

The Echoes of Trauma in *A Slow Fire Burning*: A Critical Review

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ABSTRACT

A Slow burning fire by Paula Hawkins deals with the point of view of five characters. Each of them deals with their own grief, trauma and abandonment. The novel begins with a map which is the setting of the novel and all the characters are connected to each other. Then the narrative directly jumps into a marvellously planned mystery, starting with a murder. Each character gives the reader more context and slowly builds a sad story that leads to something unimaginable. Daniel Sutherland is brutally murdered on his houseboat, and it turns out that those closest to him are inadvertently connected. Is it his grieving relatives, his socially awkward neighbor who spies from her windows or the woman with a criminal past that he meets at the pub? As the book moves forward while giving the reader glimpses into the past, everything becomes clearer piece by piece.

This review focuses on the suppressed trauma which lead to unexpected outcomes. According to the concept of Sigmund Freud, the novel is about pain that is scarred, healed, reopened, and oozing

and crusted from circumstances. Carla is the aunt of Daniel Sutherland who loses her son at his home, negatively impacting her. Before the loss she is portrayed as a sweet loving woman. This heartbreak causes her to hate everyone who is with their children. It makes her envious and when the twist hits, she becomes the most uncertain of characters compared to others.

Laura is portrayed as a humorous middle-aged woman who never really bothers about anything and has a great sense of humour. Throughout the novel, one can easily fall in love with her character, and her response to the officers feels like a humorous play. The emotional pain when her stepmother chooses her over her own affairs causes her to behave and act in a short-tempered manner as she suffered in her childhood. This causes her emotional turmoil over the days. She is the primary suspect, and she often seems to lose her temper, which is believable to the audience. Her trustworthy dialogues lead some members of the audience not to suspect her.

Each character in this novel undergoes trauma, which leads to memory distortion. This novel feels to be submerged in bloodshed right from the opening scene where Laura is introduced. Many characters seem to shed their blood. In the first scene where the author mentions that blood oozes out of her body, the readers might feel the pain. That is so because the blood is portrayed in such a way to make it feel like real bleeding, and the taste of the blood feels as if it's from a rusted metal. I subjectively consider this as a peak form of narration, and it is evident that the depth of the narrative richness is not compromised.

In Hawkins's previous novel *The Girl on the Train* in which the protagonist Rachel feels parallel to Angela's character in the novel where the prejudice of the mind is taken into consideration that a person who drinks a lot is close to making mistakes and in *A Slow Fire Burning* everyone assumes that it is Angela's mistake that leads to Ben's death. It is evident that Paula's tendency is to play with memories and make the narrator vulnerable and unreliable. Laura is like the character Rue from the web series *Euphoria*, which is played by Zendaya, who is chaotic and carefree at the same time to the

surroundings and has a good sense of humor to make the audience laugh as she knows that she's not the one who commits murder.

The strengths of the book lie in how relatable the characters are, and her writing deals with the narrative point of view of five characters. She gives utmost care to her language and expresses the micro details on how each characters feel. Even though many characters have their own chapters she refrains from using simple words or lowering the quality to the details. The novel maintains tension till the end to expose the guilty party. At the beginning of the novel it's mentioned that the suspect is a middle-aged woman. There is the possibility of the audience's attention shifting to Laura. She is a strong character who though having suffered mentally and throws short-tempered tantrums, is not a woman who's scared of lame threats. The ending of the novel feels quite predictable.

The pacing of the novel is sluggish, and it takes time in the novel for developing characters and portraying their pain, abandonment and grief. On a comparative basis, Gillian Flynn's *Gone girl*, is a fast-paced thriller. It is easy to read the novel. Every scene literally feels like it is moving, and every chapter makes the audience to read the book without putting it down due to end of each chapter. *A Slow Burning Fire* feels slow due to the shift in narratives and timelines.

The novel is useful for researchers who want to study human psychology, trauma and the importance of recovery and therapy, as the novel pays attention to the details of human psychology. The characters develop their thought process and the impact of long-term psychological impacts of trauma leads to complex human behavior. Additionally, several recent books have gained a cult following psychological trauma in the recent trends such as Alex Michaelides's *The Silent Patient*, which has an amazing ending plot twist that no one normally expects and it can be celebrated as a good form of thriller and *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* by Holly Jackson is a page turner.

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