

# The importance of tension as a literary theory

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**Abstract:** Tension plays a vital role in enriching a novel or story by being a fundamental element that keeps the reader engaged. No literary work is without tension, as it is the driving force that maintains interest and compels the reader to continue the narrative. It is the thing that keeps you interested in the story and makes you to read the literary work till the end. To be more precise, tension is the heartbeat of a story — it pulls you in and keeps you turning the pages.

**Keywords:** Tension, conflict, suspense, readers, types of tension, examples, sources of tension, Graham Greene.

**Introduction:** Tension is a term used in a particular sense by Allen Tate to designate the

totality of meaning in a poem. He derives it from the logical terms

'extension' and 'intension' by removing the prefixes. Extension:

literal meaning; intension: metaphorical meaning. The simultaneous

co-existence of these sets of meaning constitutes tension. It may also

refer to 'conflict structures'. For example, the counterpoint (q.t.)

between the rhythm and meter of a poem and speech rhythms; or

between the concrete and the abstract. Some critics, following the

theories of Anaximander and Heraclitus, take it to mean the balance

of mental and emotional tensions which help to give shape and unity

to a work. In another dictionary of M.N. Abrams it is written that other critics use "tension" to characterize poetry that manifests an equilibrium of the serious and the ironic, or "a pattern of resolved stresses," or a

harmony of opponent tendencies, or any other mode of that stability-in opposition which was the favorite way in the New Criticism for conceiving the organization of a good poem. And some critics, dubious perhaps about the validity of Tate's logical derivation of the term, simply apply "tension" to any

poem in which the elements seem tightly rather than loosely interrelated.

As we can see in both dictionaries it is more about a tension in poems with scientific approved examples, but in other sources such as "Tension in Graham Greene's novels" it is given more specific: the term "tension" will be employed

in its most extended meaning. Viewed narrowly, "tension" signifies 'conflict', 'stress', 'pull'. In its broadest meaning, it may be made to mean 'anxiety', 'frustration', 'disillusionment', 'suffering', and 'pain'. Accordingly, since this thesis deals with tension in its extended meaning, it is really a study of the human predicament not only as it applies to our times but insofar as it applies to Universal Man.

Here what says Graham Greene about tension in modern world:

Great literature can hardly escape being influenced by the times in which it is created. It is an inescapable fact that modern man lives in times of extraordinary

tensions. Undoubtedly, man through the ages has experienced the pull of tension. The fact about our modern times is that the tensions

are so widely spread among men, that they are so painfully acute in degree, and that the modern consciousness is so fully aware of their presence.

After deep analysis, it is also important to mention that tension is closely related with the words like conflict, suspense, problem or even fight. Tension is really important in the story or novel, because it moves the story forward. Many people confuse tension with conflict or suspense. To be more precise, tension is a feeling, the reader gets that something is going to go wrong that there is a threat just around the corner, it is the tension that causes that tight feeling in our chest when we are in exciting part of a book and a movie and we just can't look away, we need to know what happens next. It can also refer to emotional response readers have to character conflicts and challenges. It plays a crucial role in making stories more gripping and engaging. That's why tension is more common in horror and thriller genres. Tension is built from the conflict and it is essential in creating tension. Conflict is the primary driver of the tension, because conflict, as we know, is a struggle between opposing forces in a novel. If conflict is the engine of a story, so tension is a fuel that keeps the novel exciting, to say exactly tension and conflict in the novel can't exist without each other. In most cases it is stated that suspense and tension are the same things. However they are quite different sources. If suspense is waiting, then tension is an immediate feeling. Suspense is when something scary is behind the door but you don't know for sure. Tension is when that thing comes out suddenly and you feel anxious or frightened.

There are four main types of tension:

1. Tension of the task
2. Tension of relationships
3. Tension of surprise
4. Tension of mystery

1. The first one is tension of the task is all about difficulties that characters of the novel overcome throughout the story especially when a character tries to accomplish a particular task or a goal and goals can be in different sizes. If the task is interesting, hard or urgent so the tension here can be enhanced

For example, in the novel of Khaled Hosseini "The Kite Runner" the main hero of the novel Amir faces different obstacles in order to rescue Hassan's son Sohrab from Taliban, and fortunately he achieves his goal. Sohrab's traumatic experience, the risk involved in rescuing all contribute to the tension of the task.

2. The tension of relationship is when there is conflict between characters or even it can be some family dynamics and even interpersonal dramas. It can also occur between antagonist and protagonist. These are all makes a reader emotionally tangled up.

Example: *Pride and Prejudice* nails this type of tension. Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy's evolving relationship, filled with misunderstandings and changing perceptions, creates a pull that makes you want to know if they'll ever get together and how it'll all play out.

3 The third one is tension of surprise. It is when something happens unexpectedly and you become surprised as a result. Readers often tend to predict what happens next in the novel, but the events become vice versa and this definitely grasps readers attention.

For example in the novel "Murder on the Orient Express" by Agatha Christie is full of tension of surprise. You're constantly trying to put things together, but just when you think you have found out, you're stressed out by another surprise in the novel.

1. The last one is tension of mystery, which is built on the unknown and it is full of surprises and sudden unexpected events. Example: Sherlock Holmes stories are wonderful examples of tension of mystery. The intricate cases and the obscure clues make you continuously wonder about who actually is in need while Sherlock and Watson work out the high-stakes, diabolical plans.

To keep the plot interesting and the readers engaged, each of these tension types works hard. Your story will then be filled with tasks, challenges, emotions, and surprises as it unfolds. However, for any of these types of tension to even exist, conflict is necessary.

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