

Psychological Thriller Genre And Its Major Characteristics

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Abstract— The importance of historical conditions and factors in the emergence of the thriller genre in literature, its subgenres and their main characteristics have been studied and systematically analyzed in this article from a conceptual point of view. The specific aspects of the psychological thriller, the differences from the works written in detective or gothic style, and the common aspects with them have been compared, taking into account that they have a common root. The role of social and political factors in the development of the psychological thriller as a literary genre in American literature is important. It has been proved through the fundamental reforms implemented in the country's law enforcement agencies. Their positive results, and the achievements made in the fight against criminals are reflected in the psychological thriller written by Thomas Harris. In a psychological thriller, the author prepares the reader for a closer look at the human psyche while depicting the emotional state of the characters and the struggles in their inner world. Psychological thriller novels do not have clear boundaries, unlike works depicting the process of detective or police procedurals. Therefore, it is natural for a thriller writer to be free, to a certain extent use the characteristics of other genres, to be inspired by them and create as such.

Keywords— Psychological Thriller, Detective Fiction, Profiling, Suspense, Horror, Psychologism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Literary works written in various genres have always attracted the attention of curious and inquisitive readers. Genres, in turn, continue to develop based on the wishes of readers. Most of the favorite works that are admired by book lovers all over the world belong to the thriller genre. The key advantage of this genre in attracting the reader's attention is the atmosphere of tension created by the novel. It is somewhat surprising that the thriller genre has not yet been seriously and widely studied by literary scholars even though it has already achieved its status as a priority genre among literary works. The element of intense imagery and excited anticipation of the subsequent event in the work is first found in "Poetics" by Aristotle, an ancient Greek philosopher who lived in the 4th century BC. There is a notion that tension in the story is resolved through catharsis. For example, in Achilles' *Oresteia*, Clytemnestra kills her husband [5;851]. It is emphasized in the dramaturgical literature that the true charm of tragedy is felt through the construction of the plot and ultimately the tension distribution in the play. Therefore, several ancient Greek poems, including the *Odyssey*, have such elements. Whether or not Odysseus will survive the dangers encountered during his journey, the solution of the work will not be clear to the reader until the end. Odysseus is a complex hero whose ongoing struggle with the sea god Poseidon can only be resolved once he returns home [3;14]. There is no obvious example of a thriller in the literature of antiquity, so it is possible to find more specific examples from the analysis of the works created in medieval Europe. Although the alliterative poem "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" by an unknown author contains elements, such as the search and finding the end of the trap that suggest the structure of a detective work, the threat (the knight's supernatural powers shaking the palace) and the complex resolution of the work, Gawain's encounter with the knight, make the poem connects with the thriller genre.

II. METHODS

In the 1970s, the Department of Behavioral Science, which studies the psychology of extremely dangerous criminals and serial killers and the factors that motivate them to commit crimes using the method of psychological analysis, was opened at the Federal Bureau of Investigation of the United States of America. The collected information and results were summarized and intended to be used to find and apprehend criminals. The profiling method, that is, the development of the psychological image of a potential criminal based on available data and evidence, and the importance of starting criminal investigations only after that, was addressed to the scientific and practical achievements in the field of psychology, psychiatry and criminology. The profilers set themselves the goal of analyzing not only crime scenes, but also the psychological factors influencing criminal behavior. The process of implementation of these reforms and their results are also reflected in the literature. Between 1970 and 1995, John Douglas, who worked at the US Federal Bureau of Investigation, headed the Assistant Investigation Department there, and invented a new and effective method of investigation, which consists in creating a psychological portrait of a criminal through personality analysis, in his scientific-popular "Journey Into Darkness" (1997). During his 25-year career, he worked on more than a thousand serious crimes, including serial murders, child abductions, and sexual abuse, and solved most of them using his own style. Speaking about the importance of style, John Douglas said to parents all over the world, *"Creating a psychological portrait of criminals has been and continues to be of great help not only in catching them, but also in informing society about how they carry out their actions and taking preventive measures. The best way to protect your children, though, is to know your enemy," he makes a serious appeal*" [6;163]. Creating a psychological portrait is one of the most effective methods in the field of crime analysis, in which the expert focuses on putting himself in the place of the victim and the criminal, feeling the experiences they experienced when they met, thinking as they think. Douglas was right to mention it as follows: *"This is what you get from spending hours in the prisons and penitentiaries, sitting across the table, listening to the actual stories. After you've heard from them, you begin to put the pieces together. The crime itself begins to talk to you. As horrible as it sounds, this is what you have to do to be effective"* [6;21].

In the 1980s and 1990s, in the American literature of the crime fiction and psychological thrillers, gothic styles were also mixed, the wave began to be directed to criminals, and it became customary to focus attention from the detailed description of detective processes to the depiction of the criminal's mind. For example, in Thomas Harris' novels about Hannibal Lecter, the character of the killer who attracts the reader is described from the edge in "Red Dragon" (1981), and in "The Silence of the Lambs" (1988) and "Hannibal" (1999), his role in the work gradually increases. In his fourth novel, "Hannibal: Rising" (2006), Lecter's youth, war-torn, emotionally and psychologically traumatized orphan boy's development into a sharp-witted and merciless killer are penned. Until the last quarter of the 20th century, psychological thrillers and detective works did not feature a serious criminal or a serial killer in the central role (in the works of Patricia Highsmith and Jim Thompson), but from the beginning of the new century, writers in this direction went beyond the mold and actively involved offenders and criminals in the construction of the work. The extensive use of gothic elements by giving a separate word in his works and as a result the reader's attention shifted from the process of putting an end to crimes to the depiction of the state of breaking the law. In "Hannibal", the narrative begins to turn towards Hannibal after Clarice Starling, now an FBI agent, leaves Quantico and is rescued by Hannibal. The expression of the investigative process is lost, a gothic melodrama appears on the stage, and from there the reins of the development of events pass to the judgment of Hannibal [10]. Joel Black states that the murderous characters in this and three other novels hold a mirror to the morally decadent society and expose its true image, and in this way, the writer has achieved a sharp criticism of the society through sophisticated methods [2;42].

It is important that in that period and after that, in the fiction literature, there are many appeals by writers to cover the topic of developing a psychological portrait of the criminal. At this point, the four novels of the Hannibal Lecter series by Thomas Harris can easily be said to be the most successful steps in the fight against violent crime and the delivery of news to the reader through literature. Among the FBI agents named Will Graham, Clarice Starling, and Jack Crawford, the villain Hannibal Lecter, who opposes their great and human goal of establishing justice in the world, enters the mind of a heinous criminal and accompanies his thoughts in the novels. The usual investigative narrative is altered, often giving way to gothic intrigue through psychological deviance and physical violence. The proof of this can be seen in the example of Will Graham in Harris's novel "Red Dragon" who has a great skill in "getting inside" another person and thinking like him. After all, he "is able to listen to the thoughts of any person, to understand him" [9;18].

III. RESULTS

When Henry James wrote, “A house of fiction has many windows, but only two or three doors,” he meant the diversity of literary genres, and this also applies to the thriller genre and its gradual development [4;7]. The term “thriller” has been applied to literary works since the 1880s. The name of the genre comes from the English word “thrill” which means “to excite”. A work in the thriller genre brings pleasure to the reader by arousing feelings of nervous anticipation, excitement and fear, and excitement is manifested at all stages of the development of the plot []. In the English literary tradition, a thriller is understood as a work that evokes emotions, excitement and fear. In the introduction to his edited collection of short stories, “Thriller Stories”, James Patterson, a premier exponent of the genre, writes of the genre succinctly: “*What gives the variety of thrillers a common ground is the intensity of emotions they create, particularly those of apprehension and exhilaration, of excitement and breathlessness, all designed to generate that all important thrill. By definition, if a thriller doesn't thrill, it's not doing its job* [7;6]. Thriller is also known for the intensity of the works and the power to attract the reader's attention. It's like a race full of obstacles, and the goal can only be achieved through heroism. The goal can be personal (trying to save a spouse or long-lost relative) or global (trying to prevent a world war), but often both are addressed equally. Maybe there is a time limit, maybe not. Writers sometimes maintain a rhythm until the climax, and then bring it to a climax through catharsis. In other cases, things happen incredibly fast and never seem to slow down. The hallmarks of the best thrillers are that the writer carefully researches and uses specific details to create an atmosphere that teaches us about the world through meaningful characters. After reading a thriller, the reader should not only feel emotionally satisfied, but also have more information for the next exciting event. According to Dave Kerr, the thriller is a genre more typical of American literature, because it has a unique spontaneity and power of influence rarely found in European art, touching the physical and mental limits of life, enjoying risks, their characterized by the characteristics of realizing its attractive and at the same time inevitable power [7;43].

A thriller is a literary genre that is significantly different from a detective story. The focus of detective works is on the search process, the main character goes on a journey to achieve a certain goal, encounters obstacles on the way, and finally achieves happiness. Detective stories have their own trajectory, with a predetermined resolution, a place where a crime is solved, a stolen item returned, a major tragedy averted, a crime narrative. Detective literature is considered a branch of adventure literature, and its plot is based on events related to solving mysterious crimes. Edgar Allan Poe's *Murder in the Rue Morgue* (1841) is an early example of pure detective fiction, in which the writer introduces an inquisitive character with amazing logical analysis skills. The plot of the work is based on the events related to the process of solving the crime. Detective works keep the reader's attention on one point, increase his activity in the reading process.

A psychological thriller is a thriller genre novel or movie that focuses on the psyche of the characters and mentally manipulates the viewer or reader. Developments in the hero's mental state, such as sensations, thoughts, and difficulties in realizing the original view of the distorted reality, are the main features of the genre. Fear and anxiety increase mental tension in unexpected ways. The uncertainty of the next actions of the characters, how they see the world, ensures that the tension does not subside. A psychological thriller is characterized by an overt and gruesome ending where the villain, portrayed primarily as a psychopath (Hannibal Lecter in “The Silence of the Lambs”) or a man with multiple personalities (Francis Dolarhyde in “Red Dragon”), returns to haunt the heroes forever. It reveals hidden aspects that are not revealed in ordinary detective novels. It shows the world as full of injustice, suffering and violence. The villain wants to laugh at other people's pain, is in search of temporary and amazing impressions. James Frey, while recognizing that the focus of well-written psychological thrillers is on the psychology of the main character and gradually building tension through the unknown, does not want the often negative reception of creations created in the horror genre, and describes it as a psychological thriller, precisely. In addition, this situation is manifested in the fact that literary critics call the work a psychological thriller in order to increase its literary value. The characteristics that distinguish a psychological thriller from an ordinary thriller are reflected in the abundance of enigmatic situations and bloodshed that attract the reader's attention. For this genre, the atmosphere of constant threat and sudden acts of violence, crime and murder, and the main characters are ordinary people who are not used to danger and violence (Matthew Bannion – student; Clarice Starling – cadet at FBI Academy; Will Graham – investigator). Based on the plot, the peaceful and calm life of the main character suddenly turns into chaos due to the influence of an incomprehensible and uncontrollable evil and falls into various dangerous situations. The main difference of the psychological thriller from other horror genres, including the chiller genre, is the authenticity of the villain in it. For example, Hannibal Lecter, the serial killer in the four novels taken as the

object of this study, is the prototype of the doctor who worked in a Mexican prison. And in Stephen King's chiller novel "It", the bloodthirsty "clown" used as a villain combines the features of a mythical creature that can change its appearance and a vampire.

Professor Christopher Pittard of the University of Portsmouth conducts research on the psychological thriller genre, its nature and gradual development, in addition to detective works. It was Christopher Pittard who introduced the term psychological thriller and its scientific description to the "Encyclopedia of Gothic" published by Wiley. In his article he also listed the integral aspects of the genre with the Gothic style. According to him, the psychological thriller has a double connection with the Gothic. First, as literary analogues of detective literature, psychological thrillers and gothic works have a common root [1;531-534].

IV. DISCUSSION

In a psychological thriller, the main focus is on the inner world of the main characters. Unlike classic thrillers, which focus on actions and external realities, psychological thrillers depict the emotional state and inner struggles of the characters. The reader will unknowingly become a witness of research into the human psyche, revealing secrets and solving puzzles. The tension, which is the main element of a psychological thriller, gradually increases throughout the work. Writers in this genre skillfully use plot twists, puzzles, and unexpected connections to keep the reader in a constant state of tension and curiosity, play with the reader's expectations, and create an atmosphere of uncertainty and abstraction. A psychological thriller also often has elements of a psychological drama. In psychological dramas, characters face the dark and dark sides of their nature, painful memories of the past, or unresolved conflicts. The main character is embodied in the center of attention, who is trying to organize his thoughts and feelings and understand the intentions of other characters.

A psychological thriller can be based on various themes such as mystery, betrayal, revenge, loss of reality. The work allows the writer to explore complex emotional situations and moral dilemmas, and in Anatija, this example of creativity is somewhat deeper and more vivid when compared with works of other genres. Theodore Dreiser's novel "An American Tragedy" can also be included among the most famous psychological thriller works, because the author fully reveals the inner world of the main character, his quest for success, and the moral dilemmas he faces along the way.

Sally Mant enumerates the characteristics of the psychological thriller genre, describing it as a "dissolving sense of reality; restraint in moral statement; characters that stick in the brain; describes it as a combination of a narrative style that emphasizes complex and nuanced relationships [8;526]. David Glover described the thriller as "a text that strives to increase the scope of storytelling by increasing the intensity of events and softening them with danger, oppression, or shock" [2;187]. This is, of course, a partial adaptation to the definitions given about the Gothic, but in a psychological thriller, the action is doubled. Glover's upward narrative approach is metaphorically consistent with a downward movement into the human psyche [2;188]. For this reason, psychological thrillers, like other Gothic literature, seek to ease the tension between different genres of storytelling and philosophical dualism.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be stated that although some of its features can be found in the plot of ancient literary works, the thriller as an independent literary genre first appeared in the 80s of the XIX century, and from the middle of the last century, it began to spread widely in American and European literature. In many works created in this genre, a mixture of romantic, gothic and realistic traditions is noticeable. One of its most popular genres, the psychological thriller, is distinguished from other genres by its feature of combining tension and spiritual depth, and the detailed description of the inner world of the characters. A psychological thriller forces the reader to ponder complex questions and emotions, and surprises him with interesting and unexpected plot twists. Psychological thriller is a literary genre that is noticeably different from the works of the detective genre, and at the same time, it reflects some of its elements.

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