Analysing the Pattern of "Suspense Building" in "Stephen King's the Shining"

Dr. Raji Ramesh

NET, Ph. D, Associate Professor, SK Somaiya College of Arts, Science and Commerce, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India
raji.iyer[at]somaiya.edu
8446964993

Abstract: *Stephen King is an iconic author who wrote several legendary novels in the horror genre. He is a prolific writer who combines various genres and conventions to create stories which explore modern social issues, according to the academics who have gone through his works over the years. To be precise, The Shining is a modern Gothic and American horror novel. The novel explores supernatural elements and more solid threats and explicit metaphors of violence. The Shining consists of various pop - culture references and references to real brands and people. King also uses the effect of reality with various textual approaches like italics, bold text, colloquialisms, and locations. These approaches blur the line between fiction and reality and italics also have acoustic power. This article is aimed to discuss how King builds suspense in "The Shining". The article explores the basic motifs of suspense in the novel and creates some usual patterns of distribution and development across the novel. After theoretically explaining the suspense, the paper explores how King has built the same in the novel. To examine the patterns of "suspense building" in story, this study collects secondary data from various relevant studies. There are three groups of suspenseful motifs in King's novel as per their operations – small moments of surprises, suspense revealed at the climax, and gradually developed suspense.*

Keywords: The Shining, Stephen King, horror novel, horror genre, suspense building

1. Introduction

Alfred Hitchcock defines the term "suspense" as "the most powerful way of grabbing viewers' attention (Truffaut). Proper handling of uncertainty is one of the key approaches to make a gripping story. Stephen King is well known for building tension out of his artistic talent. There are some studies on the way suspense works in his novels. This study is aimed to discover outlines of building confusion in his popular study titled "The Shining". By analysing the structure of major suspense motifs, they are classified with an attempt by offering a glimpse of narrative techniques of the author. The Shining is a psychological horror story and its basic plot includes a household of three members who choose to enjoy winter in an isolated hilly hotel to resolve family issues and financial crisis. A former alcoholic, Jack Torrance accepts the job offer after some wrong decisions, as the Overlook Hotel's caretaker to reunite his family and earn some money.

The novelist Stephen King was born in September 1947 in Maine, Portland. In his family, he was the son of an Irish father and a Scottish mother and he also had an adopted brother born in the same year. His father left the family when he turned 2 years old and never came back. They moved around the nation for nine successive years and his mother was the only breadwinner of the family. He listened to a radio show when he was four and encountered his first horror experience. He said, "it was an adaptation of [Ray Bradbury's] story 'Mars Is Heaven!' on Dimension X. [. . .] I asked to listen, and was denied permission by my mother. [. . .] I crept down to the door to listen anyway, and she was right: it was plenty upsetting. [. . .] I didn't sleep in my bed that night; that night I slept in the doorway" (Danse, 120).

The Shining is based in Colorado which focuses on the Torrances. The father, Jack, is a writer and a teacher who is looking for a new job and lost his previous one. The novel starts with an interview where a caretaker is required for The Overlook, a deserted hotel. After selection, Jack moves into the hotel with his family, Danny and Wendy for the winter. The ghosts from Jack's past start haunting him when the family of three is cut - off from the outside world. In addition, the hotel is supposed to be haunted with some supernatural power which also attempts to feed on the family. The novel consists of gripping and scary elements like Jack's deteriorating mental health and supernatural powers in the hotel and the merging of these elements into a powerful villain.

2. Literature Reviews

The novel is critically acclaimed for exploring social issues and characters as well. The book has a solid autobiographical element linked with Jack and his alcohol addiction and his transformation is widely discussed in various studies on the book. Jack eventually becomes a loser in different aspects of life. For example, he abuses his child as a father. His wife suspects him due to his alcohol addiction and earlier failures. He was fired as a teacher for physically harming a student. He faced a writer's block as a writer. In short, he turns out to be the monster (Casebeer).

Some critics have seen this insufficiency of the white male in a novel as major issues of American society. Tony Magistrale has read the text as a review on class division and capitalism in Reagan history. It is worth noting that supernatural evil and capitalism are two evils that created a complete nexus where ghosts still represent the power of privilege and wealth on board. This insufficiency of a person is considered by other scholars causing a poorly functioning family. King provides the most family - centric and objective work till date with "The Shining" (Dymond).

The Torrances are perceived weak and affected by social flaws and their own faintness easily. The Shining stages the

opinion that a compulsive person is an indication of a compulsive family and both need cure (Casebeer). The character of Danny is another important part of the novel which is focused on literary discussion. The book focuses mainly on the evil's nature and its spell on virtue of childhood and other critics like Casebeer and Reino explored the dual personality of Danny who is both an adult and a child (Reino). Magistrale went too far and called the novel "a scathing critique of patriarchal abuses".

Since the publication of an experimental adaptation of Stanley Kubrick's novel in 1980, which met King's disapproval, the debates across the novel have become more vivid. Kubrick dared not only to test the resolutions of horror category, but it was also adapted as the film inspired from the rudimentary theme and message of the novel and offered various metaphors from "racism to Holocaust". All in all, the serious treatment of both film and novel "The Shining" is oriented to cultural, historic, and literary analyses and interpretations. There is also a lack of attempt at narratological explanation of suspense buildup in the novel and how it works in the text.

2.1 Research Gap

Even though the existing research is going to be completely analytical and may not break any record in exploring the buildup of suspense, it fills the gap between fiction and its phenomenon and suspense motifs.

2.2 Research Question

How does King build suspense in "The Shining"?

2.3 Research Objectives

To find out the pattern of suspend buildup in "Stephen King's The Shining"

3. Research Methodology

In order to fulfil the objective of this research, secondary data has been collected and analysed from relevant studies from different authors and other online resources. We have referred to various research papers, books, journals, and online sources.

4. Analysis of Study

The story reveals paranormal activities which start haunting the Torrances when they are far away from civilization. Weird noises, hedges moving on their own, strange dreams, and sometimes appearances of ghosts are merely the beginning of terrifying experiences for the family at this creepy hotel and it eventually turns out to be evident that the place is going to hold them. Jack continues his alcoholism and acts like a lunatic to kill his family, even though he wants to set free of alcohol. The Torrances have gone through a range of terrifying experiences. The 5 - year - old Danny holds a superpower named "The Shining" which enables him to call an African - American chef, Dick Halloran over telepathy to rescue them. Halloran, Danny, and his mother somehow survive after a ruthless pursuit.

Jack forgot to check the boiler which he was supposed to do from time to time and died of explosion at the hotel.

The novel discovers some of the basic themes like how family bonds are ruined by living in isolation, and transformation of protagonist into villain and good into evil. Although it was published in the year 1977, the appearance of "Doctor Sleep (2013)" and its rave reviews on Goodreads are still grabbing the attention of readers to its narrative.

4.1. How does King build suspense in "The Shining"?

In order to find out how suspense works in horror stories, Carroll (p.130) explains "erotetic narrative" according to which situations, scenes and events which take place earlier in exposition of the story are associated with later situations, scenes, and events in the story as questions are associated with answers. For example, a reader imagines a lot of possible scenarios while going through a horror novel in his mind as unspoken questions or implied expectations which are represented as questions by the narratologist (Carroll, 133). It builds their interest in story and a lot of narration instruments like parallel narration and analepses that can answer those questions.

Carroll (p.136) builds two important narrative questions – "micro questions" that establish "small - scale events" in the subversion even as they take "macro - questions" in the plot ahead and macro questions which are concerned with the universal buildup of the entire story. According to Carroll,

"Suspense arises when a well - structured question – with neatly opposed alternatives – emerges from the narrative and calls forth what was earlier referred to as a simple answering scene (or event). Suspense is an emotional event that accompanies such a scene up to the point when one of the competing alternative outcomes is actualized." (p.137)

It is evident that one should read its plot and how the story unfolds to understand how suspense is built up in the novel. This is why, some of the key ideas have been adopted from "narrative theory" for analysis – "focalization (who sees it?)", "voice (the storyteller)", and "time (the categories of duration, order, and frequency)". Hence, analysing suspense in "The Shining" pursues situations which give fear and hope to the reader with two logically opposite results. One of them is morally wrong but possible and one is morally correct, but impossible. These situations unfold as per its "event structure". Before separating the "suspense motifs", readers must figure out the overall distribution of suspense - building episodes.

The book "The Shining" has five parts. "BOOK ONE" and "BOOK TWO" introduce the characters and plot. They don't thrive in suspenseful episodes but they play a role to build suspense and plant major suspense bombs in such parts. The elements that will develop later are introduced as suspenseful motifs. These elements are room 217 and hedge animals. Initially, Danny hates the topiary when he sees it and Halloran warns him to stay away from 217. These two are built up later as suspense motifs.

More suspenseful episodes are built up in "BOOK THREE" and few of the previously presented elements are used as dynamic conditions which eventually approach the climax. Finally, Jack witnesses the movement of hedge animals when he enters 217.

Other suspenseful episodes are also revealed as the story unfolds in "BOOK FOUR" and various circumstances reach their highpoint. Finally, "BOOK FIVE" becomes stronger and more suspenseful. The episodes of suspense are shorter with calculation of conclusion, but they build great tension due to the possible death that encloses their consequence. The "micro - questions" lead to "macro - questions" like – will the family make it? In the beginning, there was minimal suspense and it intensifies eventually as the end comes closer in overall structure.

This type of narration is called heterodiegetic as defined by Gérard Genette (p.244), i. e. the narrator is not present in the story that he tells. He is undetermined, covert, and placed out of action, while using the singular form of third person. The story is presented from the perception of the internal focalizer which is changed in every chapter. This kind of narration is called as "figural narration" by Manfred Jahn –

"… narrative which presents the story's events as seen through the eyes of (or: from the point of view of) a third - person internal focalizer. The narrator of the figural narrative is a covert heterodiegetic narrator presenting an internal focalizer's consciousness, especially his/her perceptions and thoughts. Because the narrator's discourse will preferably mimic the focalizer's perceptions and conceptualizations, the narrator's own voice quality will remain largely indistinct. "

Figuratively, the novel guides a reader on a tour around the heads of various characters. According to "Russel", the author moves quickly into the "characters' mind" and allows the readers to recite their views (p.47). In the focalizer, this change can be distinct usually as a "variable focalization". There are multiple localizations in different cases, where one incident is relevant from the views of various characters in the narrative constantly. It is worth mentioning a few general tendencies about time analysis of overall novel structure. The structure of the discourse generally goes through the structure of the event in order, even though there are also anachronies. All five modes are taken in duration, i. e. summary, ellipses, slowdown, scene, and pause. The dependency of general frequency is singulative around the text, even though one might find iterative frequency and repeating cases. Usually, the repeating mode is viewed in multiple localizations. In room 217, the tale of the dead lady is initially told in the beginning by Watson which is repeated from the final part.

5. Results

By closely analysing "The Shining", several suspenseful episodes have been revealed and identified –
1) Situations which are based on one motif developed in various episodes. These are not consecutive chapters. Instead, they are scattered in rotation with other sections of commerce with various aspects of the narrative. This type is known as suspense motifs which are gradually developed.
2) Shorter suspenseful episodes which cause a general conclusion of the story. Their outcomes are directly related to a "macro question – will the family survive?" Those incidents are scattered across the conclusion of the book where the plot is stranded. It is known as a climatic suspense motif.
3) Mini episodes of suspense bring specific situations with experience of tension for the reader but don't have denunciation of the tale and are not advanced completely in discourse time. They are positioned in episodes with extra emphasis.

Tension is also built on incidents when Danny's made - up contact, Tony shows up and gives frightening visualisations to Danny as cautions and also in protagonists' dreams. As the reader knows that these are unreal, their reaction is quite different. Even though his visions are quite terrifying, it is evident that Tony will guard him and the reader won't have any intense care for the lead. With dream sequences, such episodes are prophetic, more or less. Particularly in "Gothic literature", the dream is aimed to prefigure the future and the story goes ahead. They take uncertainty to the next level. They pretend that something terrible is about to take place and they also indicate the vulnerability and unpredictability of family. All characters have imaginings that reflect their present and past dreams and nightmares somehow, especially bad ones, that take place when it bothers the psyche. Hence, they are vital for suspense building.

On the other side, the episodes of climatic suspense are less intense in action and shorter in discourse. They lead to its conclusion and appear at the end of the novel. They constantly use the analogues (a kind of narration) to the similar end in film, after two different circumstances going simultaneously. The incidents are narrated most often in slowdowns or "scene mode". They are more dynamic and less thoughtful in action. It includes every small detail of the scene but the outcome is retarded somehow. There are no major conventionalities from the main narrative. The singulative frequency in those episodes are the signs of fast - paced action. The instant change of a micro - question with the next one ultimately proceeds to the macro - question.

6. Conclusion

Considering the above arguments, it is worth noting that the suspense in "The Shining " by Stephen King is constantly being operated on various levels as the three patterns identified of suspense that work together and cooperate. Episodes of suspense motifs that are gradually developed are scattered across the chapters and, hence, these motifs are intertwined. When they are fixed with the end of the book approaching, the climatic suspense episodes replace them and they reach the end. The whole narrative is occupied with "mini episodes of suspense" which are sporadically scattered without any direct relation with more intricate outlines but they hold suspense across the book by relief and tension. The suspense functions with "emotion of horror" but they are not related directly. The suspenseful episodes are narrated in analytical and linear orders. "Scene, pause, slowed - down scene" are the most widely used modes in

duration. Narration is majorly iterative and singulative in terms of frequency.

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Author Profile

Dr RajiRamesh, is currently working as an Associate Professor at S. K Somaiya college of Arts. Science and Commerce Mumbai. She has immense experience of teaching Undergraduate and Post Graduate students. She has presented many papers at national and international conferences and also published papers in reputed journals. Her areas of interest are British fiction, Gender studies, Indian literature and English language teaching. DrRaji has contributed for the framing of syllabus of MA programs in the University of Mumbai.