



Project
MUSE[®]

Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration.

<http://muse.jhu.edu>

AN ELIMINATIVIST THEORY OF SUSPENSE

MOTIVATING PHILOSOPHICAL INTEREST IN the notion of suspense requires comparatively little appeal to what goes on in our ordinary work-a-day lives. After all, with respect to our everyday engagements with the actual world suspense appears to be largely absent—most of us seem to lead lives relatively suspense-free. The notion of suspense strikes us as interesting largely because of its significance with respect to our engagements with (largely fictional) narratives. So, when I indicate a preference for suspense novels, I indicate a preference not only for reading novels with certain narrative structures or content but for novels that in virtue of their narrative structure or content, when properly engaged, evoke a certain sort of emotive response, i.e., feelings of suspense. But what exactly is the “feeling of suspense”?

The answer appears to be that the relevant feeling in play just is the *emotion* of suspense. Call this view *suspense realism*.

SUSPENSE REALISM: suspense is itself a real emotion, i.e., suspense is a distinct, genuine emotion (singular or composite) right alongside other genuine, distinct emotions (e.g., anger, sadness, fear . . . *suspense*).

Against this prevailing background of suspense realism, the principal philosophical difference between the extant competing theories of suspense¹ lies squarely with how these theories specify the substantive conditions that must be satisfied in order for someone genuinely to be in the emotive state of suspense—and *ipso facto* to report such feelings. This suggests that a viability precondition for any theory of suspense is the assumption of suspense realism, i.e., *the correct theory of suspense must be a suspense realist theory*.

On the contrary, an equally if not far more productive theory of suspense can be predicated on the *denial* of suspense realism, i.e., that there is no such genuine, distinct emotion that is the emotion of suspense—call this denial *suspense eliminativism*. If a theory of suspense can be *prima facie* viable absent the background of suspense realism, then not only needn't we be suspense realists but *ceteris paribus* we ought to be suspense eliminativists.

Of course, endorsing eliminativism about suspense doesn't entail rejecting suspense *simpliciter* as a subject of philosophical interest, nor should it be seen as shorthand for an ontologically conservative theory in which *suspense* reduces fully to the taxonomies of genuine, distinct emotions. Rather, my view is that suspense theory can more productively be seen as constitutive not of a theory of the emotions but a theory of narrative engagement, specifically one concerning how we emotionally engage with primarily fictional narratives.

I

In order to provide the best frame for my arguments to come, I must first discuss what I take to be a general constraint on theory of suspense. This assumes that a principal task (among others) of any suspense theory is to address the paradox of suspense, which is as follows:

- (i) Suspense requires uncertainty (*Uncertainty Premise*).
- (ii) Knowledge of a story's outcome precludes uncertainty (*Knowledge Preclusion Premise*).
- (iii) We feel suspense in response to some narratives when we have knowledge of the outcome (*Repeater Suspense Premise*).

Given that resolving the paradox of suspense requires denying one of the above (and endorsing the remainder), denying the Knowledge Preclusion Premise seems a poor place to start as it looks comparatively unassailable. As such, we should expect theories of suspense purporting to resolve the paradox of suspense to be predicated on the denial of either the necessity of uncertainty or repeater suspense. Two such views, and my principal targets for the remainder of the paper, are the following.

The Emotional-Misidentification Theory. Proposed by Robert Yanal (1996, 1999), this theory explicitly denies the Repeater Suspense Premise, and so entails that repeaters cannot, even in principle, feel suspense. So,

if repeaters report feeling suspense, then repeater reports of suspense must be mistaken. Repeaters experience emotions in repeat encounters; they simply misidentify those emotions (ones for which uncertainty isn't required) for the altogether distinct emotion of suspense.

The Desire-Frustration Theory. Proposed by Aaron Smuts (2008), this view explicitly denies the Uncertainty Premise, and instead claims suspense to be an emotion predicated on the frustration of certain desires (epistemic or affective). Though it rejects uncertainty as necessary, and thereby allows at least in principle for repeater suspense, it claims uncertainty to be nonetheless important. Moreover, this view purports to best explain the following phenomena: *Narrative Imbalance* (suspense seems a prevalent response to narratives but comparatively absent from our ordinary lives) and *Diminishing Returns* (feelings of suspense diminish with repeated encounters).

Rather than criticize the specifics of the above respective methods of resolving the paradox of suspense, my aim is to provide an alternative model to suspense realist theories, one according to which suspense is not itself a genuine, distinct emotion yet one equally capable (if not more so) of doing the work required of any theory of suspense. The principal question then should not be what sort of emotion suspense must be but whether we must regard such an inquiry as being itself well-formed in order to have a *prima facie* viable theory of suspense.

II

Yanal's emotional-misidentification theory resolves the paradox of suspense by denying repeater suspense via endorsing both the uncertainty requirement and knowledge preclusion. Given that Yanal takes the uncertainty requirement for suspense to be evident, unsurprisingly the comparatively least incoherent option is simply to deny that repeaters feel suspense, as such a denial demands only a supporting error theory rather than radical conceptual revision. Of course, the pressing concern then is to explain how, according to Yanal's emotional-misidentification theory, a host of normal functioning viewers in standard cases routinely commit flagrant self-reporting errors. Of course, denying that repeaters feel suspense in repeat encounters does not entail that repeaters feel nothing in repeat encounters. According to Yanal, when repeaters report feeling suspense, they are in fact feeling an emotion (e.g., apprehension, anxiety, anticipation), which they then *misreport* as the emotion of suspense. More precisely, for Yanal repeater misidentification is the

misidentification of one genuine, distinct emotion (apprehension, anxiety, anticipation) as another genuine, distinct emotion (suspense), i.e., repeater misidentification is a specific instance of a more general form of *emotional* misidentification. Subsequently, as a suspense realist theory, the plausibility of the emotional-misidentification theory, at least in this respect, depends on how well suspense fits within the standard taxonomies of theory of the emotions, and seen against the backdrop of suspense realism, commitment to uncertainty as a substantive necessary condition for suspense requires a hefty error theory. The only alternative for the suspense realist is to deny the necessity of uncertainty.

In his desire-frustration theory, Smuts neither rejects uncertainty out of hand nor denies that uncertainty is the primary underwriter of suspense as typically experienced in our initial narrative encounters. Uncertainty, however, needn't be exhaustive; the frustration of certain desires grounds suspense. This allows him both to recast uncertainty in terms of the desire to know an outcome and to broaden the suspense-relevant desires so as to include desires that certain outcomes obtain that are nevertheless informed by some certainty. For uncertainty to play any role in suspense, it must be in terms of a condition on having a desire to know, i.e., one desire among many for which frustration gives rise to feelings of suspense.

To better illustrate Smuts's view, consider George Sluizer's 1988 film *Spoorloos* (English title: *The Vanishing*). During our initial viewing of *Spoorloos*, we, just like the main character Rex, develop an overwhelming and perverse desire to know what happened to his girlfriend Saskia after she vanished from a heavily trafficked roadside gas station. *Spoorloos*, however, isn't a whodunit; we as viewers are told quite early on in the film that Raymond abducted Saskia. Yet despite being so informed, we are little better off epistemically than Rex, who spends the three years following Saskia's disappearance utterly consumed by his obsession to know what happened to her. Towards the end of the film, Raymond finally presents himself to Rex to offer him a one-time chance to learn the truth. Rex need only drink a cup of drugged coffee and upon awaking from the drug-induced sleep will experience exactly what Saskia experienced when she awoke from being similarly drugged.

We the viewers, just like Rex, believe that drinking the coffee is the only way to know what happened, and we, just like Rex, believe that drinking from the cup will most likely lead to a horrible death. In fact, we want Rex to drink from the cup for roughly the same perverse reason that Rex wants to drink from the cup: *to know what happened to Saskia*. This

uncertainty drives both Rex's desire to drink and our desire that Rex drink. For Rex, the satisfaction of his desire to resolve the uncertainty ultimately leads to his death. For us, the satisfaction of our desire to resolve the uncertainty only dissipates the feelings of suspense generated via its frustration—after the initial viewing that uncertainty, that desire to know, like Saskia, vanishes. Of course, when we again encounter *Spoorloos*, as repeat viewers we know what happens to Rex and therefore what happened to Saskia, yet we appear to have feelings of the same sort experienced as initial viewers, and so, we likewise report these as feelings of suspense.

According to the desire-frustration theory of suspense, we as repeaters can feel suspense not just in spite of a certainty but often precisely because we know what happens. That is, knowing what we now know as repeat viewers, we form the desire that Rex not drink from the cup; such a desire, however, can't help but be frustrated and when so frustrated gives rise to feelings of suspense. This explains why we report feeling suspense on repeat viewing of certain scenes for which feelings of suspense were absent in the initial viewing. For instance, when Rex notices the thermos of coffee in the backseat of Raymond's car, we notice it too but in a much different manner as repeat viewers than we did as initial viewers. In our initial viewing, we, like Rex, casually noted it and perhaps even thought it somewhat sinister merely by being present (for Rex, the thermos being in the car, for us, the thermos being an object of filmic attention). Upon repeat viewings, however, we depart from Rex and from our initial-viewing selves in that as repeaters, noticing the thermos gives rise in us the occurrent desire that Rex not drink from it; unlike Rex, we know what happens if he drinks. Of course, Rex must drink from the cup; he knows this and we know it too (though for additional metaphysical reasons). It is then the frustration of our desire (among others) that he refuse to drink which gives rise to the same sorts of feelings had by our initial-viewing selves to which uncertainty played a role. For Smuts, however, these feelings are both feeling of suspense, the difference being only that uncertainty in terms of frustrated desire to know gave rise to one and the frustration of a desire that required certainty gave rise to the other.

Smuts further argues that suspense theory, in addition to the paradox of suspense, must also adequately explain the following two phenomena: *narrative imbalance*—suspense seems a prevalent response to narratives but comparatively absent from our ordinary lives—and *diminishing returns*—feelings of suspense diminish with repeated encounters. Only

by denying the necessity of uncertainty, he argues, can such phenomena be explained. However, by aligning with repeater suspense over the necessity of uncertainty, viewed against the backdrop of suspense realism, Smuts's theory of suspense replaces the intuitive necessary condition of uncertainty with the less intuitive and far broader mechanism of desire-frustration (i.e., replacing *uncertainty* with *frustration of relevant epistemic or non-epistemic affective desires*). Subsequently, for those still intuitively wedded to the necessity of uncertainty, Smuts does little more than show that repeaters feel something intimately akin but not identical to genuine suspense.

III

The emotional-misidentification theory promises to capture basic intuitions about uncertainty and suspense in return for the support of an imposing error theory. The desire-frustration theory promises a more nuanced and informative explanatory mechanism in return for abandoning our intuitions with respect to the necessity of uncertainty. For suspense theory to avoid such trade-offs altogether requires rejecting suspense realism. Both the necessity of uncertainty and the desire-frustration mechanism I show to be far more productive when appropriated into an eliminativist framework, a framework out of which can emerge suspense theory plausibly able to:

- (i) Secure the necessity of uncertainty for suspense.
- (ii) Productively ground the relevant intuitions behind repeater suspense.
- (iii) Reveal the appearance of a paradox of suspense to result from a category mistake.
- (iv) Better explain the phenomena of narrative imbalance and diminished returns.

If a theory can plausibly accomplish the above at the cost of denying suspense realism, then suspense eliminativism should be seen as both a plausible and preferable alternative for suspense theory.

An eliminativist theory of suspense at least in its minimal or general form I take to be roughly as follows:

Eliminativist Theory of Suspense: Suspense is not itself a genuine, distinct emotion but rather a category comprising all and only the subspecies of

emotions (e.g., apprehension, anticipation, anxiety . . .) chiefly demarcated by the necessity of uncertainty (e.g., suspense is apprehension for which uncertainty is necessary) and primarily the province of (primarily fictional) narrative encounters.

In order to better facilitate my arguments advocating a general eliminativist account of suspense, in what follows, I use *apprehension* to stand-in for the operative category that a far more exhaustively prepared and specified eliminativist account may employ.

Apprehension Theory of Suspense: Suspense is not itself a genuine, distinct emotion but rather a subspecies of the genuine, distinct emotion of apprehension chiefly demarcated by the necessity of uncertainty and primarily the province of (primarily fictional) narrative encounters.

Again, the above is for purely illustrative purposes and shouldn't be seen as an endorsement of any specific view, emotion, or set of emotions. For example, one might think that suspense involves fear, hope, or fear and hope *pari passu* (e.g., suspense requires uncertainty (at t) that [p], hoping (at t) that [p], and fearing (at t) that [$\sim p$]).² My general eliminativist account is compatible with such views at least insofar as they do not entail commitment to suspense realism (e.g., suspense is itself a genuine, distinct, *composite* emotion).

IV

Repeater Suspense. Suspense requires uncertainty because suspense just is apprehension with uncertainty as to an outcome as a necessary condition. Notice, however, that true-repeater suspense simply doesn't pose a worry for the eliminativist theory. By appropriating the desire-frustration mechanism, we can claim that certain desires formed by the true repeater with respect to the narrative world when frustrated give rise to feelings of apprehension (typically) phenomenally indistinct from those uncertainty-based feelings of apprehension had by the true repeater on the initial encounter. *Pace* Yanal, true repeaters don't misidentify one emotion as another emotion because *to report suspense just is to report apprehension*.

True repeaters aren't emotionally confused—they don't confuse one emotion with another emotion. Rather, they are at worst merely taxonomically confused. For example, we may misidentify one mineral (jadeite) as another mineral (nephrite), but to misidentify nephrite *as*

jade isn't to confuse one mineral for another—*jade isn't a mineral*—but rather to confuse taxonomies (e.g., minerals with precious stones). Given the necessity of uncertainty, true repeaters technically mislabel their apprehension as suspense. This mislabeling itself, however, should be expected as it tracks nothing more than reporter unfamiliarity with certain theoretical taxonomic structures (e.g., those at play in theory of narrative engagement). Moreover, correction in most ordinary cases will be unproductive and misguided (e.g., while botanists classify the Brazil nut as a seed and not a nut, in most ordinary cases—a cocktail party rather than a botanist's experiment—correction is unproductive, misdirected, and usually quite obnoxious).

V

Diminishing Returns. The eliminativist view captures the phenomenon of diminishing returns quite well when recast in broad terms of diminished feelings of apprehension for repeaters. Again, consider *Spoorloos* and the frustration of the true repeaters' desire that Rex not drink. That this desire again and again becomes occurrent upon each repeated viewing of *Spoorloos* is a product of *Spoorloos* being a near perfectly crafted film. Lesser sorts of films have implicit or explicit structures that predominantly if not exclusively rely on uncertainty to elicit feelings of apprehension. Films disposed to be "suspenseful" only on their initial viewing, often rely on trickery and stock narrative cues rather than subtlety and innovation, thereby ensuring the absence of any and all feelings of apprehension in repeat viewings—such films are largely unable to give rise to, let alone sustain as occurrent, the requisite desires for true repeaters on multiple viewings. As such, we ought to expect true repeaters to experience heavily diminished returns for movies predominantly relying on uncertainties to elicit feelings of apprehension. While stock whodunits fully exhaust their power to evoke such feelings upon initial viewing, more complex and innovative narratives can hold multiple caches of apprehension for repeaters.

Moreover, apprehension appears at its most salient in case of certainty rather than uncertainty. For example, suppose that I am apprehensive about my dentist appointment on Tuesday. Typically, this is the case not because I am uncertain as to whether or not it will be painful but precisely because I am certain that it will be painful—the desire that it be painless is frustrated by the certainty of its being painful. Complex, carefully crafted narratives evoke apprehension in much the same way

(e.g., repeater feelings of apprehension stemming from the desire that Rex not drink being frustrated by the certainty that he will drink). Innovatively structured and nuanced narratives not only foster intense desires to know certain outcomes but also (simultaneously or subsequently) foster in repeaters intense desires for certain outcomes to obtain even despite repeater certainty that such outcomes cannot obtain, and such desires remain to varying degrees of intensity in repeat engagements.

A great suspense film then is not simply one that evokes high degrees of uncertainty-based apprehension but also one that can sustain repeater feelings of apprehension. So, when true repeaters report feeling suspense upon repeat viewings, they aren't far from the mark. That is, they are reporting feeling the same emotion as reported felt in the initial encounter, and these repeater feelings, though not evoked in the same manner as those initially, nevertheless are evoked in a manner predicated on those initially evoked. On this view, although uncertainty vanishes for true repeaters, its effects can still be felt in terms of subsequent repeater feelings of apprehension.

Furthermore, we ought to expect the degree of intensity of the initial feelings of uncertainty-based apprehension to directly relate to the degree of intensity of the initial subsequent repeater feelings, and that further subsequent feelings of apprehension *ceteris paribus* ought to feature a diminishing fraction of the intensity of the initial feelings of apprehension the greater the distance between that subsequent viewing and the initial viewing. So, on the apprehension theory of suspense, repeater feelings, while not *suspense*, are nevertheless predominantly underwritten by suspense. The relevant diminished returns then can be explained by appeal not just to repeater distance from the initial suspense but also to the nature of that initial suspense.

VI

Narrative Imbalance. Of course, there is a very straightforward sense in which the eliminativist theory of suspense accounts for the narrative imbalance: it's built into the account of suspense as being simply a subclass of an emotion or set of emotions demarcated by the necessity of uncertainty and *primarily the province of narrative encounters*. Smuts assumes that a theory of suspense must explain, at least in part, the dearth and excess of suspense in our ordinary lives and in our (primarily fictional) narrative encounters respectively. On the contrary, our principal motivating interest in suspense has little if anything to do with how or how

much suspense figures in our ordinary lives and everything to do with how suspense figures in our narrative encounters. The narrative imbalance isn't something to be explained by a theory of suspense; instead, the imbalance itself motivates suspense theory. This suggests that suspense realism may be guilty of bootstrapping. The narrative imbalance demands explanation only when suspense realism is taken as a background assumption, subsequently creating a condition best satisfied by a realist theory of suspense, which is then taken to count as evidence for suspense realism. In fact, the narrative imbalance should be taken as a *prima facie* compelling reason not to assume suspense realism in the first place. Carving emotions according to their narrative or non-narrative relevance looks to be utterly absent at any level of analysis in standard theory of the emotions.

There does appear, however, to be a narrative imbalance between the actual world and narrative worlds with respect to apprehension for which uncertainty is necessary. Feelings of apprehension in the actual world, in the main look predicated on epistemic states bent far more towards certainty than uncertainty. Standard cases of apprehension largely concern states of affairs thought more or less certain to obtain. For example, suppose employees *A* and *B* are both called to meet individually with their boss. Further suppose *A* to be wholly uncertain (relevantly construed) as to the content of that meeting, i.e., *A* believes that it could just as well be about non-trivial matters (e.g., being given a raise, being promoted, being demoted, or being fired) as it could be about comparatively trivial matters (e.g., paper-clips, company softball). Suppose *B*, however, to believe that while there is a small chance that the meeting will be about company softball, it most likely will be about his being fired. In normal cases, we ought *ceteris paribus* to expect *B* to experience rather intense feelings of apprehension about the upcoming meeting and *A* to experience comparatively little of any such feelings.³ Furthermore, the degree to which we expect *A* to experience any substantial feelings of apprehension is the degree to which we implicitly or explicitly adjust *A*'s epistemic and preferential attitudes toward the relevant options (e.g., *A* having a comparatively greater degree of belief in a particular sort of (undesired) outcome obtaining, namely being fired or demoted) than other sorts of outcomes (desired or non-desired) obtaining (e.g., being promoted, being asked to play left-field). Insofar as there are standard non-narrative cases of suspense, uncertainty functions both as a necessary condition and as an ameliorative—*ceteris paribus*

(for a limited range) the degree of the uncertainty that p is inversely proportional to the intensity of the feelings of apprehension that p .

While uncertainty looks neither necessary nor especially salient for ordinary cases of non-narrative apprehension, uncertainty plays a dramatically different role in feelings of apprehension evoked in narrative engagements. Unlike engagements with the actual world, narrative works can be and are often structured around uncertainties in a manner that maximizes the salience and force of uncertainty in emotive uptake, thereby allowing uncertainty to play an emotive role far more immediate, uninterrupted, profuse, and crucial (even in predictable narratives) than it does in the actual world. Moreover, unlike most desires directed toward the actual world, fictional narratives are such that the relevant desires of true repeaters directed toward the fictional world *necessarily cannot be satisfied*. Additionally, conspicuously absent from the actual world are the variety of manners (tricks-of-the-trade) by which fictional narratives may elicit feelings of apprehension in their audiences. For example, one may come to feel apprehension in virtue of low-level cognitive manipulation via certain aural or visual techniques (e.g., repetition of the first two notes from “Theme from *Jaws*,” the disorienting low-frequency sounds and dizzying camera movement in the opening scene of Gaspar Noe’s *Irreversible*). This is precisely why we ought to expect suspense as a target of interest to be primarily the province of narrative encounters.

VII

Of course, the plausibility of the eliminativist theory depends entirely on there being a more technical notion of suspense entailing an uncertainty condition that is itself theoretically productive. For example, one might intuitively think that suspense *qua* apprehension for which an uncertainty is necessary *ceteris paribus* has a more forceful phenomenal character than apprehension for which an uncertainty isn’t necessary. In this respect, *suspense* bears the same relationship to *apprehension* as *rage* does to *anger*. That is, rage isn’t itself a genuine, distinct emotion; rather, rage simply is a subspecies of anger at the extreme end of its intensity spectrum (presumably with correspondingly extreme behavioral effects and duration or preclusion conditions). When I feel rage, I no more feel two emotions (*rage* and *anger*) than when I sit on a caquetoire,⁴ do I sit on two things (*caquetoire* and *chair*). As such, I can’t misidentify my

feelings of rage as feelings of anger; in fact, to *misreport* my feelings of rage as feelings of anger is just to *under-report* my anger. Likewise, to misreport apprehension as suspense or suspense as apprehension is simply to under-report or over-report apprehension respectively.

Perhaps then suspense may also be a subspecies of apprehension that *ceteris paribus* has a phenomenal character with a comparatively high degree of strength or force. This would also substantively explain both the supposed narrative imbalance (e.g., uncertainty being more salient and forceful in narrative encounters, affective desires toward fictional worlds being necessarily frustrated) and diminished returns (repeater apprehension *ceteris paribus* has a comparatively weaker or less forceful phenomenal character).

Moreover, suspense in our engagements with fictional narratives also looks to be a subspecies of apprehension for which we, ourselves, necessarily cannot be subjects of concern. In the actual world, being apprehensive about the result of my medical test is less a matter of my uncertainty frustrating my desire to know the result and more a matter of my having an appropriately high degree of belief that a highly undesirable result will obtain. Apprehension felt by me in encounters with the actual world looks primarily if not exhaustively to concern states of affairs directly relevant to me and my well-being. Given the nature of fictional worlds, apprehension arising therein concerns neither me nor my well-being and so has the luxury of being driven by concerns of an epistemically purer sort (i.e., apprehension resulting from my uncertainty as to an outcome frustrating my desire to know that outcome). Furthermore, this helps explain relevant behavioral differences—predominantly aversion-oriented action tendencies for real-world apprehension (e.g., distraction as ameliorative) but inclination-oriented action tendencies for suspense *qua* fictional narrative apprehension (e.g., distraction as ruinous).

Considered alone, suspense realism ought to strike one as awkward if not baldly implausible. Unsurprisingly then, as the principal working assumption for suspense theory, it can perform no substantial work other than being a source of otherwise unrelated philosophical worries (e.g., the nature of compositional emotions, its absence in everyday life, that suspense if a genuine, distinct emotion, most certainly isn't of the garden-variety). Obviously, should parsimony have the final word, the correct theory of suspense must be an eliminativist theory of suspense.

I would like to thank Robert Yanal, Richard Gerrig, and Aaron Smuts for their helpful suggestions and criticisms.

1. See Noel Carroll, "The Paradox of Suspense," in *Beyond Aesthetics*, ed. N. Carroll (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 254–69; Richard Gerrig, *Experiencing Narrative Worlds* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Aaron Smuts, "The Desire-Frustration Theory of Suspense," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66 (2008): 281–90; Robert Yanal, "The Paradox of Suspense," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 36 (1996): 146–58; Robert Yanal, *Paradoxes of Emotion and Fiction* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).
2. For the hope and fear view, see Andrew Ortony, Gerald Clore, and Allan Collins, *The Cognitive Structure of Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 131.
3. Robert Yanal suggested that perhaps *B* is best viewed as experiencing not apprehension but dread. My reply is that dread is perhaps best viewed as apprehension at the higher end of the intensity spectrum. I develop this point more in the final section.
4. A "conversation" chair from the Renaissance (the name is derived from the French "caqueter" meaning "to chat"). Likewise, consider *agony* and *pain*.