

Conceptual Blending in Narrative Suspense: Making Pain of Anxiety Sweet

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Suspense, "a curious mixture of pain and pleasure" (Barnet et al. 1971: 107), is viewed as a two-fold phenomenon having extratextual (experiential) and intratextual (narrative) dimensions (Vorderer et al. 1996: vii). Traditionally, *narrative suspense* has been regarded as resulting from such unfolding of the plot when the progress of events acquires a conflicting and alternative pattern. The latter triggers the readers' effort to navigate a challenging problem space for an important target outcome or to restore what is behind instances of narrative ellipsis. The emergent pattern makes the possibility of various outcomes salient while leaving it delayed (Gerrig 1993: 77-90).

Accounting for the effect suspense entails has remained so far within the range of psychological and narratological quests. Probing into intricacies of literary narrative and verbal texture alone does not provide a sufficient ground for revealing the underlying mechanisms of suspense as a textual challenge. Given the basic assumptions of cognitive poetics (see Freeman 2000) and possible worlds theory in its narrative version (Pavel 1986; Ryan 1991; Dolezel 1998; Werth 1999), literary suspense can be viewed as an emotively charged emergent conceptual structure that results from (i) the conflict of mental spaces (cf. Fauconnier 1994) differing in their modality and/or (ii) the clash of alternative narrative sub-worlds involving the protagonist as a focalizer. The reconstructed conceptual integration network does not only account for the textual concept inferred but gives access to the mechanism of *empathetic distress* (Zillman 1996: 217), "a sweet pain of anxiety" (Brewer 1996: 108) experienced by the reader.

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