



THE REPRESENTATION OF INNER CONFLICT IN CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY DETECTIVE FICTION

Fayzullayeva Nigina Surat kizi

*Asia International University, Assisstant Teacher of
foreign language and social sciences department*

Abstract. This article examines inner conflict as a central psychological and narrative mechanism in detective literature. While early detective fiction often presents the investigator as a figure of rational mastery, later crime narratives increasingly expose protagonists to guilt, trauma, divided loyalties, unstable identity, and moral uncertainty. Using qualitative comparative textual analysis, the study considers representative works by Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Raymond Chandler, and Gillian Flynn. The analysis focuses on four variables: the source of conflict, its mode of representation, its effect on investigation, and its ethical outcome. The findings show a historical shift from contained conflict, subordinated to the restoration of order, toward constitutive conflict that shapes both the protagonist and the truth-producing process.

Keywords: detective fiction; inner conflict; psychological realism; moral dilemma; unreliable narration; protagonist; crime narrative

РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯ ВНУТРЕННЕГО КОНФЛИКТА В КЛАССИЧЕСКОЙ И СОВРЕМЕННОЙ ДЕТЕКТИВНОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ

Аннотация. В статье внутренний конфликт рассматривается как один из центральных психологических и нарративных механизмов детективной литературы. Если в ранних детективных произведениях следователь преимущественно предстаёт как воплощение рационального мышления и интеллектуального превосходства, то в более поздней криминальной прозе главные герои всё чаще сталкиваются с чувством вины, психологической травмой, противоречивой преданностью, нестабильностью идентичности и нравственной неопределённостью. На основе качественного сравнительно-текстуального анализа исследуются репрезентативные произведения Эдгара Аллана По, Артура Конан Дойла, Агаты Кристи, Рэймонда Чандлера и Гиллиан Флинн. Анализ проводится по четырём основным параметрам: источник внутреннего конфликта, способы его художественного выражения, влияние на процесс расследования и нравственный итог. Результаты исследования свидетельствуют об историческом переходе от сдерживаемого внутреннего конфликта, подчинённого

восстановлению порядка, к конститутивному конфликту, определяющему как личность главного героя, так и процесс установления истины.

Ключевые слова: детективная литература, внутренний конфликт, психологический реализм, нравственная дилемма, ненадёжная наррация, главный герой, криминальный нарратив.

KLASSIK VA ZAMONAVIY DETEKTIV ADABIYOTDA ICHKI ZIDDIYATNING BADIY IFODASI

Annotatsiya. Mazkur maqolada ichki ziddiyat detektiv adabiyotning asosiy psixologik va narrativ mexanizmlaridan biri sifatida tadqiq etiladi. Dastlabki detektiv asarlarda tergovchi, asosan, ratsional tafakkur va intellektual ustunlik timsoli sifatida tasvirlangan bo‘lsa, keyingi davr jinoyat nasrida bosh qahramonlar aybdorlik hissi, psixologik travma, qarama-qarshi sadoqat, beqaror identitet va axloqiy noaniqlik bilan tobora ko‘proq to‘qnashadi. Sifatga asoslangan qiyosiy-matniy tahlil yordamida Edgar Allan Po, Artur Konan Doyle, Agata Kristi, Raymond Chandler va Gillian Flynnning detektiv asarlari o‘rganiladi. Tahlil to‘rtta asosiy mezon: ichki ziddiyatning manbai, uni badiiy ifodalash usullari, tergov jarayoniga ta’siri hamda axloqiy natijasi asosida amalga oshiriladi. Tadqiqot natijalari detektiv adabiyotda tartibni qayta tiklashga bo‘ysundirilgan nazoratli ichki ziddiyatdan bosh qahramon shaxsiyati va haqiqatni aniqlash jarayonini belgilovchi konstitutiv ziddiyat tomon tarixiy o‘tish yuz berganini ko‘rsatadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: detektiv adabiyot, ichki ziddiyat, psixologik realizm, axloqiy dilemma, ishonchsiz narratsiya, bosh qahramon, jinoyat narrativi.

Introduction

Detective literature is conventionally organized around an external disturbance: a murder, disappearance, theft, or unexplained event demands interpretation. Yet the genre’s most memorable protagonists are rarely defined by reasoning alone. Their investigations are accompanied by private tensions between knowledge and doubt, law and justice, professional obligation and personal desire, detachment and empathy, or truth and self-preservation. Such tensions may remain understated, as in the classical tale of ratiocination, or may dominate the entire narrative, as in contemporary psychological crime fiction. In both cases, inner conflict converts detection from a mechanical search for clues into a test of identity and ethical judgment.

The term inner conflict refers here to a sustained contradiction within a protagonist’s motives, values, emotions, memories, or self-conception. It differs from an external obstacle because the opposing forces coexist within the same consciousness. A detective may want to expose the truth and simultaneously fear its consequences; a suspect-protagonist may seek innocence while concealing morally compromising knowledge; an investigator may uphold

the law but distrust the institutions that administer it. Inner conflict can consequently influence what a character notices, suppresses, narrates, or misinterprets.¹¹⁰

Genre theory has often emphasized the structural distinction between the absent story of the crime and the present story of the investigation. This model remains useful, but it can understate the psychological pressure produced when the investigator’s personal history enters the inquiry. Scaggs (2005) and Knight (2010) show that crime fiction develops through repeated negotiations among formal convention, social context, and changing ideas of authority. The protagonist’s divided mind is one site where these negotiations become visible. The detective does not merely reconstruct a past event; he or she also confronts the limits of personal interpretation.

The study is significant because discussions of detective fiction sometimes separate plot from psychology: classical detection is treated as puzzle, while psychological crime fiction is treated as character study. A broader approach reveals continuity between them. Even the apparently detached detective depends on habits, desires, eccentricities, and selective forms of sympathy. Conversely, even the most psychologically fragmented contemporary narrator remains embedded in a structure of clues, concealment, and revelation. Inner conflict provides a bridge between these traditions.

Methods

The research uses qualitative comparative textual analysis. The corpus is purposive rather than exhaustive and includes Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), selected Sherlock Holmes stories by Doyle, Christie’s *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* (1939), and Flynn’s *Gone Girl* (2012). These texts represent five influential configurations of detective or crime narrative: the tale of ratiocination, the consulting-detective story, Golden Age experimentation, hard-boiled investigation, and contemporary domestic psychological thriller.¹¹¹

Four analytical categories guide the comparison. The first is the source of inner conflict as intellectual, emotional, moral, social, or traumatic. The second is representational technique, including focalization, dialogue, interior reflection, retrospective narration, concealment, and unreliability. The third is investigative function: whether conflict obstructs detection, sharpens perception, generates suspense, or redirects suspicion. The fourth is ethical outcome: whether the conflict is resolved, contained, displaced, or left open. These categories allow psychological interpretation without reducing fictional characters to clinical cases.

The method combines close reading with genre-historical comparison. Recurrent features—distance, compulsion, guilt, divided loyalty, self-deception, and performance—were identified and interpreted in relation to plot structure. The analysis also distinguishes author, narrator, and character. A narrator’s statement is not treated automatically as the author’s

¹¹⁰ Todorov T. *The Typology of Detective Fiction* // *The Poetics of Prose* / trans. by R. Howard. — Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1977. — P. 42–52.

¹¹¹ Scaggs J. *Crime Fiction*. — London ; New York : Routledge, 2005. — P 245

judgment, and a protagonist’s account is evaluated against discrepancies, omissions, and alternative perspectives. This distinction is especially important in Christie and Flynn, where the narration itself becomes an instrument of misdirection.

The study has clear limitations. A small Anglophone corpus cannot represent the full diversity of global detective literature, and the selected texts do not form a continuous chronology of every subgenre. The purpose is analytical generalization: to establish a transferable framework for examining inner conflict across detective traditions. The findings may later support comparative research involving other national literatures, including Uzbek detective prose.

Results

The comparative analysis identifies four major models of protagonists’ inner conflict as controlled division, ethical contradiction, narratorial concealment, and identity fragmentation. These models overlap, but each places psychological tension in a different relation to the investigation.

Controlled division: reason against affect. In Poe’s Dupin stories, the detective’s authority depends on his ability to enter another mind while maintaining analytical distance. Dupin imaginatively reconstructs the movements of criminal or witness, yet this identification is governed by method. His apparent inner division—between nocturnal eccentricity and lucid calculation, or between sympathy and abstraction—does not destabilize the solution. Instead, it makes extraordinary perception possible. Conflict is contained inside a superior intellect and converted into interpretive power.

Doyle’s Holmes extends this model but gives it greater emotional visibility. Holmes cultivates detachment, treats cases as protection against boredom, and often presents feeling as interference. Nevertheless, his friendship with Watson, responses to injustice, and occasional personal investment show that reason and affect cannot be fully separated. His inner conflict is therefore not simply emotion versus logic; it is a conflict over how much emotion can be admitted without compromising professional identity. The stories preserve his mastery, but the recurring need for stimulation suggests that detection also regulates an unsettled inner life.

Narratorial concealment: knowledge against confession. Christie radicalizes the relation between consciousness and evidence in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Dr Sheppard occupies the roles of narrator, local observer, assistant, and culprit. His conflict emerges between the wish to control the record and the pressure imposed by Poirot’s reconstruction. The narration avoids direct falsehood at crucial moments and instead relies on omission, compression, and carefully managed phrasing. Psychological conflict is formalized as a struggle over disclosure.

This structure alters the reader’s task. The narrator’s calm professional voice encourages trust, while textual gaps retrospectively reveal self-protection. Inner conflict becomes legible not primarily through confession but through the mismatch between surface composure and

narrative design. Del Gobbo¹¹² observes that crime-fiction conventions encourage assumptions of objective interpretability; Christie exploits precisely that expectation. The solution is consequently both external and internal Poirot identifies the murderer, while the narrative exposes the moral evasions through which the murderer has narrated himself.

Ethical contradiction, for example, private code against public corruption. Chandler’s Philip Marlowe embodies the hard-boiled transformation of detective subjectivity. Unlike the classical detective who restores an intelligible order, Marlowe operates in a world where wealth, policing, family respectability, and criminal power overlap. His inner conflict arises from the incompatibility between his private moral code and the compromised environment in which he must work. He needs money but resists being owned; he is professionally detached but repeatedly protects vulnerable people; he pursues truth while recognizing that disclosure may produce further harm.

In *The Big Sleep*, the investigation does not end with complete social purification. Marlowe’s decisions involve selective silence, loyalty, and damage limitation. His integrity is thus not purity but a repeated act of negotiation. The hard-boiled protagonist’s conflict sharpens moral perception because he cannot rely on institutional definitions of justice. At the same time, the conflict produces fatigue, loneliness, and cynicism. The detective’s body and voice register the cost of remaining ethical in a corrupt system.

Identity fragmentation such as truth against self-performance. *Gone Girl* places inner conflict at the center of a domestic crime narrative through alternating first-person accounts by Nick and Amy Dunne. Both characters manage public and private selves. Nick wants to appear as the innocent husband, yet his dishonesty, emotional withdrawal, and fear of exposure weaken his credibility. Amy turns identity into an authored performance, constructing versions of herself for parents, husband, police, media, and reader. The investigation becomes inseparable from competing acts of self-narration.

Flynn’s novel differs from the classical model because psychological opacity is not merely an obstacle that the detective eventually removes. It is the durable condition of the relationship and the narrative. The protagonists know that social institutions interpret recognizable roles-faithful wife, grieving husband, victim, suspect-and they manipulate those scripts. Their inner conflicts therefore have a social dimension. Private dissatisfaction is intensified by gender expectations, economic decline, media spectacle, and fantasies of marital perfection.

Amy’s conflict is not presented as simple hesitation between good and evil. It involves the desire to control meaning while demanding recognition, intimacy, and admiration. Nick’s conflict combines self-preservation with a disturbing attraction to the adversarial intelligence of his wife. By the conclusion, neither protagonist achieves moral integration. Conflict is stabilized as mutual surveillance and performance. The mystery is solved at the factual level, but truth does not restore freedom or ethical order.

¹¹² Del Gobbo D. Unreliable Narration in Law and Fiction // *Canadian Journal of Law & Jurisprudence*. — 2017. — Vol. 30, No. 2. — P. 311–351.

Across the corpus, three general tendencies emerge. First, the location of uncertainty shifts from the crime scene toward the protagonist’s consciousness. Second, the resolution of conflict becomes progressively less complete: classical detection contains disturbance, hard-boiled fiction manages it provisionally, and contemporary psychological fiction often preserves it. Third, narrative form increasingly imitates psychological division. Alternating perspectives, retrospective gaps, and unreliable narration do not merely describe conflict; they make readers experience uncertainty as part of interpretation.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that inner conflict serves psychological, moral, and narrative functions simultaneously. Psychologically, it gives the protagonist depth by revealing incompatible motives rather than a single stable essence. The detective’s intelligence becomes more persuasive when it has a cost, and the suspect-protagonist becomes more complex when self-protection competes with the need to be understood. Conflict also prevents characterization from becoming a list of traits. It creates movement: the protagonist must repress, revise, justify, or confront an internal contradiction.

The comparison also suggests that the detective protagonist occupies a paradoxical position. Detection promises coherent explanation, but the detective is never a neutral instrument. Dupin’s imaginative identification, Holmes’s controlled emotional distance, Poirot’s reading of Sheppard’s discourse, Marlowe’s ethical selectivity, and Flynn’s dueling narrators all reveal that truth is produced through situated consciousness. The genre’s enduring power arises partly from this paradox: it offers the pleasure of explanation while repeatedly exposing the instability of the person who explains.

Inner conflict further connects individual psychology to social reality. Chandler’s corruption is institutional; Flynn’s marital antagonism is shaped by class decline, gender performance, and media judgment. Recent criticism likewise emphasizes that crime narratives can investigate the human condition and combine mythic and realist modes in the construction of the detective protagonist (Latimer, 2025). The protagonist’s divided consciousness is therefore not an isolated private defect. It can function as a compressed representation of wider contradictions within family, profession, class, gender, and law.

A useful conceptual distinction follows from these results. In contained inner conflict, tension is temporarily activated but subordinated to successful detection. In productive inner conflict, tension strengthens perception or ethical resistance. In corrosive inner conflict, guilt, trauma, or deception damages judgment and relationships. In constitutive inner conflict, division becomes inseparable from identity and cannot be fully resolved without destroying the self the character has constructed. Classical detectives tend toward the first two forms, while psychological thrillers frequently employ the latter two. This is a tendency, not an absolute historical law.

These categories can widen future comparative research. Studies of American and Uzbek detective prose, for example, may examine whether protagonists experience conflict primarily through individual guilt, family responsibility, communal expectation, professional

duty, or trust in legal institutions. The same framework can compare how direct interior monologue, dialogue, symbolic space, silence, and retrospective narration encode conflict. Such work would preserve cultural specificity while using common analytical questions.

Conclusion

Inner conflict is not a secondary ornament in detective literature; it is one of the genre's principal engines of characterization and renewal. From Dupin and Holmes to Marlowe and the narrators of *Gone Girl*, protagonists are defined by the pressures that accompany interpretation. The historical tendency identified in this study moves from controlled conflict, which confirms rational mastery, toward unresolved conflict, which makes consciousness itself a contested field of evidence.

A wider understanding of the topic should therefore include not only psychological symptoms but also narrative technique, ethical choice, and historical change within the genre. The protagonist's inner conflict matters because detection always involves two searches: the search for what happened and the search for the position from which truth can be told.

REFERENCES

1. Chandler, R. (1939). *The big sleep*. Alfred A. Knopf.
2. Christie, A. (1926). *The murder of Roger Ackroyd*. William Collins, Sons.
3. Del Gobbo, D. (2017). Unreliable narration in law and fiction. *Canadian Journal of Law & Jurisprudence*, 30(2), 311–351. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cjlj.2017.14>
4. Doyle, A. C. (1892). *The adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. George Newnes.
5. Flynn, G. (2012). *Gone girl*. Crown Publishers.
6. Horsley, L. (2005). *Twentieth-century crime fiction*. Oxford University Press.
7. Knight, S. (2010). *Crime fiction since 1800: Detection, death, diversity* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
8. Latimer, E. (2025). *Writing the detectives*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009502412>
9. Poe, E. A. (1841). The murders in the Rue Morgue. *Graham's Magazine*, 18, 166–179.
10. Scaggs, J. (2005). *Crime fiction*. Routledge.
11. Todorov, T. (1977). The typology of detective fiction. In *The poetics of prose* (R. Howard, Trans., pp. 42–52). Cornell University Press.