

Contemporary Thriller Fiction: Background and Characteristics

Maha Samih Hamoudi¹, Prof. Pulin Bhatt²

¹PhD Research Scholar, Department of English, Gujarat University, India

Maha.samih78@gmail.com

²Department of English, City C U Shah Commerce College, Gujarat University, India

Article Detail:	Abstract
Received: 25 May 2026; Received in revised form: 22 Jun 2026; Accepted: 26 Jun 2026; Available online: 30 Jun 2026 ©2026 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). Keywords – Thriller Fiction, Contemporary Literature, Psychological Suspense, Moral Ambiguity, Digital Espionage	<i>Thriller fiction, once largely a realm of pulp, has morphed into a complex literary genre engaging with the anxieties of the 21st century. While the commitment to suspense, high stakes and narrative velocity remains undiminished, modern thrillers, in a departure from the clear-cut hero-villain narratives of yesteryear, delve into psychological nuances, moral ambiguities and existential threats such as digital espionage. This transformation parallels shifts including the breakdown of faith in organisations, the domination of technology and the growing obsession with human perception. Contemporary thrillers do not just entertain but disrupt the reader, forcing unsettling realisations about the identity, power and nature of reality.</i>

I. INTRODUCTION

The Twenty-First Century is an era in which thriller fiction flourishes as the most popular genre ever to emerge in the field of publishing on a global spectrum. Defined by tight narrative structure, at stake and a style of language much more concerned with movement than with ornament, the contemporary thriller moves away from the earlier traditions of the mystery novel to its preoccupations with puzzle, detail, society and settlement through community, to instead embrace an aesthetic of the lone, the capable who solves the riddle, restores the order, often out of or at odds with order, through acts of physical and even political violence which resonate more with contemporary anxieties of the individual over bureaucracy, security and their sense of agency over life in the postmodern age than they do with earlier crime related fiction. In this essay I shall trace this development from its roots at work in the twentieth

century novel to its maturation at work in the crime fiction of today.

II. BACKGROUND ABOUT THRILLER FICTION

Narratives, like sentences, are codings of experience and constructions of reality. They can be said to have an internal structure similar to that of sentences, while the notion of ‘well-formedness’ is nearly as reasonable of stories as it is for sentences. (Fowler, 24)

a narrative is not just a list of events. It selects, arranges, and connects experience into a meaningful pattern, so it helps people understand what happened and why it matters. The sentence-like part means stories have structure: they have parts that depend on each other, and some stories feel more coherent than others. So “well-formedness” here means a story

hangs together logically and emotionally, the way a grammatical sentence does. According to Priestman:

crime, or detective fiction, has been submitted to 'ghettoisation' from 'serious' fiction. That is, the genre under analysis has been classified under the guise of popular fiction, which is defined and set apart from other types of fiction. (Priestman, 181)

Thriller Fiction has become one of the most economically and culturally successful genres in the modern literature and it has a massive popularity among readers, it is also commercially significant amongst other contemporary genres. Modern thriller fiction has experienced a massive redevelopment from its former generic conventions, adopting new technologies, new social anxieties, and formal innovations whilst retaining a firm adherence to generic elements of emphasis on psychological suspense, emotional tension, and high-stakes plot lines that compel readers peruse the narrative. The basic project of the genre is the same: to arrange the emotional involvement of the reader systematically and to achieve this goal by carefully control of suspense, the feeling of uncertainty, and psycho-emotional tension.

Contemporary thriller fiction is an active literary genre, which is essentially characterized not only by detailed plotting or stereotypical characters but by structured coordination of the reader emotional responses through strategic and skillful control of suspense, tension and psychological intensity. In general, the genre is defined as wherein a crime or the threat of crime is the main theme or storyline and thus, by positioning the thriller within the broader genre of crime fiction, also the investigation of crimes that have already taken place. This forms an important difference that distinguishes the thriller plots against the classical detective fiction whose retroactive focus is on explaining the crimes that have already been solved. The heart of the artistic business that drives the modern thriller fiction is the production of what literary theorist David Glover describes as "a text that attempts to expand the narrative and broaden the scope of the telling by intensifying the events and subduing them with either danger, suppression or shock". This theoretical description places emotional

intensity and reader involvement as the organizing principle of the genre, highlighting that the thriller is all about thrill the creation of emotion mixed with anxiety and that the thriller is not about intellectual mystery-solving, like in the detective fiction, or moral and psychological analysis and introspection, as in the literary fiction. The thriller functions on the basis of specific emotional structures that set it apart essentially as compared to other similar literary genres.

The thriller is a distinctive literary genre, which differs markedly from the detective story. The latter reaches back to the 'quest' narratives found in many oral traditions, whereby the protagonist sets out on a journey to achieve specific goals, encounters obstacles and finally reaches the conclusion. (Blench)

Contrary to detective fiction, which focuses on the intellectual solutions to the problem and logical reasoning, or horror fiction, which focuses on fear and repulsion as the main emotional reactions, the thriller specifically develops the excitement with the help of provoked tension in position of other emotional scales. Such an unusual emotional structure places the reader excitement and suspense in a contradictory and simultaneous position: on the one hand, the readers are met with a desire to learn what will happen in the story, and on the other hand, the fear and anxiety about what may occur. The following paradoxical emotional situation being both to progress through the narrative and to fear what that may bring are the crucial emotional experience that the thriller interaction creates and is a characteristic of the genre compared to other literature genres. The modern thriller novels operate on the basis of specific formal principles that determine their individuality within the wider frame of the literary fiction. In a thriller the main character, according to the modern literary standards, exists in an almost unbroken state of threat. It is more through these stories that the extinguishing of plot is exciting due to the speed of the story. the basic formal rule which differentiates thriller narratives and detective fiction: instead of crafting elaborate mystery to be solved patiently by the use of intellect, thrillers create a situation of impending and growing danger that needs to be countered at once by both the heroes and the audience. The structural frame

work of the thriller accentuates the push and pull, the constantly growing effects and the constant impending doom.

The elements of unreliable narrators, fragmented narrative, and continuous internal monologue are also the common ways of psychological thrillers to create a major degree of reader doubt about the reliability of the protagonist, the fundamental verity of the story. As for the structure of thriller novel Christiana Gregoriou believes that:

writing classified as 'popular' isn't necessarily any less 'literary' than that which is classified under a strictly literary category. Therefore, complexity of language, as well as 'literariness' (attributing aesthetic value), cannot be considered important factors in defining crime writing as 'popular' or not.
(Gregoriou, 15)

A work should not be considered less literary simply because it is written for a wide readership or belongs to a recognizable genre such as crime fiction. The label "popular" usually describes a book's circulation, audience, or marketing category rather than its artistic quality. A crime novel may be commercially successful while still displaying complex language, sophisticated characterization, thematic depth, and structural innovation.

Carter Nash's discussion of language and literariness rejects a strict division between literary and non-literary language. Instead, literariness can be understood as existing along a continuum, or "cline," rather than as a quality that a text either possesses or lacks. (Nash,35) Literary value may emerge through semantic density, stylistic patterning, ambiguity, and the interaction of different levels of language. These features can occur in ordinary or popular forms of writing as well as in texts traditionally classified as literary.

The detective story is a kind of intellectual game. It is more—it is a sporting event. [...] For the writing of detective stories there are very definite laws—unwritten, perhaps, but nonetheless binding; and every respectable and self-respecting concocter of literary mysteries lives up to them. Herewith, then, is a sort of Credo, based

partly on the practice of all the great writers of detective stories, and partly on the promptings of the honest author's inner conscience. (Van Dine, 30)

A detective story is not only a mere entertainment, but it suggests itself like a kind of intellectual contest between the author and the reader. As S. S. Van Dine called it "a kind of intellectual game", in such kind of story, readers are expected to think over, observe tiny details, compare pieces of evidences and, using their reasoning capability, detect who the criminal is within these evidences. They gain satisfaction not merely by knowing happened to whom, but also by detecting who the villain is before the detective tell out the truth.

Additionally, Van Dine reiterates and reinforces this idea by the comparison writing novel to a sporting event. By comparing the reader-detective interaction to sport, he adds the elements of competition, rules, skill and fair play. Like people playing a sporting contest, authors of crime fiction should observe limitations; a game would not make meaningful if people secretly break the rules or gain their unfair advantages. In the detective novel it offers little enjoyment if the reader is denied such opportunities of competing with a fictitious opponent as a detective. The significant clues should, at least, be equally available to the reader and detective though the author can allow the detective to excel the former in detecting his implication for more insight.

The writer states there are "definite laws" while at the same time describing these laws as an "unwritten code", suggesting to the reader that she is aware of them but does not wish to restrict the imagination of the writer who is trying to be original, an attitude that has made detective fiction so long-lasting. She explains these laws are not forced by law but important to the morality of detective fiction writers or any writer who claims to be writing a well-crafted book. It is about honesty in writing; one should create a solvable mystery and avoid tricking her readers with hidden clues, coincidence or the 'discovery' of a new piece of information the reader was not previously in the know about. The author must be "honest" in explaining things but at the same time still leave an enigma for the astute literary critics to solve in her book. They like to guess the culprits before the book allows them to see. This explains the tradition known as 'fair play': "is the notion that a mystery or detective

story should, in principle, at least, be capable of being solved by a careful and observant reader" (John Scaggs, 47); this principle argues that the clues needed for solving the crime should be in the story and they should be obvious to an attentive reader. It is for this reason that detective fiction produced during the Golden age gave significance to this relationship between a writer and his audience who were as thrilled about his writing a book similar to them solving a crossword puzzle!

The notion that 'every respectable and self-respecting concocter of literary mysteries' suggests humour with an almost threatening authority. Using bizarre language such as the word concocter, Van Dine reduces the mystery writer to something similar to the humble work of a mixer following the guidance of a specific recipe. However, at the same time, this writer (concocter) has a 'duty' to uphold the respectable honour of the form, that 'respectable' in particular implies. The task of the mystery writer is not just to produce surprising plot twists, but to construct a coherent, puzzle truthfully.

The final sentence of the Twenty Rules introduces the notion of a 'Credo'. A 'Credo' is a statement of belief or set of principles, and the addition of this word creates an aura that the rules should be adopted with a pious seriousness. The claims of Van Dine are rooted in the established practice of "all the great writers" and also the "inner conscience" of the honest writer. This has significance, they are more than a technical guide to creating bestselling works; they are also pieces of morality. The writer who purposefully deceives their reader unfairly does more than employ poor artistry; they are also jeopardising the reader's basic trust upon which the story is founded.

In other words, the definition of detective fiction here is one of trust shared between the author and the reader. The author is permitted to challenge, to mislead, to surprise the reader, but the challenge must be a lawful one. The criminal may wipe off his traces or put up a false appearance but the author should not hide the truth from the audience in the form of dishonest narration. In the end, the solution must derive from pure logic and not be introduced in the nick of time by some accident, confession or piece of information. The essence of Van Dine's famous rules is that the reader too can have an equal chance to find out who the criminal is and the method used thereof.

To put it simply, the solution must remain a logical one, not circumstantial.

Crime fiction is often regarded as formulaic because it repeatedly uses familiar elements such as the crime, the investigation, the suspect, the detective, the clues, and the final revelation. However, the presence of a formula does not prevent a writer from using language creatively or exploring serious ideas. The formula provides a structure, but the writer's treatment of that structure creates the work's individual artistic character.

Complexity should therefore not be measured only by difficult vocabulary or elaborate sentence construction. A crime novel may use direct, economical prose and still achieve literary effects through irony, shifting perspectives, unreliable narration, symbolism, repetition, or carefully controlled suspense. For example, short sentences and ordinary dialogue may reflect fear, urgency, or emotional repression, while changes in narrative viewpoint may force the reader to question the reliability of the evidence. Stylistic simplicity can consequently be deliberate and meaningful rather than evidence of artistic weakness.

most factors of production and distribution used to distinguish popular fiction from other fiction are not relevant to detective fiction: there are detective works that can be categorised as popular fiction and produced and sold under mass circumstances whereas other works are produced and sold as serious literature. (Bo'nnemark 15)

The point is that detective fiction doesn't fit the simple split between popular fiction and serious literature. Unlike some other genres, detective stories can be mass-produced on one hand, or polished literary works on the other, so publication and sales alone don't determine which category they belong to.

Literary value doesn't depends solely on aesthetic language. "Literariness," in this context, involves more than beautiful or unusual wording; it includes the way a text encourages interpretation and produces multiple levels of meaning. Contemporary crime fiction can be literary when it makes readers think about how truth is constructed, how identities are formed, or how institutions define crime and justice.

Christiana Gregoriou's stylistic work on contemporary crime fiction demonstrates that popular crime novels can create linguistic, social, and generic forms of deviation, challenging both the boundaries of language and the expectations of the genre. the distinction between popular and literary crime writing should be treated critically rather than accepted as an objective division. A novel's popularity does not determine its artistic value, just as a book's classification as literary does not automatically guarantee complexity or excellence. The most useful approach is to examine how each crime text uses language, structure, character, genre conventions, and social themes. From this perspective, popular crime fiction can be both accessible and artistically significant, proving that readability and literariness are not mutually exclusive qualities.

The modern thriller fiction has a great number of subgenres, which have grown and developed along the lines of thriller fiction, and each of which upholds the fundamental elements of the genre: suspense and psychological tension together with certain thematic focus, style or specialized narrative interests. The psychological thriller is one of the most important, culturally relevant, and popular of the modern thriller subgenres, which is focused on an internal psychological conflict, character motivation, and exploration of human consciousness instead of arming a series of actions on the exterior. The type of psychological thriller that is being discussed is that where two brains are involved in a fight of wit, one of them being a brilliant psychopath, and the other, a brilliant protagonist. This is a plot-based story that tends to portray themes of human consciousness, reality, identity, and what life is all about.

This subgenre found a remarkable modern popularity with the help of Gillian Flynn and her book *Gone Girl* that turned the psychological thriller into a real trend in literature and demonstrated how this subgenre can not only gain great commercial success but also be critically well-received. Modern literature records that Gillian Flynn is regarded as a writer of dark and psychological thrillers with unreliable narrators and startling twists. Her bestselling book, known as *Gone Girl*, is the story of the mysterious disappearance of a woman and the secrets that have been revealed in her marriage and redefines the psychological thriller of these times. The unique focus on the character

psychology and internal motivation in the psychological thrillers is an impressive change compared to the action-oriented subgenres of the thriller genre. Tzvetan Todorov asserts:

In "The Typology of Detective Fiction" that the whodunit is a narrative that conveys two stories: that of the crime and that of the investigation, whereas the thriller is a narrative that suppresses the story of the investigation and only contains the narrative of the crime. (Todorov,43)

Tzvetan Todorov differentiates between the whodunit or mystery story and a thriller by means of the manner in which they organize the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. In a whodunit, "there are two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation." The story of the crime has ended, but that of investigating has yet to begin; it is now the detective's turn to recreate past events, establish the criminal's motives and explain away pieces of evidence. In this way, "the primary interest of the reader is based on curiosity: for what the question who committed the crime leaves unanswered."

The thriller changes this structure. Todorov points out that this cannot suppress the investigation but suppresses or reduces the prior story of the crime and intensifies the story of ongoing action. Instead of taking place completely before the actual narrative, we are presented simultaneously with a story of a danger, escape, pursuit, etc. With the protagonist on the thin line of life and death, we are not as much bothered about discovering the truth, as we are concerned with whether the protagonist will survive at all.

This also influences the focus on time. The detective looks back because he resolves a crime; the thriller-protagonist looks ahead as he is threatened continuously and the results of his actions seem uncertain. What it all depends on and finally is about to be discovered, is the future; not merely what happened in the past.

The spy thriller emphasizes spy, international intrigue and the battle between the conflicting intelligence agencies or the battle between the intelligence agencies and the terrorist groups posing danger to the security of the country. The subgenre is usually

realistic and concerned with the topic of spying. Such spy thrillers today are often written using elaborate geopolitical structures and elaborate technical spy trademarks that give the story a sense of verisimilitude and offer interest to the reader.

The techno-thriller uses a superior technology as a narrative focus with a recurring theme of how technical sophistication gives birth to narrative danger and narrative resolution and explores the consequences of technological supremacy. The legal thriller revolves around a courtroom action, legal strategies, and the interplay of law and justice, and the characters are usually lawyers and go about their business in a complicated court case with ethical issues. These novels are more focused on the legal system as the main character (a lawyer in most cases) struggles to seek justice. A lot of drama and suspense will be set in court and the process of the law and ethical issues the characters have to deal with.

The conspiracy thriller also focuses on the massive conspiracies that the main characters face powerful institutions the full scope of which cannot initially be observed. The genre is characterized as A conspiracy thriller the genre is defined by the fact that the hero is faced with a large, powerful group of enemies, of which he is the only person aware of their actual size. Conspiracy thrillers usually put emphasis on paranoia and discovery of the concealed organizational web that exist on the basis of hidden agendas. Also, there is the domestic thriller which focuses on the close relationships and family dynamics of thrillers, it explores the tensions and the possible violence within families, psychological tension within the family, or within a close relationship.

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTEMPORARY THRILLER FICTION

An effective modern thriller fiction is written in a way that there is coherent adherence of specific formal features that define the genre and create reader involvement due to the systematic use of certain narrative devices. These features work jointly and mutually and all together created the unique experience of thriller that constitutes the interest of the reader to the genre. The essential elements that drive all good thriller stories are suspense and narrative tension; the psychological state that will define thriller

involvement as compared to other literary experiences. The elements that leave the readers to the edge of their seats and they want to flip through the pages to know what happens next. Uncertainty generates suspense, where characters encounter life-threatening or high stakes challenges. The modern thriller plot preserves the suspense due to the environmental and atmospheric factors playing the material roles in influencing the psychological pressure. Thriller stories are set in dark, rainy and threatening climate. This kind of suspenseful setting is frightening to the readers as they do not know what could happen, so they wait till action is completed. Environmental threat and physical location act in combination with time pressure and incomprehensibility to produce the long-term psychological condition that is the hallmark thriller engagement. Modern thrillers realize the so-called high stakes and serious consequences what literary analysis terms high stakes, which go beyond the individual hero to include wider groups of people and important social aspects. High-stakes conflict is a necessity of the thriller genre, which can keep the readers on the cliff-hanger. It is extreme adversities or threats that have seriousness like life or death, world devastation, or revenge against adversaries. Risks in the thriller stories run in specific architectural rules of creating credibility and reader interest. The stakes should be proven serious and understandable to the readers, and investment should be formed by acknowledging the outcomes of the issues beyond the self-interest. Importantly, the high stakes in the thriller plots are often running on two or more levels at the same time: global and personal levels are intertwined in a manner that helps to engage the readers more emotionally by making clear how abstract and global threats are threat or not.

Modern thrillers are generally fast-paced and fast-moving and this is what makes them attached to other types of literature and it is what brings the urgency that is a defining factor in thrillers. The stories are powerful since the readers are sucked into the moral dilemmas of the hero. They include the most important aspects like mystery, suspense, excitement, violence, terror and horror. This accelerated movement is vital to the emotional structure of the genre: lengthy exposition or contemplative lines disrupt the rhythm that keeps the thrillers going and

keeps the reader interested. Successful modern thrillers can also utilize tactical variations of pacing instead of the story maintaining the same velocity, as has been known to cause reader exhaustion instead of continued interest.

In the thrillers of this time it is the character of the male protagonist that has the clearest relationship to the novel's theme and structure. In contrast to the post-World War Two period, the roles of female characters tend not to be of determining importance. The women represented are often defined primarily as the helpers of the men, either as, say, the gangster's moll or as the basically tough, good girl who helps the downtrodden gangster or endangered victim. (Horsley, 20)

Horsley argues that, in the thrillers of the modern period, the male protagonist is the central organizing figure of the novel. The plot, themes, and narrative structure are usually shaped around his experiences, decisions, and moral problems. Whether he is a gangster, detective, criminal, or endangered outsider, the male protagonist provides the reader's main point of view and connects the different elements of the story. His movement through danger often determines the novel's suspense: he may be forced to escape, solve a crime, protect someone, or confront a corrupt social world.

The male protagonist is closely connected to the thriller's themes. His character may represent alienation, violence, moral uncertainty, social failure, or the struggle between survival and justice. Because the story is organized around his choices, the novel's structure often follows his decline, pursuit, escape, or transformation. In this sense, the protagonist is not simply one character among many; he is the figure through whom the thriller's central conflicts become visible. Traditional thriller narratives frequently use a solitary or morally ambiguous man whose relationship with society is unstable, while women are often positioned in relation to his journey.

Female characters in the earlier period generally do not determine the plot to the same extent. They are often assigned supporting roles that help explain,

motivate, or complicate the male protagonist's actions. For example, the gangster's "moll" may provide emotional support, loyalty, or access to the criminal world, while the "tough, good girl" may help the gangster or an innocent victim survive danger. Although these women may appear courageous or intelligent, their narrative importance is limited because the story's major decisions and conflicts remain centered on men.

This reflects a gendered structure within traditional thriller fiction. Men are commonly presented as active agents who take risks, commit crimes, investigate mysteries, or confront violence, whereas women are more often represented as helpers, victims, love interests, or moral influences. The contrast with the post-World War Two period suggests that later thrillers increasingly gave female characters more independent and determining roles. In later thriller narratives, women may become investigators, protagonists, criminals, or figures whose own experiences organize the plot rather than merely supporting a male character. According to Cawelti:

In detective fiction, there is a specific set of roles that a character would have to fit into, and this set, includes that of the perpetrator, that of the victim, that of the detective and that of the bystander. (Cawelti, 91)

In detective fiction, characters are often organized into a recognizable system of roles: the perpetrator, the victim, the detective, and the bystander. These roles provide the basic structure through which the crime is committed, investigated, interpreted, and finally explained. The detective story depends on this arrangement because each character contributes to the movement from uncertainty to knowledge. Classical discussions of the genre similarly identify the victim, murderer, suspects, and detective as central elements of the narrative.

The perpetrator is the character responsible for creating the mystery. By committing the crime and concealing the evidence, the perpetrator produces the central problem that the detective must solve. This character often controls the story indirectly: although the criminal may remain hidden, their actions determine the sequence of events, create false clues, and generate suspicion among other characters. The

perpetrator therefore functions as the main source of disorder and secrecy within the narrative.

The victim is usually the immediate object of the crime and the event that initiates the investigation. A murder, disappearance, or attack gives the detective a reason to act and provides the central question that the narrative must answer. Although the victim may be dead or absent from much of the story, their relationships, secrets, enemies, and past actions often supply important clues. In this way, the victim can remain narratively powerful even when they are not an active participant in the investigation.

The detective represents the movement from confusion toward explanation. Through observation, questioning, deduction, and the interpretation of evidence, the detective reconstructs the hidden chain of events. This role is central because detective fiction is generally organized around the effects of detection: the detective connects apparently unrelated facts and reveals the identity or motive of the perpetrator. The detective may be a police officer, private investigator, amateur investigator, or ordinary person drawn into the case.

The bystander occupies a less active but still important position. Bystanders may include witnesses, family members, neighbors, colleagues, companions, or suspects who are not directly responsible for the crime. They provide information, misunderstand events, conceal facts, or offer misleading interpretations. Often, the bystander represents the ordinary reader because they react to the mystery without possessing the detective's ability to interpret evidence. Their questions and limited knowledge help explain the investigation and make the detective's reasoning more understandable.

These roles are not always fixed. Modern detective fiction frequently complicates or reverses them: a perpetrator may pretend to be a victim, a victim may be connected to the crime, a bystander may become an investigator, and a detective may behave like a criminal. Such reversals create suspense because they challenge the reader's assumptions about identity and morality. The basic role system therefore provides the foundation of detective fiction, while contemporary writers gain dramatic power by blurring the boundaries between these positions.

Psychoanalysis

seems to have become a hidden or acknowledged subtext for the detective, who is now not so much in search of the truth of the crime he or she is investigating, as in search of the truth or trauma of a past, often his or her own past. (Ffrench, 225)

Patrick Ffrench's essay, "Open Letter to Detectives and Psychoanalysts: Analysis and Reading", focuses on the connections between detective work and psychoanalysis, as they are portrayed as interpreters who look 'beneath the surface' of things. For the detective, reading means looking at clues, statements, objects, and patterns which together construct a hidden crime, while for the psychoanalyst, his reading looks at speech, memories, symptoms, and silence to discern meanings that even the patient cannot consciously retrieve. It is, therefore, suggested that reading into certain signs plays an important role in both professions.

In a traditional detective story, the investigation usually aims to produce a final explanation: the criminal is identified, the motive is revealed, and the mystery is solved. Psychoanalysis, by contrast, does not simply uncover a hidden fact and bring the investigation to an end. It pays attention to the instability of language and to the ways in which meaning may be displaced, repeated, or concealed within ordinary speech. The unconscious is not treated as a simple secret waiting to be discovered; it appears through indirect signs and contradictory expressions.

Ffrench's discussion can be connected to Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," particularly through Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic reading of the story. In Poe's narrative, the letter remains hidden in plain sight because the police search for a concealed object while failing to recognize the significance of its visible

position. This example demonstrates that interpretation depends not only on looking for evidence but also on understanding how attention, expectation, and language shape what can be seen. Lacan's reading emphasizes the importance of the letter's movement and displacement, showing how characters are positioned by the symbolic system through which the letter circulates.

The detective and the psychoanalyst therefore occupy similar but not identical positions. Both attempts to interpret what appears mysterious, but the detective generally seeks a stable answer, whereas the psychoanalyst questions the desire for final certainty. A detective may believe that every clue will eventually form part of a coherent explanation; psychoanalysis shows that interpretation can reveal further contradictions rather than eliminate them. In this sense, Ffrench presents reading as an active and complicated process rather than a mechanical method of collecting evidence.

Detective stories are not concerned only with crime, punishment, and the discovery of the culprit. They also explore how people create meanings, misread situations, conceal their desires, and become trapped by language. The detective's investigation can therefore be understood as a model of interpretation, while psychoanalysis provides a way of questioning the assumptions behind that model.

Contemporary thriller narratives characteristically construct specific relationships between protagonists and antagonists that generate reader investment through carefully calibrated power imbalance and asymmetrical advantage. Usually, the protagonist or group of protagonists in a thriller are commoners. This means that they are ordinary people, and are usually at a disadvantage against a powerful enemy. The protagonist positioning generates reader identification and emotional investment through recognition that protagonists face overwhelming obstacles requiring exceptional resourcefulness, moral conviction, and determination. While, the antagonists need to have significant resources and reputable power that creates the actual risk to the success of the protagonist. Thrillers introduce the reader not only to an underprivileged main character but also to a powerful antagonist, who causes the threats to the main character to appear real. The villain should possess plausible resources and a real threat potential

to make the protagonist never certain of his success. Modern thriller plots regularly use tactical information disclosure as a working structural principle that holds the attention of the reader.

Modern thriller plots often use the twist of the plot that is not perceived in advance and the narrative integrity and logical continuity of the narrative with the preceding details of the narration. Unexpected Twists: The thriller genre is characterized by unexpected twists, which keep the readers on their toes by presenting unexpected twists, breaking their assumptions. Effective twists are neither carelessly startling nor inconsistent with hindsight reasoning, but shocking, and yet obvious, at the same time. Thus, successful modern thriller heroes act as doers of action as opposed to the victims of fate and coincidence. The main character must possess a significant objective and desire to achieve it.

IV. CONCLUSION

The modern thriller is characterized by several defining features that distinguish it from its predecessors. Domestic suspense and psychological thrillers have democratized the genre, making it accessible to diverse demographics while exploring the darkness lurking behind seemingly ordinary settings. Rather than external threats from serial killers or international conspiracies, contemporary thrillers increasingly locate danger within intimate spaces the home, the family, the workplace reflecting what scholars term "controlled danger" that allows readers to experience threat from a position of safety. Technology and digital anxiety have become central pillars of the genre, with threats migrating "from the shadows to the server room." Modern thrillers map specific fears of the digital age: surveillance, data exploitation, algorithmic manipulation, and the erosion of privacy. The villain is less likely to be a cackling criminal mastermind and more likely to be a beautifully branded corporation promising convenience, safety, or self-improvement.

REFERENCES

- [1] Blench, Roger. "The Genesis of the Thriller." *Academia.edu*, 2023.
- [2] Bo'nnemark, M. *The Mimetic Mystery*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Stockholm University, 1997.

- [3] Cawelti, John G. *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. University of Chicago Press, 1976.
- [4] Fowler, Roger. *Linguistics and the Novel*. Methuen, 1977.
- [5] French, Patrick. "Open Letter to Detectives and Psychoanalysis: Analysis and Reading." *The Art of Detective Fiction*, edited by W. Chernaik, M. Swales, and R. Vilain, St. Martin's Press, 2000, pp. 222-232.
- [6] Gregoriou, Christiana. *Deviance in Contemporary Crime Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- [7] Horsley, Lee. *The Noir Thriller*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- [8] Porter, Dennis. *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction*. Yale University Press, 1981.
- [9] Priestman, Martin. *Detective Fiction and Literature: The Figure on the Carpet*. Macmillan, 1990
- [10] Van Dine, S. S. "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories." *The American Magazine*, Sept. 1928, p. 30.
- [11] Scaggs, John. *Crime Fiction*. Routledge, 2005. (The New Critical Idiom)