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The Moral Dimension of Suspense
in *The Romance of the Forest* and *Northanger Abbey*

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For those who discovered their love for reading

through the thrill of suspense.

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Introduction

The present dissertation explores suspense within the Gothic novels *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) by Ann Radcliffe and *Northanger Abbey* (1817) by Jane Austen, highlighting its moral dimension. Grounding my argument in these works, I intend to prove how suspense shapes characters' reactions, contributing to their moral growth and elucidating the authors' strategies in guiding readers through ethical considerations. My exploration does not solely aim to dissect the gothic genre's tropes but strives to showcase how suspense is wielded as a literary tool to evoke ethical introspection, transcending conventional expectations tied to mere thriller or horror associations.

My decision to focus on suspense, in particular, stems from my burgeoning fascination with how it evolves within the realms of both the gothic and its parodic counterpart as I believe that suspense is what makes these books so entertaining and unique despite their different origins. I think this topic is worth discussing in literary studies since suspense not only serves as a driving force behind readers' engagement but also as a powerful conduit for exploring deeper themes and moral dimensions within narratives. Its nuanced presence in both the Gothic and its parodic forms unveils the flexibility of suspense as a tool.

The analysis in this dissertation focuses on several key terms central to the title. The main focus of this research lies in 'suspense'. Nevertheless, Gothic literature has not explicitly defined this term, prompting its exploration in the first chapter of this dissertation. This deliberate choice aims to elucidate the crucial role of suspense within this study, underscoring its significance in understanding the analysed works. In brief, suspense is a form of fear rooted in uncertainty and anticipation revolving around curiosity, being the

emotional investment of the reader and the danger within the story's construction, the preconditions to its development.

The 'moral dimension' refers to the ethical implications that emerge from characters' conscious responses to suspense and addressing the readers' moral inclinations. Lawrence Kohlberg and Richard H. Hersh explore the theory of moral development and its instructional implications, referencing *Ibid* to elucidate the concept as "to be understood in the restricted sense of referring to situations which call for judgments involving denotological concepts such as right and wrong, duty and obligation, having a right, fairness, etc." (qtd. in Kohlberg & Hersh 58). This explanation serves my argument as it underscores the importance of ethical decision-making in response to situations that demand judgments based on moral principles, aligning with the examination of characters' reactions in Gothic novels.

Regarding *The Romance of the Forest* and *Northanger Abbey*, 'Gothic novels' allude to the literary genre characterised by elements such as mystery, horror, and the supernatural, where the interplay of suspense often amplifies the thematic and emotional impact of these works. Nonetheless, I believe it is crucial to define 'parody' as well since it is a key term in understanding *Northanger Abbey*, as Austen parodies Gothic conventions. In the fifth edition of *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, parody is defined as "The imitate use of the words, style, attitude, tone, and ideas of an author in such a way as to make them ridiculous. This is usually achieved by exaggerating certain traits, using more or less the same technique as the cartoon caricaturist" (Cuddon 514). This definition emphasises the intentional nature of parody. Nonetheless, while Austen's use of parody aligns with some aspects of this concept as the imitation of certain techniques that Radcliffe employs, I would argue that Austen's parody involves a subtler critique instead of mockery.

The methodology employed in this dissertation revolves around Narratology and Reader Response Criticism. In *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*, the study of ‘Narratology’ recognises that many acts of human communication “contain *elements of constructive form* that coalesce and interact in broadly similar ways to make a story *sensible to the observer/reader*” (Childs & Fowler 151, my emphasis). This aspect of the scope of narratology is highly pertinent to my argument, as these elements serve the purpose of eliciting specific responses from the reader. This approach helps analyse the pacing, plot, and narrative techniques deployed in both novels, revealing how suspense is cultivated and resolved. Reader Response Criticism, on the other hand, delves into the readers’ interpretations and emotional engagements, allowing exploration of how suspense influences their perceptions and ethical reflections. However, to counterbalance potential limitations, I plan to triangulate these approaches with other methodologies like historical and contextual analysis to grasp the broader societal influences on the authors and their works.

Many scholars have examined aspects such as suspense, moral dimensions, character development, reader engagement, and narrative tension in their studies. Similarly, individual works like Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* or Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, along with other novels from these authors, have been subjects of investigation. Nonetheless, there is a notable absence of research delving into the exploration of suspense in Gothic literature, particularly in a comparative analysis of both novels. Furthermore, there is a distinct scarcity of studies investigating the intentional use of suspense. Unlike previous studies that have separately explored these elements, this dissertation offers a nuanced understanding of them. Therefore, I argue that Ann Radcliffe astutely cultivates suspense within her novel by employing narrative focalisation to elucidate the pitfalls of imagination in which common

sense may be lost. A stance with which Jane Austen adopts as she deftly parodies the genre and integrates into *Northanger Abbey* the moral underpinnings of suspense found in *The Romance of the Forest*.

The dissertation unfolds across three chapters, each shedding light on different dimensions of suspense in Gothic literature through an analysis of Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. Chapter 1 dissects the essence of suspense within the Gothic genre as rooted in uncertainty and anticipation, while entwined with emotional investment in protagonists and the presence of peril. Chapter 2 delves into the way that concealment produced by narrative focalisation catches both the reader's and character's attention, while misinterpretations develop suspense. Finally, Chapter 3 explores that both Radcliffe and Austen resolve suspense by grounding it in realism, which can be illustrated by the characters' conscious response to suspense and the moral implications it holds for the reader's understanding. Together, these chapters construct a comprehensive exploration of the moral dimension of suspense within Gothic literature.

Chapter 1: Aspects of Literary Suspense

In this chapter, I will discuss suspense as presented in Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* and Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, specifically, how this term has been defined and my analysis throughout this dissertation. I argue that, in these novels, suspense is rooted in uncertainty and anticipation while entwined with emotional investment in protagonists and the presence of danger. To support this, I contend that suspense is both a form of fear and a product of the story's construction, shaped by two interconnected elements that revolve around curiosity: uncertainty and anticipation. Furthermore, in both novels, suspense is predicated upon our investment in the well-being of the protagonists. Moreover, I assert that peril is necessarily woven into suspense, as it is linked to the feelings that arise from hidden elements. To illuminate the significance of the suspenseful elements in both novels, I will draw upon the insights of scholars within literary analysis who have explored terms that interplay with plot devices, revealing how these elements captivate readers.

Defining Suspense in Gothic Literature

The definition of suspense in Gothic literature remains elusive, with no generally accepted delineation in existing works. However, suspense is illustrated in literary terms as a "state of uncertainty, anticipation and curiosity as to the outcome of a story or play, or any kind of narrative in verse or prose" (qtd. in Beecher 255). This definition, quoted by Beecher from *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, is valuable to define the feeling but does not specify the reason, which is why he resorts to *A Handbook to Literature* and states that these states of 'uncertainty', 'anticipation', and 'curiosity' arise "particularly as *they affect a character for whom one has sympathy*" (qtd. in Beecher 255,

my emphasis), implying that ‘sympathy’ acts as a precondition for suspense since the level of emotional attachment with characters influences the degree of suspense felt by the reader. Then, contemplating this condition, Beecher acknowledges that “plot types vary in ways that affect the ethos of suspense: those situations in which the outcome is *uncertain*, and readers are *concerned* with *how they will be resolved*, and those in which the outcome is *inevitable* and readers, in their *fear*, concentrate merely on knowing *when* the catastrophe *will be complete*” (Beecher 255, my emphasis). Beecher’s explanation suggests that suspense has two facets involving emotional investment through uncertainty and anticipation, both centred on curiosity.

Moreover, Bermejo-Berros, Lopez-Diez and Gil also discuss suspense within the context of narrative structures in their article, asserting that “the organization of the stories, depending on their structures of suspense, surprise, or curiosity, induces narrative tension” (1). Here, they contemplate that suspense actively creates narrative tension instead of resulting from it. Later, they provide Baroni’s definition of narrative tension as “a phenomenon that occurs when the interpreter of a story is enticed to wait for an *outcome*, characterised by an *anticipation tinged with uncertainty*” (Bermejo-Berros et al. 2, my emphasis). Although I concur with this analysis of narrative tension and its impact on the reader, I view suspense as equivalent, considering both – Baroni’s delineation of narrative tension and Beecher’s portrayal of suspense – tied to ‘outcomes’ rooted in ‘anticipation’ and ‘uncertainty’. Still, they differ as Beecher draws a distinct line between them, while Baroni highlights anticipation’s prominence with some uncertainty. I believe that Beecher’s separation serves well in theatrical plays where inevitability is clearer but is less conspicuous

in Gothic literature. Consequently, Baroni's interpretation, wherein both aspects collaborate, aligns more closely with my understanding of suspense for this work.

Nonetheless, Beecher ends his explanation by stating, "Suspense, then, must have *two sides*: that which is invested in *the design of the story as an emotion prompt*; and that which is a *feature of mind*" (255, my emphasis). He elucidates that suspense would not be solely a product of the story's construction but also heavily influenced by the reader's interpretation. Hence, I contend that narrative tension aligns more with the initial facet of suspense related to the story's construction, given Bermejo-Berros et al.'s exploration of separate emotions, such as surprise and curiosity, with suspense being just one among them. I chose to focus on suspense in this dissertation since it is a specific response, unlike narrative tension. Suspense is a form of fear rooted in uncertainty and anticipation revolving around curiosity, which is linked to the story's construction and shaped by reader engagement with the protagonists and the looming danger.

The Function of the Heroine

In *The Romance of the Forest*, the precondition of suspense regarding reader involvement connects with the character of Adeline, who is crafted to endear the reader. In his essay, Robyn R. Warhol employs the terms: 'unnarration' and 'disnarration', arguing that "Narrators practice narrative refusal either by saying they cannot or will not tell what happened (unnarration) or else telling what did not happen in place of what did (disnarration)" (259). I consider that this last term, disnarration, serves my analysis of the creation of the heroine to produce sympathy when the narrator describes Adeline in the second chapter, "She had *no retrospect of past delight* to give emphasis to present calamity

– *no weeping friends – no dear regretted objects* to point the edge of sorrow and throw a sickly hue upon her future prospects: *she knew not yet* the pangs of disappointed hope, or the acuter sting of self-accusation” (Radcliffe 32, my emphasis). This quote illustrates how the absence of certain narrative elements like ‘past delights’, ‘weeping friends’ or ‘regretted objects’, accentuates her loneliness and magnifies her vulnerability. This, in turn, prompts readers to form a deeper sympathetic bond with her, evoking feelings of pity. Consequently, as she becomes the target of the Marquis’s pursuit, our apprehension for her safety intensifies, creating a sense of uncertainty and anticipation. This apprehension for the heroine’s potential peril or suffering plays a crucial role in building suspense, and this form of suspense stems from contextual explanations about the characters’ circumstances designed to elicit sympathy.

On the other hand, in *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine is presented as anything but a standard heroine, as the narrator states in the very first line of the first chapter, “*No one* who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy *would have supposed her born to be a heroine*” (Austen 2160, my emphasis). Her lack of typical heroine qualities, unlike Adeline’s vulnerability, is significant because she is not designed to instil fear in readers, and her average life seemingly suggests that suspense might not be attainable in her case. Nevertheless, her very normalcy is what evokes sympathy, naturally drawing us toward her as the story’s protagonist. This inclination leads us to be concerned about her, even amid mundane issues in the narrative. In his article, Alessandro Giovannelli discusses reader engagement in narratives and its correlation with characters, affirming that “We are concerned for the protagonist in a special way, in the way we are when we know what it must be like for someone to undergo the experiences he or she is having” (85). He establishes that

our sympathy for the protagonist is rooted in our ability to relate to their experiences, which, I believe, strengthens the emotional connection between Catherine and the reader. Conversely, such a connection would be improbable with a protagonist like Manfred, given his lack of benevolent intentions towards other characters that we might find more relatable.

Peril and Suspense Intertwined

In Radcliffe's novel, the peril is necessarily entwined with suspense because, without it, the emotions concerning the outcome fail to surface. Chapter 12 presents an example of this when Adeline and Theodore, having just emerged from an encounter with the guards, find themselves in a room, alert to the approach of an unidentified carriage outside the inn:

This *mournful silence was interrupted* by the arrival of the carriage at the inn, and Theodore, arising, went to the window [...]. The *darkness of the night* prevented his distinguishing the objects, but a light now brought from the house shewed him a carriage [...]. Presently he saw a gentleman, wrapped up in a roquelaure, alight and enter the inn, and the next moment *he heard the voice* of the Marquis. (Radcliff 194, my emphasis)

Within this passage, the auditory perception becomes pivotal within the quiet and obscure nocturnal setting because of the 'darkness of the night', amplifying the tension as the prevailing silence is abruptly 'interrupted'. Subsequently, they 'hear the voice' of the individual responsible for inflicting immense pain and suffering upon them. The manipulation of atmosphere and sound envelops the scene in an air of foreboding because the narrative structure accentuates the imminent threat. Besides, as the outcome following

the Marquis's arrival remains veiled, the characters in the room and readers are left with uncertainty and anticipation.

In his article, George E. Haggerty delves deep into the terrains of terror within Gothic fiction, focusing on erotic loss. While this particular aspect does not seamlessly align with my argument, it is worth noting that Haggerty posits that Radcliffe, in her works, “tells story after story of *female victimization*, [...] the disowned and *dishonoured heroine* often [...] flees the *aggressive attentions* of an overly *erotic father or father surrogate*” (158, my emphasis). While I concur with Radcliffe's tropes, I would add that in *The Romance of the Forest*, the presence of the ‘erotic father or father surrogate’ intensifies the suspense by assuming the role of the figure of danger within the narrative. This is precisely why the earlier-mentioned quote suffices to signify that he is ‘heard’, thus effectively evoking a palpable sense of suspense stemming from peril.

Likewise, within Austen's novel, a similar occurrence unfolds, marked by analogous elements of obscured surroundings and eerie background noises. In Chapter 21, Catherine undergoes a moment of apprehension as she endeavours to peruse the manuscript she had discovered within the chest. The narrator recounts this episode:

A lamp could not have expired with a more awful effect. [...] It was done completely; *not a remnant of light* [...]. *Darkness impenetrable* and immovable filled the room. *A violent gust of wind*, rising with sudden fury, added fresh horror to the moment. Catherine trembled from head to foot. In the pause which succeeded, *a sound like receding footsteps and the closing of a distant door*. (Austen 2351-2, my emphasis)

In this instance, the author appears to be parodying Radcliffe by exaggerating the same elements we see in *The Romance of the Forest*. Nonetheless, it leaves the reader in a state of ambiguity, fully immersed in the narrative crafted through darkness, ambient sounds, and wind. These components, known for their capacity to induce suspense, plant the seeds of apprehension in the reader's mind, hinting at the potential for impending peril. In the end, nothing untoward occurs, and Catherine emerges unscathed, but the same happens in Radcliffe's novel by her 'explained supernatural', and suspense is still fulfilled. Therefore, the residual tension continues to exert its influence, affecting both the reader and Catherine, akin to the earlier example involving Adeline and Theodore.

Conclusion

The function of this chapter was to determine the multifaceted aspects of suspense in both novels since it sets the stage for a comprehensive analysis of it in the present dissertation. Throughout this exploration, the essence of suspense emerges as a form of fear rooted in uncertainty and anticipation revolving around curiosity, being the emotional investment of the reader and the danger within the story's construction, the preconditions to its development. By highlighting the nuanced portrayal of heroines like Adeline and Catherine, I was able to showcase how their depictions evoke sympathy and contribute to the suspenseful narrative. Furthermore, the intertwining of peril and suspense, depicted through atmospheric elements, highlights the role of danger in constructing suspense. As a result, this chapter serves as a foundation for understanding how suspense functions within these Gothic works, laying the groundwork for deeper explorations in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2: Concealment and Misunderstanding

As previously outlined, suspense requires two conditions to be met: the reader's emotional investment and the presence of danger within the story's construction. Still, I believe it is essential to highlight its aspect as a product of the story's construction since it relates to the author's intentions. Therefore, in this chapter, I will explore how concealment and misunderstanding are requirements for suspense in *The Romance of the Forest* and *Northanger Abbey*. I argue that in these novels concealment produced by narrative focalisation catches both the reader's and character's attention, while misinterpretations develop suspense. Consequently, I assert that the deliberate use of narrative focalisation serves as a thoughtful mechanism by both authors to produce suspense in their novels by introducing concealed elements. Besides, concealment needs to be implied to evoke a sense of curiosity in individuals, whether within or beyond the confines of the fictional world, and misinterpretations are a consequence of this. Conversely, I state that the pivotal role of peril introduced in the previous chapter lies in its connection with misinterpretations, as these alone do not consistently accentuate the suspense in the novels.

Hints Regarding the Hidden

Concealment in Radcliffe's novel intertwines with the dichotomy between what the narrator opts to disclose and what to veil in a mystery concerning the narrative focalisation within the novel. In his chapter, William F. Brewer delves into the experience of enjoying narrative suspense, stating that suspense is generated "by including an initiating event or situation in the underlying event structure. An initiating event is an event that has the potential to lead to a significant outcome (good or bad) for one of the main characters" (113). In line

with the previous chapter, I concur with the emphasis placed on the initiating event that shapes the consequential outcome, and I would suggest that this event might involve concealment, wherein allusions play a crucial role in inciting curiosity. This is evident in *The Romance of the Forest* as La Motte's being to behave after their settlement in the abbey, as the narrator unveils that La Motte:

...became *suddenly gloomy and reserved*; [...] and he would spend whole hours in the *most secluded parts of the forest*, devoted to melancholy and *secret grief*. He did not, as formerly, indulge the humour of his sadness, without restraint, in the presence of others; he now evidently *endeavoured to conceal it*. (Radcliffe 45, my emphasis)

Here, the 'sudden' and inexplicable change, given the circumstances, is what gives more significance to the concealment of La Motte since he used to show his feelings and then 'endeavoured to conceal' them, indicating his effort to hide them, as well as his deliberate search for the 'most secluded parts of the forest'. Hiding something from the outset might not appear peculiar as there is no observable change. Nonetheless, when something previously known becomes hidden, it represents a noticeable shift that naturally arouses suspicion. Besides, La Motte behaves 'gloomy and reserved', carrying pejorative implications as it is his 'secret grief'. These practices do not portend favourable outcomes associated with discretion, thereby instilling in the reader a sense of impending calamity, notwithstanding other characters' reactions. Furthermore, the reader could have been aware of the motive behind his concealment, considering that the narrator had previously followed La Motte in the narrative. However, the narrator deliberately obscures La Motte's perspective, leaving the reader without clues.

In James Phelan's chapter, mind-reading abilities are mentioned as a problem concerning the misuse of this ability. He gives as an example the novel *Atonement* regarding a passage in which two characters cannot communicate and fill the silence with their perceptions, explaining that "In reading fiction, we watch characters engaged in reading each other's minds and simultaneously read those minds ourselves" (77). I consider that this problem occurs many times in different types of novels, not only gothic, but I would add the fact that the reader also plays a role when the story is narrated in the first person or follows the events focused on a character. We can see the importance of narrative focalisation in the following example from *Northanger Abbey* when Mr Tilney discovers the big picture that Catherine had created in her mind:

"Yes, a great deal. That is – no, *not much*, but *what she did say was very interesting*. Her dying so suddenly [...] and you – none of you being at home – and your father, *I thought – perhaps* had not been very fond of her."

"And from these circumstances," he replied [...], "*you infer* perhaps the probability of some negligence." (Austen 2385, my emphasis)

In this quote, Catherine mentions Miss Tilney's speech regarding the death of her mother, and though it was 'not much', she did say some things that were of interest to Catherine and made her imagine all sorts of things. Mr Tilney corroborates the misunderstanding by saying that she 'inferred' some negligence, which creates an awkward situation between the two of them. Still, as the narrative focuses on Catherine, we cannot be sure whether her interpretations were misguided or not. Therefore, Catherine's fanciful construal does not come across as quite as ludicrous given that as the protagonist we perceive events from her perspective, allowing us to entertain her thoughts to some extent.

Veiled Enigma

In both novels, what transcends the boundary into suspense is curiosity surrounding concealment. In his article, Jacek Mydla discusses the mechanics of suspense in the novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe and two Poirot investigations of Agatha Christie, stating that “In the case of the famous black veil at Udolpho, the reader’s curiosity is given little to go on, as the narrator refuses to be explicit. [...] The narrative does not spell out the ideas which cause Emily to be terrified and the readers are supposed to build their own suspicions” (44). I have not personally read the book, and I do not anticipate my readers have either. However, this quote is valuable to my analysis because it resonates with my perspective that subtle hints of concealed elements make readers curious to uncover more.

For instance, in Chapter 3 of *The Romance of the Forest*, Adeline is telling her past life story to Madame La Motte, and we encounter the beginning of the terrible event in which the novel set the first few pages as Adeline says, “The next morning, I was surprised, on attempting to leave my chamber, to find the door was locked” (Radcliffe 41). Were this any story, this would be the climax point, but as we already know the outcome of Adeline’s path, no curiosity derives from the enigma that it is the fact that her door is locked. Adeline experiences astonishment at the event, but to readers, it is already evident that she has not met with any harm or misfortune.

Similarly, in *Northanger Abbey*, there is an absence of elements that could evoke curiosity and the narrative fails to intrigue the reader. When Catherine reunites with Mr Tilney for the first time after a long time in Chapter 8, he is in the company of a woman: “He [...] was talking with interest to a fashionable and pleasing-looking young woman, who leant

on his arm, and whom *Catherine immediately guessed to be his sister*; thus unthinkingly *throwing away a fair opportunity* of considering him lost to her forever” (Austen 2211-2, my emphasis). There is no element of suspense as Catherine ‘immediately’ guesses that the woman accompanying Mr Tilney is his sister. Still, this is because her guess is correct and the reader has no occasion for curiosity since later is corroborated that it would have been a ‘fair opportunity’ for drama, but it was not. As a result, the woman’s identity was promptly ascertained, which we could attribute to Austen’s intention to provide rational explanations.

Uncertain Interpretations

While concealments serve as the initial source of suspense in the novel, the pivotal role of peril introduced in the previous chapter lies in its connection with misinterpretations that arise from concealment, as these alone do not consistently accentuate the suspense in the novels. In her book, Caroline Levine discusses narrative suspense in Victorian fiction, expressing in her introduction that, “The secret, when it finally emerges, turns out to be entirely different from what we have been invited or expected to imagine”. (2-3). While her reference pertains to Victorian readings, I think the same principle applies to Gothic literature authors like Radcliffe, who excel in misleading and prompting readers to make conjectures about the plot.

In *The Romance of the Forest*, due to the openings in La Motte’s behaviour, Madame La Motte begins to imagine things about him, as the narrator tells us the following in Chapter 4, “*After much consideration, being unable to assign any other motive* for his conduct, she began to *attribute* it to the influence of illicit passion; and her heart, [...] confirmed the *supposition* [...]. She did not long hesitate to *decide*, that Adeline was the object of her

husband's attachment" (Radcliffe 46, my emphasis). Madame La Motte analyses her husband's concealed behaviour and, 'after much consideration', meaning that she filled her head with her own reasoning, 'attributes' it to an affair. Besides, considering that no one in that place could be the object of desire for La Motte, she 'decides' that Adeline is the one cheating. This proves that due to the gaps in the concealed behaviour of La Motte, and the easy clues she gathers to fill them, she has understood something entirely different to what later is to be revealed. Nonetheless, even though the reader does not know La Motte's intentions, the narrative focuses on Adeline, making us understand Madame La Motte's interpretation as nothing more than absurd and that the real danger is still being hidden. Therefore, because Madame La Motte does not elucidate the secret, the reader can still feel suspense as there might be perilous motives behind La Motte's secrecy.

This is also the case in *Northanger Abbey*, as the Tilneys withhold information from Catherine. Despite their care for her, evident in their attentiveness, Catherine becomes engrossed in the undisclosed aspects of the Tilneys' conduct. This is evident when Catherine observes General Tilney's peculiar behaviour during the abbey's tour with Miss Tilney. His intentional omission of showing her a narrow passageway leading to a staircase raises questions about his motives:

The general's *evident desire of preventing* such an examination was an additional stimulant. Something was *certainly to be concealed*; [...] and what that something was, a short sentence of Miss Tilney's, as they followed the general at some distance downstairs, seemed to point out: "I was going to take you into what was my mother's room – *the room in which she died*—". (Austen 2372, my emphasis)

Here, the narrator highlights the general's intention to conceal as his 'evident desire of preventing such examination'. Even though the narrator could reveal his secret, the narrative focalisation serves to create the feeling of intrigue. The general's desire to keep Catherine from the passage could have any motive, such as the sadness of the 'room in which she [General Tilney's wife] died' or that it was very dusty. However, the 'evident' manner in which he desires to hide, coupled with something 'certainly' being concealed, along with Miss Tilney's mention of her mother's demise, creates suspense due to the danger Catherine might be in. Therefore, even though this work is essentially a parody of the gothic genre, it effectively sustains the element of suspense, prompting us to consider the possibility that something might have transpired.

Conclusion

Upon a deeper exploration of *The Romance of the Forest* and *Northanger Abbey*, the significance of concealment and misunderstanding becomes evident. The aspect of suspense associated with the story's construction originates specifically from concealment established through narrative focalization; however, curiosity and peril regarding the obscured mysteries within these stories are equally crucial. Without this curiosity or the potential danger in the interpretations that arise from it, suspense cannot emerge. Furthermore, this analysis provides insight into the authors' intentions, as the concealed mysteries woven into the plot shed light on their creative aims through a comparative examination of both texts. Ultimately, both Austen and Radcliffe masterfully leverage concealments, leaving readers with an enduring appreciation for the intricacies of storytelling and the power of the unexpected.

Chapter 3: Moral Reflection of Suspense

In the previous segment, I focused on the aspect of suspense related to the story's construction. However, to comprehend its significance within the novels, it is essential to address the first precondition: the reader's emotional investment. In this chapter, I will explore the moral reflection of suspense in *The Romance of the Forest* and *Northanger Abbey*. I argue that, in these novels, both Radcliffe and Austen resolve suspense by grounding it in realism, which can be illustrated by the characters' conscious response to suspense and the moral implications it holds for the reader's understanding. To support my thesis, I initially claim that Radcliffe promotes common sense by providing natural explanations for seemingly supernatural occurrences that influence suspense, while Austen employs a similar strategy by criticising Catherine's reactions to suspense. Additionally, I emphasise that both authors construct their works with a distinct audience in mind – discerning and astute readers – by addressing them within the narrative and enticing them to delve into the moral complexities involved in reading. Consequently, I state that both authors use suspense to prompt ethical reflection among readers, influenced by a religious background – Anglican – that shapes the moral dimension of their narrative.

The Impact of Suspense on Character Development

In the first volume of *The Romance of the Forest*, a series of events unfold that initially appear to carry a 'supernatural' connotation, engendering suspense. It is essential to emphasise that these manifestations do not entail conventional supernatural entities like ghosts or spectral beings haunting the abbey, instead, Radcliffe only creates the illusion of it.

However, the characters react to these occurrences with palpable terror, although this apprehension is swiftly dispelled. For example, when they first enter the abbey in Chapter 2:

La Motte pointed to the broken roof and was proceeding when was interrupted by an *uncommon* noise [...]. They were all silent – it was the *silence of terror*. Madame La Motte spoke first. ‘Let us quit this spot’, said she, ‘*any evil is preferable to the feeling, which now oppresses me*’ [...]. La Motte, *ashamed of the fear* he had involuntarily betrayed, now thought it necessary to affect a boldness, which he did not feel. (Radcliffe 18, my emphasis).

During this incident, all of them – the La Mottes, Adeline, and Peter – experienced the ‘silence of terror’, a suspenseful sensation born from the anticipation and uncertainty of the unknown, triggered by an ‘uncommon’ noise. This unusual occurrence hints at the supernatural, as it deviates from the ordinary by not being a common noise. Madame La Motte even prefers ‘any evil’ over enduring that feeling, indicating her willingness to face external threats like the king’s guards or any other threat rather than spending another second in a place that induces such terror as to make her feel physically ‘oppressed’. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that La Motte swiftly succumbs to a sense of ‘shame’ for the fear he just felt. This reaction could be interpreted as a manifestation of traditional gender norms, where men are expected not to display fear. Yet, I contend that it runs deeper and suggests that fearing something that ‘should not exist’ is a source of shame.

A few pages later, the La Mottes had recently reunited with Louis when Peter informs him that their arrival at the abbey had sparked some fear, as he says: “We were frightened enough the first night we came here, and I, myself, God forgive me! Thought the place was

inhabited by devils, but they were owls, and such like, after all” (Radcliffe 69). This illustrates Radcliffe’s “explained supernatural” by transforming the initially supernatural notion of an abbey inhabited by devils into a mundane and natural occurrence involving owls. In his article, Robert Miles clarifies the supernatural element as Radcliffe’s ability to generate surprise, highlighting that “Radcliffe’s so-called explained supernatural is best thought of as a means of keeping antithetical possibilities in solution, and that this device is the source of her surprising complexity” (301). I concur with Miles’ interpretation of Radcliffe’s use of supernatural ambiguity, but I would add that Radcliffe’s direct portrayal of explained supernatural events supports my argument, as it lessens the reader’s sensitivity to ‘supernatural’ suspense. The contrast becomes evident in the aforementioned quote from *The Romance of the Forest*, where the confusion between owls and devils seems almost comical and foolish. Additionally, La Motte’s harsh response to Peter by saying, “Your opinion was not asked [...] learn to be silent”, appears to be an exaggerated reaction to Peter’s innocent comment (69). La Motte feels ashamed when Peter discloses that they were ‘frightened’ by what seemed supernatural in the abbey, mirroring his initial reaction to the suspenseful event.

In the case of *Northanger Abbey*, from the moment Catherine departs from Bath, she becomes preoccupied with uncovering mysteries in the most mundane of things. While I’ve already delved into Catherine’s misunderstandings in the second chapter, it is worth emphasising that Austen, in addition to criticising Catherine for her overactive imagination, employs a technique similar to Radcliffe’s. Austen comments on common-sense understandings of situations that previously caused suspense for the character. For example, in Chapter 22, right after Catherine discovers that the manuscript is nothing more than an inventory of linen:

Nothing could now be clearer than the *absurdity* of her recent fancies. To suppose that a manuscript of many generations back could have *remained undiscovered in a room such as that, so modern, so habitable!* – Or that she should be *the first to possess the skill of unlocking a cabinet* [...]. Heaven forbid that Henry Tilney should ever know her *folly!*” (Austen 2355, my emphasis)

Here, the narrator highlights Catherine’s ‘absurdity’ for entertaining the idea that there was a mystery surrounding the coffin and proceeds to offer common-sense interpretations of the entire event that had previously left her in suspense. This is because the discovery of the manuscript in a modern and habitable room, and her belief that she was special as the first to unlock a cabinet, now appear egotistical and baseless. Additionally, as Catherine dreads Henry’s reaction upon finding out, she feels a sense of shame. Much like La Motte, she is ashamed of her ‘folly’, which, in reality, should not have elicited any suspense or curiosity.

Reader Perceptions

Wolf Schmid’s definition of the ‘implied reader’ is pertinent to my argument as he explains that the *presumed addressee* is “a function of the work, even though it is not represented in the work” (301). Both Radcliffe and Austen design their works with an assumed audience in mind who will comprehend that suspense is not inherently negative unless it leads to imprudent or self-centred actions. In *The Romance of the Forest*, following the owls’ situation, Radcliffe appears to indirectly address the reader regarding the morality in her novel: “Thus ended this *adventure* [...]. Adeline, *removed from the apprehension of those evils*, [...] and from the *depression* which her interest in his [La Motte’s behaviour]

occasioned her, now experienced a more than usual *complacency of mind*" (70, my emphasis). Radcliffe is drawing a clear contrast between the period before and after the adventure, suggesting a negative impact on Adeline. She had to actively 'remove' herself from the 'apprehension' and 'depression' caused by the encounter with the supernatural and La Motte's peculiar behaviour to attain a sense of mental 'complacency'. This suggests to the reader that succumbing to the influence of these perceived evils has a detrimental effect and, consequently, the suspense in situations that diverge from common sense.

Still, Austen goes beyond by explicitly addressing the reader at the end of *Northanger Abbey*: "I leave it to *my reader's sagacity* to determine how much of all this it was possible for Henry to communicate [...], how much of it *he could have learnt* [...], in what points *his own conjectures* might assist him, and what portion must *yet remain to be told*" (Austen 2447, my emphasis). In this passage, Henry is elucidating the truth concerning his father's anger. Austen astutely initiates this paragraph with the phrase 'reader's sagacity', which is a deliberate attribution to the reader's selective abilities in discerning the information she has omitted. I believe expressions like 'he could have learnt', 'his own conjectures', and 'yet remain to be told' indicate the author's desire to engage and teach the reader. The reader 'learns' about common sense through the impact of 'conjectures' on suspense and its subsequent embarrassment, as well as uncovering what was intentionally left undisclosed but expected for the reader to deduce.

Morality in Suspense

In his article, James Lindemann Nelson delves into moral thought in *Northanger Abbey*, initiating his discussion by incorporating another author's perspective to complement

his argument, as he says that Gilbert Ryle “wrote a much-cited article in which he placed Austen within an Aristotelian-British sentimentalist ethical tradition, seeing her novels as constituting a way of honing the reader’s ability to apply moral notions” (189). I believe that this idea is relevant to my argument as Ryle underscores the ‘reader’s ability to apply moral notions’ in Austen’s book, a stance I endorse. Additionally, I assert that suspense plays a significant role in shaping the moral dimension of the narrative. This moral factor is also considered by Peter L. De Rose as Austen’s intention since he mentions in his article:

*By teaching heroine and reader alike to see things not as they imagined but as they actually are, the comic-realistic episodes of *Northanger Abbey* serve a genuine moral-purpose – to provide “the young, the ignorant, and the idle”, as Dr Johnson characterized the readers of popular fiction, with “lectures of conduct, and introductions into life”. (qtd. in De Rose 63, my emphasis)*

While I concur with the assertion that *Northanger Abbey* genuinely serves a moral purpose by imparting lessons to both its characters and readers, I disagree with the characterization posited by Samuel Johnson, which labels readers as ‘ignorant’. It is my conviction that Austen and Radcliffe hold their readers in high intellectual esteem, regarding them as sufficiently discerning to render moral judgments within the confines of their literary works. Such judgments, I contend, are predicated on the didactic guidance provided to the characters, employing suspense as a tool to facilitate their exercise of common sense and, consequently, allowing readers to independently uncover these valuable lessons.

Conversely, Robert J. Mayhew’s article delves into Radcliffe’s religious beliefs rooted in Latitudinarian Anglicanism and how they influenced her writing, and he posits, “The key

element of Radcliffe's 'old-fashioned society' lies in her religious beliefs" (585). Mayhew explores Ann Elwood's interpretation of Radcliffe's seclusion as indicative of the antiquated society to which she belonged, suggesting that it was a reflection of the societal norms and religious beliefs of that era. I concur with his perspective, as he elucidates Radcliffe's upbringing in a religious environment and how her life was shaped by Anglican influences. This background provides insight into Radcliffe's aversion to employing overtly supernatural elements in her works. Besides, Bradford K. Mudge also acknowledges the influence of the author's background, as he states that "When, in the 1760s, the Gothic novel began to get traction [...] Commentors feared that these implausible fantasies did nothing to inculcate duty, responsibility, and hard work. Once again, women readers were thought to be the most susceptible" (133). Here, Mudge offers insights into the societal concerns of the time and the experience of women in selecting Gothic readings. I believe Radcliffe's work is notably shaped by societal norms and her religious beliefs, compelling her to demonstrate through her writing that she can impart common sense and values aligned with her society and faith.

Furthermore, Austen also appears to be influenced by religious and societal undertones. A noteworthy example is evident when Mr Tilney admonishes Catherine:

If I understand you rightly, you had formed a surmise of such *horror* as I have hardly words to – Dear Miss Morland, consider the *dreadful nature* of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? *Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians.* [...] Does our *education* prepare us for such atrocities? Do our *laws* connive with them? [...] Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting? (Austen 2386, my emphasis)

In this quote, Mr Tilney alludes to the background and context in which they live, emphasising their education, English heritage, and Christianity. I think Austen, similar to Radcliffe, who shared an Anglican faith, integrates religious themes into her storytelling to offer moral guidance to both her characters and readers. Besides, as both authors use suspense as a source to influence common sense in the reader, their narratives serve as potent conduits for moral reflection and ethical contemplation, fostering a deeper engagement with the ethical underpinnings of their societies and the complex moral dilemmas faced by their characters, inviting readers to ponder the implications of their choices.

Conclusion

The exploration of *The Romance of the Forest* and *Northanger Abbey* underscores the profound interplay between suspense, character development, and reader perceptions in shaping the moral dimension of these literary works. Both authors employ suspense as a tool to guide characters and readers towards a deeper understanding of common sense and ethical considerations. The evolution of characters' reactions to suspense, from initial fear and apprehension to eventual clarity, serves as a testament to the authors' intent to impart moral lessons. Still, they diverge in the way they approach these elements since Radcliffe uses her 'explained supernatural' while Austen 'criticises' characters' overreactions. Nonetheless, while Radcliffe and Austen may have employed distinct literary genres and narrative techniques, their common use of suspense to influence moral thought exemplifies the enduring impact of their storytelling in the realm of literature and moral philosophy.

Conclusion

The first chapter of this dissertation lays the groundwork by defining suspense and its dual preconditions: emotional investment from the reader and peril within the story's construction. Defining suspense was imperative as it formed the foundation for the following chapters, leaving no other possible topic for this particular chapter. Then, the second chapter explores how narrative focalisation introduces concealed elements that instigate curiosity and how misinterpretations arise from them, intensifying suspense. Rather than adhering strictly to the preconditions outlined in the initial chapter, I decided to explore the aspect of suspense as a product of the story's construction to effectively demonstrate how both authors shape their narratives to evoke suspense in readers. This chapter distinctly showcases the deliberate use of suspense in their novels, setting the stage for the subsequent discussion in the third chapter that clarifies the authors' intentions behind employing this technique. Consequently, the third chapter focuses on the moral dimension of suspense, illustrating how both authors resolve suspense by grounding it in realism, highlighting the characters' conscious responses and the moral implications for the reader. This approach underscores how suspense functions not merely as a plot device but as a conduit for moral inquiry across Radcliffe's and Austen's narratives.

This dissertation excels in its thorough exploration of suspense, unravelling its multifaceted nature in *The Romance of the Forest* and *Northanger Abbey*. Furthermore, through a comparative lens, the elements were equally scrutinised to highlight the similarities and differences present in both novels. The utilisation of diverse literary theories in the first chapter laid a strong theoretical framework, while the subsequent chapters effectively dissected the elements of the discussion with rich textual evidence. Besides, I made sure to

engage with each quote from primary and secondary sources in order to deepen my analysis and arguments. Nonetheless, the occasional repetition of concepts within chapters slightly impacted the dissertation's coherence. While I have adeptly analysed the moral reflections prompted by suspense, I believe this dissertation could benefit from a deeper exploration of how these reflections influence the reader's perception beyond the implicit moral lessons. Additionally, further exploration of alternative literary contexts or contrasting works might offer a richer comparative analysis, broadening the scope of the discussion.

In my writing process, I first encountered challenges in comparing *The Romance of the Forest* and *Northanger Abbey* due to their extensive depth. Nonetheless, once I compiled pertinent quotes to my analysis from each novel, I found the dissertation's word limit restricting. Therefore, I was prevented from a broader discussion and integrating more diverse critical perspectives that might have enriched the dissertation. Once I finished writing the three chapters, I had to summarise almost 3 thousand words since I had not yet written the introduction and conclusion of the whole dissertation when I was already exceeding the 8-thousand-word limit. Concurrently, time constraints from other college subjects limited my exploration of the works and topics discussed in this dissertation. Additionally, I aimed for a deeper dive into the historical and societal contexts influencing the novels, particularly the impact of religious and societal norms on the authors' portrayal of suspense and moral reflection. Unfortunately, the word limit constrained this analysis, compounded by restricted access to a book that was very useful to my understanding of suspense in literature since the author never answered my email, and I had to rely solely on the available introduction.

Having explored the interplay of suspense and its moral dimension in gothic literature, a pertinent question surfaces: how might contemporary authors leverage suspense

and ethical quandaries within diverse genres to not only captivate readers but also prompt deeper introspection? The examination of the works of Ann Radcliffe and Jane Austen unveils a compelling link between suspense, moral reflection, and societal norms, inviting us to ponder the broader role of literature in shaping ethical perceptions. Therefore, the question of whether contemporary storytelling, particularly genres like mystery and thriller, undertakes a similar responsibility or if it primarily aims to entertain. Exploring the role of suspense in modern literature within the framework of moral education could offer intriguing insights into how the narrative influences our ethical understanding in today's society.

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