



“I Am Not the Girl I Used to Be”: Remembering the Femme Fatale in *The Girl on the Train*

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Abstract. This article situates Rachel from Paula Hawkins’s novel *The Girl on the Train* (2015) as a contemporary incarnation of the femme fatale, redeployed within the domestic noir subgenre. The analysis demonstrates how Rachel’s perspective works to enact a feminist backlash against postfeminist rhetoric.

Paula Hawkins’s novel *The Girl on the Train* (2015) follows the perspectives of three women—Rachel, Megan, and Anna—as their lives become increasingly enmeshed. Central to this entanglement is Tom—Rachel’s ex-husband, Anna’s husband, and Megan’s lover. Rachel, the titular girl on the train, struggles with alcoholism. She longs to return to the apparent safety of domesticity, gazing ceaselessly at the place that she used to live and at Megan’s idyllic life in the neighboring house from the train window. When Megan is reported missing, Rachel sets out to investigate the mystery of her disappearance, uncovering truths much closer to home in the process.

Hawkins’s book is by no means the first novel with *girl* in the title to achieve acclaim. Indeed, following the success of Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl* (2012), *The Girl on the Train* was marketed as “the next *Gone Girl*”—a tagline that has proved prophetic if considered in terms of sales (Dokterman). However, the use of the word *girl* in these titles have multileveled meanings. Jacqueline Rose’s less than favorable review of Hawkins’s book—which also refers to Flynn’s novel—suggests that such titular girls betray a “sly complicity” with the patriarchal “diminishment” of femininity and “a world that still permits it.” This association between the term and the internalized misogyny identified by Rose is drawn from the “instant connotations” apparently evoked by *girl* (Rose). The mode of *girl* found within *The Girl on the Train*, according to Rose, is overtly sexualized, “pliable,” and “ripe for

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