



## POETIC JUSTICE IN PAULA HAWKINS' *THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN*

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### ABSTRACT

*The Girl on the Train starts with the flashback introducing the previous life of the main character of the novel, rather heroine of the novel, Rachel. She is a divorcee and lives alone with her friend, Cathy. Simultaneously she had a friend named Megan who used to work in a gallery. Rachel has no job and house. She has hired an apartment and she travels daily in the train in the morning to show herself as a working woman with job and returns in the evening. This is to show herself as earning-hand, lest her house owner should ask her to leave the house. She wants to remain in the same colony because it is attached with her past memories of married life. She visits gallery and libraries frequently to kill her time and sometime she is seated at the public places uselessly, and sometimes goes to the pubs. Habitual of alcohol, Rachel is always dreaming about an ideal and happy life. On the way in the train, she now and then finds a couple seated on the balcony of the adjoining house, sometime drinking coffee and sometime wine. She used to live in the same colony with her ex-husband Tom and the construction of the house was the same. She imaginatively names this couple as Jason and Jess.*

The story of the novel begins on July 5, 2013 and comes to an end on Sep.10, 2013, including the old memories of Megan and her life during May16, 2012 to Sep.25, 2012. She was murdered and the culprit is still unknown. The whole story revolves around Megan's murder mystery and Rachel's past married life. The book contains thirty-eight chapters. The novel is written in the Subjective style and all chapters are dedicated to the three leading women of the novel: in nineteen chapters Rachel herself narrates the story, Anna is second main character of the book describing the story in ten chapters, and last of all is Megan who moves the story forward in nine chapters only. Although the mails in the novel are good enough as well as bad yet the novel is female dominant. Females are superior to males in the novel. These women feel useless and dependent upon the respective men but they are obstinate enough to live the life according to their own ideals. They love their men but can't compromise with their evil aspect.

All three women of the novel are highly romantic in cherishing the emotions of love but gradually they become cautious towards the realism. Rachel is the heroine of the novel and

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1P a g e

deals with her past married life with Tom. She and her husband wanted a baby but they could not, and it was some incompetency from the side of Rachel. She now started to consume alcohol and started to suspect on her husband whether he had another affair with another women. It resulted in the break of their marital relations. She has no job and no money sometime. She is still so deep in love with her husband that she constantly haunts him but she is so hypertensive sometimes that her activities are unpredictable. She says, “I humiliated my husband at a summer barbecue by shouting abuses at the wife of one of his friends.”(P.22) Love between Jess and Jason is nothing but the hidden desire of her heart but her eccentric attitude is notable when she says, “Jason loves her, I can see it, they’re happy. I can’t believe she would do that to him, he doesn’t deserve that. I feel a real sense of disappointment, I feel as though I have been cheated.”(P.37) On the one hand, Jess and Jason are happy and she is sure of it while on the other hand, she assumes that “he doesn’t deserve it”. Rachel is a miserable character, sad at heart, misused and misbehaved by her husband as he has many affairs and he can reconcile her easily, “my husband was in love with her” (P. 38) Before marriage Tom saved her from grief when her father died but now she is “barren, divorced, soon-to-be-homeless alcoholic.” (P.57) When Rachel looks Tom from the train, she says, “picking up his little girl, giving her a kiss, embracing his wife. The dagger in my heart twists, round and round and round.” (P.155)

Rachel had a friend named Megan who worked in a Gallery where Rachel too, used to go to spend her time. Her other best friend, Lara has had two children. Though, “there was no problem with Tom’s virility” yet she is egoist enough to think that both of them “should share the blame; it was all down to me.” (P.84) Rachel is sometimes highly realistic when she says, “women are still really valued for two things – their looks and their role as mothers. I am not beautiful, and I can’t have kids, so what does that make me? Worthless.” (P.85) She is sad about her parents, abusive uncle, her alcoholism but highly depressed now for children, love and respect from the worldly people. “Parents don’t care about anything but their children; they are the centre of the universe; they are all that really counts. Nobody else is important, no one else’s suffering or joy matters, none of it is real.” (P.86) Megan was very happy with her brother Ben but he died and she started her love affair with the best friend of his brother. She became pregnant while unmarried. She quarreled with her boy-friend who runs away from her company. The child is dead and buried. This story is unknown to everyone. Now Megan is married with Scot who has his own work of IT consultant. After some time Megan conceives but she is not sure whether the father of the to-be baby was her husband or Tom. Megan disappears on the Friday night. The same night Rachel wanted to meet with her ex-husband, Tom. She was drunk. She looked Megan in the car with Tom but thought that she was Anna. She shouts and abuses her. In the meantime, Tom hits her head with some keys and she faints. She forgets everything under inebriety. Actually, this was Megan who wanted to explain her pregnancy to Tom. Tom took her to forest, killed her without intention and buried there in hurry during the rain. Thus, Megan is disappeared.



One day, during her daily travel, Rachel had looked a man kissing to Megan on the balcony of her house. She could not recognize the man but she was sure that it was somebody other than Scott, rather Dr. Kamal Abdic, a psychotherapist. Rachel is highly emotional about this case and she asserts, “I was in some way involved in Megan’s disappearance.” (P.75) Rachel suspects Abdic and expresses this before Police and Scott too. She now meets Scott near the house of Anna and her ex-husband, perhaps to see Tom or to have friendship with Scott. She is a part of the mystery and she is connected to it and wanted “Megan to turn up safe and sound.” (P.95) All of it shows Rachel’s heroic quality that she was not deeply attached with Megan, yet, she wanted her safe. That is why she involves in this murder mystery. She feels, as Megan’s friends say, that she was, “wonderful, funny, beautiful, war-hearted. Loved. She made a mistake. It happens. None of us perfect.” (P.111)

There are two main mail persons excluding Kamal Abdic who is neatly and cleanly adhered to his profession. Megan used to consult there with him about her past and present along with Rachel. Dominant women in the novel know very well that they are going to do something wrong but they forgive themselves soon and don’t forget to indulge in the misdeeds again. Rachel admits her mistakes before Tom, “my drinking had cost me my marriage and my job, it was costing me my health, obviously, and I feared it might cost me my sanity, too.” (P.190) Megan goes to Kamal for consultation but tries to love him, and this drawback became the reason of her death as she had indulged many times is adultery with Tom, not seriously but as a game. Rachel too, helps Scott but looks the signs and possibilities of adultery with him. Both of the women have double standard. They are possessive about their husbands but not aloof from other men. Rachel too, have been “close enough to touch” (P.188) Scott. Rachel makes her mind soon to come to any outcome but soon she alters it. She changes her conviction about Megan when she came to know her reality about her affair, pregnancy and child. “She wasn’t a loving wife. She wasn’t even a good person. She was liar, a cheat. She was a killer.” (P.208)

Rachel at last concludes that, “I remember curling in it, feeling safe and happy, thinking this is what marriage is – safe, warm, comfortable.” (P.300) She can’t compromise with the evils, even with her husband. Though she finds it full of solace when Tom used to console her yet, “he’s a master at it, making me feel as though everything is my fault, making me feel worthless.” (P.309) This is contradictory feeling that she needs to be consoled but she feels herself not inferior to males, this makes her unpredictable and dominant character of the novel.

Tom is main male character of the novel, out of humour, sexually presumptuous, ornery and dull person who hardly can utter any interesting thing about anything. If there is any villain in the novel, he is Tom. He has no connection with his parents now, because he had spent the whole money of his parents and ran away from them because, “his father declined to remortgage their house in order to lend him more money. He lied all the time, about

everything. Even when he didn't need to, even when there was no point."(P.313) He is a philanderer and does not take any woman seriously. They are toys for him. In the last of the novel his character comes to light when Rachel recollects her memory with the help of the person who had seen her at the Friday night. She goes to Anna to run away with her daughter so that they may escape from Tom but Anna denies. Anna does not believe her for two reasons: Anna thinks that Rachel wants to steal her husband from her, and, once she had tried to harm her daughter (though this is not true, she kissed the baby and ran away when she observed Anna). Rachel told Anna that Tom was a liar. He tells stories about his job. He killed Megan to conceal his affair and suggested her to abort. Tom becomes merciless with Rachel when he comes to know that Rachel knows about the murder. He wants to kill her but she escapes and runs towards garden where he catches her. Tom compares her activities with a dog. Rachel explains Tom's character in the end, "Tom's whole life was constructed on lies – falsehoods and half-truths told to make him look better, stronger, more interesting than he was." She says this before Anna to save her, "I wonder whether we would have loved the weaker, flawed, unembellished version" (P.313)

Tom can do anything to keep himself safe. He confesses his mistakes before Anna to win her favour but he could not control his anger as usual, and hits in Rachel's head. He runs behind her with a corkscrew and catches her. Rachel snatches corkscrew from him and stabs him in the throat. All of a sudden Anna comes there and twists the corkscrew in his neck to kill him. Tom dies and Anna confesses before Police that she tried to stop his blood but could not. At last the villain meets to his fate.

Megan, after the death of her brother Ben in a motorcycle accident, became alone and loved his friend Mac, who ran away from her because Megan wanted another home in place of the old one. She wants to live a new life and buries her child stealthily. She is married with Scott but not satisfied with her because he has no humour and fun. He is busy with his work and gives not much time for romance. Megan is tensed and consults Kamal Abdic about her problems. All of it seems a new starting to enthrall him for love. The same mistake she committed with Tom that she goes out with him frequently for love and romance, resulting into pregnancy. Tom wants to get rid of the child because she would prove to be, "a terrible mother" but Megan's intention is something different, and she asserts, "I am going to make you pay for this. For the rest of your bloody life you're going to be paying for this." (P.299)

Megan is killed by Tom. He digs and engraves her in the rain but Police searched the body. Investigation is going on but Police gets misleading tips many times. Megan cheated an innocent husband like Scott. She has been the murderer of her daughter. She did not compromise with her poverty for some time which for Mac had assured her. She is ambitious and unreal to the conjugal life. As a mother and wife she is a bare failure and meets to death at last. On the other hand, it seems treacherous in the reference of her daughter which met

death for no fault. Scott, too, had to suffer a lot for no fault due to the frivolity and adultery of Megan. His mistake is that he could not recognize her and believed her.

Dr. Kamal Abdic is a true professional. He is seriously concerned to his business of a psychiatrist. He is flirted by Megan and other customers but he very cleverly diverts them to his own intention. He proves to be a man of stern character. That is why that he is safe and happy after many allegations on him before Police. In this way we find that his honesty is rewarded in the novel. Anna is a good wife, good mother but too much contemptuous towards Rachel. Though she loves Tom with her whole heart, yet she suspects at his activities. All of the doubts against Tom are not in vain; he himself has given clues to it. Consequently, she searches password to open Tom's laptop and finds many reasons that Tom is a liar. She is eccentric enough to doubt: always tries to reach conclusion without seeing the other aspect of the situation. Rachel entered into her house and took the baby in arms and kissed her. It was necessarily her ardent love and keen desire for a child. She meant no harm for the baby but Anna took it as if she tried to kidnap the baby. At last we see her transformation in the last chapter that she twists the corkscrew in the throat of her husband and kills her. She proves to be honest and now she seems to pass a pleasant life with her daughter but she lost her husband for the mistakes like hatred and suspicion.

*The Girl on the Train* is filled with the whiff of ideology of the females who are compelled to live divided and shattered life. It presents the real ordinary women like Rachel, who all the time is haunted by the idea to recollect her memory about the details of the drunken night and her wound in the head. *The Girl on the Train* is a book filled with thrill and mystery. It is not easy to put the novel down when once started to read. This novel is Hawkins' first one filled with thrill, yet, it seems that she, in place of journalism, is trained to create twists and mystery. The novel is written in the subjective theory of narration and all three main females are the narrators. Chapters of the novel have been narrated by Rachel, Anna and Megan. Thus, it is mainly the story of the shattered women who need care, love, shelter, respect and a place of equality with men. They are not accustomed to live in the boundaries of closed doors. Even Cathy, an ideal friend to Rachel, every week, and whenever she gets chance, likes to go out with her boy-friend. Their Fate is different. Rachel is unlucky, obsessed, and from a drinker she turns into a drunkard; Megan is complicated, manic, voluble, sometime frivolous and sometime austere; and Anna is possessive enough for new love of Rachel's Tom and envious for Rachel.

The prospect of *The Girl on the Train* is tricky and gripping. Hawkins uses the technique cleverly. All chapters are filled with deep attention and the picture becomes breathtaking before the mystery is solved. The plot construction is excellent and cinematic, not screaming in prose but wrestled with thrills. The treatment of 'Poetic Justice' is exuberant in the novel; guilty is punished and the honest is rewarded. All of them get the punishment of their



mistakes and Rachel is found to see the graves of Megan and her little one in the end of the novel.

## REFERENCES

All quotations have been taken from:

Hawkins, Paula, *The Girl on the Train* (London: Doubleday) 2015.

### NOTE:-

Paula Hawkins, daughter of a Professor of Economics and journalist, was born on August 26, 1972 in Salisbury, Rhodesia, at present Harare in Zimbabwe, and got her primary education in Arundel School, later at an independent College named Collingham College, and Kensington College. In 1989 she moved to London at an age of seventeen. She studied there Economics, Politics and Philosophy in Keble College, Oxford University. She worked as a journalist in *The Times* and wrote a number of books on a freelance basis along with a financial book, *The Money Goddess* to advice women. Hawkins adopted the pen name as Amy Silver and started to write romantic comedies around the year 2009 and wrote four comedies. Her novel *The Girl on the Train* (January 2013) is best-selling novel on the basic theme of domestic violence and social evils like drug abuse and alcoholism. This novel she completed in six months and it has been filmed this year. At present she lives in South of London.