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RECONSIDERING SUSPENSE

The present study is both a continuation and a reaction against the article *Understanding Suspense* by Joanna Drążkiewicz¹, which provides an illuminating insight into the nature of suspense, being the more significant since suspense is not often dealt with in criticism.

The most frequent critical approach to suspense appears to be focused on formulating a definition, enumerating the means of evoking suspense, and suggesting the genres in which it is most potently operative. It seems, however, that the definition is only the first step in the understanding of the phenomenon, which cannot be satisfactory until we try to indicate the functions of suspense in literary texts and, perhaps, in the literary process. The above remarks determine the order of the argument here: after considering the definition and means of initiating and sustaining suspense, we will outline its possible functions as well as the tentative directions of further studies. Before formulating the definition, we will consider the approach to suspense proposed by J. Drążkiewicz.

The concept of suspense as developed by J. Drążkiewicz is probably the first precise formulation of the problem in criticism. She not only provides a thorough review of the existing definitions and approaches to suspense but also proposes a new understanding of it:

Suspense is a literary device consisting in repetitions of the question suggested to the addressee, narrator and/or character of a literary work. The repetitions result in sustaining the question and consequently in postponement of the answer.²

Three personal categories are enumerated here as possible „recipients” of the question. Yet, in many cases, the questions suggested to the characters and repeated by them do not serve suspense but function in introducing humor or in building up character.³ The same can be true about the questions

¹ Cf. J. Drążkiewicz, *Understanding Suspense*, „Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich” 1974, Vol. XVII, fasc. 2, p. 21—30.

² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³ Cf. R. S. Crane, *O pojęciu fabuły i o fabule Toma Jonesa*, [in:] *Sztuka interpretacji*, Vol. I, ed. H. Markiewicz, Wrocław 1971, p. 257—287.

repeated by the narrator. It seems that the questions uttered or suggested by the character or by the narrator may initiate suspense only in such cases when the answers to them are not known to the implied reader. The preponderance of the latter category for creating the suspense question becomes apparent.

The necessity of emphasizing the role of the implied reader emerges also from the consideration of foreshadowing. J. Drązkiewicz defines foreshadowing as „hints of what is to come”.⁴ It seems that such a definition leaves no criteria for distinguishing between hints constituting foreshadowing and those which sustain the suspense question. The proposed solution: right foreshadowing diminishes suspense and wrong foreshadowing sustains suspense,⁵ does not seem to be satisfactory. In the examples examined in J. Drązkiewicz's article, the hints sustaining suspense could be interpreted as either right or wrong foreshadowing, and yet, this does not seem to influence suspense in the considered units. In the differentiation between the two types of foreshadowing, the perspective of the reader is implicitly, though not explicitly, taken into consideration, as only the final appearance of the answer to the suspense question constitutes the basic condition for the implied reader to determine whether particular elements of the text point to right or wrong solutions. Foreshadowing, then, is a *retrogressive* understanding of the anticipatory function of textual elements by the implied reader.⁶ Suspense, on the other hand, appears to be *progressive* in nature, i.e., it is always „pointed toward a possible resolution”.⁷

The above remarks reveal our intention to consider suspense from the point of view of the implied reader, which appears to have fundamental consequences for the understanding of suspense.

It seems that a literary text may evoke in the reader numerous expectations directed towards various possible resolutions. Such expectations may be created by the uttered, expressed, or described desires, hopes, anxieties, predictions, reckonings, calculations etc. of the characters and/or the narrator.⁸ The expectations may also be shaped by the implied reader's recognition

⁴ Drązkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 23; cf. also her note to S. Barnet, M. Berman, W. Burto *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Boston 1960.

⁵ Cf. Drązkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 23—24.

⁶ For the terms 'retrogressive' and 'anticipatory' cf. J. N. Tynianow, *Zagadnienie języka wierszy*, [in:] *Rosyjska szkoła stylistyki*, eds. M. R. Mayenowa, Z. Saloni, Warszawa 1970, p. 92, 98; and also cf. A. Zgorzelski, *The Notion of the Equivalent in the Study of Fiction*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Wydziału Humanistycznego. Linguistica et Anglica Gedanensia 1”, Gdańsk 1979, p. 116, 119.

⁷ J. G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance. Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*, Chicago—London 1976, p. 17.

⁸ Cf. Drązkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

of conventional patterns of action established in the literary and cultural tradition.⁹ The appearance of such an expectation is, of course, insufficient for creating suspense, just as (contrary to J. Drązkiewicz's assertion) not every repeated question serves to sustain suspense. It seems that suspense can appear only when there is a conflict¹⁰ of aroused expectancies—when the reader is faced with the choice of two or more alternative solutions of a given problem.¹¹ For instance, in C. S. Lewis' *That Hideous Strength*,¹² suspense in a certain part of the text is centered on the search for Merlin, the magician of the Arthurian legend, who after an ages-long sleep re-awakes in the twentieth century. Two competing groups undertake the search, and the conflicting expectancies lead the implied reader to the suspense question: which of the search-parties will find Merlin? We may say that the suspense question is always the same: which of the expectancies will be realized? The question is usually sustained through a certain compositional part by hints suggesting the possibility of realizing both (or more) expectancies. It is obvious that the answer to the suspense question cannot be known to the implied reader, even though it may be known to the characters and the narrator and purposefully withheld.

Suspense operates in a certain compositional part delimited by the initial clash of expectancies (i.e., by the appearance of the suspense question) and by the fulfillment of one of the expectancies (i.e., by the solution of the suspense question). After J. Drązkiewicz we will call such a compositional part a unit of suspense.¹³ The search for Merlin we have mentioned above is an example of a unit of suspense. Suspense in this unit results from the tension between the expectancies that (1) the people associated with the evil powers will find Merlin and make use of his magic, and that (2) the people fighting for the good cause will manage to find him. The first expectancy appears much earlier than the second one. The unit starts with the appearance of the second expectancy which is initiated when the search-parties are

⁹ Cf. J. Sławiński, *O dzisiejszych normach czytania* (znawców), „Teksty” 1974, fasc. 3 (15), p. 9—32; and also cf. K. Bartoszyński, *Zagadnienie komunikacji literackiej w utworach narracyjnych*, [in:] *Problemy socjologii literatury*, ed. J. Sławiński, Wrocław 1971, p. 139—140; and also cf. Cawelti, *op. cit.*, p. 10—13, 17.

¹⁰ An unequivocal definition of a conflict, whether between expectancies or between other elements of the text is rather troublesome. Compare, for instance, J. Mukařovsky's explanation: „Co rozumiemy tutaj jako 'sprzeczność' — jest jasne: sprzeczność, subiektywnie odczuwana bywa jako nieadekwatność, często nawet wzbudza naszą niechęć” (J. Mukařovsky, *Pojęcie całości w teorii sztuki*, [in:] *Znak, styl, konwencja*, ed. M. Głowiński, Warszawa 1977, p. 91). Despite the lack of clear definition, there seems to exist a number of literary phenomena depending on the implied reader's recognition of some conflict or, in other words, depending on tensions in reception. Parody seems to be one of them (cf. Tynianow, *op. cit.*, p. 75).

¹¹ Cf. Bartoszyński, *op. cit.*, p. 140; and also cf. M. Boulton, *The Anatomy of the Novel*, London 1975, p. 47.

¹² Cf. C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, London 1963.

¹³ Cf. Drązkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

sent. Both expectancies are sustained for 41 pages by hints strengthening the possibility of fulfilling either of them. The answer to the suspense question—Merlin joining the people opposing the evil forces—closes the unit of suspense.

The concept of the suspense unit is indispensable for estimating the intensity of suspense. Intensity is considered by J. Dążkiewicz to be proportional to the frequency of hints sustaining suspense, so that intensity depends on the number of signals in a given unit.¹⁴ This is only partially adequate for our modified understanding of suspense. It often happens that in a unit of suspense one of the expectancies dominates unquestionably being sustained by a decidedly greater number of hints than the other one. The intensity of suspense seems to be low in such units, even if the number of hints is considerable. Not the number of hints, then, but the number of direct oppositions between the expectancies in a given unit should be taken into consideration. In other words, the intensity of suspense is proportional to the frequency of the direct clashes of the expectancies.

A suspense question can be initiated and sustained by a number of means. As we have already mentioned, the characters may give expression to their fears, desires, or doubts conflicting with the expectancies established previously. In the most obvious cases, a suspense unit is initiated by direct or indirect questions formulated by the characters or by the narrator. Uttered or unuttered monologues, or conversations may contain hints sustaining the opposed expectancies. Often the characters' desires conflicting with the seemingly unavoidable course of events are described by the narrator. A unit of suspense taken from C. S. Lewis' *Out of the Silent Planet*¹⁵ will serve as an illustration. Suspense in this unit appears owing to the tension between the expectancy that the travellers going from Mars to Earth will die during the journey and the expectancy that they will safely arrive on Earth. The former is shaped by the characters' anticipation of death signalled in their utterances and behavior. "Tell him to kill us now"¹⁶ says one of the travellers when they learn what they are to expect during the journey. The narrator's descriptions of the characters, emphasizing their paleness, nervousness and hysterical behavior, also sustain the expectancy of danger. The opposite expectancy of the safe arrival on Earth is shaped mainly by the characters' hopes and desires present in their conversations and in the narrator's descriptions of their actions and thoughts.

Characters' reactions generating the opposed expectancies of the implied reader may not only be uttered or described but also expressed through lyrical means. In a unit of suspense concerned with the fate of the protagonist of C. S. Lewis' *Out of the Silent Planet*, one of the expectancies is sustained

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁵ Cf. C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, London 1956.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

in a passage describing the character's imaginary vision of the strange planet by means of various devices *expressing* the emotional state of the hero.¹⁷ The use of rhythm and alliteration, the repetition of phrases, syntactic parallelisms, short sentences and anacolitic constructions, accumulation of synonymical expressions and epithets with negative connotations all express the protagonist's fear and in this way sustain the expectancy of danger.

It may also happen that the conflicting expectancies are shaped on the narrator—addressee level and the characters do not know that there can be more than one solution of their problems. This occurs when particular expectancies are sustained mainly through composition.

So far, we have considered such instances when suspense is evoked owing to a clash of expectancies built up of individual text signals, i. e., the signals characteristic of this and no other literary text. It is obvious, however, that a literary text is never an absolute novelty. In order to be properly understood, the text must be considered also in its synchronic and diachronic aspects. The implied reader is led to recognize the systemic features allowing him to perceive the text's connection with certain sets, such as genres, and to understand it accordingly.¹⁸ The recognition of cultural and literary paradigms may function in shaping the implied reader's expectancies and, consequently, suspense. If so, the examination of the individual text signals building up syntagmatic expectancies appears to be insufficient. In some cases it is necessary to investigate the ways in which a text calls forth cultural and literary paradigms and to study their function in creating suspense. The paradigmatic expectancies shaped by systemic text signals will be illustrated by two examples taken from two books by C. S. Lewis.

The identification of a cultural code (the Christian cultural code in this instance) is functional for creating suspense in C. S. Lewis' *Voyage to Venus (Perelandra)*.¹⁹ The hero of the book, Ransom, finds himself on Venus where he must assist the Queen of the planet in overcoming the temptation into disobedience to God. Suspense results here from the clash of two expectancies: that the Lady will fall or that she will successfully resist the temptation. The latter is shaped mainly by the syntagmatic, i. e., individual text signals.

The expectancy of the Lady's fall is built owing to the reader's recognition of the parallelism of the situation on Venus to that described in the *Book of Genesis* (II, 17, III) or in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.²⁰ The recognition pro-

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 39—40.

¹⁸ Cf. Sławiński, *op. cit.*, p. 12—13; and also cf. H. R. Jauss, *Historia literatury jako wyzwanie rzucone nauce o literaturze*, [in:] *Współczesna teoria badań literackich za granicą. Antologia* ed. H. Markiewicz, Vol. III, Kraków 1976, p. 104—147.

¹⁹ Cf. C. S. Lewis, *Voyage to Venus (Perelandra)*, London 1956.

²⁰ Cf. W. L. White, *The Image of Man in C. S. Lewis*, Nashville—New York 1969, p. 122; and also cf. B. W. Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree. The True History of Science Fiction*, Garden City, New York 1973, p. 199.

ceeds gradually from the suggestion of equivalence between Venus and Paradise, through the identification of the Queen as Venusian Eve, to the recognition of the tempter as Satan's embodiment. Finally, the parallel between the temptation by the serpent and the events on Venus is explicitly identified by the protagonist.²¹ The recognition of the parallel to the Biblical temptation story is necessary for establishing the expectancy of a similar end to the temptation of the Queen.

In many other instances in Lewis' space trilogy, suspense is built owing to the reader's recognition of literary conventions. We will shortly consider an example from *Out of the Silent Planet*. The book starts with a distant, impersonal narrator presenting the details of the setting and providing an outline of the situation. In the first presentation of the protagonist, the narrator withholds his name and describes him from the point of view of an incidental observer. The countryside is depicted in economic and social terms, and the character is related to the economic and social background. The exposition contains some ironic remarks concerning British national character. The stress on objectivity (the convention of the detached observer), concentration on the typical (economic and social aspects), the matter-of-fact information about the country and the character—all prepare the addressee to expect a novel concerned with social problems, perhaps even more specifically, a novel of manners. Immediately after the expository scene, the expectancy of danger appears owing to the motif of fear and to the threatening behavior of some characters. In the descriptions suggesting danger, language loses the previous generality and objectivity, its emotive function coming to the fore. The expectancy of danger conflicts with the suggested genological shape of the text, since nobody would expect a direct, physical danger to the protagonist as a convention in a novel of manners. The hero acts like a protagonist of such a novel: he disregards all signals of the increasing strangeness of the situation and takes his safety for granted.

It may be concluded that the expectancy of the safety of the hero is built mainly owing to the initial suggestion that the book may be a novel of manners and later by the behavior of the protagonist concurring with such a genological convention. Although the opposed expectancy of danger is chiefly shaped by the individual text signals (characters' behavior and utterances), they may also suggest an opposed literary convention. The more so as the convention is almost explicitly identified: "The last thing Ransom wanted was an adventure . . .".²²

The examples chosen from two volumes of C. S. Lewis' space trilogy served to illustrate the cases when a literary text evokes a literary or a cultural tradition in order to create suspense.

The formulation of a definition and enumeration of the techniques used

²¹ Cf. Lewis, *Voyage to Venus*, p. 109.

²² Cf. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, p. 10.

for arousing suspense should constitute but a starting point in the consideration of this phenomenon. The most important problem is obviously its function. Seen as a dynamic opposition between certain tendencies in the text's structure, suspense is one of the forces determining and organizing the implied reader's understanding of a literary text. The examination of suspense may reveal the basic semantic tendencies of such a structure.

Suspense often serves as a spotlight focusing the implied reader's attention on these moments in the text's construction which are essential for the created meanings. Thus, the places where suspense is initiated or resolved, and the moments of its highest intensity are often those in which the reader is given the most important clues to the text's meanings. The opposed expectancies, operating in a certain compositional part, focus the implied reader's interest on motifs associated with them, especially of the motifs are repeated. The association with an expectancy may link motifs into a semantic field ²³ (of motifs). For instance, in C. S. Lewis' space trilogy the motifs functional for suspense build semantic fields of world order, of evil and of human nature, which are dominant in the thematic sphere of the consecutive volumes. The connection with suspense gives particular prominence to a given field. The tensions between the opposed expectancies draw the implied reader's attention to the conflict between the semantic fields of motifs. In such cases, suspense exposes the basic semantic tensions of the text.

Within a suspense unit, the expectancies often change their mutual relationships, attaining or losing dominance. It obviously entails changes in the relations between the semantic fields associated with the respective expectancies. Hence, the examination of suspense may help to reveal the semantic dominant of the text. Sometimes the gradual accumulation of motifs is more important than their group opposition. It may also happen that the tension is feigned (oblique suspense) and serves to underline one of the expectations rather than to juxtapose it with another one. ²⁴

The semantic fields associated with particular expectancies may influence the implied reader's evaluation of the characters, spheres of the fictional world, types of behavior, features or opinions. The evaluation is determined by the elements of the semantic field, which may have strongly positive or negative connotations. For instance, in C. S. Lewis' *Out of the Silent Planet*, the semantic field of the unknown world is defined by the motifs of bloody

²³ The notion of semantic field as employed here differs from its understanding in linguistics (cf. D. Buttler, *Koncepcje pola znaczeniowego*, „Przegląd Humanistyczny” 1967, R. XI, fasc. 2 (59), p. 41—59; P. Giraud, *Semantyka*, Warszawa 1976, p. 74—91; W. Pisarek, *Pojęcie pola wyrazowego*, „Pamiętnik Literacki” 1967, R. LVIII, fasc. 1—2, p. 505). It is closer to what is called stylistic field by M. R. Mayenowa in her *Poetyka teoretyczna. Zagadnienia języka*, Wrocław 1979, p. 213—216.

²⁴ The tension is feigned when one of the expectations is in actual fact a handful of disconnected hints which do not constitute a coherent whole. The tension, though only apparent in such cases, still functions in focusing the implied reader's interest.

monsters, cruelty, human sacrifice, horror, revulsion and imminent death. These motifs function in building up the implied reader's expectancy of danger. Simultaneously, they shape his negative evaluation of the unknown planet.

Suspense can also be considered from the point of view of the literary-historical process. It seems that suspense may well be one of the forces participating in the redynamization of automatized genological conventions.²⁵ In fossilized genre variants all textual elements are motivated (in Tynianov's sense²⁶), which makes them easily predictable for the implied reader. In such instances the presence of the dynamic opposition of the expectancies is hardly possible. On the other hand, the less stabilized periods in the development of genres are characterized by increased "unexpectedness" of textual elements. Hence, the possibilities for suspense to appear are in such cases much greater. The study of the development of the detective and sensational literature may well supply expedient illustrative material ranging from the extremely conventionalized classical detective story, to the thriller and sensational novel.²⁷ In the classical detective story, the expectations (of the puzzle being solved, and of the presence of false clues or insufficient data) are not in conflict, nor do they undermine the implied reader's assurance of the achievement of the final solution. This genre variant of detective fiction seems to be usually devoid of suspense, which does not seem to be true in the case of other sensational genres, or, perhaps more accurately, of other stages in the genre development. The problem certainly deserves thorough consideration.

The understanding of suspense proposed in this study opens new issues and leads to new questions. For instance, tensions similar to suspense may direct the implied reader's interest to the development of character or to the shape of the fictional world. It is possible that action is not the only object of suspense. This proposition should be checked against a broader literary-historical material reaching beyond the novel of adventure and the so-called popular literature, to the novel of manners and psychological fiction.

Some tensions may operate on higher levels of the structural hierarchy of the text. Every literary (as well as non-literary) text demands the acceptance of certain presuppositions by the implied reader. They are conditioned by the recognition of the "literariness" (or „non-literariness”) of the text

²⁵ For the notion of automatization and redynamization cf. Tynianow, *op. cit.*, p. 70—71, and also cf. A. Zgorzelski, *Fantastyka. Utopia. Science Fiction. Ze studiów nad rozwojem gatunków*, Warszawa 1980, p. 13—40.

²⁶ Cf. Tynianow, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

²⁷ Cf. J. Symons, *The Detective Story in Britain*, London 1962; W. Ostrowski, *Thriller*, „Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich” 1980, Vol. XXIII, fasc. 2 (45), p. 109—117, A. Bear, *Popular Reading: The New Sensational Novel*, [in:] *Sphere History of Literature in the English Language*, vol. VII: *The Twentieth Century*, ed. B. Bergonzi, London 1970, p. 336—361.

and of the genological conventions according to which the text is built.²⁸ They often strongly determine the reader's expectations concerning the development of plot, the appearance of dominant motifs and problems, the shape of the fictional reality and its relation to the empirical world, generating particular styles of reading.²⁹ Tensions on this level, appearing when presuppositions come to a conflict, are not „progressive”, i. e., they do not by themselves suggest the future solution. They may even remain unresolved, but they prompt questions about the real nature of the text and about its place in the orders of literature and culture. Such tensions can be seen as dynamic forces somewhat similar to, but by no means identical with suspense. Several other problems emerging from the consideration of suspense can only be suggested here.

There are certainly many techniques for stimulating the reader's interest and focusing his attention. Suspense is only one of them. Foreshadowing also seems to require thorough examination from this point of view. Surprise, emotional involvement, identification with the hero and numerous other terms which are used to describe the reactions of the reader (usually in such cases understood as a real-life person) would also be worth considering. It should be elucidated what are the textual means of generating such reactions. Identification with the hero and emotional involvement often participate in building up suspense. The category of surprise also requires thorough study. When a solution comes as a surprise, it is usually logically linked to everything preceding it. One could ask about the techniques used for diverting the implied reader's attention from some trails of clues and for generating false anticipations.

We should also signal the problem of suspense in serialized fiction.³⁰ Suspense seems to function here in establishing the unity of the texts accessible to the reading public only in instalments each of which may be as well considered a separate text. At the same time, the presence of a text boundary—the end of the instalment, but also the end of the chapter in an ordinary book—seems to influence the intensity of suspense.

The problems of serialized fiction lead to the literarysociological aspect of suspense. Novels published in weekly instalments are often more popular with the readers than the book versions.³¹ Suspense seems to be involved here. One could also inquire about the connection between suspense and wide readership of ‘popular literature’.

²⁸ Cf. Jauss, *op. cit.*, p. 111—114.

²⁹ Cf. M. Głowiński, *Świadectwa i style odbioru*, [in:] M. Głowiński, *Style odbioru*, Kraków 1977, p. 116—137.

³⁰ Cf. E. Pięrcikowski, *Emancypantki — powieść w odcinkach*, „Przegląd Humanistyczny” 1967, R. XI, fasc. 4 (61), p. 31—43.

³¹ Cf. W. Iser, *Indeterminacy and the Readers Response in Prose Fiction*, [in:] *Aspects of Narrative. Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. J. H. Miller, New York—London 1971, p. 17.

Suspense has been considered in the present study from the point of view of the implied reader. It has been seen as one of the tensions in the text's structure and as a means of directing the implied reader's reception and understanding of the text. Such an approach to suspense opens the perspectives for estimating its functions in a literary work and in the literary-historical process, i. e., these aspects which are particularly neglected in the criticism. The study does not offer all-explaining solutions, being rather a tentative proposition and a suggestion for further research.

PONOWNIE O ZJAWISKU „SUSPENSE”

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł nawiązuje do definicji *suspense* zaproponowanej przez J. Drążkiewicza w pracy *Understanding Suspense* i stanowi próbę rozwinięcia i modyfikacji zawartych tam twierdzeń. Punktem wyjścia niniejszych rozważań staje się teza, że kategorią decydującą o istnieniu *suspense* jest projektowany przez tekst odbiorca — czytelnik implikowany. *Suspense* pojawia się w tekście literackim wówczas, gdy wzbudzone różnymi środkami oczekiwania czytelnicze wchodzą ze sobą w konflikt. Moment zderzenia tych oczekiwań jest zawiązaniem pytania *suspense*. Pytanie to jest podtrzymywane w pewnej części tekstu (nazwanej za J. Drążkiewicza jednostką *suspense*) przy pomocy wskazówek sugerujących możliwość realizacji któregoś z oczekiwań; realizacja jednego z nich jest rozwiązaniem pytania i zakończeniem jednostki *suspense*. Czytelnicze oczekiwania mogą być kształtowane przez wypowiedzi postaci o ich pragnieniach, obawach i nadziejach, przez wypowiedzi narratora o sytuacjach lub postaciach, czy wreszcie wynikać mogą z rozpoznania przez czytelnika implikowanego przebiegu akcji usankcjonowanego tradycją literacką i kulturową. Ze względu na różnorodność sygnałów kształtujących oczekiwania czytelnika implikowanego, niezbędne wydaje się badanie nie tylko specyficznych dla danego tekstu oczekiwań dotyczących układu syntagmatycznego, lecz również oczekiwań na paradygmat związany z istnieniem dzieła literackiego w określonej synchronii i diachronii.

W artykule położono nacisk na to, co wydaje się szczególnym zaniedbaniem istniejących określeń *suspense* — na zarysowanie jego funkcji. *Suspense* okazuje się być jednym z czynników organizujących odbiór tekstu przez czytelnika implikowanego. Powodując zaciekawienie czytelnika, skupia jego uwagę na pewnych elementach tekstu, które stają się szczególnie ważne dla tworzonych w dziele znaczeń dzięki skoncentrowaniu na nich uwagi odbiorcy. Badanie tak rozumianego *suspense* służyć może ujawnieniu podstawowych napięć semantycznych tekstu. Zarysowuje się również perspektywa badania funkcjonalności *suspense* w procesie historyczno-literackim: może być przecież *suspense* jednym z czynników redynamizujących skostniałe struktury gatunkowe.

Ujęcie *suspense* z punktu widzenia odbioru dzieła literackiego sugeruje cały szereg nowych pytań badawczych. Wydarzenia akcji nie muszą być jedynym możliwym obiektem *suspense*: zderzające się oczekiwania mogą dotyczyć również postaci czy świata przedstawionego. Napięcia analogiczne do *suspense*, choć pozbawione charakterystycznej dlań „progresywności”, czyli nastawienia na rozwiązanie, mogą pojawiać się także na wyższych poziomach tekstu i dotyczyć, na przykład, kształtu genologicznego, lub zagadnienia literackości czy nie-literackości dzieła, prowokując pytania o miejsce tekstu w porządkach literatury i kultury. Dalszych badań wymagają również inne techniki organizowania odbioru tekstu, na przykład, zapowiedź przyszłych wydarzeń, niespodzianka czy mechanizmy identyfikacji czytelnika z bohaterem. Socjologiczno-literackie zjawisko popularności czytelniczej pewnych typów literatury wydaje się być także związane z *suspense*.