

The Pain of Trauma: How it Shaped Rachel, Anna, and Megan in *The Girl on the Train*

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Abstract

Paula Hawkins, The Girl on the Train explores the psychological struggles of women caught up in a cycle of trauma, deception, and social expectations. The novel follows Rachel Watson and Megan Hipwell. The two women's lives are characterized by emotional disturbance, addiction, and self-doubt. Having to deal with alcoholism and manipulation. Rachel begins with a journey of self-confidence and healing, but Megan is haunted by her past, leading to her tragic fate. The novel also highlights the strict gender roles placed on women, the burden of social judgments, and the devastating effects of emotional oppression. Through his intricate tale, The Girl on the Train provides a tragic assessment of her identity as a woman and often deconstructs external influences.

Keywords: Gender, Manipulation, Struggles, Abuse, Betrayal, Problems, Trauma, Emotional, Deception

Society expected men and women to follow certain rules. which they called gender roles. These roles decided their duties and responsibilities in society. Women were supposed to be emotional, supportive, and dedicated to their families, while men had to be strong, in control, and responsible for earning money. Over time, these traditional expectations shaped women's education, careers, relationships, and personal choices. Women who did not follow these roles often faced criticism and judgment. Society viewed them as different or unacceptable, making it difficult for them to live freely and make their own choices.

Women who challenged gender roles faced many problems. The Agency acknowledged only the women who managed the household as great dreams and purposes. A woman who focused on her career was accused of ignoring her family. Choosing to stay single or not have children was not accepted, and society viewed these women as incomplete. Divorced women were blamed instead of empathized with. Victims of abuse were questioned instead of holding abusers responsible. These judgments caused stress and fear, making it hard for women to make choices without worrying about criticism. Furthermore, societal expectations placed additional burdens on women, emphasizing appearance, fashion, and fitness pressures that

men did not face to the same extent. The world slowly changed as more people recognized that women deserved respect for their power, goals, and choices. The mistreatment of women in society and the trauma they encountered were often ignored.

Paula Hawkins was born in Salisbury, Rhodesia now Harare, Zimbabwe in 1972. Hawkins was a renowned writer who was recognized as a spiritual thriller. She gained international fame in 2015 when she published *The Girl on the Train*. She was also published in 2021 *A Slow Fire Burning*, *In to the Water* 2017. Her published works focused on topics of psychological tension, deception, and complex relationships. Her book was widely published and received critical recognition for its fascinating stories and deep psychological knowledge. Hawkins' literary achievements included nominations for the British Book Awards and the Goodreads Choice Awards. *The Girl on the Train* won the Goodreads Choice Award for Mystery and Thriller in 2015. She was also honored with a Glamour Award for her writing and became one of the most notable recipients of the Specsavers Bestseller Awards. The audiobook adaptation of *The Girl on the Train* received an Audie Award in 2016, further establishing her reputation as a renowned author.

Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train* was a psychological thriller that explored themes of domestic abuse memory and deception. The story follows Rachel Watson, a woman who struggles with addiction and guilt while taking the same train every day. Rachel's repeated battles with addiction and emotional instability reflected the depression that many women endured. As she travelled, she often looked out the window and noticed Scott and Megan Hipwell, a couple who lived near her ex-husband Tom and his new wife, Anna. She convinced herself that Scott and Megan had a perfect marriage, which deepened her feelings of loneliness and hopelessness. Over time her curiosity transformed into obsession, unexpectedly drawing her into their lives.

Rachel initially thought that she had killed Megan as her alcohol caused her memory to be unclear. After seeing Megan with another man her belief in an ideal marriage was shaken. When Megan disappeared Rachel was convinced that what she saw was a critical sign of the case solution. However, her unreliable memories made it difficult for her to distinguish between reality and illusions. When she put together the truth. She realizes that she is not a murderer and discovers a shocking revelation about the true murderer. She took part in the investigation which uncovered hidden secrets about Megan's life. Megan's connection to Kamal Abdi became a key factor in the case. As the investigation progressed, shocking details about Megan's fate and Rachel's connection to the mystery were revealed, ultimately uncovering the truth behind Megan's murder.

Tom manipulated Rachel and used her weakness and drinking problems. He made her believe she did something she didn't remember making her doubt. He cut down on her and changed the truth to control her thoughts. While he secretly manipulated her, he acted like a friendly ex-husband. His actions made Rachel even more painful and she felt guilt and confusion. Rachel heard everything Tom said and believed him. She trusted his words even when he was lying to her. She thought he told the truth and criticized her for not doing it. Tom's tricks made them more, causing him to feel guilt and confusion. Tom used the gap between alcoholism and memory towards her to control Rachel. She doubted herself as he believed she was the problem and twisted the event. His manipulation caused her to feel guilt and confusion, preventing her from seeing the truth.

The Girl on the Train was a psychological thriller that examined themes of truth, reality, and suspense. The novel uses a complex structure and an unreliable narrator to create tension. It explored trauma, trust, and betrayal throughout the story. Rachel Watson, the main character, struggled with alcoholism as a result of the emotional pain from her failed marriage to Tom. She relied on alcohol to cope with feelings of rejection, betrayal, and loss. These emotional struggles led to her traumatized state and affected her actions throughout the novel.

“Women are still only valued for two things
their looks and their roles as mothers.
I’m not beautiful, and I can’t have kids
so, what does that makes me?”(GT 85)

Rachel battled uncertainty and self-doubt, knowing that society often judged women based on beauty and motherhood. She felt that she had not met these expectations, so she questioned her value and identity. This struggle revealed her low self-esteem and emotional pain, making her feel irrelevant.

Rachel’s addiction led to frequent blackouts, causing her to lose awareness of her thoughts, actions, and surroundings. The only emotions she remembered from these incidents were fear, guilt, and regret. These emotions did not help her recall the actual events. Even after their separation, Tom manipulated Rachel during these vulnerable moments. He made her believe that she was responsible for her unstable behaviour in their marriage. His actions deepened her self-doubt and made it harder for her to distinguish between reality and lies.

Rachel experienced both emotional and physical abuse from Tom, but her memory impairment blocked her from realizing the truth. Her alcoholism defined much of her identity and kept her emotionally trapped in the past. Her thoughts often returned to the life she had shared with Tom. Moving forward became difficult for her because each time she passed their former home during her daily train rides; she was reminded of everything she had lost.

“I am not the girl I used to be
I am no longer desirable;
I am no longer wanted.
I hate this version of myself, but
I don’t know how to go back.”(GT 20)

Rachel was in a state of great loss and struggled with her identity, self-worth, and control over her life. Her mental instability was evident as she constantly fought rejection and vulnerability. She embraced her regret and helplessness, trapped in a cycle of emotional distress and self-destructive behaviour. She felt it was impossible to regain stability.

Rachel’s journey to self-awareness was essential to her recovery from the abuse she had endured and to rebuilding her self-worth. As she regained control of her memories and faced the truth about her marriage, she found a path toward healing and hope for the future

“I felt isolated in my misery. I became lonely,
so, I drank a bit, and then a bit more, and then
I became lonelier, because no one likes being around a drunk.
I lost and I drank, I drank, I drank, and I lost.” (GT 85)

Rachel’s battle with isolation, loneliness, and alcoholism worsened over time. She realized that her addiction pushed people away and deepened her loneliness. This self-destructive cycle led to further suffering, trapping her in depression.

In the novel, Megan Hipwell suffers from deep emotional trauma caused by significant losses in her life. The sudden death of her brother and the loss of her baby daughter left her overwhelmed with guilt and helplessness. Unable to cope with her pain, she sought distraction and excitement through multiple affairs.

Tom deceives Megan by initiating a connection with her while he is unscathed. He gave her the wrong hope and used her for his wish. His betrayal led to tragic consequences indicating his repentance and lack of responsibility.

“Hollowness: that I understand. I’m starting to believe that there
isn’t anything you can do to fix it. That’s what I’ve taken from

the therapy sessions: the holes in your life are permanent.
You have to grow around them, like tree roots around concrete;
you Mold yourself through the gaps.” (GT, 99)

Megan’s acceptance of her unresolved trauma shaped her outlook on life. She realized that some wounds could never fully heal and that she had to adapt rather than overcome them. Despite the scars of the past, her struggle with emotional emptiness and survival highlighted her deep inner turmoil.

Megan’s disappearance revealed her struggle to manage her inner conflicts, marking the peak of her psychological distress. Her unhealed past and emotional turmoil led her to make reckless choices, ultimately determining her tragic fate. Unlike Rachel, Megan never confronted her pain, resulting in a bleak and unresolved ending.

Anna significantly contributed to the themes of dishonesty and betrayal in the narrative. She became Tom’s wife after leaving Rachel for her. She seemed satisfied and confident in her new life. She didn’t like Rachel’s presence and felt uncertain about her relationship with Tom. She remained loyal to him and ignored any doubts about his actions. Later she learned the truth about his lies and manipulation. Their history showed the effects of deception, trust, and blind love.

Anna Watson, who was experiencing emotional and mental difficulties with Paula Hawkin on the train, seemed to be leading an idyllic existence. Rachel experienced triumph and felt that she had created a lovely family with Tom and her daughter Evie, just like the new lady in Tom. However, Rachel’s constant presence caused her fear and frustration. Rachel frequently called out what Anna felt was uncertain in her home and visited. Over time Anna realizes that Tom is manipulative and injustice. Anna deteriorated when she discovered the truth about Tom. She discovers that he is a liar and dangerous person, which has led to a relationship with her. Like Rachel, she was manipulated and controlled. Her pain reached its peak when she learned about Megan Tom’s loss of disappearance. This forced her to face the truth about the man she married. Ultimately, they urged the fear and pain to take action. She played an important role in the novel climax. Her journey from confidence to fear and her emotional struggles showed her.

“I can’t move, can’t breathe.
I play it again and again.
My throat is closed, I feel as though
I’m going to faint, and then the light
comes on upstairs.” (GT.264)

Anna was completely disabled and struggled to breathe as the fear consumed her. Her mind repeated the situation and strengthened her needs. She tightened her neck and felt unsteady, giving her a sense of her being taken over. The sudden appearance of light on the upper floor increases the fear, indicating an imminent conflict or shocking knowledge. This moment shows her suffering as she had overwhelming fear, helplessness, and emotional disorder.

Tom reveals Anna by deceiving Rachel when he deceives her. She believed he was the loving husband who left Rachel due to her instability. However, with the revelation of the truth, she recognized that he had consistently deceived her. He manipulates her to what she thinks is special, but he continues to cheat him and deals with Megan. His betrayal destroyed her perception of marriage and made her manipulate. She was once proud to be the woman who chose Rachel, but, in the end, she realized that she had only been another victim of his lies.

Tom presented himself as a devoted spouse to Anna, although he was duplicitous and insincere. He felt safe as she continued to lie and revealed her. Anna trusted him unaware of the depths of his deception.

Paula Hawkins, *the girl on the train*, shows an emotional battle between Rachel, Megan, and Anna. They all saw the pain, betrayal, and pressure in society's expectations. Rachel suffered from addiction and self-debt due to Tom's lies. Megan's past trauma leads her to make harmful decisions, and Anna realizes that it is too late for Tom to deceive her. The novel highlights the impact of abuse, trust, and the quest for truth. It showed how lies can infect people with pain and how reality is the first step towards healing.

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