

This essay will not be suspenseful. One feature of this essay that makes it not very suspenseful is that I will tell the reader exactly what will be coming up. This essay will be on the characteristics of suspense using “The Raven” by Edgar Allan Poe as an example. Since examples will be drawn from the poem, this essay will talk mainly about suspense that comes in this literary form, although the discussion can easily be transferred to films and stories.

There will be no unexpected surprises in this essay. Of course, to remain not suspenseful, one must believe in what I, the author, say. One aspect of suspense arises when the reader believes the author is deliberately trying to trick the reader or doubts the truth behind an author’s statement. Then the reader is pushed to read on to figure out where and how the deception occurred. The first stanza of “The Raven” ends with “Only this, and nothing more.” But even after only the first stanza, the dreary mood that has been set makes the reader of the poem doubt the simplicity of the whole situation. This doubt pushes the reader to continue reading to find out if it is only a visitor tapping away at the chamber door. And after “’Tis the wind and nothing more!” in the sixth stanza, the reader should highly doubt that it is only the wind and nothing more. This doubt of the author’s words adds to the effect of suspense.

Suspense is making the reader believe that he has the ability to guess what will happen without giving the reader too much confidence in his judgment. The reader will want to read on to resolve the suspense. This means that an author must give hints to guide the reader, whether or not the hints guide the reader in the right direction. Too much information and too many hints can lower the suspense by making the outcome too obvious. In the poem, Poe used repetition to give a special significance to words like “tapping” and “nevermore.” These were part of the hints or clues given to guide the reader. Another way Poe used emphasis to give hints was in his descriptions. Lenore was described as a “rare and radiant maiden” in sharp contrast to the dark mood and tone of the poem, which drew the reader to wonder about this radiant woman.

Being suspenseful means uncertainty. Unexpected turn of events that shock readers help create suspense by creating doubts in the reader’s mind as to what will really happen next. The fourth stanza ending with “darkness there, and nothing more,” was an unexpected event that should create doubts in the

reader's mind as to the source of all the tapping. Poems or stories that make the reader feel as if there was only one possible outcome cannot be very suspenseful. In "The Raven" after the first stanza, there are many reasonable alternatives that can be creatively imagined to resolve the tapping at the door. Creating uncertainty creates suspense, since readers, being human as they are, want to know that they are right, so they continue reading in the hope of confirming their predictions. Suspense leaves questions unanswered and poses a challenge for the reader to answer the questions before the answers are revealed. What is the meaning of the raven? Who is Lenore? What happened in the narrator's past? These are some of the questions that need to be answered and finding the answers to these questions is a compelling reason to continue reading.

Suspense does not need to be scary, however suspense must engage the reader's interest. If the reader is not at all interested in what will happen, then it does not matter how carefully the author has thought out the plot and setting, since the reader has no interest in continuing reading. Scarieness, however, seems suited for suspense, since humans are naturally interested in frightening and mysterious things. Poe influences suspense with the mode and tone of the poem by creating a scary, mysterious setting that helps arouse the reader's interest. Taking place in a dark, lonely room at midnight, the plot adds to the mysteriousness by being obscure and abnormal. Seeing a talking raven is not an everyday occurrence and so this sparks some interest. Another way to generate suspense is with time. Suspense builds suspense. As time goes on, if suspense is not relieved, it naturally is built up in preparation for a climax. Stanzas eleven to thirteen in the poem do not do say much but do heighten the suspense. Poe is able to increase the suspense just by having the narrator sit in one place staring at a bird. As time passes, the suspense increases.

Suspense, then, is created in many ways. The author sometimes gives hints revealing certain aspects but not all aspects of the plot. The reader must never be fully certain, but always in a state of uncertainty as to the real intent of the author, and the reader must be interested enough to think about possible outcomes. Suspense, then, is a sense of interest and uncertainty in the reader such that the reader will not wish to stop reading. That is it and nothing more.