

**Psychological suspense in the plot of McMahon's *The Children on the Hill*****Marsha Aqillah Putri Syuhra<sup>1</sup>✉, Sufi Ikrima Sa'adah<sup>2</sup>**<sup>1,2</sup> English Literature Department, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia

Article Info	Abstract
<i>Article History:</i> Received 24 January 2024 Approved 27 April 2024 Published 30 April 2024	Complex plots filled with surprises are often found in literary works of psychological suspense, where, in the end, the reader's perspective will be completely twisted. This research aims to elaborate on the feature of psychological suspense in Jennifer McMahon's work, <i>The Children on the Hill</i> . This novel tells how Violet and Lizzy dig for information to find the truth about something in each different time zone. It is none other than the dark family secret and the truth about the real monster. The descriptive qualitative method is applied to explain the plot of <i>The Children on the Hill</i> in detail and thoroughly. Through the application of Wyatt and Saricks' theory of genre fiction characteristics, several plots that give the effect of psychological suspense were identified. The story was complex in that the truth of the matter was jumbled as information overlapped. Another surprising element is where the incident depicts a mental state that seems to be trapped in a nightmare and feels like it is beyond rationale. Both characters have their own complicated and heart-breaking problems as they go deeper to discover the truth. These plots show compatibility with Wyatt and Saricks' theory of psychological suspense.
<b>Keywords:</b> genre, psychological suspense, plot twist, the children on the hill.	

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What is *suspense*? This question might arise when reading something about suspense, perhaps because one is unfamiliar with it. In her book *The Suspense of Horror and the Horror of Suspense*, Anastasova (2018) argues that most people, including directors and fiction writers, still have difficulty understanding suspense conceptually and theoretically. Faced with this situation, Brewer (1996) represents suspense in a few words, namely:

“curious mixture of pain and pleasure,” “delicious agony,” and “sweet pain of anxiety.” In its definitive side, *suspense* is “an experience of uncertainty, mainly, whose hedonic properties can vary from noxious to pleasant” (Zillmann, 1981). Another perspective on suspense is the feeling of threat experienced by a character in a particular situation, which triggers hope and fear at the same time (Carroll, 2001; Diteweg, 1996; Ortony et al., 1988). Broadly speaking, it can be said that suspense is an emotional feeling.

✉ Corresponding author:

Jl. Malik Ibrahim Gang 3 No. 1, Pucang Anom, Sidoarjo, Sidoarjo, Jawa Timur, 61217, Indonesia.

Email: [shmrsha23@gmail.com](mailto:shmrsha23@gmail.com)

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The word 'suspense,' has now added a word behind it to become 'psychological suspense.' The meaning of the word psychological suspense is not much different from its word base; it is just more flavored with things related to a person's mental or psychological state (Comisky & Bryant, 1982, p. 51). Holtrop (2018) suggests that psychological suspense narratives may only succeed if the writer can portray the character's characteristics, behaviors, and thoughts well (p.101). Good here refers to the direction in which the character walks between the real and imagined worlds as if playing with the character's psychological state (Holtrop, 2018, p. 103). Overall, the narrative contains a variety of dark matters concerning the character's mentality, puzzles around every corner, the existence of other existences, and the uncertainty of the truth of the central conflict (Lehne & Koelsch, 2015; Wyatt & Saricks, 2018). It is worth noting that this level of psychological suspense is not only triggered by evil things but can also refer to good things that are too much and make emotions go haywire (Lehne & Koelsch, 2015, p. 4).

### Genre

In French, the word *genre* is defined as a class or kind. The word genre refers to the specificity of linguistic terms for distinguishing types of texts and rhetorical applications, as well as in media and literary theory. The analogy of class divisions of different types of writing can be likened to how "the botanist divides the realm of flora into varieties of plants" (Allen, 2013). In the literary sphere, the content and structure of a text, including theme, writing style, and setting, are the basis of genre classification (Chandler, 2004, p. 2). Through the previous statement, genre provides a view of how the author produces his writing, leaving the reader to interpret his intentions (Chandler, 2004; Livingstone, 1994). Learning about genre will be very helpful for both the writer's and the reader's sides to deal with the work in front of their eyes because, with an understanding of genre, they will find it easier to analyze the work.

### Psychological Suspense

Psychological suspense is not much different from the concept of suspense in general, except that it combines two existing genres. Wyatt and Saricks (2018) contend that this story is unique in that "the creepiness generated by the Horror genre and the tension inherent in Suspense" are integrated into one. The world created in this novel is a nightmare from the start, one that readers cannot imagine in the real world. Naturally, a psychological suspense story would present a plot where the characters are trapped in their nightmare visions, obsessed with revenge. However, it is essential to note that the obsession will not always be about 'revenge' as it could be about the hidden truth. A completely ambiguous story depicts the character facing external or internal danger. An example is when "the protagonist battles personal demons" (Wyatt & Saricks, 2018, p. 34).

The uniqueness of this genre is that the reader will be made to seek out the 'truth actively,' no matter how small the clue, because the characters in the novel are less reliable (Wyatt & Saricks, 2018, p. 33). The characters are unreliable because of their emotional state in the face of the instability of their surroundings. From the beginning of this story genre, nothing is stable, be it the characters or the plot. Everything initially thought to be true can be reversed as the story progresses. Stories that offer many sinister puzzles full of traps make this genre "crime-based that propose dark mysteries that lure readers into their disordering events" (Wyatt & Saricks, 2018, p. 34).

A characteristic point of the psychological suspense genre can be found in Wyatt and Saricks' book *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*. The characteristics mentioned include tone, plot, characterization, writing style or language, pacing, and framing or setting. Of the many characteristics, this research focuses explicitly on the storyline. A psychological suspense novel's typical storyline is usually close to its complexity and many twists, which can ultimately create a nightmarish narrative that cannot be thought of rationally.

As mentioned earlier, a psychological suspense storyline must have its complexities identified. The effect of the complexity of this

storyline will make the reader indirectly take more time to understand. Readers may be able to guess the next story in their minds, but novelists will not let it happen that easily. Each part of the story must have a hidden puzzle; the reader will be asked to connect it independently until the story ends. This is evidenced by the statement that readers must “get at the truth or a peeling away of those layers one by one as the story deepens and twists under their feet.” The point of this statement can be found, for example, in S. J. Watson’s *Before I Go to Sleep*, where the character has amnesia. The character will follow the clues she leaves daily to unite the past and the present. Things like this create an emotion of suspense that raises the question of whether all of this is believable.

The surprises in their stories also add a sense of tension to psychological suspense novels. Wyatt and Saricks (2018) believe that writers of psychological suspense novels try to play with the readers’ minds in their stories. The reader’s initial expectation will be shattered by the fact that the continuation of the story is not what they expected. Story A, which is supposed to continue in the order of B, C, and D, is broken by story N, which suddenly appears. It is not uncommon for readers to get frustrated because they feel like they are being played.

In a psychological suspense novel, the author will describe the character’s journey of dealing with his or her problems. As one problem is solved, a new, more complicated one will emerge. In addition, in this story, the reader’s emotions and the character’s emotions are played out. The character will be placed in a mentally distressed position because they are in an unpredictable situation. The character will not quickly obtain happiness in this story. All traumatic things that are very disturbing mentally will be included in the narrative. In short, this story is a nightmare. A nightmare that can make readers feel “the chill on the back of their neck, the slowly dawning realization that doom is unavoidable, and the dark thrill in understanding that a rescue will not be forthcoming” (Wyatt & Saricks, 2018, p. 35).

*The Children on the Hill* is a psychological suspense book that keeps the readers flabbergasted with the plot presented. Jennifer McMahon, the mother of the novel, is well-known as a best-selling author in New York (McMahon, 2023). This novel was published in 2022. McMahon’s latest work about suspense has already counted twelve books, including *Promise Not to Tell* and *The Drowning Kind*. Last October, McMahon also published her latest work entitled *My Darling Girl*. McMahon’s books have always been famous for the psychological suspense genre (McMahon, 2023). The story is created so readers can feel how the character faces mental obsession in an environment full of open and hidden threats.

The narrative in this novel is one of its attractions because it is different from the narrative of novels in general. McMahon carefully divides the novel into several viewpoints with different timelines. The viewpoints in this novel include Vi, Lizzy, and The Monster, while the timeline is 1978 and 2019. In 1978, readers can find the story of their childhood and the background of how the story all began. Violet, a character in this timeline, is trying to figure out the identity of her new sister, Iris. Nevertheless, not only does she discover the truth about Iris, but she also discovers the biggest secret that her grandmother has been keeping and her origins. Flash forward to 2019, where Lizzy, the famous ghost podcaster, investigates the disappearance of children suspected of being abducted by monsters. Monsters who turned out to be intimately acquainted and a part of her life in the past. Regarding The Monster’s point of view, he only has three sections. From her point of view, it is told how this monster begins to accept herself as a monster. It is also told what the monster goes through when she is relieved of the truth about herself. With this brief introduction, it is safe to say that reading this novel will provide a satisfying reading experience thanks to its psychological suspense and plot twists.

This novel is enjoyable for people who are used to reading the same genre because of its steady pressure. However, among millions of people, not all of them have the same opinion, such as Lehne and Koelsch (2015), who fear that

reading this will provide “tension experiences [that] tend to be negative (causing anxiety or stress) (p. 6).” Lehne and Koelsch’s (2015) point is undoubtedly a consideration for the future so that readers can limit themselves to reading novels of this genre. Nevertheless, again, *The Children on the Hill* is not so bad because it is basically a story about a family looking for the truth about something with a small quantity of spice of suspense.

Recently, the study of ‘suspense’ has received much attention from several researchers. These researchers managed to widen the discussion in terms of suspense through various perspectives. In his thesis, Fajrin (2023) analyzed the characteristics of psychological suspense in a novel entitled *The Collector*. This analysis includes tone, pacing, plot, and how the characteristics of psychological suspense novels portray the characters in the novel. The many points of discussion made by Fajrin (2023) leave gaps regarding language and writing styles that still need to be analyzed. Not far from the story’s object, Adelia (2022) compared the suspense characteristics of the five short stories she chose. Adelia’s (2022) study demonstrated that although the five novels have the same genre, each author can represent the character’s journey amid mental shock differently.

Regarding narrative comparisons, Indrusiak (2018) conducted a study on how Edgar Allan Poe and Alfred Hitchcock constructed suspense narratives in their works. The result is a complex narrative with enigmatic entertainment that naturally creates fear and suspense. A different discussion on suspense can also be found in film-based research. In their research on thriller formulas, Salsabila and Assidiqi (2019) found a connection between thrillers and the element of suspense, which found plot complexity and a high frequency of conflicted surprise plots. Moreover, the possibility of psychological suspense in a song cannot be ignored. In this case, a person’s emotions with connected music can create psychological suspense for the listener (Lehne, 2014).

Although several studies related to psychological suspense have been conducted on

various objects and perspectives, in-depth attention to the plot in a novel is still lacking. In this study, the researchers present an advanced plot analysis in a psychological suspense novel. Rather than simply attaching sentences from the novel, the researchers connect the sentences so that it can be seen how the plots collide to create complexity and psychological suspense when read. Through this, the researcher establishes the problem formula of how the plot in *The Children on the Hill* shows the characteristic features of the psychological suspense fiction genre.

## METHODS

This research is based on a qualitative descriptive method that naturally emphasizes contextual analysis techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As the name implies, the qualitative descriptive method emphasizes the elements of words or sentences obtained from written speech and narratives on the object of analysis compared to the numerical context (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Taylor et al., 2016). Dawson (2009) mentioned that the qualitative descriptive method has advantages, such as researchers can later evaluate research data in real-time due to the completeness of the information. Through various considerations, the researchers decided to use this method to follow up on the elements of psychological suspense contained in the plots of *The Children on the Hill*.

The current research relies on the story plots presented in the novel *The Children on the Hill*. The data is taken from the sequence of events in the novel, both from Violet’s and Lizzy’s points of view. After that, the researchers marked sections or pages of the novel that showed characteristics of psychological suspense as a data collection technique. The researchers scanned how these sections and pages intertwined to create an intricate surprise plot. The researchers matched the collected pieces with the characteristics that Wyatt and Saricks listed in their book. After that, the researchers discussed it with literary experts to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the data. It is necessary to avoid any errors in data analysis.

Then, in the last stage, the data that has been collected is converted into a descriptive narrative so that it can answer the formulation of the problem posed previously.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the researchers describe the answer to the previous problem formulation regarding how the plot in *The Children on the Hill* shows the characteristics of psychological suspense. This plot is identified by matching it with the characteristics of psychological suspense regarding the storyline proposed by Wyatt and Saricks. Based on the existing theory, the researchers can represent the descriptive analysis narrative about the plot of *The Children on the Hill*, which is full of surprise, has many plot twists, and complicated.

### Plot Surprise

Dr. Helen Elizabeth Hildreth is a doctor and director of an inn, but in this story, she is better known as the grandmother of her three grandchildren: Eric, Violet, and Iris. In her grandchildren's eyes, Dr. Hildreth is strict and kind, but all of that can be considered as a mask of kindness that covers all her rottenness. Who would have thought that this grandmotherly figure was a person who liked to conduct experiments on humans? Violet first discovers this truth when she is investigating the underground room. Only Dr. Hildreth or Gran was allowed to enter this room, but Violet sneaked in quietly. Inside the room, Violet found a locked drawer that piqued her curiosity. Lady luck may have been on Violet's side as she could open the drawer with the key she had found earlier. Just inside the drawer was a strange book that Vi found suspicious: *A Case for Good Breeding: The Templeton Family Study and the Promise of Eugenics* by Dr. Wilson G. Hicks (McMahon, 2022, p. 132).

When Violet opened the book, she discovered that the author was the mentor of Dr. Hildreth, her grandmother. Page by page, the book exposes the intentions of the sterile obligation for humans. Humans are not supposed to have babies,

a fact that makes Violet feel even sicker when she learns that her grandmother was an assistant in this experiment. This is evident from the confession Dr. Hicks wrote in his book: "I am forever indebted to my marvelous assistant, Helen Elizabeth Hildreth, whose research and fieldwork have proven invaluable-I know she will make a fine physician and a noble warrior in our cause" (McMahon, 2022, p. 134).

Fast forward a few chapters, and Violet asks Gran about the patient's condition. However, Gran dismisses her by saying: "Some people's problems are better hidden than others," "In fact, sometimes, the better hidden, the deeper they go, the more difficult they are to fix" (McMahon, 2022, p. 162). Gran's statement at the time might have been taken for granted because it could have been the patient's privacy. However, this assumption changes when Violet finds several file folders in a cabinet in one of the basement rooms. Violet picked up a file marked "**MAYFLOWER**" and placed it on the table. The files contained patient files, but there was something strange about them as the patients' names were hidden in alphabetical order, such as Patient B or Patient D. After a careful reading, Violet suspected a combination of medicinal ingredients, including sodium amytal and Metrazol. In addition, there were also experiments with lysergic diethylamide plants, electroconvulsive therapy, and even surgery.

"Vi looked down at carefully sketched diagrams of the brain, of cranial cuts, of areas stimulated, pierced, and cut away. These were not cures. These were experiments"

...

"Vi continued to scan the charts, reading how Gran tested her subjects' memories, their cognitive abilities and IQs. Again and again, she was disappointed in the results" (McMahon, 2022, p. 177).

The fact that Gran, whom she knew so well, treated people like experimental material made Violet feel like a rat being dissected. Violet's heart felt even tighter when she realized that one of the patients listed in the file was someone she knew: "Because she recognized this man, Patient I.

Patient I was Old Mac” (McMahon, 2022, p. 178). A first plot surprise regarding Gran’s actual identity shocks Violet. In the first half of the novel, Gran is portrayed as a good individual, but in the second half, everything is revealed.

### Plot Twists

The cases of human experimentation do not stop with Patient I, whom Violet recognizes as Old Mac. As Violet opens the file, she comes across a file with the name of patient S. Violet keeps going to the basement to find out the origins of Iris, her new sister, whom Gran suddenly brought. Violet wants to help Iris find out who her true identity is so that Iris does not feel discouraged. Patient S’s file notes that this time, the experimental patient is a success: “Patient S is the one. I know she is. The one who will change everything. I have, given this child a new life. A new beginning. I have taken a doomed soul and created a blank canvas, a life full of possibility” (McMahon, 2022, p. 178).

The success of this experiment also brings an answer for Violet about who Iris is. Based on the depiction of the girl in the file, Violet thought that patient S, the subject of the success, was Iris. At the end of the chapter, it is also written that “Vi realised, also the story of how her beloved grandmother, the brilliant Dr Hildreth, had created her very own monster” (McMahon, 2022, p.179). It can be inferred indirectly that Violet thinks Iris is a monster.

Enough with Violet’s point of view in 1978, researchers now turn to Lizzy’s in 2019. Lizzy Shelley is a famous blogger and podcaster who talks about monsters. In her daily life, Lizzy is on a mission to tell the world that monsters exist and live around them. Before we go any further, Lizzy is named after her grandmother’s middle name, Helen ‘Elizabeth’ Hildreth, while Shelley comes from Frankenstein’s famous author, Mary Shelley.’ This character matches Violet in the 1978 time zone, where Violet is obsessed with monsters and wants to become a monster hunter. Is Lizzy Violet? It could be because it was said above that Iris is the monster. Starting her journey as a monster hunter or her sister’s hunter, Lizzy faces many unfortunate events. One of them was when

she found Gran’s lighter and scraps of paper that were the same as the monster book Lizzy filled with her brother and sister as a child.

“An old gold Zippo lighter with a butterfly engraved on the front. A lined piece of notebook paper with three holes punched in the side-the kind we once used for our monster books-folded into a neat rectangle, tied up with a piece of dirty garden twine. Heart racing, I turned the lighter over in my hands, ran my fingers over the engraved initials: HEH” (McMahon, 2022, p. 140).

Lizzy was one hundred percent sure that it belonged to Gran. After that, Lizzy opened the bundle containing the scraps of paper and read the contents. The paper contained the monster’s message to her (McMahon, 2022, p. 141). The message read:

“The Monster gives the Monster Hunter a stone so she can make a wish.

What does the hunter wish for?

What does she dream of?

What does the Monster dream of?

An old dream, a dream of endings and beginnings.

A dream of fire.

Of a lever pulled and a world of bright white light, crumbling ruin.

A single line spoken: “We belong dead.”

Do you share the same dream?

Do you dream it with me?”

Reading this message made Lizzy realize that the monster had been watching her all along. The message written is like an outburst of emotion towards the recipient. Messages that implicitly show how the author’s mental state is. This finding was told to Charles, formerly Eric, but Charles thought Lizzy was crazy and should go to a psychologist. At the thought of finding her grandmother’s relics in the middle of the forest, who would not be crazy? The suspense continues when Lizzy finds her childhood book in the tower: *The Book of Monsters* (McMahon, 2022, p. 184-185). The monster had prepared this book as a gift for Lizzy. McMahon tries to convince us that the monster is indeed Lizzy’s sister. Readers might guess that the monster is Iris.

It is too complicated to explain, too shocking to believe. While the initial guess was that the monster was Iris, this was a mistake. Lizzy herself stated that she was Iris, the figure who was predicted to be the monster turned out to be the opposite; she was a monster hunter. Even though Lizzy/Iris believes herself to be a monster, the real monster is Violet. This confession is released when Skink, a child, asks Lizzy if the author of the monster book is Lizzy and her sister.

“Are you Violet Hildreth or Iris?”

“I was Iris.”

“What was she like? Back then, I mean, did you know that she had this... this evil inside her?”

“No. I was supposed to be the broken one. I was the monster” (McMahon, 2022, p. 252).

Going back to Violet’s point of view in 1978 when it was revealed that patient S was not Iris but Violet. This time, Violet returns to the room in the basement with Iris; while checking some files, Iris finds a file about patient S. In it, there is a note about patient S, who believes Gran’s hoax that their parents did not survive the car accident; only patient S and her brother survived. As they explore the file, they find an embedded photograph that Violet is familiar with. It was Violet’s eleventh birthday photo, and the back read “Patient S, 11th birthday,” which stated that Violet was Patient S or the monster (McMahon, 2022, p. 248). Knowing she was a monster prompted Violet to feel the darkness within her. The psychological state that overwhelms her is confusing and shocking. The truth about who the monster really is takes many twists and turns, each chapter playing with the reader’s guesses until it is finally solved after many surprises and complications.

### Plot Complexity

As the truth about the monster is revealed, other truths come to light. Violet intends to tell her non-brother, Eric, that Gran is not who they think she is. However, when Violet tries to tell him, Eric responds negatively. Instead of being surprised, Eric sprays Violet with anger and reveals everything. He has been hiding these things from Violet for a long time. Eric exclaims to Violet, “I

know who you are. I know all about you. You’re not my sister. You’re a stray, like Iris” (McMahon, 2022, p. 280). Violet’s mental state is punched so hard that she feels like she is going to pass out. Eric makes this one truth even more apparent when he says that Gran has been telling him to keep an eye on Violet and report anything that happens.

The trust built up in a brotherly relationship is shattered instantly, making Violet’s body tremble. It turns out that it is not just Iris who has to be watched, but herself as well. Violet’s life as Patient S was played from the start, whether from Gran’s or Eric’s side. The statement, “But Gran was right. She said one day you might do something bad. Something awful,” makes Violet feel cornered and choose to surrender to the situation (McMahon, 2022, p. 281). Iris is the only one she can trust at that moment, but instead of following Violet, Iris stands in fear of Violet. What is heart-breaking is that Violet feels like she really is a monster to the point where the people she wants to protect are afraid of her.

From then on, Violet or the monster is nowhere to be found. In Lizzy’s point of view, the monster begins to make its move by kidnapping children. In almost every full moon, there would be a missing child. Lizzy’s job as a monster hunter is to target Violet; she is worried about what Violet is doing to the children she kidnaps—her anxiety peaks when Lizzy finds a doll with stitched hair next to a monster book. Lizzy is shocked to discover that the doll is made with the actual clothes and hair of one of the children rumored to be missing. Did the monster or his sister commit the crime?

“The doll was made from white cloth, like the fabric of a T-shirt. It had a stitched face, frowning, with crosses for eyes like a dead character in a cartoon. It was dressed in blue denim shorts, a black hooded sweatshirt. Black sneakers stitched together with pieces of worn canvas made from actual sneakers (I could spot part of the star of the Converse logo). And sewn into the top of the doll’s head was a wild spray of blond hair with purple tips. Real hair, I realised as I touched it. Lauren’s hair” (McMahon, 2022, p. 185).

It would only be a psychological suspense novel if the plot were more complex and tricky. When Lizzy is finally reunited with Violet, she completely disbelieves Violet's reasons for kidnapping the children. Lizzy even points a gun at her despite she is trembling. The truth of the monster's or Violet's purpose in kidnapping the children is not to harm them but to save them: this is conveyed by Lauren: "She saved me" (McMahon, 2022, p. 286). Violet's web page shows the condition of the children who were once missing and have now grown into great people.

"What we do. Take girls in bad situations: girls who are being abused by family members or boyfriends, girls with drug problems, girls who've made terrible mistakes, even girls who've killed people. The girls other people call monsters. We give them a second chance. We transform them. Teach them that the anger they feel inside, the thing that makes them different, can be a source of strength and power. We show them how to slip away from who they once were and start again" (McMahon, 2022, p. 288).

Violet is not a monster despite being labeled as such. Violet still has her conscience even when faced with unfortunate events during her childhood. Violet grows up to be a kind-hearted 'monster' who helps children. The previous few sentences may sound like a favorable perception of Violet's character, but psychological suspense novels do not end that smoothly. In the afterwords, Skink, one of the characters Lizzy meets, feels there is something odd about the sudden disappearance of Lauren's father:

"Well, he disappeared the night before they found the diary, for one. His wife, Lauren's mum, said he went to take the trash out and just never came back. He left his car, his phone, his wallet. His bank account and credit cards haven't been touched. The dude disappeared without a trace. And get this—he was in his pajamas and barefoot when he went out with the trash" (McMahon, 2022, p. 293).

Lizzy felt the incident was strange but did not want to think anything of it. Initially refusing, Lizzy eventually agrees to Skink's request to email Violet as a precaution. On Violet's side, the bitter

and awful truth is revealed once again. Lauren's father disappeared not because he ran away but because Lauren killed him. Violet not only acts as a witness to the incident but is also the mastermind who controls Lauren's new life. The evidence is from Violet's statement: "She's ready, this girl. Ready to go the rest of the way, to complete the transformation. Death is always part of the rebirth. Gran taught me that. It's part of my origin story. My own DNA. Death and sacrifice" (McMahon, 2022, p. 294).

This incident proves Gran's statement to Violet, "You've got a strong heart, Violet Hildreth" (McMahon, 2022, p. 295). A strong heart is not just someone who stands firm in the face of adversity but someone who has no feelings. The chase between Violet, the monster, and Lizzy, the monster hunter, will probably continue without anyone knowing when it will end. The complexness and endlessness of the story shows the vital element of psychological suspense in the novel (Wyatt & Saricks, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

The novel *The Children on the Hill* shows that a story with a psychological suspense genre is not far from a plot twist. This proves that *The Children on the Hill* successfully demonstrates the storyline characteristics of the psychological suspense genre, which is complex and full of surprises—from the truth about the grandmother's experiments, the complexity of finding the real monster, to the overall surprise about Violet.

Every time the reader starts reading the following sentence, there will be a feeling of suspense and cold sweat thinking about how the story will continue—even remembering that McMahon plays with the reader's feelings regarding guessing. The false truth that has initially formed in the reader's mind will immediately collapse after following the story deeper. The combination of two different points of view makes the storyline complicated because the reader's focus will be split to explore what happened in each time zone.



In both Vi's and Lizzy's perspectives, they are well portrayed. Each time zone has its problems and suspense. The truth that is connected between the plot of 1978 and the plot of 2019 is neatly arranged. As the plots complement each other, the reader feels the psychological suspense of the situation described in the narrative. In the end, it can be mentioned that Jennifer McMahon successfully slipped the effect of psychological suspense in the novel *The Children on the Hill*.

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