Narrative Unreliability in Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train* as a Strategy of Reader Immersion

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Abstract

This paper considers the narratological phenomenon of unreliable narration in the novel The Girl on the Train *by Paula Hawkins, concentrating on mechanisms of reader perception. Starting with a survey of the main contemporary definitions of unreliable narration as well as sources of unreliability, the article moves to the problem of how unreliable narration can influence a reader of the analysed text, discussing ways in which unreliability combines with other aspects of the narrative. The effect of unreliable narration on the reader is examined in terms of recipient immersion. The disclosure of unreliable statments, the search for truth hidden beneath the cover of narration, along with the recuperation of the "reliability" of the narrator are viewed as supplementary objects of the reader's interest during text perception. Attention is focused on two components of reader gratification as manifest in Hawkins' novel: intellectual satisfaction due to the solution of the murder mystery (temporal immersion), as well as satisfaction resulting from the protagonist's psychic recovery and revenge (emotional immersion). The last section of the paper compares the reader's perception of the novel with the viewer's reactions to a screen version directed by Tate Taylor.*

Keywords

unreliable narrator, narrative, the reader, immersion, sources of unreliability, The Girl on the Train, Paula Hawkins

In search of definition

The phenomenon of unreliable narration has commanded great attention from contemporary narratologists. In 1961 Wayne C. Booth proposed a definition: "I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not."[1] Since then, many narratologists such as Seymour Chatman, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan and Dan Shen have adhered to this definition.

Nevertheless, modern interpretations of the concept vary among different branches of narratology. Understandings of unreliable narration within the realms of rhetorical and cognitive narratology are especially discrepant, with the former carrying on Booth's tradition in a more straightforward way, and the latter modifying aspects of it.

Rhetorical narratologists James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin in particular accept Booth's definition, extending and elaborating on it by adding to Booth's axes of events and values one more axis, that of knowledge/perception: "… a homodiegetic narrator is 'unreliable' when he or she offers an account of some event, person, thought, thing, or other object in the narrative world that deviates from the account that the implied author would offer."[2]

It should be noted that this paradigm does not change the essence of Booth's definition, but complicates relationships between these instances, with each representing not a particular person but only a speculative structure.

1 Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 158–159.

2 James Phelan, "Estranging Unreliability, Bonding Unreliability, and the Ethics of Lolita," *Narrative* 15 (2007): 94.

Tamar Yacoby's conception of the hypothetical nature of this methodology, i.e. one that fulfils itself only in the interpretation process, is one of the most noteworthy contemporary approaches to the concept of unreliable narration. Yacoby claims that unreliability is a reading hypothesis: "one that is formed in order to resolve textual problems (from unaccountable detail to self-contradiction) at the expense of some mediating, perceiving, or communicating agent – particularly the global speaker – at odds with the author."[3] Yacoby emphasizes the relative nature of unreliability, according to which narratives interpreted as reliable in one world-view, authorial or generic framework can be considered unreliable in another one.

The German cognitive narratologist Ansgar F. Nünning has criticized Booth's conception of narrative unreliability, relating how: 1) Booth's definition refers to the quite fuzzy notion of the implied author; 2) the reader's role in the unreliable narrative perception is underestimated.[4]

Nünning insists that the information upon which the phenomenon of unreliable narration is based can be found not only in the text; models and schemes within the recipient's consciousness also contain elements of unreliability: "[W]hether a narrator is regarded as unreliable not only depends on the distance between the norms and values of the narrator and those of the text as a whole (or of the implied author) but also on the distance that separates the narrator's view of the world from reader's or critic's world-model and standards of normalcy, which are themselves, of course, subject to change."[5]

Nünning reproaches philologists for their unwillingness to admit that immanent epistemological, ontological, psychological, moral and / or linguistic norms are present in any reader's consciousness, as well as "assumptions that are rooted in a liberal humanist view of literature."[6] In addition, Nünning states that Booth's traditional interpretation of unreliable narration is based on an objectivistic world-view which assumes the existence of the only one true "authoritative version of events" and criticizes this epistemological premise of the definition.[7]

Based on these premises, Nünning tries to build a new theory of unreliable narration upon a world model with different values and norms, along with the reader's or critic's mindset and interaction between textual and extra-textual information. He considers unreliability as an interpretative strategy of text reading through which the reader resolves ambiguities and textual inconsistencies of the narration.

I estimate Nünning's approach to unreliability as the most relevant and appropriate for the cognitive narratology studies of the considered problem since it devotes particular attention to the cognitive mechanisms of reader's perception of the text. Thus it is to Nünning's theory that will refer to most often in my analysis of the influence of narrative unreliability regarding the reader's interpretation of the fictional text.

3 Tamar Yacobi, "Authorial Rhetoric, Narratorial (Un)Reliability, Divergent Readings: Tolstoy's Kreutzer Sonata," in *A companion to narrative theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 110.

4 Ansgar F. Nünning, "Reconceptualizing Unreliable Narration: Synthesizing Cognitive and Rhetorical Approaches," in *A companion to narrative theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 89–107.

5 Nünning, "Reconceptualizing Unreliable Narration," 95.

6 Nünning, "Reconceptualizing Unreliable Narration," 95–96.

7 Nünning, "Reconceptualizing Unreliable Narration," 96.

Thus unreliable narration implies a strategy of text interpretation programmed by the author based on the reader's doubt concerning correspondences between the content of the narrator's story and fictional world properties, properties of the characters involved, relationships among all of these parameters, as well as the formal functions and roles which a particular character plays in the narrative structure. Ideas regarding a lack of correspondence are formed within the scope of the narration itself as well as within the scope of other narrative and non-narrative means. The strategy of unreliable narration presupposes the gradual resolution of narrative contradictions in conformity with the reader's conception of narrator's intentions, motives and functions. Untrustworthy narration is an integral part of this strategy, with particular forms, i.e. homodiegetic, heterodiegetic, etc. within a fictional work stipulating specific structural and temporal peculiarities of different modes of exposition.

Investigations carried out by such narratologists as Marissa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon, Monika Fludernik, Ansgar F. Nünning, Greta Olson, Tamar Yacobi, James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin[8] have laid out the methodological foundations of the narrative unreliability studies. Despite the diversity of their approaches, they are all united by an assertion about redirection of the reader's attention from the narrated events to the narration itself.

Influence of the unreliable narration on the reader

Such a specific narrative strategy as unreliable narration highly influences the reader's perception modus of the work. The present paper about the transference of the reader's attention from the events narrated to the act of narration itself is the common denominator of statements by scholars concerning this influence. Uri Margolin asserts that by representing a narrator as a figure which can possibly be viewed by readers as unreliable, an author shifts attention from *what* is being narrated to *how*, i.e. to the narrative process and and the narrator him/herself as well as to the circumstances and the ways of informing (2015).

Even though Wayne C. Booth generally does not include the reader's perspective into his basic model of the unreliability effect, he does raise particular ideas about the recipient's response to unreliable narration. Booth describes the reader's pride and satisfaction regarding his/her realization of the narrator's unreliability and about his/her sense of "collusion with the silent author."[9] Booth

8 See: Marissa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon, *Psychonarratology. Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literary Response* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Monika Fludernik, "Defining (In)sanity: The Narrator of The Yellow Wallpaper and the Question of Unreliability," in *Grenzüberschreitungen: Narratologie im Kontext / Transcending Boundaries: Narratology in Context*, ed. Walter Grünzweig and Andreas Solbach (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1999); Ansgar F. Nünning, "Reconceptualizing Unreliable Narration: Synthesizing Cognitive and Rhetorical Approaches," in *A companion to narrative theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Blackwell Publishing, 2005); Greta Olson, "Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators," *Narrative* 2, no. 1 (2003): 93–109; Tamar Yacobi, "Authorial Rhetoric, Narratorial (Un)Reliability, Divergent Readings: Tolstoy's Kreutzer Sonata," in *A companion to narrative theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Blackwell Publishing, 2005); James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin, "The Lessons of Weymouth: Homodiegesis, Unreliability, Ethics and The Remains of the Day," in *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*, ed. David Herman (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999); etc.

9 Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 305.

also assumes a certain ambiguity and inconsistency regarding the recipient's feelings about being repelled by a narrator's faults and at the same time attracted by this act of his (self)revelation.[10]

Phelan and Martin see in the recipient's actions the same contradiction describing in general two types of the reader reactions to perceived narrative unreliability. "When readers understand that a narrator's information can't be taken as the truth: (1) They reject those words and, if possible, reconstruct a more satisfactory account; (2) they […] accept what the narrator says but then supplement the account."[11]

Greta Olson tends to reify Booth's model of unreliable narration and offers a distinction between two types – "fallible" and completely "untrustworthy." Olson in turn separates reader strategies of perception into these types. In particular, "fallible narrators do not reliably report on narrative events because they are mistaken about their judgments or perceptions or are biased," i.e. not with the marked intention of deception.[12] The fallible mode can be characteristic of child narrators, as children are generally seen as lacking experience or knowledge, or of adult narrators whose own sources of information are untrustworthy or insufficient. Readers take such narrators as persons led astray by external circumstances, thus their unreliability can be justified.

Olson insists on the essential discrepancy between readers' reactions to these two types of narration, e.g. the untrustworthy narrator elicits in the reader scepticism and elicits in the reader the intention to amend inconsistencies, e.g. by imagining another narrative mode in which could more dependable information could be communicated.[13] Nevertheless, Olson does not eliminate the probability of two-way crossing between these types of narrators.

Tamar Yacobi projects the reader of unreliable information as putting forward various hypotheses and their subsequent transformation, i.e. adjustment, a conflicting interpretation or the replacement of one hypothesis by another one. As mentioned above, Yacobi underscores the relativity of the reader's estimation of a narration as reliable or unreliable. The scholar argues that the source of this relativity is a diversity of principles or mechanisms of the narrated data integration as well as the complicated interaction between them. Yacobi outlines five main mechanisms of such integration: existential, functional, generic, perspectival, and genetic mechanisms.[14]

In contemporary narrative studies it is often noted that the moment of discovering the (possible) unreliability of a narrator holds a high cognitive potential, e.g. comparable with a sudden insight by a detective or psychologist. Monika Fludernik points to the similarity of perception in famous examples of unreliable narration to detective activity:

> readers experience a moment of revelation (not to say epiphany) when discovering the "truth" or the secret about the narrator persona. This moment of revelation accounts for the postulation of collusion with the implied author: when readers discover the secret, they are "in the know" and they can congratulate themselves on having unearthed the figure in the carpet, the secret which the implied author was trying to impart.[15]

10 Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 240.

11 Phelan and Martin, "The Lessons of Weymouth," 94.

12 Olson, "Reconsidering Unreliability," 101.

13 Olson, "Reconsidering Unreliability," 102.

14 Yacobi, "Authorial Rhetoric," 110–111.

15 Fludernik, "Defining (ln)sanity," 78.

Greta Olson also draws this analogy between reading unreliable narration and detective activity, as readers and critics have to decide how trustworthy a narrator is.[16]

Marissa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon compare the reception of the unreliable narration with the work of psychologists, i.e. readers can draw their own conclusions concerning the events of the narrated world taking into account the specific knowledge and aims of a narrator. Generalizing unreliable narration's helpful influence on recipient's consciousness, the scholars state: "Reading the narrative of a mentally unstable narrator may have the effect of increasing the reader's sympathy, tolerance, and understanding, placing the reader in the position of a privileged 'psychologist'."[17]

All the ideas considered above refer to the important role which the reader plays in the process of unreliability interpretation. Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck claim that unreliability is derived not from the text itself or its correspondence with the implied author but from the specific of the reader's expectations.[18] Thus the reader's consciousness is one of the key concepts for understanding of mechanisms of the unreliable narration influence.

One of the most recipient-oriented interpretations regarding the impact of unreliable narration is put forth by Ansgar F. Nünning. He focuses on the presence of certain "referential frames," categorizing certain parameters of the perception of narrative within the reader's consciousness. Nünning argues that the first referential frame "should be based on the readers' empirical experience and criteria of verisimilitude. This frame depends on the assumption that the text refers to or is at least compatible with the so-called real world and allows us to determine reliability according to the narrator's behavior in relation to the norms of that world."[19] The second referential frame depends on the reader's acknowledgement of social, moral or linguistic norms relevant in the period of text creation, with the third frame set by psychological knowledge about typical human behaviour.

Moreover, Nünning defines a set of the particular literary frames of reference which can be used to gauge a narrator's unreliability. In his conception, these include general literary conventions, genre and intertextual conventions and models, stereotyped models of characters, as well as specific structures and norms within the literary work itself.[20]

Special attention should be devoted to textual signals as well; these which implicitly or explicitly suggest reader doubt about narrative reliability, with Nünning having proposed the most exhaustive typology of such signals, the importance of which bears citing in full here:

> "(1) the narrator's explicit contradictions and other discrepancies in the narrative discourse; (2) discrepancies between the narrator's statements and actions; (3) divergences between the narrator's description of herself and other characters' descriptions of her; (4) contradictions between the narrator's explicit comments on other characters and her implicit characterization of herself or the narrator's involuntary exposure of herself; (5) contradictions between the narrator's account of events and her explanations and interpretations of the same, as well as contradictions between the story and discourse; (6) other characters' corrective verbal remarks or body signals; (7) multiperspectival

16 Olson, "Reconsidering Unreliability," 103.

17 Bortolussi and Dixon, *Psychonarratology*, 83.

18 Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck. *Handbook of Narrative* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 139.

19 Nünning, "Reconceptualizing Unreliable Narration," 98.

20 Nünning, "Reconceptualizing Unreliable Narration," 98.

> arrangements of events and contrasts between various versions of the same events; (8) an accumulation of remarks relating to the self as well as linguistic signals denoting expressiveness and subjectivity; (9) an accumulation of direct addresses to the reader and conscious attempts to direct the reader's sympathy; (10) syntactic signals denoting the narrator's high level of emotional involvement, including exclamations, ellipses, repetitions, etc.; (l l) explicit, self-referential, metanarrative discussions of the narrator's believability; (12) an admitted lack of reliability, memory gaps, and comments on cognitive limitations; (13) a confessed or situation-related prejudice; (14) paratextual signals such as titles, subtitles, and prefaces."[21]

In spite of the breadth of this unreliability signals system, it seems necessary to add a few more marks conditioned by the genre or thematic of the work, or by the unique features of certain texts such as ironic or humorous tone of the narration, discrepancies among implicit senses of the symbols and mythologemes of the text, as well as explicitly narrated information.

Thus the reader's understanding of fictional narration unreliability activates peculiar ways of reaction to the work which include juxtaposition and adjustment of the material narrated according to everyday experienced data, literary conventions, along with the particular individual's psychological processes and judgments.

Ways of reader immersion in the novel *The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins

The concept of immersion characterizes the reader's attitude to the narrated world and its inhabitants. The term was adopted from virtual reality theory and introduced into narrative studies by Marie-Laure Ryan, who maintains: "In the phenomenology of reading, immersion is the experience through which a fictional world acquires the presence of an autonomous, language-independent reality populated with live human beings."[22] Immersion is grouped by the narratologist into three types: spatial ("response to setting"), temporal ("response to plot"), and emotional ("response to character").[23] Ryan considers temporal immersion to be closely connected to the reader's knowledge in conjunction with the suspense effect, and emotional immersion as sympathy which is not sensitive to a discrepancy between narrated and real worlds. These two modes of immersion are the special objects of the scholar's attention as opposed to the spatial type.

Taking as the point of departure Ryan's conception of temporal and emotional immersion, this paper aims to examine the effects produced by unreliable narration on the reader in Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*, specifically the possible mechanisms of reader perception. The novel was published in 2015 and became a bestseller. It can be classified as a thriller, a genre which has been defined as "a tense, exciting, tautly plotted and sometimes sensational type of novel […] in which action is swift and suspense continual."[24]

21 Nünning's list of signals was adapted by Greta Olson in Greta Olson, "Reconsidering Unreliability," 97–98.

22 Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000), 14.

23 Marie-Laure Ryan, Narrative as Virtual Reality, 121.

24 John Anthony Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1977, 4th edition, London Penguin books, 1999), 914–915.

The story in the novel is narrated by three women, each of whom can be viewed as unreliable: the first narrator is the protagonist, the unemployed, divorced alcoholic Rachel. The second is her rival Anna, the new wife of Rachel's ex-husband, while the third is Megan, a woman who went missing and, as it subsequently turns out, became a victim of a murder.

In pretending that she has a regular work in London, Rachel commutes by train from the suburbs to the city. Each day through the train window Rachel monitors the life of "an ideal couple" residing near her ex-husband's house. She calls them Jason and Jess. Once Rachel notices Jess with a lover, and soon after this day she hears the news that the women (whose real name is Megan) has gone missing. Thus the protagonist feels it her duty to help in the inquiry, an undertaking which at last also leads to the resolution of her own problems.

For the sake of clarity and brevity the present analysis of emotional immersion focuses on the narration of Rachel, the main protagonist of the novel, but in fact, all the significant characters of the novel are considered to be "unreliable" since they are all shown to be dishonest. Rachel, Anna, Megan as well as Megan's husband Scott repeatedly lie to people due to psychological traumas which they have experienced in their past. Even Rachel's almost ideal neighbour Cathy deceives herself about the essence of her relationship with her boyfriend. But it is Tom who is the biggest liar in the world of the novel, and it is through the exposure of his pathological need to tell untruths that underlies the solution of the murder mystery by Rachel.

In terms of the Olson's classification, Rachel may be considered a fallible narrator. She does engage in deception, but her falsehoods centre on unimportant matters to avoid shame, and she is shown to be telling the truth about the most important circumstances of the story in her diary.

Several bases for Rachel's unreliability emerge.

1) The most obvious and surface source is her alcoholism. She does not remember important events and conflates the real world with her imaginative one. (Thus Suzi Feay defines the genre of *The Girl on the Train* as "amnesia thriller.")

2) Rachel has low self-esteem, which also distorts her world-view. She would rather believe somebody else's words then her own convictions. At the end of the novel it is revealed that Rachel's low self-esteem is the direct result of her husband Tom's premeditated actions.

3) Rachel often lies for no reason at all.

4) Her own traumatic experiences also bias her judgements. For instance, when Rachel finds out that Megan has been unfaithful to Scott (as Tom was unfaithful to her) she tries to help Scott to avoid arrest in spite of his suspicious behaviour.

In Paula Hawkins' novel it is relatively easy to detect specific features of emotional and temporal immersion in the fictional world of the work based on unreliable narration, i.e. the emotions accompanying the untrustworthiness and deception are quite distinct.

These signals of unreliability induce increasingly disapproving judgments in the reader regarding the protagonist's unconventional behaviour. Actually, the first signs of what we may call Rachel's unreliability might at first glance be estimated as neutral, i.e. merely as the features of an eccentric or otherwise unusual individual, or in the character's words: "My mother used to tell me that I had an overactive imagination."[25] Even when her alcohol habit is mentioned for the

25 Paula Hawkins, *The Girl on the Train* (London: Riverhead Books, 2016), 15.

first time it does not really draw the reader's condemnation, but here we have the first hint of the games of (self-)perception the character is involved in: "It's Friday, so I don't have to feel guilty about drinking on the train."[26] Thus at the primary stages of the emotional immersion the readers' attitude to the narrator is sympathetic, mostly due to her status of divorcee and her claims of feeling miserable among "flagrantly, aggressively happy" people.

Every sequential diary record provides the reader with increasing conflicting feelings about the protagonist, but these moods are mainly centred on sympathy and irritation. Possible inducements of sympathy are caused by the gradually-revealed recollections of Rachel regarding her childlessness, Tom's adultery, her divorce and her loss of job. ("I have lost control over everything, even the places in my head.")[27] These all can be seen as provoking the recipient's empathy. Thus the sympathetic reader becomes progressively immersed in the fiction world through these revelations of the narrative, e.g. in the record of 9 July 2013, when the narrator overhears Cathy's boyfriend Damien saying that nobody is so "desperate" to go out with Rachel.

However, once the recipient is hooked in terms of attention and empathy, the means of emotional immersion change. Signs of Rachel's disapproval from other people begin to appear in Rachel's narration more frequently. She takes notice of scowling glances and tries to explain them: "I am no longer desirable, I'm off-putting in some way. [I]t's as if people can see the damage written all over me, can see it in my face, the way I hold myself, the way I move."[28] The narrator is conscious of her unseemliness to others in everyday life, yet she cannot change.

But the reader still cannot qualify Rachel as a completely unreliable narrator till the moment when she reports forgetting her night calls to her ex-husband and how she has only recollected them when she finds them in her phone. This moment triggers a stream of self-damning confessions from the girl about the time of her unsuccessful marriage:

> It's not the worst thing I've ever done, it's not as if I fell over in public, or yelled at a stranger in the street. It's not as if I humiliated my husband at a summer barbecue by shouting abuse at the wife of one of his friends. It's not as if we got into a fight one night at home and I went for him with a golf club, taking a chunk out of the plaster in the hallway outside the bedroom.[29]

Such avalanche of discrediting facts about the narrator's life causes the increase of the reader's negative emotional reaction towards Rachel. The denial of her own behaviour, her indignation, and even disgust emotionally colours this stage of the reading process, and we can estimate the strong emotional reaction as a clear sign of reader immersion. It is possible that the contradictions within of the reader's attitude to the protagonist are highly likely to ensure the depth of his/her emotional immersion in the novel. As an example, one reviewer on the Goodreads website reveals that: "I felt a reluctant sympathy for Rachel, she is so totally flawed, seemingly unable to help herself." (sic) [30]

26 Hawkins, *The Girl on the Train*, 17.

27 Hawkins, *The Girl on the Train*, 24.

28 Hawkins, *The Girl on the Train*, 27.

29 Hawkins, *The Girl on the Train*, 30.

30 "The Girl on the Train" on the Goodreads website. Accessed November 4, 2017 https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/22557272–the-girl-on-the-train

The loss of confidence in the narrator's reliability is exacerbated by the lies Rachel tells with no need, for example, while talking to her ex-boss in the cafe when she pretends as if she is waiting there for a job interview. Finally, the readers are given what they can estimate as a definite signal about future adventures connected with the protagonist's psychical instability: "I'm going to do something I will regret."[31] And due to the reader's awareness of the Rachel's amnesia problems, the reader is geared up to embark on an intricate search for the truth during the course of untangling the narration of the unreliable protagonist. On the contrary, for some readers the negative features of the protagonist can be seen as an obstacle to the immersion process, an outcome which also reflected in online reviews. Apparently, in their perception of fiction characters such readers are not used to this identification mechanism, maintaining another set of genre expectations than those appropriate for a thriller.

Nevertheless, before the real story conflict begins many readers have already become emotionally immersed. After having gone through the stages of sympathy, then disapproval, complex feelings of emotional neutrality toward the unreliable narrator emerge, and Rachel's peculiarities regarding her behaviour as well as her narration become intriguing.

It is just at this very moment of the novel that temporal immersion eclipses emotional involvement. From this point on, the answer to the detective's' "Whodunit?" becomes the main object of the reader's involvement.

At first, Rachel's alcoholic amnesia disguises the signs of a big trouble, maybe even a crime. She feels that something has happened but fails to remember what exactly. Due to her "unreliable" status and low self-esteem the girl does not even pay attention to the multiple injuries on her body:

> My upper arms bear more worrying marks, dark, oval impressions that look like fingerprints. This is not necessarily sinister, I have had them before, usually from when I've fallen and someone has helped me up. The crack on my head feels bad, but it could be from something as innocuous as getting into a car. I might have taken a taxi home.[32]

She tries to recollect the events of the previous night but only some emerge in her: she visited Anna and she was beaten up by somebody in a tunnel. Moreover, Rachel cannot get rid of the sensation that she is involved in Megan's disappearance.

The scenes of police interrogations about Rachel's involvement into Saturday night's events provoke a mixed reader's reaction. On the one hand, the reader understands that the girl is lying, and the policemen understand this as well. On the other hand, the reader already sees the motives of this lie and sympathizes with the narrator: "Were you drunk?" "No," I said, keeping my eyes firmly on the detective … "I'd had a couple of drinks in the afternoon, but I wasn't drunk."[33]

The narrator's unreliability complicates the seemingly routine detective activities, and makes them more interesting and adventurous. For one thing, Rachel cannot report to policemen and Scott that she saw Megan with the lover out of the train window, as she fears she will not to be believed because: 1) she has discredited herself by the previous deceptions, and 2) that she would partake in such spying would seem unbelievable. Thus she has to make up alternative intricate

31 Hawkins, *The Girl on the Train*, 55.

32 Hawkins, *The Girl on the Train*, 65.

33 Hawkins, *The Girl on the Train*, 103.

ways to communicate this information to then, including inventing new lies and taking new risks, such as meetings with dangerous people. Quite often the features of Rachel's character (underlying her reliability as a narrator) make for development of the novel's action. For instance, when drunk she goes to talk to Anna, has sex with Scott, and makes complaints to police against Scott without any evidence of his brutality towards her. Thereby we can see that unreliability in the narrative becomes a way to complicate it and to add dynamics to the action.

The recuperation of reliability by Rachel (either as a character or a narrator) is one of the individual objects of the reader's interest. This process starts when the protagonist's story becomes objectified. One of the first steps toward this end is the "diagnosis" made by Detective Sergeant Riley: "I have to say that to me, your behavior suggests that […] you are unwilling to move on, that you refuse to accept that your ex has a new family."[34] In spite of the narrator's denial of this conclusion, after this moment she starts considering her life objectively and entertains her first doubts regarding Tom's sincerity get to her.

The next crucial step on the way to the recovering of Rachel's "reliability" is her visit to the psychotherapist Kamal, who reveals her hidden wish to be punished for being so miserable in a sober state, concluding that the girl is too "hard on herself." The protagonist's conversation with the therapist gives the reader the opportunity to enjoy the feeling of being "a privileged psychologist" (as Bortolussi and Dixon have mentioned). As the reader has already had a chance to draw the same conclusions on basis of the previous narration, a further display of this perspicacity gives him/her even more pleasure.

Since this moment Rachel's recovery process has developed along with the investigation of Megan's murder. Rachel's self-confidence increases as she becomes involved in this practical activity. At last two these inquiries – internal and external – become merged at the moment of Tom's revelation, when Rachel realizes that it was he who convinced her of her "unreliability": "What he told me was a lie. I didn't imagine him hitting me. I remember it. … Just like I remember the fear when I found myself on the floor next to that golf club—and I know now, I know for sure that I wasn't the one swinging it."[35] Immediately after her self-justification, Rachel solves the crime, as her memory comes back to her:

> Everything is a lie. I didn't imagine him hitting me. […] I saw him turn, shout. I saw him walking down the road with a woman, I saw him getting into the car with her. [S]he was wearing jeans and a red T-shirt. She was Megan.[36]

The reader's satisfaction at that moment consists of two components: intellectual gratification due to the murder mystery solution (temporal immersion) and emotional gratification due to the protagonist's psychic recovery and revenge (emotional immersion).

34 Hawkins, *The Girl on the Train*, 118.

35 Hawkins, *The Girl on the Train*, 349.

36 Hawkins, *The Girl on the Train*, 350.

The screen version of *The Girl on the Train*: influence on the viewer

A screen version of Paula Hawkins' novel directed by Tate Taylor and was released on September 27, 2016. It should be noted that this version of the text activates a set of recipient reactions which are different from that of the novel reader. First of all, as far as we have here no narrator of full meaning or such focalization the narration loses part of its immersive potential, mainly concerning the disclosure of Rachel's inner world. First-person narration is used in the film only as a mode of including into the text characteristics of Rachel's personage, thus Rachel's status of unreliable narrator status changes into unreliable personage (protagonist).

In the film, Rachel is also shown as a person who experiences despair, but she is more socialized than the book character (she plays billiards, has drinking companions); she enjoys drawing, brings herself to turn to Alcoholics Anonymous. Actually, the whole line of recipient satisfaction due to his/her psychological perspicacity remains undeveloped in the screen version.

In the book, the reader experiences clear dynamics of the emotional immersion going through consecutive stages of sympathy and disapproval. The observation of this aspect of protagonist's psychic recovery and revenge gives satisfaction to the reader, while the cinema viewer is deprived of this immersion experience. The stages of sympathy and disapproval are here mixed and their development does not follow any clear pattern. For instance, the episode of dramatic conversation about an unsuccessful IVF in the doctor's consulting room (sympathy) follows the scene in which a drunken Rachel calls Tom (disapproval). Then follows the scene when Rachel sees out of the train window Megan and Kamal kissing, and hysterically reacts to this (disapproval) and so on.

Rachel's visit to Kamal Abdic is an important episode in the film, as it provides temporal (not emotional, as in the novel) immersion. Whereas this scene in the book is a trigger for the protagonist's recovery, in the film, a semantic centre of the scene is Rachel's confession that she is afraid of herself. This confession grows into an avalanche of signs-hints which indicate clearly that it was drunken Rachel who had killed Megan and had forgotten about it.

The sequence of scenes sowing into the viewer's mind suspicion that it was Rachel who committed the murder then appear. To begin with, the day before Megan's disappearance, the protagonist becomes hysterical in the toilet scene, screaming out that now she has realized her feeling towards Anna, and this feeling is rage. At this very moment Rachel acknowledges that she wants to kill Anna. Then Detective Riley gives her own account of events according to which Rachel murdered Megan because she took her for Anna by mistake. Afterwards Kathy tells Rachel a story about a man who murdered a family, came back home and could not even remember about this homicide. Further, in the film a recurring scene appears in which Rachel seriously injures that head of blonde woman and drags the woman's body through a house. Presumably this is a vision that Rachel's is having, and it is not known who her victim is.

According to the conventions of the thriller genre, all these signs are aimed at creating a false suspicion. This type of "red herring" effect increases suspense, which in turn raises viewer interest. The film creators have chosen this moment as the pivotal one, thus rejecting other ways to attract the recipient's interest such as the disclosure of the true nature of Rachel's status of unreliable or gratification due to Rachel's psychic recovery and revenge.

Comparing literary and cinematographic works, we can say that the use of unreliable narration is a generally more fruitful technique in fiction writing. A game of "I Doubt It" with the recipient can only be feasible only under condition that a clearly defined narrator is present, i.e. that some aspect of the storytelling can be taken as valid and trustworthy, whereas a film often has no narrators but only characters.

Conclusion

To sum up the above-stated observations, we can say that the process of reader perception of a work with unreliable narration becomes more complicated. Along with the many supplementary objects of interest brought to a text by a reader, works with unreliable narration contain disclosures of unreliable facts, locations of truth hidden under the cover of narration, as well as evidence of the possible recuperation of reliability by the narrator. Thus within the process of reading an unreliable narrative text the recipient's satisfaction is met not only by conflict resolution, but by encountering insights into exactly how and why the real course of events has been distorted within a narrator's mind.

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