

Spies college essay



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The author Michael Frayn has used many different devices in order to sustain the tension in the novel “ Spies”, an example of some of these techniques are the settings, characters, themes and language techniques including powerful descriptive passages, use of tenses and the questions the reader finds themselves asking constantly throughout the novel. All these play a different part in sustaining the tension, and collectively all develop anticipation in the text. The language techniques that have been used play a crucial role in holding the suspense during the novel.

In the very first chapter the reader can already find themselves asking questions about what will be happening later on in the novel, since they already begin to try and piece his memories and clues together to obtain the full story. From the beginning the reader is being pulled into the tale by Michael Frayn’s techniques of only providing the audience with snip-it’s of what’s happening, keeping the tension, and constantly building it up. Short sentences are used throughout the novel to increase tension as they produce pauses in text, making the reader stop and slow down before they read the next part of the story, a prime example of this in the novel is where there is a man behind Stephen, but he does not want to turn around and look, “ I can’t move. I can’t breathe. And all at once the darkness dissolves in a flood of moonlight.

Neither of us moves. Neither of us breathes”. A similar technique which can be commonly seen within this novel is the use of ellipses, these are once again used by authors as they make pauses in the story, show an unfinished thought or at the end of a sentence, trailing off into silence, “ Cloth, yes... a lot of cloth.

.. different sorts of cloth..

. some of it smooth, some of it fibrous...

a hem... A button.

.. Another button". The main effect that they have in the novel " Spies" is to expand and uphold suspense throughout the chapters. Imagery has been used as the employment of the vivid description can create clear images in the reader's mind of what the characters and location of the novel is like.

In chapter three Keith's mother attempts to produce an image of herself, which is normal and part of the group, however the author uses imagery of " alien eyes" to describe her, giving clues to the reader that she is infact not standard and common at all, and infact quite the opposite as she is keeping secrets from everyone, and acting very unusual. The use of tense, past and present, help the reader have a clearer understanding of what old Stephen is going through. He cannot remember all of his memories and is trying to piece together what happened by going back to his old home, and remembering what it was like to be young Stephen. The shift in tense shows his disorientation and loss of memory, also allowing the reader to follow his thoughts, trying to piece the mystery together with him, giving us active involvement in the development of the unknown, and keeping the reader hooked. Chapter five begins with the use of a paradox, " everything is as it was; and everything has changed".

This has been used as a device to sustain suspense in the novel as it does not only show the confusion of Stephen when he is trying to piece together

his memories, but also keeps the reader interested since we want to discover what has changed, constantly drawing the reader further into the story. In some cases the reader may also be able to relate to this feeling, when smelling a familiar aroma it can occasionally feel for a moment like nothing has changed, but the reality is entirely the opposite, as they find themselves comparing their feelings to Stephens. The confusion we see of this character also brings in another device that Michael Frayn has employed in order to sustain the tension and show uncertainty in the text, the use of questions once again gets the reader involved in the novel as they are constantly asking themselves questions such as what is the 'liguster', and coming up with possible solutions as to Mrs. Hayward's unusual actions.

The characters' behaviour in the novel helps to sustain the tension as the author has invented the nature of the characters so that they can be perceived as suspicious, and the audience can grow to be weary of them, whilst also trying to find out more throughout the book in order to understand the storyline. The main character that we are very suspicious of is Mrs Hayward. To someone who wasn't familiar with her, her actions may come across as normal and nothing out of the ordinary, but as we see her behaviour and activities transform from being very calm and composed to scurrying about hurriedly down to Auntie Dee's each day, the audience begins to enquire as to why, and their suspicion of her being a German spy grows rapidly. This assists to continue suspense within the novel as each point that she is mentioned we observe the latest side of Mrs Hayward as it becomes quite obvious at that moment she is keeping secrets and trying to justify her actions to those who begin to query her.

Mr Hayward's behaviour can also be seen as particularly distrustful, on the occasions that we hear from him in the novel he can be presented as a violent and intimidating character. He is constantly seen with his bayonet, a symbol seen by Keith as heroic and a symbol of bravery. At the end of chapter six, Mrs Hayward is very anxious when running back to her house, and struggles to make numerous excuses as to where she has been to Mr Hayward, " So sorry Ted, your parade – I know. I went to paradise.

Tried everywhere for a rabbit for the weekend. No luck. Ran all the way back". This implies she may be fearful of him since he may possibly be the sort of individual who resorts to aggression and hostility if he does not get his own way.

Soon after in the text we notice Mr Hayward accompanying Mrs Hayward to the post-box, it appears he doesn't want her out of his sight, furthermore has even torn himself away from his work to escort her, this is once more a particularly bizarre behaviour as he would never usually be seen outside of his garage. Mrs Hayward has become a prisoner in her own home. The way that Mr Hayward also talks to Keith hints that he is not quite the loving father too him either, " if that toy aeroplane touches the green house old bean', he'd smile, ' I'll cane you", the menacing tone in his voice when we hear this suggests he can be a aggressive man running on a short fuse. His behaviour helps to keep tension as it builds up suspense of the mystery of this character, as we yet still do not know much about him. The novel is set during war time Britain; this immediately creates an aire of suspicion for the reader.

During the war there were many people sent over to spy on their opposing country, and anyone who began to act suspiciously and secretive may have been questioned by on-lookers. By using the war time setting it automatically makes the book more sinister and serious. It also additionally reflects on the theme of betrayal, and those individuals who did not support their country in the war, as an alternative turned to spying. The idea of spying and conflict was all over the world at the time, Frayn has cleverly used this since it shows how even the children have picked up on the idea, even though they only see spying on Keith's mother as a game, it illustrates that they learnt it from people around them who were privately spying and studying on each other.

Along with being set in the midst of a war, the novels main setting is a small close in London. All the houses would be collectively together in a close group, which meant every person is aware of everyone else's chitchat and business, plus people tend to observe each other through their windowpanes, taking note of their daily routines, this conversely means they also tend to notice if neighbours start acting strange or abnormal. Due to the war it meant that the blackout was in force at the time of the novel. People would have been able to sneak around at night being unseen by anyone, perfect for spies.

Michael Frayn may have chosen this setting of the close as people are acquainted with each other to a great extent and tend to notice any strange actions or a change in behaviour, for instance even Barbara Berril had detected that Mrs Hayward had grown very edgy, " Mrs Hayward always used to be running round to Mrs Tracey's. She never goes there now. Why

not? Have they fallen out or something? ” The idea of people ‘ spying’ on each other is strongly reflected in the close. The scenery of the tunnel may also have been selected very carefully by the author as its effect is especially powerful on the novel.

It is very mysterious, dark and dingy place, slime on the walls, and no light in the middle of the night. It is a perfect place for a spy to hide or organise secrets meetings, which also arouses suspicion about why Mrs Hayward keeps returning to the tunnel. At the opening and ending of each chapter the author has included cliff-hangers to commence and conclude, “ What’s going to happen now? ” or “ The dark of the moons coming, and it’s going to be more frightening than we thought” This is a very important narrative technique as it draws the reader immediately in to the novel and generates them to read further and further. The narration used and the repeated switch between first and third person provides us with the effect of the memories old Stephen is having, and that he is trying, much like the audience, to piece together the memories of what happened and why he has such horrific recollections of the smell of the ‘ liguster’ plant.

The use of this technique shows us that he is confused; Frayn has also included this method as it gives us a perspective of what has happened through the eyes of an adult and also a child – making it easier for the audience to understand his thoughts and feelings. The world is seen differently through the eyes of a child and by using this technique it simply gives the audience almost like another persons view. It is an unreliable narrator, he can’t quite remember all that has happened, and this illustrates to us he is mystified and disorientated. The novel is presented to us in a non-
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chronological order; the majority of it is given to the reader in fragments and different sections.

This maintains the suspense of the novel as it keeps the reader guessing about what is too happen. At the very opening of the book it begins with old Stephen telling us something dreadful has occurred in his past, but he cannot remember what, as it's just the smell of a plant that reminds him. This gives the readers clues from the outset that something very traumatic must have taken place for him to completely blank it out of his mind – a very disturbing experience just brought back by a smell. These clues already construct plenty of tension in the novel, Frayn has used this technique to keep the audience interested and guessing instead of simply giving the facts out to them straight away. The shifts in time help to draw the reader into Stephen's memories. We get the experience from young Stephen and his view of the world, along with older Stephens's memories about what he remembers it to be like.

There are numerous diverse themes that can be distinguished in the novel “Spies”, though one of the most effective ones being memory and perception. This theme is significant in the novel as it shows the reader the different perceptions dissimilar people can have on the same subject, for example a child's view of the world is very different to an adults. The theme of memory is important as they story is based around one persons memories and piecing them together to acquire the complete facts. The themes can be useful for sustaining tension in the novel as there is an aire of mystery and curiosity about them. Other themes presented to us in the novel are betrayal and the idea of secrecy.

There is a great deal of betrayal seen during the book beginning with Stephen who breaks many promises, to Mrs Hayward keeping secrets from her family, which also ties in with the topic of secrecy. Michael Frayn has also included the effects of the technique ‘rites of passage’, which follows Stephen as the story goes on and shows the change in his social and sexual status. This maturity we see of Stephen can also be included as another theme of the novel since he begins to have more intimate relationships with Barbara Berril and Mrs Hayward, has began smoking and has now realised that it is no longer a game but infact quite serious, “ I feel...

something disturbing. I don’t think it’s sick. I think it’s... a soaring sensation.

I have a sense of freedom, as if im no longer bound by the rules and restrictions of childhood”. The symbol of “ X” throughout the story plays a vital function in maintaining the suspense. There are many questions for the audience about what the values of “ X” could be, and by not knowing what it truly means the reader will want to carry on reading the book to find out. Stephen and Keith first believe that it stands for a kiss or a secret meeting arranged by Mrs Hayward. There are lots of references to X in chapter six, and many possibilities to what it could be, but the audience does not know for certain unless they read on, thus the tension constantly being built up. The bayonet is also a very important symbol in the novel; it is a sign of violence and power carried by Mr Hayward, this influence of power reflecting on him.

He is seen sharpening the bayonet, which creates suspicion about the character of Mr Hayward, and what his real behaviour is like behind closed

doors towards Keith and Mrs Hayward, “ The little smile comes back to his father’s lips. He goes back into the garage. I can’t see what he’s sharpening, but I don’t need to because I know. It’s the bayonet, the famous bayonet”

The smell of the privet creates suspense in the book as we know that this smell brings back horrific memories for old Stephen, but the audience does not know what of at the beginning, however it becomes apparent that it must have been very traumatic as he has blanked it out of his memory, and even he does not remember what happened. From looking at the novel “ Spies” I can conclude that Michael Frayn has employed a variety of different techniques in order to sustain the tension, some of these being the characters behaviour, themes, motifs and language techniques. The use of first and third person switching between old and young Stephen along with techniques of only providing the audience with snip-it’s of what’s happening are all very important in keeping the tension, and constantly building it up.

The characters behaviour in the novel helps to sustain the tension as the author has invented the nature of the characters so that they can be perceived as suspicious, and the overall setting is located during war time Britain; this immediately creates an aire of suspicion for the reader, reflecting on the idea of spying and the title “ Spies”.