a character's motives or actions done by a character that nobody knows about until the end of the novel. Suspense is essential to mystery because the author does not want the reader to understand the mystery until the end. Suspense is not only developed in murder mysteries. It is created in many stories and novels by alluding to something that happened, or is going to happen in the future, but not saying what that is until the end.

Mood and suspense go together. It is all up to the author whether he or she wants to create a certain mood in their novel. I don't think an author says to herself, I am going to create the mood of sadness then makes a scene. I think the author says to herself that she wants to create a certain character then that character faces difficulties in life. Then how they react to those troubles causes a mood in the scene. However, I do think it is a conscious choice to use suspense. Suspense keeps the reader turning the pages. It takes the readers` interest. It is beguiling. Suspense is essential for good literature. Suspense is a compositional device which consists in arranging the matter

¹W. Brewer, M. Friedrichsen. The Nature of Narrative Suspense and the Problem of rereading. 1996. – 334-p.

²Engelhardt, Sandra. The Investigation of crime in literature. – Germany: Tectum Verlag, 2011. 435-p.

of a communication in such a way that the less important, descriptive, subordinate parts are amassed at the beginning, the main idea being withheld till the end of the sentence.

3. DISCUSSION

The frequent mention of “little grey cells” also gives us some insight into Poirot: his major strength is his brainpower. He is a bit different from contemporary detectives on Law order and Homicide. Poirot relies almost exclusively upon his reason and rationality, along with whatever he can find out about a person’s temperament and individual psychology.³

Poirot has a few flaws, including a little bit of fussiness and maybe more than a little vanity. He is referred to as “dandified” in the novel, meaning he cares a little too much about his clothes or appearance, and has a silly little moustache to boot. He is also incredibly proud of his reputation.

Poirot’s aptitude to discover any kind of crime can be noticed from the very beginning of “The ABC murders”. When he received the first letter Hastings thought it to be sent by “some madman or other”, however, Poirot considered it as vice versa. At that moment he stated that:

“A madman, mon ami, is to be taken seriously. A mad man is a very careful dangerous thing.”(23)⁴

Through this sample we can realize that Poirot is a detective who is cautious even the situation may be ignored by many.

Moreover, Hercule Poirot's self-confidence may be recognized during reading the novel.

“Not instinct, Hastings. Instinct is a bad word. It is my knowledge--my experience--that tells me that something about that letter is wrong.”(24)⁵

The following example taken from “The ABC murders” represents precisely how a Belgian detective Hercule Poirot found out exactly who was the ABC murder: *“...you were seriously alarmed for the future. I do not know whether you realize it, Mr. Clarke, but you played into my hands when you showed me a certain letter written to you by your brother. In it he displayed very clearly his affection and absorption in Miss Thorn Grey. His regard may have been a paternal one--or he may have preferred to think it so. Nevertheless, there was a very real danger that on the death of your sister-in-law he might, in his loneliness, turn to this beautiful girl for sympathy and comfort and it might end--as so often happens with elderly men--in his marrying her. Your fear was increased by your knowledge of Miss Grey. You are, I fancy, an excellent, if somewhat cynical judge of character. You judged, whether correctly or not, that Miss Grey was a type of young woman 'on the make.' You had no doubt that she would jump at the chance of becoming Lady Clarke. Your brother was an extremely healthy and vigorous man. There might be children and your chance of inheriting your brother's wealth would vanish. You have been, I fancy, in essence a disappointed man all your life. You have been the rolling stone--and you have gathered very little moss. You were jealous of your brother's wealth.”*(177)

It is obvious that Agatha Christie used to express psychology of the characters in her works, especially, detectives. Precisely saying she created skillful psychologists out of the characters of her novels. In the above mentioned sample we can guess how great psychologist Hercule Poirot was.

“Your photograph was picked out from half a dozen others by two people who saw you leaving the cinema when you were supposed to be on the race-course at Doncaster. You were identified at Bexhill the other day by Milly Higley and a girl from the Scarlet Runner Road-house, where you took Betty Barnard to dine on the fatal evening. And finally--most damning of all--you overlooked a most elementary precaution. You left a fingerprint on Cust's typewriter--the typewriter that, if you are innocent, you could never have handled.” (181)⁶

Poirot conducted investigations secretly without announcing them to her colleagues till the end of the novel. He did everything by himself and never took part in conferences freely expressing his options about crimes that were occurring in an alphabetical order.

Poirot forms a "Legion" of relatives of the deceased in hopes of uncovering new information. Inspector Crome, who doubts Poirot's detective abilities and Dr Thomson, who tries to profile this serial killer, Captain Arthur Hastings and Inspector Japp are part of the police team.

³Lask, Thomas. “Hercule Poirot; Famed Belgian detective”. New York: The New York Times, 1975. 11-p.

⁴ Agatha Christie. “The ABC murders”. UK: Collins Crime Clup,1936. 23-p.

⁵Agatha Christie. “The ABC murders”. UK: Collins Crime Clup,1936. 78-p.

⁶Agatha Christie. “The ABC murders”. – UK: Collins Crime Clup,1936. 181-p.

Each chapter of the novel narrated by Hastings is followed by a description of events in the life of Alexander Bonaparte Cust, a travelling salesman.

Captain Hastings was often the narrator of the Hercule Poirot story, and was privy to most of Poirot's thoughts and ideas. However his slowness to see the significance of these, and his apparent lack of ability to think things through and therefore jump to fanciful conclusions, makes the reader feels one step ahead of him. He also often asked the questions of Poirot that the reader themselves are thinking.

The device of suspense is especially favored by orators. This is apparently due to the strong influence of intonation which helps to create the desired atmosphere of expectation and emotional tension which goes with it. Suspense always requires long stretches of speech or writing. This device is effective in more than one way, but the main purpose is to prepare the reader for the only logical conclusion of the utterance. It is a psychological effect that is aimed at in particular.⁷

It must be noted that suspense, due to its partly psychological nature (it arouses a feeling of expectation), is framed in one sentence, for there must not be any break in the intonation pattern. Separate sentences would violate the principle of constant emotional tension which is characteristic of this device.

According to the definitions found in different dictionaries, suspense is "A state or condition of uncertainty and excitement, with some anxiety, as the outcome of something is unknown"; "The state or quality of being undecided, uncertain, or doubtful"; "A feeling of tension, worry, etc. what may happen". But in literature it can be considered as an element that is used to leave a reader or audience wait in excitement trying to figure out what is going to happen next, the quality of a literary work that makes the reader or audience uncertain or tense about the outcome of events. Suspense comes from the ancient period. Even Aristotle referred to suspense as an element of drama. But suspense is not confined to drama; it can be found in a novel or a short story or a poem. Suspense inherent in a situation enhances the interest of the plot and contributes to the atmosphere. Suspense is a crucial plot element in literature. The plot is the arrangement of the ideas or events that make up a story and its elements determine the reader's experience. Its primary elements include not only plot but causality, foreshadowing, conflict, exposition, rising action, crisis and denouement as well. Suspense is the sense of anticipation or worry that the author instills in readers.⁸

Thus, the aim of suspense is to keep a reader in constant interest, feelings of tension and anxiety, in the state of uncertainty and expectation and somehow prepare the reader for the logical conclusion of the utterance. It can also be said that this stylistic device causes psychological effect. Suspense is that element that keeps a reader turning and turning pages. It is a vital ingredient in almost any text - be it a story, a novel, a fairy-tale, or a poem. Some readers think that suspense belongs to mysteries and thrillers, but suspense is vital to all genres. Suspense as a compositional device consists of arranging the matter of a communication in such a way that the less important, descriptive or subordinate parts are amassed at the beginning and the main idea is withheld till the end of the sentence/paragraph/chapter/the whole text. Thus the reader's attention is held and his/her interest is kept up.

Suspense can start at any place of the text:

- ✚ From the very title;
- ✚ At the beginning of the text;
- ✚ In the middle of the text;
- ✚ At the end of the text;

Suspense can end:

- ✚ In the middle of the text;
- ✚ At the end of the text;
- ✚ And generally anywhere throughout the text;

In the novel "The ABC murders" Agatha Christie expressed suspense from

⁷ Vorderer, P. H. Wuulff & M.Friedrichsen. Suspense. Conceptualizations, Theoretical analyses and Emperical Explorations. – Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996. – 111-p.

⁸W. Brewer, M. Friedrichsen. The Nature of Narrative Suspense and the Problem of rereading, 1996. – 222-p.

the title of the work. While reading the novel a reader feels suspense, he/she becomes anxious of thinking what will be next and who did the murder. The author created several victims and she showed Cust as ABC killer till the end of the work.

As all other stylistic devices, suspense can also be classified according to its strength. It is obvious that the strongest will be suspense which starts from the title, grows throughout the text and ends at the end of the text. We believe that weakest will be that suspense which comprises one sentence or one paragraph.⁹

Besides the type of suspense described above, the material under investigation enabled us to distinguish the following types of suspense:

- ✚ Hidden suspense;
- ✚ Macro suspense;
- ✚ Micro suspense;

Suspense can be considered as hidden if it is not perceived without aided eye. As an example we can bring Elizabeth Bowen's story "Tears, Idle Tears". If a reader is not extremely attentive and does not penetrate deeply into the story, he/she will never be able to notice suspense and consequently, will never understand the essence of the story.

Macro and Micro Suspense are somehow interrelated with each other. They cannot exist without each other. The "The ABC murders" can serve as a good example of these two kinds of suspense. Suspense starts from the very title and ends in the last paragraph of the novel. But besides, there is noticed another suspense in the text that starts from the second page and lasts for a while, i.e. comprises a couple of pages. Namely this story made us think about distinguishing macro and micro suspense. Thus, we call the first suspense macro suspense as it comprises the whole text and the second one – micro suspense which is included in the macro suspense.

4. CONCLUSION

There are basically two different ways to approach the problem of describing and explaining suspense. One begins with an analysis of suspenseful texts (books, films, etc.), whereas the other focuses on the reception process. Researchers who follow the more text-oriented method identify the uncertainty of the narrative's outcome, the threat or danger for a protagonist, the play with time delays, and so on, as important and necessary for the production of suspense. The more reception-oriented scholar, on the other hand, focuses on the cognitive activities of audiences, the expectations of readers, the curiosity of onlookers, their emotions (fear, hope, etc.), and their relationships with the protagonists. None of the researchers would deny the importance of aspects investigated by their colleagues, but it is obvious that every individual scholar concentrates primarily on either.¹⁰

In this view, powerlessness is a necessary condition for suspense and suspense is based on a series of frustrated desires in the novel. As we are mere onlookers of the unfolding drama, we have no means to intervene in the story. Our situation is similar to real world situations where there is nothing we can do to affect a result: waiting for an exam result perhaps.

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⁹Phelan, J. Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression and the Interpretation of Narrative. – Chicago. University of Chicago Press, 1989. – 2-3-p.

¹⁰Patricia D. Maida, Nicholas B. Spornick. [Murder She Wrote: A Study of Agatha Christie's Detective Fiction](#). — Popular Press 1, 1982. — 206-p.



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