



AMBIGUITY OF EXPERIENCE OF GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND POWER IN INTO THE WATER BY PAULA HAWKINS

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Article history:	Abstract:
<p>Received: 6th May 2022 Accepted: 6th June 2022 Published: 17th July 2022</p>	<p>Feminism has provided critics and researchers with a helpful methodology to scrutinize those literary works that revolve around women's repressive conditions in patriarchal societies. Benefitting from the feminist approach to the analysis of literary works aims at forming and setting equal civil, political, financial, and societal rights for women. Depending on its cultural or political goals, feminism is viewed as a movement to attain equality for women in various areas. The present study uses a feminist technique along with Foucault's theory regarding power to study <i>Into the Water</i> by Paula Hawkins. The significance of choosing Foucault is that he censures the customary manners of referring to the subject as a practical, united entity with a fixed foundation or soul; he asserts that, "Nothing in man- not even his body - is sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men" (Foucault, 2012, pp. 87-88). It is also discussed that women's oppression and difficulties form an important part of Hawkins's writings. Women in her novels all have to struggle hard in order to gain power and overcome the limitations imposed on them due to their gender and sexuality.</p>

Keywords: Feminism, Foucault, Gender, *Into the Water*, Power, Sexuality

1. GENERAL BACKGROUND

Paula Hawkins was born on August 26th, 1972 in Salisbury, Rhodesia. When she was seventeen years old, her family moved back to London where she graduated from Oxford University, studying in philosophy, politics, and economics. Then, she worked for *The Times* as a business journalist and also, as a freelance journalist for numerous newspapers or journals. In 2009, Hawkins decided to write fiction. Hence, she used the pen name Amy Silver and started her fiction writing with four romantic comedy novels.

Her first novels were not that popular or critically commended. It was not until publishing her thriller *The Girl on the Train* that she became a blockbusting novelist. On May 7th, 2017, Hawkins published her next thriller entitled *Into the Water* which is believed by some readers as not good as *The Girl on the Train* due to having too many characters and stories to be heard. Hawkins employs diverse voices in order to tell the stories of numerous women in Beckford who were drowned, murdered their husbands, or were to some extent related to the Drowning Pool.

Into the Water revolves around the suspicious death of Nel Abbott and her sister's attempts to find out what has happened to her. The novel is set in Beckford as an illusory town in Northumberland. Nel who was taking care of Lena as a single mother drowned in Drowning Pool, a place where many women of the town have died. It is believed that she committed suicide, but her family does not think so.

Consequently, this occurrence unites the residents of Beckford. Two months before this event, a teenager named Katie who was Lena's close friend also died in the same place. Nel had been extremely curious about this mysterious pool when she was alive, and supposed that before 200-300 years, this river was the location where many witches were drowned. As Jules, Nel's sister, searches for a hint, she realizes that Nel was writing a book about the drownings, which made her some enemies.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Paula Hawkins's psychological novel *The Girl on the Train* (2015) has been analyzed by several researchers. However, *Into the Water* has not attracted such attention and what is found regarding the analysis of this thriller novel is restricted to a limited number of websites and theses. Alison Flood (2017) has reviewed *Into the Water* and claims that Hawkins switches the straightforwardness and openness of *The Girl on the Train* with manifold raconteurs and storylines in *Into the Water*.

Flood compares the two novels and states that contrary to the three narrators of *The Girl on the Train*, *Into the Water* benefits from at least eleven narrators. In fact, instead of probing into the lives of limited characters, Hawkins has been curious about the whole people of the town which makes the novel more complicated. It is also

written that *Into the Water* isn't as smooth or as ingenious as *The Girl on the Train*; still it is very scary on condition that the reader can follow the manifold narrators and the deaths (*Into the Water by Paula Hawkins Review*).

In *Townsend's Covert Motivation on Killing Nel Abbott in Paula Hawkins' Into the Water Novel: A New Criticism Study* (2020), Kasapa seeks to find out and analyze Sean Townsend's purpose of killing Nel Abbott. Thus, Kasapa has used qualitative descriptive approach in order to discuss the formal components, including the setting, plot, symbols, characters, and characterization. The findings show that Sean Townsend's killing Nel Abbott was unintentional.

Projection of Defense Mechanism of Lena in Paula Hawkins novel Into the Water (2019) benefits from the intrinsic and extrinsic approaches in order to examine this novel. This research revolves around the projection of Baumeister's notion of defense mechanism in Lena Abbott, in addition to its association with other intrinsic features. As it was noticed, there are lots of gaps concerning the analysis of *Into the Water* which need to be filled. One of the gaps is related to the investigation of feminism and women's role in this novel. So, this research will probe into the female characters in order to provide the readers of Hawkins's novel with a detailed investigation.

3. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Since the studies regarding *Into the Water* are just a few, benefitting from the researches which have analyzed Hawkins's other works can be helpful. *The Portrait of Patriarchy in the Novel The Girl on the Train by Paula Hawkins* (2018) discusses the matter of patriarchy experienced by the three women in that novel: Rachel, Megan, and Anna. To do so, the researcher has used radical feminism viewpoint which emphasizes patriarchy by Sylvia Walby. The findings of the study disclose three facets of patriarchy, including patriarchal relation to paid employment, patriarchal relation in the state, and male's fierceness.

"Gender Oppression and Women Violence in Paula Hawkins's *The Girl on The Train*" (2020) is another study in which the researcher has investigated the way through which gender subjugation and ferocity are epitomized in *The Girl on The Train*. A feminist approach has been used in this study which has employed Raewyn Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. It is found that the gender disparity is portrayed through the role dissimilarities between men and women, whereas vehemence is shown as a power to regulate the female characters through physical and non-physical violence.

"Domestic Violence and Sexual Exploitation in Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*" (2022) discusses that Hawkins's representation of womenfolk as mothers, leaders, wives, friends, and maids causes the reader to appreciate the sensitivities of women and their powerlessness. This article discloses the problems faced by contemporary women in *The Girl on the Train*. In fact, Hawkins emphasizes the necessity to stop one of the prevalent social glitches that is the recurrent homicide of maids

4. METHODOLOGY

In writing most of her fiction, Paula Hawkins generally employs female characters and uses them as her protagonists. She discusses the difficulties that women have to encounter due to a patriarchal society and the limitations that are imposed on them. Her novels are teemed with women who are struggling hard in order to prove their equality and humanity. This is why such a theory as feminism can be a suitable approach to probe into the characterization of women. This essay intends to use feminism to analyze the female characters in *Into the Water* because feminism is regarded as an interesting theory in the realm of literature and offers new standpoints for a better understanding of literary works.

Furthermore, the perspectives of Michel Foucault which have been really significant amongst feminist scholars will be used since as King (2004) asserts, his attitudes concerning discipline, power, sexuality, and subjectivity are primarily related to feminist studies (p. 29). Dorothy E. Smith (1990) claims that Foucauldian theories, chiefly those regarding power "capture a sense of something significant about contemporary society that they are incapable of explicating" (p. 70).

Barry (2002) states that feminist criticism in the 1970s was more about revealing what might be labeled as the practices of patriarchy. Then, in the 1980s, feminist criticism became more heterogeneous and changed its emphasis from discussing male accounts of the world to probing into the essence of the female viewpoint (p. 122). Women are the 'second sex', according to Simon de Beauvoir (1949), one of the world's most prominent feminists, because their existence is only meaningful in relation to men. She also believes that women are just as talented and capable of making decisions as men and that they may therefore empower themselves (p. xv). De Beauvoir claims that man is thought of as the self, whereas a woman is thought of as the Other.

Thus, it can be inferred that humankind is masculine and that man is the one who can define woman 'as related to him' rather than 'as herself' (pp. xv-xxix). At present, feminism is not restricted to women's political or social situation, and it also includes their psychological status. In the 1960s, feminists acknowledged that the field of psychology had overlooked the study of women and gender. Since that time, much has been different in psychology because feminist psychology has progressed, and the emphasis on the psychology of women and gender has been more

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

At the beginning of the novel, the readers come across Nel Abbott's death which brings her sister, Jules to Beckford. When Nel died, some people of the town like her own daughter got really sad while some others got contented. Jules and Nel were having a problem and this is why Lena is somehow upset with her aunt regarding her mother's demise. Nel's death is really suspicious because not a long time ago, Lena lost her best friend, Katie similarly in the Drowning Pool. Then, Detective Inspector Sean Townsend and Detective Sergeant Erin Morgan are the chosen officials to do the investigation and find out how Nel died.

At Nel's memorial ceremony, many people of the town are participating such as Robbie Cannon as Nel's high school boyfriend who raped Jules at the age of thirteen. It is also noticed that the Whittakers as Katie's family are determined to leave town in order to escape from the current atmosphere and sentiments which they have been going through after Katie's death. One day while Louise, Katie's mother is cleaning her daughter's room, she discovers some diet pills prescribed by Nel and goes to the police since she thinks that Nel was responsible for Katie's death. Lena discloses that she bought the pills for herself but remembers that Katie had a sexual affair with her teacher Mark Henderson.

Mark has now gone from the town because Lena and Katie's sister, Josh, broke his house's windows as a revengeful act and because they regarded him as the responsible one for Katie's death. Josh makes known Katie's relationship with Mark to Sean Townsend which causes Sean and Erin to ask Lena some questions. Lena tells them that Katie committed suicide because she wanted to protect Mark. Lena tells Jules that it was Nel who frightened Katie and pushed her to commit suicide; she then escapes from home and goes back to Mark's house. Mark finds Lena there. They have an argument, and Mark leaves the town with Lena in his trunk.

Jules understands that Lena is Robbie's daughter. In the meantime, Erin finds out that Sean was passionately in love with Nel. Mark drives Lena to a coastal lodge. They fight again. Lena goes to an adjacent village and Sean brings her back to Beckford. Lena tells Jules that Nel was killed and according to Mark, Helen Townsend, Sean's wife, had a bracelet in her office that was absent from Nel's body after her death. Jules goes to the Townsend house and blames Helen that she has killed Nel.

Patrick then admits that he has murdered Nel and also his own wife, Lauren some years ago. Some months after Patrick's confession, all the characters leave Beckford. Jules and Lena go to London and have a much better relationship. Patrick is in prison. Helen and Sean leave together, but Sean vanishes one day and Helen does not go after him. Sean, in an unnamed place, attempts to deal with himself and confesses that it was he who murdered Nel.

As the most important character of *Into the Water*, Jules is viewed to benefit from either first-person or second-person voice in order to speak openly to Nel during the entire story. Jules's affiliation with her sister was tense because when Jules was only thirteen years old, Nel's boyfriend raped her. Instantly after this event, Jules decided to commit suicide; thus, she went to the Drowning Pool and approximately drowned but Nel showed up and rescued her.

Jules has witnessed lots of other shocking events, including her mother's death due to breast cancer. She is stuck in the past, incapable of getting free from past disturbing memories. As the story moves forward, Jules is seen to be growing significantly as she analyzes her relationship with Nel and understands that her sister was not that person that she had always thought. She succeeds to establish a good relationship with her niece, Lena, and finds a way to compensate for her erroneous abhorrence of Nel by taking care of her daughter.

One of the most important points which highlights Hawkins's feminist viewpoints is revealing the reason why Nel and Jules were alienated from each other. Their estrangement was due to Nel's boyfriend's raping Jules which caused her to commit suicide; however, she was saved by Nel, "But I went to the Drowning Pool anyway, and Nel dragged me out. She pulled me to the bank and hauled me to my feet. She slapped my face hard. 'You bitch, you stupid fat bitch, what have you done? What are you trying to do?'" (Hawkins, 2017, p. 64).

This brutal act by Robbie as a man harasses Jules so much that she has not been able to escape from the consequent traumatic memories after so many years. Her story signifies her lack of agency which occurred primarily through her sexual abuse, and then by a suicide attempt as a sign of her powerlessness. Of course, Jules was not the only person who was sexually abused by Robbie. Once, she states that:

When Nel had been with Robbie, she sometimes came back with bruises on her wrists or the top of her arms. When I asked her how that happened, she laughed and said, 'How do you think?' Robbie gave me a weird feeling in my stomach and I couldn't help but stare at him whenever he was around. I tried not to, but I kept looking at him. He'd noticed it now and he'd started to stare back. He and Nel made jokes about it, and sometimes he'd look at me and lick his lips and laugh. (Hawkins, 2017, p. 61)

The following part is a quotation from the novel which shows Jules's viewpoint toward Robbie:

Thinking of Robbie, of you and Robbie, was like going over the humpback bridge at speed: dizzying. Robbie was tall, broad and blond, his lip curled into a perpetual sneer. He had a way of looking at a girl that turned her inside out. Robbie Cannon. The alpha, the top dog, always smelling of Lynx and sex, brutish and mean. You loved him, you said, although it never looked much like love to me. You and he were either all over each other or throwing insults at each other, never anything in between. There was never any peace. I don't remember a lot of laughter. But I did have the clearest memory of you both lying on the bank at the pool, limbs entangled, feet in the water, him rolling over you, pushing your shoulders down into the sand. (Hawkins, 2017, p. 57)

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault refers to the interconnection between power and the body. In *Into the Water*, the significant role of the body and its relationship with Jules's power cannot be disregarded either. According to Foucault, the body is not merely a passive and sedentary object that is subdued by discourses and power. The body is actually the "seed" to fight against prevailing discourses and power. Hence, the body is on no occasion totally compliant (as cited in Oksala, 2014, pp. 93-106).

In Hawkins's fiction, body has two conflicting roles; on the one hand, it is the cause why Jules is bottled-up and raped and on the other hand, it is the emblem of her power. This body is in fact a representation of wrath, power, and agency in such women as Jules, which allows them to subsist. As declared by Foucault, the body that someone has, and the way by which they live in it form their lifestyle. One's body is in fact the most imperative center of power and knowledge in that person. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault discusses the close association between truth and sex. According to him, truth is an arrangement of organized processes for the construction, circulation, direction, transmission, and operation of statements. It is indeed through this system that power arrangements are established and applied (p. 65).

Foucault states that sexual discourses are amalgamated with truth since sex not only brings about pleasure, but is also able to disclose the truth. In other words, although sex may restrict one to oblivion, it may also bring one to light (Weeks, 2005, pp. 186-201). Jules is utterly tortured because of Robbie's rape, and her mother's illness appears to exaggerate this obscurity for her. She is restricted by her body and cannot leave the place where she is. In fact, she is somehow trapped not only in a dark place but also inside her body. Still, it is after these miseries that she is able to see the truth and realize the reality of her sister.

In Hawkins's novel, Jules is at first a beautiful girl whose body makes her oppressed and abused by Robbie. In fact, her humanity and sentiments are completely overlooked by Nel's boyfriend who treats her as an object. This mistreatment is closely in line with the declarations of Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (2012) that, "In every society, the body is in the grip of very strict powers, which impose on it constraints, prohibitions or obligations" (p. 59). Hawkins is completely aware of the dominant role of the body in one's true identity, since as Foucault asserts, people are characterized in terms of their bodies and their physical roles.

In *States of Injury* (1995), Brown sums up her most recent approach to Foucault by announcing that "for Foucault, insofar as power always produces resistance, the disciplinary subject is perversely capable of resistance, and in practicing it, practices freedom" (p. 63). According to this declaration, Jules's power and agency cause her to struggle and this confrontation is the beginning of her freedom. Foucault supposed that everyone has the competence to change the issues which restrict their lack of restrictions (Tylor, 2014, pp. 71-83). Although Jules's change was not according to her will, she has got the capability and power to dispose of boundaries and be free from subjugation.

6. CONCLUDING NOTES

This essay was a feminism analysis of *Into the Water* by Paula Hawkins. It was declared that although this novel has been analyzed by several researchers, there remains a gap concerning its feminist investigation. In *Into the Water*, Hawkins has been, similar to her previous works, preoccupied with women, their difficulties, and harsh experiences in relation to men. Even the way the novel starts intensifies this issue. Jules has come back to attend her sister's funeral, and it is through her struggles to find out more about Nel's death that she comes to terms with the traumatic past and the truth. Also, body plays an imperative role in the protagonist's power and agency.

According to Foucault's statements, one's body is something beyond an obedient and inactive object which can be subjugated since it indicates the female protagonist's struggles with dominant discourses and power. Moreover, the researcher found that Hawkins's benefitting from diverse points of view represents her belief in every woman's separate story and voice. The present study was in fact an attempt to analyze *Into the Water* through a feminist approach; however, it was not possible to go into more details due to the shortage of space and time. This is why Jules as the protagonist was the only character who was analyzed more deeply. Thus, it is recommended that future researchers put more emphasis on other female characters and their relationship with men. Another recommendation is to examine the novel from an ecofeminism approach because of women's close relationship with their surrounding environment.

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