

Memory and Perception in The Girl on the Train: From Literary Structure to Cinematic Adaptation

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Abstract

The complex interaction of memory and perception in Paula Hawkins's psychological thriller The Girl on the Train and its film version is investigated in this paper. The book and the movie both examine the fractured and erratic character of human memory, therefore illuminating how trauma and personal prejudices skew view. This research emphasises the dynamic transfer of these ideas across media by evaluating the narrative strategies and structural decisions in the book along with the visual and audible aspects in the movie. By means of an investigation of character development and the narrative techniques used, the study emphasises the part memory and perspective play in building reality and hence determining the audience's conception of truth.

Keywords : Memory, Perspective, Unreliable Narrator, Psychological Thriller, Literary Adaption, Paula Hawkins, The Girl On The Train.

British novelist Paula Hawkins is well recognised for her psychological thrillers, which enthrall readers with their riveting stories and sophisticated characters. Hawkins, who was born on August 26, 1972, in Salisbury, Rhodesia, eventually relocated to London and attended the University of Oxford studying philosophy, politics, and economics.

She spent 15 years working as a journalist for magazines like The Times before switching to fiction. Her experience in journalism shaped her keen narrative style and meticulous attention to detail. With her 2015 first novel, *The Girl on the Train*, which became a worldwide success selling millions of copies and ranking weeks at the top of bestseller lists, Paula Hawkins gained international recognition. Later, Emily Blunt starred in a great Hollywood movie based on the novel. Paula Hawkins's art has brought her several honours. 2016 saw her win the Audie Award for Audiobook of the Year for *The Girl on the Train*. Readers voted for her 2015 Goodreads Choice Award for Mystery & Thriller.

Carefully spun into the framework of a psychological thriller, Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train* offers a fascinating analysis of memory and perspective. Emphasising her problem with fractured memory and self-perception, Rachel notes as she considers "I have lost control over everything, even the places in my head" (Hawkins, 2015, p. 17). The book uses Rachel, an unreliable narrator whose fractured memories and poor judgement centre the tension and

uncertainty of the story. Rachel's battles with emotional trauma and drinking impair her capacity to separate fact from fantasy, which results in her unreliability.

With changing points of view among Rachel, Megan, and Anna, the broken narrative structure represents the shattered recollections and varied views of reality among the individuals. Hawkins's deft use of time and perspective completely envelops readers in the doubt the heroes experience. Rachel's comment, "There's something comforting about the sight of strangers safe at home" (Hawkins, 2015, p. 45), emphasises how her inner turmoil sometimes finds a counterpoint in her outside views. This narrative tool not only heightens suspense but also challenges readers to consider the nature of truth and dependability in narrative.

Tate Taylor's film version of *The Girl on the Train* uses certain cinematic methods to portray the instability of memory, therefore transforming these ideas into a visual media. Still, the adaptation veers from the book in some important respects. The movie moves the narrative from England to the United States, therefore changing the cultural setting and character relationships. Though visually arresting, this geographical relocation alters several subtleties of the protagonists' life, including the commuting experience Rachel's observations throughout the book centre on. To show Rachel's shattered viewpoint, the movie uses flashbacks, twisted images, and jumbled editing. This is the way the book shows Rachel saying, "I'm not the girl I used to be. Reflecting her problem with identity and dependability, I am no longer appealing and am off-putting in some sense (Hawkins, 2015, p. 62). The way Emily Blunt portrays Rachel catches the emotional upheaval and uncertainty of a heroine juggling inconsistent memories. Lighting and sound design help to heighten the disorientation, therefore converting the psychological profundity of the book into a sensual experience.

Through close and often erratic monologues, the book envelops readers in the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters; the cinema presents this complexity utilising visual and aural signals. Rachel's internal experience in the book, for instance, is turned into visual storytelling with scenes meant to externalise her challenges—though sometimes this results in the psychological depth found in the book sacrificed. Preserving the psychological nuances of the work depends on the change from internal monologues to visible actions and expressions—natural for the film media. Though some reviewers contend that its simplified storyline and character development provide a less complex study than the book, the movie does a good job of capturing the ideas of memory distortion and subjective reality.

Within the larger field of literary adaptation, *The Girl on the Train* is a shining example of the careful balance between honouring the source material and changing the story to fit the strengths of the cinematic media. Condensing complex narratives and character arcs into a restricted running time is a difficulty for adaptations that results in required changes either simplifying or eliminating certain sections. In this instance, the movie uses visual and aural devices to depict the psychological suspense of the book, however certain minute narrative elements are always missed. Moving the scene from London to New York City, for instance, changes the commuter experience and influences the thematic relevance as well as the everyday lives of the people.

Adapting literary works for films has been a habit from the early days of film, when directors often borrowed ideas from famous books and plays to draw viewers acquainted with the original story. At first, adaptations gave literal translations of story and characters with few changes top priority. But as adaptation theory developed, it became clear that rereading stories would be necessary to fit the visual and chronological constraints of films.

Scholars such as Linda Hutcheon, in her 2006 book "A Theory of Adaptation," contend that adaptation is a naturally interpretative process that lets artists rethink tales in ways that appeal to fresh audiences and media. As evidenced by *The Girl on the Train*'s change from a literary

psychological thriller to a visually orientated cinematic experience, this framework emphasises the artistic license often employed in adaptations.

The process of adaptation emphasises the use of visual metaphors and cinematic devices in communicating ideas the book deftly explores via language. Rachel's faulty memory is reflected in techniques such as twisted camera angles, sudden cuts, and fractured memories, thereby graphically depicting her inner conflict. These components show how story themes could be reinterpreted in films to provide a unique yet complimentary rendition of the work. But as evidenced by critical reactions to *The Girl on the Train*, these reinterpretations may start discussions on the balance between creative liberties and accuracy to the original material.

Literary adaptations can provide chances to bring a narrative to fresh readers. Film viewers experience the story via a different sensory media while readers sink themselves into Hawkins' language and Rachel's inner monologue, therefore maybe leading to different interpretations of the same occurrences. This juxtaposition underlines the flexibility of storytelling in many media and the special power of literature and films in addressing subjects like memory and perspective.

Uncovering the main enigma in the book and the movie depends on the interaction between memory and perspective. Rachel's effort to piece her memories together and find the truth about Megan's abduction exposes the frailty and subjectivity of human knowledge. Emphasising her need on outside validation among her inner conflict, she says, "It's impossible to resist the kindness of strangers, isn't it?" (Hawkins, 2015, p. 89). Examining trauma and how it affects memory enriches the psychological depth of the narrative and connects with viewers on both literary and film front lines.

Through her sophisticated narrative structure, the *Girl on the Train* questions conventional narrative by examining the fluid and subjective character of memory and perception. The recurring line, "I am not the girl I used to be" (Hawkins, 2015, p. 114) captures the protagonist's inner conflict and changing conception of reality. The change from book to movie emphasises even more how these ideas may be adapted throughout other media, showing the distinct approaches literature and movies explore human cognition and reality.

The attention of the book on memory and perception relates to more general subjects in contemporary psychological thrillers. Stories like Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* also expose how personal prejudices impact one's perspective of the reality, therefore challenging viewers about what is true. "Love makes you want to be a better man," the protagonist of Flynn notes. Emphasising how psychological thrillers frequently blur the line between fact and deceit, urging readers to actively piece together the truth, maybe love—real love—also gives you permission to simply be the guy you are.

This difficulty is clear in *The Girl on the Train* when the movie substitutes visual and audible narrative for Rachel's own thoughts. The adaptation discovers fresh approaches to depict the psychological depth of the book by reflecting her fractured condition of mind using cinematic devices. Ultimately, both the book and the film versions of *The Girl in the Train* highlight issues of memory, perception, and reality, thereby illustrating how erratic human ideas and recollections could be. Paula Hawkins' book explores the inner conflicts of the characters profoundly by means of fractured narrative and an unreliable narrator. Using flashbacks and distorted visuals to convey the same feeling of uncertainty and suspense, the film graphically adapts these themes. The movie catches the key principles even if it simplifies some of the fresh elements. Together, they show how psychological thrillers can profoundly captivate viewers by delving into trauma, identity, and the hazy boundaries separating truth from fantasy.

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