The Suspense of Horror and the Horror of Suspense

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By

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GDSM – gradually developed suspense motif
CSE – climactic suspense episode
MSE – mini suspenseful episode
POV – point of view
TK – telekinesis
TF – time of the fabula
TS – story time
FD – fabula duration
SD – syuzhet duration
ScD – screen duration (running time)

INTRODUCTION

Stephen King is undoubtedly one of the most prolific and popular contemporary authors in the literary domain of the horror genre and his works have been discussed by readers and researchers. Understandably, those discussions are as diverse as the characters of his novels. Their scope varies from literary parallels with other authors' works such as Edgar Allan Poe and Franz Kafka to theoretical analyses that seek to relate the author's oeuvre to literary postmodernism and naturalism. Topics like the supernatural, the roots of evil, and the innocence of childhood permeate the critical discourse. However, there are hardly any in-depth analyses of the narrative structures related to suspense buildings.

The aforementioned statement rings true about the films based on King's novels. The fact that his works are filmed and re-filmed, often by names as great as John Carpenter (*Christine*) and George A. Romero (*The Dark Half*), proves the vivid interest in the author and genre. However, despite the fact that there exists a copious corpus of analytical materials that deal with those cinematic productions, the works that focus on suspense in particular are scanty. This gap provides the research territory of the present study.

In its broadest sense, suspense is a prospect emotional experience related to the future development of a tense situation. This experience is frequently an aimed effect in literary fiction and film and it is one of the factors that generate interest. Suspenseful moments might involve a dangerous chase, the pursuing of goals that are hard to achieve, a cliff-hanging moment, or any other situation which makes the reader/viewer eager to know what happens next while expecting a particular outcome. As Alfred Hitchcock suggests, even love scenes should be suspenseful. It goes without saying that suspense could be considered a key ingredient in the horror genre.

Most suspense theories and studies do not make a clear-cut distinction between prose and cinema and conceptualize suspense generally or in either of the two media. However, it is crystal clear that films and novels are separate works of art, and although they aim at generating the same emotional effect, it can be expected that the techniques of building it differ significantly. This poses the questions of whether it is possible to retain the motifs that produce suspense in the novels and how that can be achieved in cinema.

The current work aims at exploring the suspense building in two horror novels by Stephen King and their film adaptations. The analyzed books are *Carrie* (1974) and *The Shining* (1977). The selected filmed versions are Brian de Palma's *Carrie* (1976), *Carrie* (2013) directed by Kimberly Peirce, Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) and *The Shining* (1997) directed by Mick Garris.

This is not an evaluative study that will pursue any kind of qualitative analysis of the novels and films. Nor is it intended to establish which one of the adaptations is better. There are enough publications of this sort. The scope here is limited to suspense as an emotional response to horror literary fiction and film. The novels *The Shining* and *Carrie* have been selected because they have at least two film adaptations each. The first one released immediately after the publishing of the book, and the second one minimum fifteen years later. This may be a significant detail because, as Brian Mc Farlaine (1996) suggests, the time-lapse between publishing the novel and releasing the filmed version might prove defining for the filming strategies in many ways. As he states, "[t]he time-lapse accounts for ideological shifts, for changes in censorship strictures, and for variations in aesthetic climate."[1] Just like literary translations made in different decades sound different, films produced in different decades look different because of the inevitable social and cultural changes. This is quite noticeable in Kimberly Pierce's adaptation of *Carrie*, where school bullying is replaced by cyber-bullying, for example. The existence of an earlier cinematic version of the novel is also a factor that might have defined some filming solutions, because as Mc Farlaine points out, there are productions that are more likely to be considered a remake of the first film, rather than an adaptation of the book.

The first filmed versions of *The Shining* and *Carrie* were released shortly after the books' publications and enjoyed a great success and public acclaim. *Carrie* (2013) has been less applauded by horror fans probably because it seems to move a step away from the domain of horror and pursues other objectives. Its rating on the film review website http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/carrie/ is 49% against the impressive 92% of Brian de Palma's adaptation. The shift of focus away from horror, coupled with the time span of almost forty years between the book publication and the film release, makes the question of suspense development even more complicated.

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[1] Brian Mc Farlaine, *Novel To Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (New York: OUP, 1996), 187.

The Shining presents a not less intricate case. Although Stanley Kubrick's feature was a great hit on its release, Stephen King's comment on it was unflattering as the writer thought it ignored the central themes of his novel and the cast was not appropriate. This might have been King's motive to launch the project of the mini-series *The Shining* (1997) directed by Mick Garris. Despite the fact that Garris's *The Shining* presents the novel's content with pedantic care, allowing only a few deviations from the book, it was far less successful than Kubrick's film. The novelist's participation in the venture, the time lapse of twenty years between book publication and film release, and the fact that it can be taken as a response to the first filmed version are the main reasons to include the mini-series in this analysis. One might argue that TV productions differ significantly from feature films, but as the focus here is entirely on suspense, this dissimilarity is not considered to be essential for the purposes of the study.

Since the term *adaptation* could suggest different meanings, it should be clarified that in the present work it is used to signify the transfer of a work of literature into another medium or more specifically in this context, the filming of a novel. A central issue that permeates the academic works that deal with the process of adaptation across different media is the question of the similarity between a novel and its film version. Most literature fans demand from any filmmaker to offer them exactly the same experience that they had with the book. More often than not, the severe criticism against a specific adaptation is provoked exactly by the lack of resemblance to the original. However, most theoreticians of film adaptation seem to agree that it is futile to compare both. The inevitable differences arise from the fact that the two media are autonomous and use unique means of expression, which in most cases leads to the creation of a brand new work of art rather than a kind of translation of the original. In his seminal work, *Novels into Film*, for example, George Bluestone (1957) notes that "the two media are marked by such essentially different traits that they belong to separate artistic genera,"[2] and sees the adapted film as a completely separate work of art that exists independently of the literary source its content was initially derived from. One should probably agree with Bluestone as he states: "It is as fruitless to say that film A is better or worse than novel B as it is to pronounce Wright's Johnson's Wax Building better or worse than Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake.*"[3]

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[2] George Bluestone, *Novels into Film* (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1957), vi.

[3] Ibid.: 5-6.

For Brian McFarlane (1996), before judging a filmed novel, it is important to define its kind of adaptation, that is, whether it aims at fidelity to the novel, offers a commentary to it, or tries to experiment with the text. Despite the fact that he sees fidelity as “desirable”, it is impossible to be accomplished, as it could present only one “reading” of the verbal narrative, which does not necessarily coincide with the other readers’ idea about the book. That is why he concludes that “it seems wiser to drop terms like 'violation', 'distortion', 'travesty', and those others which, like them, imply the primacy of the printed text.”[4]

Siegfried Kracauer (1960) sees these differences as arising from the nature of the novels and distinguishes between *cinematic adaptations*, in which “the similarities between the literary and the cinematic medium tend to prevail over the differences”[5] and *uncinematic adaptations*, which “are inevitably derived from novels which construct a cinematically unmanageable universe.”[6]

Most adaptation theories suggest that once filmed a novel’s content starts living its own life and should be studied independently of its source. Suspense theories, however, often tend to blur the borderline that separates literary fiction and film. That is why it is necessary to explain that the current research grapples with the problem of suspense development only and it does not pursue any issues of the art of adaptation. The theoretical focus falls on suspense and narrative theories rather than on the theory of adaptation. In short, the methodology which determines the structure of the study is to explore the patterns of suspense building in the books and trace them in the two filmed versions. The basic task is to reveal the narrative ways of achieving suspense in both media within the context of one specific work of art. Some additional tasks are:

- To establish a particular repeating plot-bound model of achieving suspense;
- To establish specific types of suspense motifs and suspense episodes in the two novels;
- To trace the outlined types of literary suspense motifs and suspense episodes in the films;
- To demonstrate the similarities and the differences in the techniques of achieving suspense in literature and in cinema;

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[4] Brian Mc Farlaine, *Novel To Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (New York: OUP, 1996), 22.

[5] Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 240.

[6] Ibid.: 242.

- To trace the suspense distribution in the analyzed works;
- To demonstrate how suspense works in connection with the horror genre.

Chapter 1 provides the theoretical framework. It presents the main suspense theories as a general overview of the research in the field and a brief outline of the horror genre aiming at establishing the place of suspense in horror fiction. For the purposes of the actual analysis a toolkit of narrative theory has been adopted. The choice of narrative theory has been determined by the fact that the effect of suspense on the reader is produced by the literary and narrative techniques employed by the author. With regard to the cinematic media specifics and considering some significant differences in literary and film analysis, the theoretical framework for the suspense analysis of the films has been slightly modified. Once the models of suspense building in the novels have been established, they are traced in the adaptations.

The following four chapters deal with each work in particular. After summarizing briefly the plot lines and basic themes in the books and films, a suspense analysis is carried out using the aforementioned toolkit and the general conclusions are drawn at the end.

In a nutshell, the nature of the analysis demands the use of concepts belonging to several theoretical fields – suspense theory, film theory, and narratology, which makes the current work an innovative interdisciplinary study. It aims at demonstrating that independently of the considerable differences in the means employed by each media and the individual director’s approach, there are certain plot-bound suspense motifs that appear in the studied books and films. However, there are narrative devices of achieving suspense specific to the particular media.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The fact that suspense is in the focus of the current study creates the necessity of clarifying the term and its theoretical use. While some scholars like Aaron Smuts (2008) are more concerned with the psychological aspect of the phenomenon, other theories like Hans Wulff's (1996) and David Lodge's (1992) explore more thoroughly the way fiction is constructed in order to produce such an emotional experience. However, it cannot be denied that suspense is related to both, the text structure and its effect on the reader/viewer. That is why, in order to understand how it functions, it is necessary to explore both the source and the mechanism of emotional effect. This is the reason why the overview of basic suspense theories is intended to provide studies of different types. Another point that needs to be made is the fact that most of the suspense theories explore the phenomenon without making a clear distinction between literary and film narrative and that is why no such distinction is drawn in the following theoretical overview.

Additionally, it is evident that in order to explore the function of the suspenseful motifs one needs to go into the world of retold events and the way they are narrated. This requires the adoption of some tools specific to narrative analysis, which are borrowed from narrative theory. As the toolkit of narrative theory can also be applied to cinema, it is partly used in the film analyses, as well. However, it is slightly modified adopting some terms and notions that are highly specific to the fiction film analysis.

Part I—Suspense: Basic Definitions and Theories

Dolf Zillman starts his article *Anatomy of Suspense* (1980) with Alfred Hitchcock's statement: "The trouble with suspense is that few people know what it is."[7] The veracity of this statement makes the phenomenon of suspense an attractive object of research for psychologists and literary and film theorists. The haziness of the concept of suspense and the desire of academics to grasp it has led to the appearance of abundance of definitions and attempts to explain its mechanisms in literature and film. However, the truth is that suspense is felt by people on a daily basis and fiction authors and directors are constantly aiming at it in order to hook their audience, but when it comes to conceptualizing and theorizing it, things become complicated and many paradoxes appear on the surface.

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[7] Dolf Zillmann, "Anatomy of Suspense," in *The Entertainment Functions of Television,* ed. P. H. Tannenbaum (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1980), 133.

Generally speaking, suspense is an emotional experience that is connected to the tension around the outcome of a situation. Noël Carroll (2003) differentiates between real life suspense and suspense as “an emotional response to narrative fiction.”[8] The first type of suspense is experienced by people while watching a football match or waiting for some important exam results, for instance. The second type, which is the object of the current study, is the suspense as a reaction to works of fiction.

Some attempts at defining suspense refer to its ambivalent nature connected to the provoking of tension and fear on the one hand, and pleasure, on the other. Among the numerous definitions William Brewer (1996) quotes, there are some which poetically represent suspense as a “curious mixture of pain and pleasure", "delicious agony" and "sweet pain of anxiety."[9] And according to Dolf Zillmann (1980) suspense is “an experience of uncertainty, mainly, whose hedonic properties can vary from noxious to pleasant.”[10] Such references are reminiscent of Aristotle’s early explanation of the cleansing properties of the ancient tragedy, which in his view accomplishes “by means of pity and fear the cleansing of these states of feeling.”[11] Probably the idea of *katharsis*[12] and the purgation of feelings have something in common with the experience of suspense and it is this cleansing effect that one aims at by willfully exposing themselves to the nervous expectation of suspense.

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[8] Noël Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 256.

[9] William Brewer, “The Nature of Narrative Suspense and the Problem of Rereading,” in *Suspense: Conceptualizations, Theoretical Analyses, and Empirical Exploration*, ed. Vorder, Wulff and Friedrichsen (Hillsdale, NJ: Elbaum, 1996), 107.

[10] Zillmann, “Anatomy of Suspense,” 133.

[11] Aristotle, *Poetics*. *Translated with Introduction and Notes*, ed. and trans. Joe Sachs. (St. John’s College, Annapolis: Focus Publishing, Newburyport, 2006), 26.

[12] This spelling appears in Joe Sach’s introduction to the English translation of Aristotle’s *Poetics* (2006). A more common English spelling of the term κάθαρσις (Greek) is: ***catharsis***.

Another aspect of the phenomenon is that suspense is connected to the interest created in the reader/viewer about the story. Thus Alfred Hitchcock, whose sobriquet is the Master of Suspense, calls it "the most powerful means of holding onto the viewer's attention"[13] and Mary Rodell (1952) speaks of it as "the art of making the reader care about what happens next."[14]

Most studies on suspense are preoccupied either with the emotional experience of the consumer of a suspenseful piece of fiction, or with the structure of such pieces of fiction as the source of such experience. Thus, some of the theories appear to be purely psychological, while others are more narratively oriented.

One of the most quoted psychological theories of suspense is the so-called *Standard Account Theory* developed by Ortony, Clore, and Collins (1998), according to which suspense has three elements: fear, hope, and "the cognitive state of uncertainty."[15] Fear and hope are described as "prospect emotions" and as Aaron Smuts (2008) explains, they illustrate respectively the "fear of displeasure about the prospect of an undesirable event"[16] and "the feeling of pleasure about the prospect of a desirable event."[17] Consequently, suspense is felt when people "fear a bad outcome, hope for a good outcome and are uncertain about which outcome will come to pass."[18] Uncertainty is seen as necessary and the greater it is, the greater the suspense is. This postulate might serve as a good starting point as it advances some key notions that appear and reappear in other studies. However, despite the fact that the involvement of fear and hope might be taken as more or less inevitable, the *Standard Account Theory* has its weak points. Thus the establishment of uncertainty as a preliminary condition for building suspense is questioned by some scholars like Aaron Smuts, Hans Hoeken and Mario van Vliet.

In his *Desire-Frustration Theory of Suspens*e (2008) Aaron Smuts deals with what causes suspense and tries to prove that the significance of uncertainty as a factor in creating it is overrated. Otherwise, feeling suspense when one already knows the ending, as is the case with multiple viewings/readings, would not be possible. The desire-frustration theory focuses on the audiences' involvement and concern for the outcome and thus sees suspense as caused by "the frustration of a strong desire to affect the outcome of an imminent event."[19] In order to feel suspense one needs not only to possess more information than the character in the story, but it is also necessary to feel the need and impossibility to help the character. According to Smuts: "Audiences feel suspense on subsequent viewings of a movie not because they cannot remember how the story will turn out, but because their desires have not been fulfilled this time around."[20]

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[13] Francois Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York: Touchstone, 1983), 72.

[14] Marie Rodell, *Mystery Fiction: Theory and Technique* (New York: Hermitage House, 1952), 71.

[15] Andrew Ortony, Gerald L. Clore and Allan Collins, *The Cognitive Structure of Emotions* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 131.

[16] Aaron Smuts, "The Desire-Frustration Theory of Suspense," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66:3 (Summer 2008): 281 .

[17] Ibid. : 281.

[18] Ibid.

Other theoreticians who deal with the question of why suspense survives when one already knows the final outcome are Richard Gerrig (1996) and Noël Carroll (1996). Gerrig terms this phenomenon *resiliency of suspense* and tries to explain it with the "expectation of uniqueness". Carroll, on the other hand, refers to it as the *paradox of suspense,* and sees it as generated by the possibility that the viewers "may entertain the thought that the relevant outcome is uncertain or improbable,"[21] although they might be aware of the particular outcome. However, unlike Smuts, neither Gerrig, nor Carroll totally excludes uncertainty from the general picture.

As Gerrig bases his ideas on the suggestion that suspense depends on the possession of information, he claims that in order to feel suspense, audiences should be aware of the possibilities of both attractive and unattractive outcomes and be uncertain which one will turn out. He states: "Suspense will arise when readers processing some particular range of cognitive processes interact with a particular range of narrative features."[22] Thus, in order to be successful in creating suspense any author should "increase readers' feelings of uncertainty by modeling a course of troubled problem solving."[23]

Noël Carroll (2003) also bases his theory on the assumption that uncertainty is a required condition for suspense. An important point in his studies is the significance of the period of the story in which suspense takes place. Carroll holds it that suspense is bound to the moment leading up to the outcome and excludes the outcome itself. What is more, the question if the outcome is positive or negative has no relevance to suspense: "the emotion of suspense takes as its object the moments leading up to the outcome about which we are uncertain […] Once the outcome is fixed, however, the state is no longer suspense [...] the emotion of suspense gives way to other emotions."[24]

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[19] Ibid.: 284.

[20] Ibid.: 286.

[21] Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics*, 267.

[22] Richard Gerrig, "The Resiliency of Suspense," in *Suspense: Conceptualizations, Theoretical Analyses, and Empirical Exploration*, ed. Vorder, Wulff and Friedrichsen (Hillsdale, NJ: Elbaum, 1996), 93.

[23] Ibid.: 95-96.

Carroll draws an important distinction between suspense and mystery in terms of their temporal orientation. He relates suspense to the uncertainty of what WILL HAPPEN in the narrative future of the story and mystery – to what HAPPENED in its past. This view is very close to Hitchcock's ideas that suspense and mystery are completely different things.

Carroll summarizes that suspense, as a response to fiction, is:

1. an emotional concomitant to the narration of a course of events
2. which course of events points to two logically opposed outcomes
3. whose opposition is made salient and
4. where one of the alternative outcomes is morally correct but improbable (although live) or at least no more probable than its alternative, while
5. the other outcome is morally incorrect or evil, but probable[25]

Another key figure in suspense studies is Dolf Zillmann, who provides one of the most thorough theoretical explanations of the phenomenon. In his *Anatomy of Suspense* (1980), he studies suspenseful drama and sees suspense as "the experience of uncertainty regarding the outcome of a potentially hostile confrontation."[26] This experience is connected with the emotions of hope and fear, or more specifically:

> (1) the fear that a favored outcome may not be forthcoming, (2) the fear that a deplorable outcome may be forthcoming, (3) the hope that a favored outcome will be forthcoming, (4) the hope that a deplorable outcome will not be forthcoming, and (5) any possible combination of these hopes and fears.[27]

It becomes evident that in order to intensify suspense, one should feel that the feared result is more probable than the one that is hoped for. That is why to make a story more suspenseful one should include stressful situations involving both hope and fear. Despite the fact that Zillmann mentions uncertainty, he does not see it as highly relevant to the levels of suspense. As he puts it, “maximal uncertainty associated with a feared outcome does not necessarily constitute the point of maximal suspense.”[28]

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[24] Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics*, 257.

[25] Ibid.: 260.

[26] Zillmann, "Anatomy of Suspense," 135.

[27] Ibid.

Another important point Zillmann makes is that in order to provoke suspense, a piece of fiction should feature a likable protagonist exposed to danger. The theoretician sees the idea of the dependency of the level of enjoyment on the level of suspense as a problematic issue in some suspense studies. He discusses this point of view within the framework of the well-known *Arousal-Jag Model* of Daniel Berlyne (1960) according to which the enjoyment is achieved by the relief caused by the rewarding termination of moderate aversion. Thus, the negative emotions are converted into positive. “As for suspense, the higher its level (i.e., the greater the empathetic distress) and the prompter its resolution, the greater the enjoyment.”[29] Zillmann questions this postulate as it leads to a number of complications that make it unconvincing. He concludes that “suspenseful drama derives its affective intensity from something more than the mere reduction of an annoyance”[30] and sees high levels of suspense as the result of the combination of factors including a sympathetic endangered protagonist and the feeling of inability to help him.

An attempt at creating a theory of suspense, which strives to conceptualize, describe, and explain it in psychological terms has been presented by Peter Vorder (1996). As a basis of his study, he uses Zillmann’s conceptions of suspense that the viewers/readers “must feel sympathy for protagonists; at least they must not dislike them. The harming of the protagonists has to be likely, but not (in the perception of the readers or onlookers) absolutely certain.”[31] Vorder sees as suspense-defining the type of texts and the situation in which a fictional work is consumed, as emotions are different when a film is watched at the cinema or at home. Another important factor for Vorder is the very viewer’s/reader’s abilities to react emotionally. His simple explanation of the suspense mechanism is that it occurs when “an unpreferred outcome (or further development) seems likely (or if a preferred outcome seems unlikely). This may (and in the prototypic case, will) be because an unpleasant protagonist or, more simply, evil threatens to triumph."[32] In short, Vorder sees suspense as a bifurcation into two contradictory outcomes, which presents a strong possibility that evil will win.

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[28] Ibid.: 138.

[29] Ibid.: 144.

[30] Ibid.: 146.

[31] Peter Vorderer, “Toward a Psychological Theory of Suspense,” in *Suspense: Conceptualizations, Theoretical Analyses, and Empirical Exploration*, ed. Vorder, Wulff and Friedrichsen (Hillsdale, NJ: Elbaum, 1996), 235.

Another author who deals with the problems of suspense, primarily in films, is Hans Wulff (1996). He sees *anticipation* as a necessary condition for it: "There is no experience of suspense without anticipation!"[33] As in his opinion "suspense is not in the text, but rather in what the text triggers,"[34] Wulff introduces the notion of the so-called *cataphoric elements*, which he defines as "classes of textual elements that serve the purpose, within the framework of textual reception, of evoking or indicating possible future courses of events."[35] Wulff calls *anticipation* the mechanism in which at a given filmic description of a situation, it is "processed by viewers into an ensemble of possible extrapolations of the situation, into the open horizon of the "not yet" of the situation"[36] and concludes that suspense can be seen as resulting from "the extrapolation of possible events from a given situation; it is the result, or concomitant, of the anticipating activity."[37]

Uncertainty is also the central focus of the suspense study of Gerald Cupchick (1996). He mentions two types, or rather two poles, of literary uncertainty. One that regards the *predictions* of future events and the other that is connected to "the *understanding* of ongoing events, which may require the discovery of facts and conditions concealed from us by the author."[38] In his opinion, suspense is associated with the problems of prediction. He uses Iser's (1978) concept of the *blanks,* which are said to appear "if the flow of discourse is broken for some reason."[39] In other words, the reader is forced to predict what happens next. Thus, suspense is built by extending the distance between the reader's/viewer's viewpoint and the actual outcome of the situation.

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[32] Ibid.: 246.

[33] Hans Wulff, "Suspense and the Influence of Cataphora on Viewers' Expectations," in *Suspense: Conceptualizations, Theoretical Analyses, and Empirical Exploration*, ed. Vorder, Wulff and Friedrichsen (Hillsdale, NJ: Elbaum, 1996), 1.

[34] Ibid.: 2.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.: 15.

[37] Ibid.: 16.

[38] Gerald Cupchik, "Suspense and Disorientation: Two Poles of Emotionally Charged Literary Uncertainty," in *Suspense: Conceptualizations, Theoretical Analyses, and Empirical Exploration*, ed. Vorder, Wulff and Friedrichsen (Hillsdale, NJ: Elbaum, 1996), 189.

[39] Ibid.: 191.

Cupchick analyzes suspense together with surprise within Berlyne's behavioral model and observes a significant difference: "Whereas suspense focuses on the future, surprise pertains to the present. Suspense builds gradually over time in accordance with the author's manipulation of information and, hence, of uncertainty."[40] Cupchick sees uncertainty and disorientation as "the operative constructs for suspense and surprise, respectively."[41] This demonstrates that although suspense and surprise can operate together in a text, they are entirely different on the emotional level. Suspense is generally associated with the tension felt by the readers until they become aware of a particular outcome.

For Ed Tan and Gijsbert Ditewig (1996) suspense is "inextricably bound up with the concept of expectation"[42] and film viewers are seen as "projecting expectations."[43] Starting from these preliminary assumptions and focusing on film viewing, they make an attempt "to predict predictions."[44] On the basis of the results of some experiments, they conclude that "predictive inferences are generated during suspense sequences,"[45] which supports their thesis that "suspense is a textual procedure that allows for specific predictive inferences, and that predictive inferences as part of an emotional response tend to be generated by necessity."[46]

A new perspective in their study is the idea of suspense as involving a promise. Suspense provokes high interest by creating a feeling that the outcome is near and that there is some threat to the character. "The promise is that an outcome is felt to be near, and this outcome is anticipated to bring certainty about a major part of the final situation in the fictional world, typically life or death for the protagonist."[47] Tan and Ditewig propose a working definition of suspense scenes in narrative films, according to which such scenes are characterized by:

> 1. An IE [initiating event] occasions expectations regarding the nature of an OE [outcome event].

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[40] Ibid.: 193.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ed Tan and Gijsbert Diteweg, "Suspense, Predictive Inference, and Emotion in Film Viewing," in *Suspense: Conceptualizations, Theoretical Analyses, and Empirical Exploration*, ed. Vorder, Wulff and Friedrichsen (Hillsdale, NJ: Elbaum, 1996), 149.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.: 172.

[46] Ibid.: 149.

[47] Ibid.: 152.

2. The IE has relevance for the fate of a protagonist; it is appraised as a threat.
3. The OE is perceived to be imminent and to eliminate threat by materializing an unfavorable result; it is appraised as uncertain.
4. The fate of the protagonist is relevant to viewers; they sympathize with the protagonist.
5. Viewers feel that they are unable to act.
6. In observing the events as witnesses, viewers respond emotionally with fear, that is, the anticipation of the unfavorable OE, and the desire for the protagonist to escape from it.
7. Another emotional response in viewers is increased interest and tension, a readiness to witness the OE."[48]

While Tan and Ditewig see the element of curiosity as inevitably involved in suspense as film scenes project hypotheses, one of the most acknowledged researchers of the curious nature of suspense, William Brewer, is interested in the contradiction suspense provokes: the fact that it presents both positive and negative emotions. In his attempt at grouping the existing suspense theories, Brewer distinguishes theories of *Reader Involvement* – readers become absorbed into the narration and the fictional world it involves, *Identification Theories*, according to which the reader identifies with the fictional character therefore they start feeling the emotions he/she feels, and *Sympathy Theories,* which the author supports*,* that postulate that "the reader feels emotions for fictional characters that are like those the reader would feel for nonfictional individuals in similar circumstances."[49] All of these theories hold their grain of truth but none of them are resistant to criticism. The basic contribution of Brewer and his colleagues from the University of Illinois to suspense studies is their work on the development of the so-called *Structural-Affect Theory of Narrative Suspense*. It associates the structural features of a narrative to the affective responses they provoke in the reader, which is related to the story liking. The theory distinguishes the events in the narrative from their linguistic presentation and uses two different terms to denote them – *event structure* and *discourse structure*. *Event structure* stands for "the events in the underlying event world" and *discourse structure* would refer to "the temporal arrangement of these events in the narrative text."[50] This differentiation is reminiscent of the Russian formalists' and French structuralists' division of the narrative into *story* and *discourse* (*fabula* and *syuzhet*).

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Brewer, "The Nature of Narrative Suspense and the Problem of Rereading," 109-110.

[50] Ibid.: 110.

Brewer and Lichtenstein recognize three basic types of discourse structures in most popular stories according to the effect they produce in the reader – surprise, suspense or curiosity. Surprise structures appear when a "critical event information has been omitted from the discourse structure to produce surprise."[51] In curiosity structures "the significant event is omitted from the discourse, but (unlike surprise) the reader is given enough information."[52] A suspense structure is produced when there is "an *initiating event* or *situation."*[53] What is unique to the suspense discourse structure is that, unlike surprise and curiosity discourse structures, it can go parallel to the event structure it covers. Apart from the initiating event, in order to reach suspense, it is necessary to propose a *significant outcome*. As the significant outcome is still unclear to the reader, logically it could be either positive or negative. However, the author agrees with Zillmann that "the vast majority of suspense texts involve a potential negative outcome for the character."[54] Another important factor is the *outcome likelihood.* Disagreeing with some theorists, among whom Carroll and Bartholomew, Brewer suggests that "maximum suspense will occur when the odds of a good outcome are very low."[55] As to *character sympathy*, in concord with sympathy theories, the author holds the view that "the reader must be concerned about the character in order for the reader to feel suspense for the character."[56] Brewer shows experimentally that the so-called *Mini Suspense and Resolution Episodes* – minimal episodes that involve suspense and resolution contribute to the overall suspense structure of the work. In sum, the experiments on suspense that were conducted proved that:

> […] suspense is produced by having an initiating event in the discourse that has the potential to lead to significant outcome for one of the characters […] suspense can be produced by events that have the potential for either good or bad outcomes and […] suspense can be produced when

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[51] William Brewer and Edward Lichtenstein, *Stories are to entertain: a structural affect theory of stories* (University of Illinois at Urban-Champaign, 1982), 14.

[52] Ibid.: 15.

[53] William Brewer, "The story schema: universal and culture-specific properties," in *Literacy, Language, and Learning: The Nature and Consequences of Reading and Writing*, eds. D. R. Olson, N. Torrance, and A. Hildyard (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985), 169.

[54] Brewer, "The Nature of Narrative Suspense and the Problem of Rereading," 115.

[55] Ibid.: 115.

[56] Ibid.: 116.

> either good or bad characters are at risk, although higher suspense is produced when there is the potential for a bad outcome for a good character.[57]

Hans Hoeken and Mario van Vliet (2000) use Brewer and Lichtensten's *Structural-Affect Theory* to test uncertainty as a prerequisite for suspense. They carried out an experiment using different versions of the same story whose "discourse structure was manipulated to evoke surprise, suspense or curiosity."[58] As both stories – with known and unknown outcome proved equally suspenseful, they logically conclude that uncertainty is not a prerequisite for suspense.

In his analyses of films in relation to viewers' emotional reception, Lothar Mikos (1996) associates suspense with the feeling of thrill. Like Ortony, Clore, and Collins, he sees suspense as involving both hope (for a good outcome) and fear (of a bad outcome). To him the inducement of fear is directly related to suspense, which is why the staging of fear in a film (using different techniques such as sound effects, darkness, the image of an obviously scared person) is an extremely important prerequisite for suspense. Following Balint (1972) in his suggestion that the "mixture of fear, delight, and a confident hope with regard to an external danger is the basic component of all thrills,"[59] Mikos explains the pleasurable feeling of fear with the security and the control the viewers have during the film experience. They are sure they are safe, as they "have what they perceive to be control over the fictitious action within the framework of realistic illusion."[60]

Another aspect of Mikos's work is the involvement of genre conventions in the discussion about suspense. He sees such conventions as facilitating *controlled thrilling experience.*[61] According to him, genre conventions can model the viewers' expectations on the basis of their previous experience with such films, in other words, on the memories they keep about the genre, as all genre films have something in common. Thus "[t]hose[62] who willfully and purposefully expose themselves to a horror film or a psycho thriller expect to find excitement, suspense, thrill, and horror in the tenor of the reception experience. The spectator is disappointed with the film when these experiences are not present (cf. Wulff, 1994c)."[63] Mikos concludes that viewers accept different films in a different manner depending on their individual experience, as he puts it, "[…] films deal with structures of experience that relate to spectators' unconscious fears and wishes […] These fears can be experienced safely and pleasurably within the framework of a secure apparative and dispositive structure […]."[64] Thus horror films might be scary to some people, and funny to others. The emotional experience depends on their individual memories of past experience. However, Mikos claims that the existence of common cultural context and collective experience presuppose the possibility of some common patterns.

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[57] Ibid.: 119.

[58] Hans Hoeken and Mario van Vliet, "Suspense, curiosity, and surprise: How discourse structure influences the affective and cognitive processing of a story," *Poetics* 26, (2000): 280.

[59] Lothar Mikos, "The Experience of Suspense: Between Fear and Pleasure," in *Suspense: Conceptualizations, Theoretical Analyses, and Empirical Exploration*, ed. Vorder, Wulff and Friedrichsen (Hillsdale, NJ: Elbaum, 1996), 38.

[60] Ibid.: 41.

[61] Ibid.: 42.

[62] The brackets indicate that in the original source the initial letter is capital.

A theoretical model of art perception has been developed by Hans Kreitler and Shulamith Kreitler in their *Psychology of the Arts* (1972). They focus on the psychological processes that occur during the perception of the different arts and concentrate on the relation between pleasure and tension-relief. They formulate the following principle: "The art experience is motivated by tensions which exist prior to its onset, but are triggered through the production of new tensions by the work of art."[65] In their view, the pleasure given by a work of art is associated with the arousal and relief of tensions. Kreitler and Kreitler mention the following ways of building suspense:

> (1) suggestion of alternative courses of development and resolution which do not always mature into events or solutions; (2) gradual build-up towards a climax over a series of crises; (3) foreshadowing and unchronological presentation of a story, with recurrent flashbacks or revelations; (4) use of ambiguities (Empson, 1953); (5) resort to possible and explicable though unexpected resolutions (e. g., Lubbock 1957; Foster, 1927)."[66]

However, in literary works whose aim is to shock and puzzle the audience, such as the Theatre of the Absurd, Kreitler and Kreitler talk about another source of tension that has to do with the readers' understanding of the plot. The problem that causes this kind of tension is seen as posed by the reader rather than the author and it has to do with the question, “What does all this mean?”[67] Unlike the suspense provoked by plot complications, which is resolved when the denouement of the specific situation comes, this type of suspense “can be relieved only by an active search for meaning on the part of the percipient.”[68]

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[63] Ibid.: 45.

[64] Ibid.: 47.

[65] Hans Kreitler and Shulamith Kreitler, *Psychology of the Arts* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1972), 16.

[66] Ibid.: 252.

David Lodge is among the researchers who associate suspense with delaying the answers to plot-bound questions. Discussing a suspenseful situation in an extract from *A Pair of Blue Eyes* by Thomas Hardy, Lodge (1992) concludes that the only way to achieve suspense is to prolong the time before the actual outcome of the situation. The detailed account of the thoughts of the endangered character in Hardy’s extract serves as a slow-down of the action and postpone the announcement of the outcome.

> What happens next? Will Knight survive, and if so, how? Suspense can only be sustained by delaying the answers to these questions. One way of doing this, beloved of the cinema […] would be to crosscut between the anguish of Knight and the frantic efforts of the heroine to effect a rescue.[69]

Another approach to suspense is proposed by Roland Barthes. In his highly influential *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives* (1977), Barthes applies a linguistic model to narrative analysis. The idea of different levels that generate meaning is at the core of his theory. He sees suspense as structure generated and defines it as a “privileged” “form of distortion”. Barthes concludes:

> 'Suspense', therefore, is a game with structure, designed to endanger and glorify it, constituting a veritable 'thrilling' of intelligibility: by representing order (and no longer series) in its fragility, 'suspense' accomplishes the very idea of language: what seems the most pathetic is also the most intellectual - 'suspense' grips you in the 'mind', not in the 'guts'.[70]

However, one must agree with Carroll, who sees Barthes’s definition as problematic mainly because it fails “to distinguish suspense from his [Barthes’s] own vague concept of narrative except to say that the former is an intense or privileged extension of the latter."[71] Thus Carroll terms Barthes's explanation "too abstract and ill-formed to be useful."[72]

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[67] Ibid.: 253.

[68] Ibid.: 252-253.

[69] David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1992), 15.

[70] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 119.

Another theory that bears its relation to structuralism is proposed by Seymour Chatman (1978). He deals with narration in fiction and film and formulates a narrativ theory similar to the structural analysis of Roland Barthes. It is inspired by the Russian formalists' and structuralists' ideas about *story* (the content) and *discourse* (the expression), or, in formalist terms *fabula* (fable) and *syuzhet* (plot). In his view, the *story*, which he calls "the formal content element of narrative"[73] is rendered by *discourse* – its "formal expression element."[74]

For Chatman suspense and surprise are not exclusive and although they differ in essence, they may operate together. He provides an original explanation of the anxiety associated with suspense: "So anxiety is not a reflex of uncertainty about the conclusion, since that is already foregone. It is rather that we know what is going to happen, but we cannot communicate that information to the characters, with whom we have come to empathize."[75] Following Hitchcock's idea that suspense can be achieved in the perfect knowledge of who the murderer in a story is, Chatman concludes:

> The relation between "foreshadowing"—the semination of anticipatory satellites—and "giving the audience all the facts as early as possible" is interesting. Foreshadowing can also take the form of inferences drawn from existents, (...) But though suspense always entails a lesser or greater degree of foreshadowing, the reverse need not occur. Narratives may foreshadow in an unsuspenseful way.[76]

It is evident that despite the individual approach used in every theory, there are some common ideas about what suspense is. It can be summarized that suspense as a reception phenomenon is an emotional experience that is connected to the tension provoked by the hope and fear the reader feels in relation to a specific outcome in a story. Suspense pertains to the period before the outcome is announced, which means that the very outcome is not significant to this experience. This broad concept is employed in defining the suspenseful episodes in the crrent research. More precisely, the analysis rests generally on Carroll's definitions and views, as they provide a most straightforward and detailed criteria for explaining suspense in fiction. However, as some postulates are shared by different theories, the use of other sources is not rigorously excluded. Now it is necessary to establish some general ideas of the horror genre and its relations to the phenomenon of suspense.

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[71] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 129.

[72] Ibid.: 130.

[73] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (NY: Cornwell University Press, Ithaca, 1978), 32.

[74] Ibid.: 32.

[75] Ibid.: 59.

[76] Ibid.: 60.

Part II—The Art of Horror: Genre Outline, the Horror Plot, Suspense in Horror

As it has already been mentioned, the context in which suspense is studied here demands elucidation of the general characteristics of the horror genre. As a starting point, it is essential to differentiate between *horror* and *suspense*. Noël Carroll (1990) calls *art-horror* the emotion that the horror genre produces via the arrangement of its characteristic features. Despite the fact that horror and suspense frequently operate together within the genre framework, art-horror and suspense are different emotions. Most horror studies do not make a straightforward distinction in terms of media and explore the genre independently of its form, literary or cinematic. Michael Collins (1996) sees horror as "a perennial element of popular culture,"[77] and observes that "the boundaries of our culture are drawn by genre, not by form."[78] Stiliyan Stoyanov (2014) agrees that horror stories are a property of pop culture, and what is more, he considers them its necessity: "Apparently the urban environment of the 19th and 21st centuries is really encouraging the cultivation and reception of such [scary] stories. It just seems to need them."[79]

The horror genre is considered to have originated from the tradition of Gothic fiction, which features horror and romance as its primary elements. For Carroll (1990) a necessary prerequisite is the presence of a monster, though not every story that features a monster can be termed horror:

> What appears to demarcate the horror story from mere stories with monsters, such as myths, is the attitude of characters in the story to the

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[77] Michael Collins, "Culture in the Hall of Mirrors: Film and Fiction and Fiction and Film," in *A Dark Night's Dreaming: Contemporary American Horror Fiction*, eds. Magistrale and Morrison (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 121.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Stiliyan Stoyanov, *Literatura i tehnologii* (Veliko Tarnovo: Faber, 2014), 69 (my translation from Bulgarian).