



Article

The “Making Up” of Mad Women in Literature: Pathologization of Female Unreliable Narrators in Domestic Noir Novels

Inge van de Ven *  and Jenny Slatman 

Department of Culture Studies, Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences, Tilburg University,
5037 Tilburg, The Netherlands

* Correspondence: i.g.m.vdven@tilburguniversity.edu

Abstract

This article examines how contemporary domestic noir fiction and its online reception relate to the pathologization of women’s testimony. Combining feminist narratology, critical phenomenology, and Ian Hacking’s concept of “making up people,” we analyze Paula Hawkins’s *The Girl on the Train* and A.J. Finn’s *The Woman in the Window* alongside Goodreads reviews of both novels. We argue that these texts mobilize women’s psychological distress—addiction, agoraphobia, depression, trauma, and gaslighting—as sources of narrative suspense while simultaneously casting doubt on women’s credibility as witnesses to their own experiences. Drawing on a thematically coded corpus of Goodreads reviews, we identify a spectrum of reader responses, ranging from diagnostic and moralizing readings that reproduce testimonial injustice to empathic and feminist readings that challenge pathologizing assumptions. By bringing textual analysis and reader-response research into dialogue, the article demonstrates that the credibility of female narrators is not determined by narrative form alone but is negotiated through broader cultural assumptions about women’s reliability and authority. Domestic noir thus emerges as a key site where women’s suffering becomes a contested object of interpretation in contemporary reading culture.

Keywords: critical phenomenology; domestic noir; gender and credibility; unreliable narration; pathologization; reader-response analysis

1. Introduction

During the infamous 2022 defamation trial of actress Amber Heard versus ex-husband Johnny Depp, where the former accused the latter of domestic abuse, Depp’s fans devoted many posts on social media to Heard’s alleged mental health issues. Some noticed “suspicious” similarities to Gillian Flynn’s domestic noir bestseller *Gone Girl* (2012), adapted by David Fincher in 2014. In the narrative, protagonist Amy Dunne is an unreliable narrator who distorts the truth and manipulates the other characters and the reader alike. Fans started accusing Heard of stealing ideas from the novel or film to make her case, and compared her psychological profile to Amy’s, pathologizing both and diagnosing them with all kinds of mental illnesses including narcissism, borderline, or antisocial personality disorder. Heard was dismissed as a “crazy unreliable narrator” [1] and faced with online hate speech, threats, and abuse. Her credibility was questioned, and one might even say destroyed, in both social and print media.

This example shows us that in our culture saturated by contested truths, from fake news to online testimony, the credibility of women’s voices is constantly scrutinized. From the nineteenth-century archetype of “madwomen in the attic” in literature [2] to *Gone Girl*



Academic Editors: Gail Weiss and
Lisa Käll

Received: 27 November 2025

Revised: 10 June 2026

Accepted: 15 June 2026

Published: 28 June 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors.

Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.

and TikTok confessionals, female narrators have been frequently cast as unreliable, manipulative, or delusional. Unreliability is a deeply gendered phenomenon, and unreliable female narration offers a lens onto wider epistemic dynamics that shape how women's credibility is constructed and contested in contemporary culture. In this article, we situate contemporary domestic noir's use of female unreliability within a longer tradition of pathologizing women's voices and perceptions, and we argue that these narrative conventions both reflect and reinforce cultural habits of reading women suspiciously, turning their distress into a source of suspense and entertainment.

Since the 2010s, the female unreliable narrator has been a popular trope in fiction, especially in the subgenre of thrillers labeled 'domestic noir,' which often has female narrators whose perception cannot be trusted, either due to mental health issues, memory loss, addiction, or gaslighting, usually by men. Stephanie Merritt in *The Guardian* [3] argues that such representations of female narrators with untrustworthy judgments and perceptions reinforce misogynistic cultural tendencies after #MeToo with its slogan #believewomen. This is part of a longer tradition: women's testimony has for centuries been subjected to suspicion and dismissed based on supposed biological predispositions to hysterical mood and behavior, rendering their judgment inherently untrustworthy. This trope is deeply ingrained in literature and drama.

In this paper, we provide a feminist reading of this genre, analyzing how the female characters' experiences and (self-)knowledge are marginalized through pathologization. Our study is informed by critical phenomenology seeking to foreground marginalized voices and epistemologies. It is noteworthy, however, that although critical phenomenology has addressed intersections of gender, age, ethnicity/race, ableism, it has paid relatively little attention to marginalized voices in psychiatry, with a few exceptions. Some claim that there is a strong potential for critical phenomenology in classical psychiatry [4]; others claim that critical phenomenology can overcome epistemic injustice in psychosis, developing a sensitivity to contingent meaning-generating structure [5]. Our analysis of the "psychiatrized" marginalized voice takes a different approach. We do not examine psychiatric voice as a clinical phenomenon or assume that erosion of voice is inherent to mental disorder. The female narrators we analyze are not psychiatric patients; they are pathologized in cultural, social, and political terms rather than through clinical diagnosis. Pathologization, as we argue, is a broader cultural process that draws authority from scientific discourse but exceeds the clinical sphere. Our analysis shows how pathologization frames and dictates the lived experience of psychological instability in women.

We will explore how this relation between pathologization and unreliable narration is materialized in our examination of two novels and their online reception, A.J. Finn's *The Woman in the Window* (2018) and Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train* (2015) [6,7], both popular novels that have been adapted to film. To examine how the pathologized female voice is "made up," we focus on whether the unreliable narrator enables forms of agency and expression or, conversely, reinforces entrenched stereotypes of pathological femininity. Whose voices are granted credibility, and whose are dismissed as incoherent or "crazy"? To address these questions, we begin by tracing the emergence of the unreliable female narrator in nineteenth-century literature, when the pathologization of the female voice as hysterical took shape. This analysis builds on Foucault's [8,9] and Hacking's [10–13] accounts of normality and classification, together with a literary genealogy of the "mad-woman." To examine how readers interpret a pathologized, unreliable female voice, we draw on Fricker's theory of epistemic injustice, which clarifies how credibility deficits and biased interpretive frameworks shape the reception of women's testimony [14].

Alongside this historical and theoretical framework, we adopt an empirical reader-response approach that situates domestic noir within contemporary platformed reading

cultures. Drawing on a thematically coded sample of Goodreads reviews for *The Woman in the Window* and *The Girl on the Train*, we examine how actual readers appropriate diagnostic vocabularies, moral judgments, and feminist or anti-feminist frames when assessing these narrators' credibility. Although the narratives appear designed to lead to a straightforward resolution, with the woman ultimately shown to have been misjudged and the man revealed as violent, readers' responses remain markedly heterogeneous, containing enthusiastic uptake of pathologizing scripts but also explicit resistance to the "madwoman" trope. By treating Goodreads as a site where literary, psychiatric, and feminist discourses intersect, we trace how the figure of the "mad" female narrator is continually "made up" and contested beyond the printed page. We map a spectrum of reader positions, from overtly diagnostic and moralizing responses that help reinforce the "mad woman" as an interactive kind in Hacking's sense, circulating between literary representation and cultural understandings of women's distress, to more empathic or resistant readings.

In bringing together critical phenomenology, feminist narratology, and empirical reception research, the article reframes domestic noir as a crucial and ambivalent site for negotiating women's narrative credibility. We argue that these novels, and the platformed responses they elicit, should be understood not only as entertainment but as popular illness narratives that participate in broader post-#MeToo struggles over whose accounts of trauma and coercion are believed.

2. Unreliable Narration and Female Madness Since the 19th Century

The genealogy of the female unreliable narrator in literature and culture can be traced along complementary literary, sociohistorical, and psychiatric lines. In their seminal study *The Madwoman in the Attic* [2], Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argued that nineteenth-century literature written by women is deeply shaped by patriarchal constructions of femininity, which they divide into two archetypes: the "angel in the house" (docile, passive, self-sacrificing, sane/normal) and the "madwoman in the attic" (rebellious, passionate, deviant, insane). They read the literary archetype of the "madwoman" as the heroine's repressed double, a figure whose anger, sexuality, or assertiveness is disavowed by patriarchal norms.

Building on this literary genealogy, Susan Lanser in *Fictions of Authority* [15] and Robyn R. Warhol in *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel* [16] both stress that unreliability is not simply a textual property but a culturally mediated judgment shaped by gender. Lanser highlights how narrative authority and credibility are gendered, with women writers facing structural pressures that predispose readers to distrust their narrators, since female speech and perspective have historically been cast as suspect. Warhol extends this argument by foregrounding the readerly dimension: the perception of unreliability arises not only from textual strategies but also from the interaction with readers whose expectations are informed by cultural norms of gender and authority. Together, their work shows that female narrators are persistently read with skepticism, their credibility constrained by social and literary conventions that align gender with diminished authority. Feminist narratology is particularly relevant for our study because it links questions of narrative authority to readerly judgments of credibility. Following Lanser and Warhol's work on gendered narrative authority [15,16] and later developments that emphasize the situated nature of narrative production and reception [17,18], we examine not only how female unreliability is narratively constructed but also how readers negotiate, reinforce, or resist such constructions. Feminist narratology thus provides an important bridge between our analysis of domestic noir and our examination of Goodreads reviews. For Elaine Showalter in *The Female Malady* [19], female madness is not an innate metaphorical double but a cultural script, imposed through psychiatric practice and broader medical and moral

discourses. Hysteria, melancholia, and later depression or borderline personality disorder exemplify the ways in which women's dissatisfaction, pain, or dissent came to be translated into diagnoses throughout the nineteenth century. Showalter emphasizes that women were not only overrepresented as patients, but that "madness, even when experienced by men, is metaphorically and symbolically represented as feminine: a female malady" [19] (p. 4). Madness, in her account, is less an expression of female creativity than a diagnostic grid through which women were rendered abnormal, unreliable, or unintelligible.

In *Mad, Bad and Sad* [20], Lisa Appignanesi extends this history into the modern era, demonstrating that psychiatric diagnoses, from depression and anxiety to borderline personality disorder, continue to define women as inherently unreliable witnesses to their own lives. Her book presents the long cultural history of women and the psychiatric profession, showing how psychiatry and psychology have constructed women as pathological subjects. She holds that women have been disproportionately cast as "mad" (hysterical, melancholic, neurotic), "bad" (morally corrupt, sexually deviant), or "sad" (depressed, fragile), and psychiatry has often reinforced social control rather than offered liberation. In the nineteenth century, "hysteria" became the paradigmatic female illness, but it is a label that has been used since time immemorial to refer to madness that is specific for womanhood.

Generally, hysteria can refer to many different symptoms ranging from convulsions, spasms, inability to speak, paralysis, loss of feeling, hallucinations, to overly emotional expression. Even though considered a kind of madness, it is habitually distinguished from full-blown (incurable) insanity. Throughout history, this relatively mild and mundane female madness has had different faces. According to the age-old theory of the "wandering womb", it was believed that all kinds of female distress and disorders emerge when the womb "is left unfertilized long beyond the normal time" (e.g., Plato *Timaeus* 91 b-c). When empty, so it was assumed, the womb becomes restless and starts straying through the body.

On top of this ancient "physical" explanation of hysteria—which still resonates in contemporary fiction, e.g., *The Girl on the Train*—through which female behavior, mood and "voice" were entirely reduced to biology, Christianity provided a moral explanation: hysterical women were seen as possessed by the devil or evil. Female bodies emulating Eva's original faithless and deceitful tongue are prone to evil. When considered mad—hysteric—they were also seen as bad, sinful and therefore needed to be punished. Today, hysterics may no longer end up at the stake, but the label "hysterical" still carries a severe moral connotation. Nowadays, the moral dimension of so-called deviant female behavior and voice is dictated by the many online and offline echo chambers that draw inspiration from insights from psychiatry and psychology. This dominant psychologizing discourse has its origins in the nineteenth century, when hysteria became an explicit subject of medicine and science.

In the first part of *The History of Sexuality*, titled *The will to knowledge* [8], Michel Foucault describes how a new science of sexuality has been developed since the eighteenth century. This new *scientia sexualis* had four privileged "objects of knowledge": the hysteric woman, the masturbating child, the perverted adult, the Malthusian (non-productive married) couple (p. 105). We thus see that "hysteria" is considered as one of four deviant sexual identities. In the vocabulary of Ian Hacking [10], who was heavily influenced by Foucault, we could say that the scientific classification practices concerning hysteria at the end of the nineteenth century enabled the "making of" hysteria. As a classified phenomenon, hysteria is not a natural or indifferent kind, but a "human" or "interactive" one that can only be understood in a social context [10,12]. Instead of simply organizing already existing pathological entities, classification makes up the classified and thus a new "kind". Classification and the materialization of the classified happen at the same time [10] (p. 165). As Hacking has pointed out elsewhere [11], the emergence of statistics in the 19th century was crucial to the process of making up people, which involves classifying

deviant or abnormal types. Through the statistical concept of normal distribution, the term “normal” took on the meaning of “average” and “common” for the first time [11] (p. 161). At the same time, this average is seen as ideal, giving the term “normal” a normative meaning as well. Normal, then, refers not only to what occurs most frequently, but also to how something *should be* [11] (p. 169). As such, something “abnormal” not only refers to a statistical deviation but also to a moral deviation.

According to the Foucauldian idea that knowledge and power are interdependent, we see that the new knowledge based on scientific classification leads to a change in how mad female bodies need to be managed and treated. Singling out hysteria as a deviant sexual identity replaces the Church as a punishing institution with science as a normalizing institution [21] (p. 27). How this normalization works becomes clear if we zoom in on the practices of two 19th century doctors who also feature (briefly) in Foucault’s *The will to knowledge*: Jean-Martin Charcot and Sigmund Freud. Charcot’s work at the Salpêtrière turned hysteria into an object of scientific observation, using photography and staged demonstrations to classify women’s bodies into recognizable “types.” Charcot thus had set up an “enormous apparatus for observation” [8] (p. 55). In the language of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* [9], written in the same period, we could say that Charcot’s Salpêtrière was turned into a panopticon, in which deviant bodies were normalized and disciplined by making them constantly visible. Charcot’s most well-known student, Sigmund Freud, quickly broke up with his teacher. Instead of trying to understand the mystery of hysteria by *looking* at it, he argues that we can find it by *listening* [22]. As such, Freud’s approach does not constitute a normalizing panopticon. It is rather strongly embedded in the Catholic tradition of “confession of the flesh”, which according to Foucault [8] forms an “institutional incitement” to speak about sex (p. 18), yielding and proliferating a strong normalizing discourse about it. Confession, indeed, is a powerful ritual for producing truth (p. 58).

Freud saw hysteria as a conversion neurosis. This means that the mainly physical symptoms of hysteria—such as convulsions, spasms, paralysis, inability to speak—are an expression of underlying psychological suffering. Because one is unable to put this suffering into words, the body becomes the means of communication; the hysterical body “says” that something is wrong [19] (p. 25). The psychological suffering is inaccessible to language because it is repressed and, as such, unconscious. Through psychoanalysis, in which Freud lets his patients talk and uses hypnosis to penetrate deeper into the unconscious, it can be made conscious. The interesting thing about Freud’s approach, and thus the emergence of psychoanalysis, is that women are finally being listened to. The rise of psychoanalysis has created space for patients to narrate their own stories. But when it comes to hysterical women, Freud quickly suggests that they are highly unreliable narrators [21] (p. 75).

In his initial studies, Freud discovered that hysteria is caused by trauma in early childhood, often consisting of sexual abuse. As many hysterical women told Freud that they had been seduced by their father or a fatherly figure, Freud’s hysteria theory came to be known as the “seduction theory” [22]. However, this theory did not hold up for long, because it could not be true that there were so many incestuous fathers and uncles walking the streets of Vienna [23] (p. 75). It could not be true that what those women said during therapy sessions really happened, they must have imagined it. In later work Freud therefore says: I “came to understand that hysterical symptoms are derived from phantasies and not from real occurrences” [24] (p. 938). Hysteria, according to the adjusted psychoanalytic theory, is induced by women’s phantasies. This explanation of hysteria indicates that it is not the hysterical patient herself who can judge what is going on. So, at the very moment women were invited to make their voices heard, to become narrators of their own stories, they were immediately labeled as highly unreliable narrators. As Foucault was not so much concerned about gender, he did not address this, but we could

say that women's "confessions" in the psychoanalytic practice not only produced a "truth" about female madness. More profoundly, it yielded the (co-)producers (women) of this "truth" as untruthful and incredible.

Hysteria, female madness, then, is not just a label for some mysterious disease that haunts female bodies and minds, but it has also become a label for being unreliable, uncredible. In the remainder of this paper, we investigate how this conjunction of female madness and unreliable narration is reflected in contemporary domestic noir. We are particularly interested in the possible effects of the literary device of unreliable narration: does it contribute to pathologization while disseminating stereotypes, or does it give voice to a marginalized experience? To interpret the difference between these two effects, both in the novels and in the reader responses, we draw on Fricker's [14] concept of epistemic injustice. This injustice may be testimonial or hermeneutic in nature. Fricker defines testimonial injustice as a situation where prejudice undermines a speaker's credibility, preventing them from being recognized as knowers. Applied to narration, this means that voices may be dismissed not because of what they say but because of prejudiced assumptions about their cognitive or identity-based deficiencies. To counter testimonial injustice, Fricker proposes the virtue of testimonial justice which consists of a "reflexive critical awareness" in a reader or listener. If readers, such as readers of contemporary domestic noir, come to realize that the low credibility judgement they made of a narrator is (partly) shaped by prejudice, then they can correct this "by revising the credibility upwards to compensate" (p. 92).

Hermeneutical injustice, on the other hand, involves the lack of collective narrative or conceptual resources available for properly expressing one's experiences. An example that Fricker provides is that of the history of the term "sexual harassment" (pp. 149–163). Before the 1970s, this term was not yet available which meant that the behavior of handsy men was often downplayed while women's distress and suffering could not be effectively reported, recognized, or remedied in legal, social, or professional contexts. The term "sexual harassment" countered this epistemic injustice. Since novels provide rich narrative resources, they might also have the potential for supporting hermeneutical justice.

3. "Mad Women" in Domestic Noir

Domestic noir is a recent label for thrillers centered on intimate relationships marked by secrecy, coercion, and gaslighting. Coined by Julia Crouch in 2013, the term has been taken up by scholars such as Burke and Clarke [25], who emphasize the genre's focus on coercive control, abuse, and other forms of domestic vulnerability, while linking its popularity to broader public discussions of gendered violence and women's experiences. Domestic noir should be understood as a subgenre of crime fiction and the psychological thriller: genres that have long relied on unreliable narrators, deceptive focalizers, and psychologically disturbed characters. Unreliability itself is therefore not unique to domestic noir, nor is it restricted to female protagonists; crime fiction also features numerous male unreliable narrators and psychopaths. What distinguishes the subgenre is how it places epistemic uncertainty in the sphere of intimate relationships and domestic life. Rather than focusing primarily on the question of who committed a crime, these narratives frequently center on whether a woman can trust her own perceptions in contexts marked by gaslighting, trauma, addiction, or mental distress [26,27]. The subgenre builds on a longer tradition of domestic gothic and psychological suspense, where the home becomes a site of manipulation and epistemic vulnerability [28]. Critics disagree, however, on the genre's politics: some read it as a feminist reworking of crime fiction, foregrounding women's agency [28], while others view its popularity as symptomatic of contemporary anxieties about gender and trust [26]. Merritt [3] questions the ethics of using women's psychological vulnerability

as entertainment. She argues that female unreliability is never neutral; it draws on a long cultural history in which women's perceptions are dismissed as neurotic or delusional.

For our purposes, domestic noir is a key site where narrative unreliability intersects with cultural scripts of pathologization. This raises central questions for our analysis: do such texts challenge or reproduce the association between women's storytelling and pathology? How is credibility granted or withdrawn? And how do readers participate in this process through their evaluative responses? To explore these questions, we turn to the reception of two prominent examples: Paula Hawkins's *The Girl on the Train*, with its alcoholic and traumatized narrator, and A.J. Finn's *The Woman in the Window*, which centers on agoraphobia and depression. In both cases, mental health is narratively mobilized to generate suspense while potentially casting doubt on women's testimony: as we will show, this effect is amplified in their online reception.

The Woman in the Window [6] follows Dr. Anna Fox, an agoraphobic child psychologist who spends her days watching classic thrillers and observing her neighbors from her New York townhouse. When Anna believes she has witnessed a violent crime in the home across the street, her account is dismissed due to her isolation, alcohol use, medication, and traumatic history, leaving both characters and readers unsure what she actually saw. Her credibility is continually undermined by others who reinterpret her testimony through the lens of pathology, making her a paradigmatic "madwoman" figure within the domestic-noir tradition, where a woman's perception is always already in doubt. Police and acquaintances repeatedly attribute her account to agoraphobia, medication, alcohol use, or emotional instability rather than treating it as evidence that warrants investigation. She is told she was "overstimulated" and that it all "went to [her] head" (p. 409–10), that she was "looking for some attention" or "going a little stir-crazy" (p. 413). The female detective calls her "delusional" and accuses her of fabricating evidence (p. 686–87), while her male colleague is more gentle in his disbelief: "I think you believe what you say you saw. I just—I don't" (p. 602). Anna's agoraphobia, medication use, and drinking thus function not merely as character traits but as narrative mechanisms that place her testimony under suspicion. At the same time, the narrative aligns readers with this uncertainty by filtering events through Anna's perspective, making her unreliability a central source of suspense. Her insistence that "I saw what I saw" (p. 411, 448) anticipates the novel's eventual reversal, in which her perceptions are vindicated.

The Girl on the Train [7] is narrated by three women (Rachel, her ex-husband Tom's new partner Anna, and the missing woman Megan) whose overlapping accounts gradually unravel a suburban crime. Rachel, an unemployed divorcée struggling with alcohol use and memory lapses, becomes entangled in the investigation after witnessing something unsettling from her commuter train. As the three narratives converge, the novel reveals that Tom, Rachel's charming but manipulative ex-husband, has been gaslighting her for years and is ultimately responsible for Megan's death.

Rachel's unreliability likewise extends beyond individual cognitive failure. Her alcoholism and memory lapses appear to justify doubts about her testimony: "Blackouts happen . . . Total black; hours lost, never to be retrieved" (p. 97). But the novel gradually reveals how those doubts are reinforced by social and interpersonal dynamics. Rachel herself recognizes the problem when she observes: "They don't believe me. I'm an unreliable witness" (p. 105). Police and acquaintances repeatedly interpret her behavior through assumptions about addiction and mental health problems. Tom's manipulation succeeds precisely because these assumptions already render her version of events suspect. As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that Rachel has been systematically gaslighted into doubting her own recollections: "You lied to me. You told me everything was my fault. You made me believe that I was worthless" (p. 166). Her infertility and depression

offer interpretive frameworks through which other characters understand her as unstable, establishing the conditions for the diagnostic responses the novel provokes (as we will see in the reception analysis). In sum, the novel links credibility not only to cognition and memory but also to broader cultural assumptions about women's emotional and embodied experience. Both *The Woman in the Window* and *The Girl on the Train* thus structure their plots around perceptual uncertainty, inviting readers to navigate gaps and conflicting versions of events. More specifically, they dramatize how women's testimony becomes vulnerable to dismissal once it is filtered through psychiatric, gendered assumptions. These dynamics form the backdrop against which readers evaluate the narrators and help explain the recurring patterns that emerge in Goodreads reviews.

4. Reader Response Research

While both novels appear to link female unreliability to forms of psychological instability, it is ultimately readers who determine how much credibility these narrators receive, and on what grounds. To examine how readers assess narratorial reliability, we analyzed reader reviews on Goodreads, treating them as expressions of interpretive work rather than transparent reports of reading experience. We examined the extent to which readers' responses reinforced or resisted dominant cultural scripts linking women's testimony to pathology and unreliability.

Goodreads was selected because it is one of the largest and most widely used social reading platforms and has become an important site for reader-response research. We do not treat Goodreads reviewers as representative of readers in general; rather, we analyze Goodreads as a prominent venue in which reader interpretations become publicly visible and circulate among other readers. We did not collect demographic information on reviewers and therefore do not examine variation according to characteristics such as gender, age, or nationality.

Our approach follows recent developments in empirical literary studies that combine textual analysis with reader-response data. Scholars such as Whiteley and Canning [29] emphasize that narrative meaning cannot be understood solely through textual analysis but must account for the interpretive practices of actual audiences. Bell and Ensslin [30] likewise underscore the importance of qualitative online reception data for examining how readers make sense of narrative perspective and intention. In line with this work, we treat Goodreads reviews as small stories [31]: discursive performances that blend retrospective evaluation, identity work, and platform-specific modes of visibility. They are shaped by the temporal gap between reading and writing [32], by attention economies and social dynamics [33], and by the affordances of digital reviewing platforms.

Data were collected in October 2025 through keyword searches of publicly accessible Goodreads reviews for each novel. Searches were conducted using Goodreads' built-in review search functionality, which returns reviews containing the selected terms. The resulting frequencies were used to identify salient evaluative clusters and to construct the qualitative subsamples analyzed in this study. The details of our search, selection procedure, and coding protocol are provided in Appendix A.

Foregrounding these interpretive practices enables us to map the frames readers activate when assessing the reliability or "madness" of a narrator—diagnostic, moralizing, empathic, cognitive, feminist, or resistant. Our thematic analysis proceeded through a combined deductive–inductive coding process. We began with eight thematic patterns for each novel and, through iterative comparison, identified six types of readings that recur across both datasets. These range from responses that reinforce the cultural "making up" of female madness to readings that challenge or resist these scripts. In what follows, we outline these six categories.

4.1. "Making Up": Pathologizing Readings

Many Goodreads reviewers approach both novels through overtly diagnostic and moralizing language. In *The Girl on the Train*, the three narrators are dismissed as "a drunk, a liar, and a cheat," "three dippy, pathetic women," or simply "dull, boring, damaged women," with Rachel repeatedly labeled "a pathological liar," "a slob," "histrionic," and "pathetic" in her alcoholism and grief. *The Woman in the Window* elicits similar reactions: Anna is described as crazy, paranoid, unstable, a "hot mess," or "a psychotic alcoholic," often faulted for "mixing pills and wine" or "refusing to help herself," as though instability signifies moral failure rather than trauma. In each case, reviewers reproduce the novels' own diegetic suspicions (police calling Anna "delusional" (p. 686) and Rachel "possibly mentally unstable," (p. 350), treating depression, addiction, agoraphobia, and infertility not as suffering but as evidence of weakness or flawed character.

This is a clear example of testimonial injustice: prejudice that downgrades a speaker's credibility on the basis of identity-coded assumptions. Psychiatric vocabulary ("psychotic," "unstable," "delusional") becomes shorthand for untrustworthiness. We here see that pathologization is a process that quickly transcends the confines of clinical practices and knowledge. Where Hacking argues that "making up people" is tied to classifications produced within the human, social, medical, and biological sciences [13], our analysis shows how contemporary networks of writers, critics, and readers continually recycle and circulate available mental-health classifications, contributing to the construction and reinforcement of the interactive kind of "female madness." Drawing on Kidd and Carel's [34] account of how illness renders subjects epistemically vulnerable, we can understand how perceived pathology becomes a standing prejudice that collapses moral character and credibility in the reception of these protagonists. Reviewers participate in the cultural script in which the "mad woman" is simultaneously diagnosed and blamed, extending the "mad-woman" convention of domestic noir and reinforcing the dynamics of medicalization and dismissal that the novels depict. While iterating and reinforcing this cultural script, these uncritical reviewers remain oblivious to the way this script dictates the lived experience of psychological instability in women.

4.2. Cognitive Suspense and the Pleasures of Unreliability

A substantial cluster of reviewers respond to both novels through the lens of epistemic uncertainty. They describe "wondering whether or not she was imagining the whole thing," trying to "figure out how many bats were in her belfry," or feeling that "the novel was gaslighting me": remarks that foreground their oscillation between trust and doubt. These reactions highlight a central pleasure of domestic noir: the hermeneutic labor of sorting truth from delusion. As in post-network "complex TV" [35], paranoia becomes a narrative engine. Mittell's [36] "operational aesthetic" is clearly at work: readers take pleasure not only in the twists themselves but in recognizing and evaluating the narrative mechanisms that produce epistemic instability. In *The Girl on the Train*, this pleasure is heightened by navigating multiple unreliable perspectives within a tripartite structure. Reviewers relish Rachel's "blackouts," "spotty memory," and "self-delusion," enjoying "never knowing when she was telling the truth or when she was having her blacked-out version of the truth." *The Woman in the Window* elicits similar responses: readers report doubting Anna at every turn and taking pleasure in being "gaslighted" by a narrative structured around ambiguity and shifting perception.

This cognitive pleasure is gendered. The interpretive instability celebrated in "quality TV" as sophistication becomes, in the female-narrated thriller, a marker of pathology. Reviewers' enjoyment of "the use of gaslighting" or of a "fucked-up woman protagonist" exemplifies this dynamic: epistemic disorientation becomes part of the appeal. As

Gill [37] observes, women's emotional turmoil is frequently commodified as spectacle. What Fricker [14] identifies as testimonial injustice thus becomes an aesthetic resource: disbelief itself is pleasurable. Omission and self-deception become the mechanisms that sustain suspense, drawing readers into a game of disbelief and doubt.

4.3. Mimetic Readings of Mental Illness and Trauma

Despite the novels' engineered ambivalence, some reviewers respond mimetically, treating them as credible portrayals of women's lived experience. They praise *The Woman in the Window* for its "believable portrayal of agoraphobia and PTSD," noting the "fuzzy-headed confusion" of medication or "suffocating claustrophobia" of confinement. *The Girl on the Train* receives similar praise for its "honest" view of trauma, "precise" depiction of alcoholism, and portrayal of "how terrifying gaslighting is." Some note how both novels capture the social pressures shaping women's lives without reducing the characters to clichés, presenting instead women navigating a world in which they "never seem enough."

These responses resonate with Fricker's [14] hermeneutical justice: taking marginalized experiences seriously in order to repair interpretive gaps. Mimetic readings, which take Anna and Rachel's suffering seriously, challenge the familiar stereotype that links women's mental illness with deceit and help counter the credibility loss produced by more pathologizing responses. Skeptical readers who question the plausibility of Rachel's blackouts or Tom's prolonged gaslighting further reveal how assessments of credibility hinge on assumptions about what trauma or coercion "should" look like. Taken together, these responses show that domestic noir can undermine women's credibility but can also create openings for readers to push back against that harm. Challenging stereotypes, this type of reading could help to give voice to the lived experiences of women who face trauma or abuse.

4.4. Empathic Ambivalence and Conditional Identification

Another group articulates an ambivalent mix of identification and distrust: they care for Anna and "hope she isn't crazy," yet continually "have [their] doubts." Readers describe her as "flawed and complicated, yet sympathetic," admitting, "I wanted to shake her, but I felt bad for her." Several explicitly recognize patterns from their own lives ("I, too, am a victim of gaslighting") and note that irritation with Rachel's apparent dysfunction turns into sympathy once Tom's long-term manipulation becomes clear and identification becomes easier. This ambivalence is built into the novels' emotional design. They invite empathy while also demanding skepticism to keep the suspense going. The back-and-forth between belief and doubt reflects the broader problem of gendered credibility: readers feel for the characters even as they question what they perceive. Keen's [38] "narrative empathy" is at work here, often tied to the novels' presentation of distress as socially produced—for instance through gaslighting or isolation—rather than as personal flaw. Both narratives foreground the visibility of distress (Rachel's dishevelment, Anna's medicated haze), cues that elicit sympathy while simultaneously marking these women as unstable.

Yet narrative ambivalence can also lead to rejection. Many insist they "cannot feel for Rachel," describing her as "pathetic," "idiotic," or "disgusting," framing her alcoholism as self-inflicted and her decisions as failures of willpower. Calls to "just seek help" reproduce the script that treats female suffering as voluntary weakness rather than the result of coercion or trauma. Even sympathetic responses are often conditional ("I pitied her, though ... which made me hope it might turn out well"). These reactions show how domestic noir positions readers between empathy, skepticism, and varying degrees of moral judgment.

4.5. Trope Recognition and Genre Fatigue

Some readers respond with irritation at what they perceive as tired or reductive gender stereotypes, focusing on representational patterns rather than broader social implications. The three narrators of *The Girl on the Train* are described as “soap-opera stereotypes”: women who “cry a lot,” “turn to drink,” remain loyal to harmful men, or “twitter about indecisively.” Rachel becomes “the ex-obsessed drunk,” Megan “the sex-addict,” and Anna “the smug yummy mummy turned vindictive home-wrecker.” Several readers object to the novel’s “hysterical” tone, linking its short, clipped sentences to “breathless subdued hysteria.” Others note that although the plots hinge on male violence (Tom’s gaslighting, Scott’s volatility, Ethan’s predation), diagnostic labels attach almost exclusively to the women. Reviewers often treat the novel’s three narrators as types rather than as fully developed voices, reading them as three versions of ‘failed’ femininity instead of three distinct perspectives. These critiques echo feminist concerns that domestic noir can reproduce the stereotypes it seeks to expose [3].

Many reviewers register fatigue with the broader “Girl/Woman” subgenre: “your usual hysterical-woman mystery,” “same old drunk, delusional narrator.” Genre-savvy readers identify a fixed template (an unstable woman witnesses a crime, is disbelieved, and is ultimately vindicated) transforming the hermeneutics of suspicion into cliché. “Mystery writers have found a gold vein: just make the woman an alcoholic—instant unreliable narrator,” one reviewer notes. What once generated epistemic tension now reads as a market formula. Some explicitly reject the novels’ traumas (agoraphobia, infertility, gaslighting, PTSD) as generic ‘furniture,’ signaling that psychological complexity has been flattened into trope. The overuse of these devices ties in with Gill and Scharff’s [39] analysis of how postfeminist media culture subsumes women’s emotional vulnerability into neoliberal regimes of visibility, transforming private distress into consumable resources. Irritation with repetition thus testifies to the exhaustion of unreliability as narrative strategy and gendered spectacle: once the trope becomes transparent, both empathy and disbelief lose their force.

4.6. Feminist and Resistant Readings

A larger and more explicitly feminist contingent goes beyond identifying stereotypes to articulate an ethical critique of the novels’ worldviews and their reproduction of harmful cultural scripts, thus applying the virtue of testimonial justice consisting of a “reflexive critical awareness” [14] (p. 92). These reviewers reject what one calls “using a genuine personality disorder as a plot device” and condemn the “demonization” of mental illness and dependence on the “drunken adulterous child-murdering woman” stereotype. Others frame their objections through gender: “why must women always be the hysterical, lovelorn alcoholics?” and “could we for once have the crazy guy?” Their concern is not only that these tropes appear, but that the novels rely on them in ways that reinscribe the very harms they depict.

For *The Girl on the Train*, this group is more numerous than for *The Woman in the Window*. Many argue that the novel ends up equating womanhood with dependency, instability, and diminished worth. Readers are particularly frustrated with the way Rachel’s infertility is used as a central plot driver; several reviewers see this as reinstating a conservative logic in which female value is tied to maternity. This reaction mirrors the broader cultural genealogy identified in our analysis: infertility has long served as a pathologizing marker, interpreted as emotional excess or moral deficiency. When Rachel’s non-maternity is repeatedly weaponized against her, the novel’s reception suggests the continuing influence of the age-old script of the “wandering womb.”

These readers also highlight a structural asymmetry in the distribution of credibility and pathology. Although men in both novels engage in manipulation or violence (Tom's long-term gaslighting, Scott's volatility, Ethan's predation), they are not subjected to the diagnostic labels, like "unstable," "hysterical," "crazy," so readily applied to Anna and Rachel. According to this group of readers, domestic noir reproduces cultural patterns in which female perception is coded as suspect while male harm is narratively normalized. They condemn portrayals of "grown women who depend on a man, love and their fertility," and ask whether the genre relies on "psychological hysteria, adultery, and infidelity" because it has little else to say about women's lives. Others question whether the novels are "feminist or anti-," describing the protagonists as "subservient housewives," "stupid girls," or characters defined only by "being wanted by men, being broken by men, [and] being worthless because of men."

The severity and volume of these feminist critiques suggest that *The Girl on the Train* provokes sharper anxieties about how fiction can slip from exposing gendered harm into reproducing the very stereotypes it seeks to interrogate. For these readers, the pathologization of women's voices is not merely a textual device but a cultural practice they recognize and resist. Their comments echo Appignanesi's [20] account of how psychiatry and popular culture have long reinforced the image of women as pathological subjects, and resonate with Fricker's [14] concept of hermeneutical justice: the effort to repair interpretive frameworks that distort marginalized experience. In calling out misogyny and ableism, these readers contest what domestic noir often commodifies—female instability as narrative spectacle—and instead demand more nuanced or redistributive forms of representation. Their resistance underscores that, even within commercial genres, audiences are not passive consumers of gendered scripts. They make explicit how the lived experience of women who must deal with trauma and abuse is constructed by cultural scripts. Resisting these scripts, they perform critical phenomenology.

5. Conclusions

This article has traced how the figure of the "mad" woman in domestic noir stands at the intersection of cultural scripts of pathology and long-standing gendered structures of epistemic distrust. From the nineteenth-century "madwoman in the attic" [2] and the classificatory practices of Charcot, Freud, and later psychiatry, to contemporary thrillers such as *The Woman in the Window* and *The Girl on the Train*, women's perceptual and affective experiences have repeatedly been interpreted in ways that undermine their credibility. This historical genealogy shows that distinctions between normal and ill, sane and hysterical, credible and delusional are not natural facts but products of power-laden systems of classification: what Hacking calls the "making up" of human or interactive kinds [10,12]. In domestic noir, these inherited scripts are reactivated when women's embodied distress, whether shown as emotional excess or exhaustion, is used to generate suspense while also casting doubt on their credibility.

Our empirical analysis of Goodreads reviews demonstrates how deeply these cultural scripts continue to shape interpretive practices. Despite the apparent simplicity of the plots, which vindicate their female protagonists and unmask the violence and manipulation of men, readers' responses diverge widely. Some reproduce testimonial injustice by diagnosing the narrators as "crazy," "unstable," or "pathetic," revealing how women's suffering remains subject to culturally conditioned judgments of credibility. Others take pleasure in cognitive uncertainty or affective complicity, illustrating how the hermeneutics of suspicion can become aestheticized. Still others respond mimetically, reading these novels as credible depictions of women living under conditions of psychological and interpersonal strain. A final resistant group explicitly challenges misogynistic and pathologizing tropes,

refusing to let female suffering be flattened into cliché. We mapped responses ranging from the “making up” of madness to its contestation or unmaking, showing that domestic noir is not only a site where harmful scripts circulate but also one where they can be critically reinterpreted.

This plurality of interpretations has methodological implications. The seeming unambiguity of a narrative resolution does not produce interpretive stability. Narrative meaning is something made between people: it emerges through readers’ own experiences, cultural expectations, and the platforms and settings in which they encounter a story. As recent work in empirical literary studies suggests [30,40], narratology must therefore take reader diversity seriously: not merely as noise to be filtered out, but as evidence of how narratives become socially consequential. In digital reading cultures especially, reviews function as epistemic paratexts [41], influencing the expectations and interpretive possibilities available to subsequent readers.

Seen through a critical–phenomenological lens, domestic noir occupies an uneasy position between entertainment and illness narrative. Although these texts are rarely classified within the illness-narrative genre, they participate in the cultural work that such narratives perform: making visible embodied vulnerability and forms of suffering that resist linearity or resolution. In this respect, they resonate with calls within the medical humanities for accounts that capture marginalized or “chaos” experiences of illness [42–45]. Domestic noir thus reveals how fictional representations of distress both reinforce and disrupt conventional boundaries between normality and pathology, offering narrative resources through which readers make sense of women’s suffering and its credibility.

By bringing historical genealogy, feminist narratology and critical phenomenology, and empirical reception research into dialogue, our study shows that the perception of women’s speech as unreliable is not a textual constant but a dynamic, socially mediated phenomenon. It is produced intersubjectively: through institutions, through narrative conventions, and through the interpretive practices of readers. Attending to this interplay offers a fuller account of how normality and illness are lived, narrated, and attributed, and how they continue to determine who is believed. In this sense, domestic noir becomes a productive (and ambivalent) site for thinking with critical phenomenology: a space where pathologizing dualisms persist, but where readers also articulate more generous and ethically attuned understandings of women’s embodied vulnerability and narrative agency.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, I.v.d.V. and J.S.; Methodology, I.v.d.V. and J.S.; Formal analysis, I.v.d.V. and J.S.; Investigation, I.v.d.V. and J.S.; Writing—original draft preparation, I.v.d.V. and J.S.; Writing—review and editing, I.v.d.V. and J.S.; Project administration, I.v.d.V. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: All data used in this study are publicly available. The analysis is based on Goodreads reviews accessible through the Goodreads website; no restricted or proprietary datasets were used.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Frequency of Selected Terms in Goodreads Reviews of *The Woman in the Window*.

Metric/Term	Count
Total number of reviews (at time of data collection)	64,615
crazy	1476
insane	284
unstable	220
delusional	235
paranoid	99
hallucinat*	244
mental	1645
psychotic	69
breakdown	43
hysterical	44
gaslight*	265
trauma	856
drunk/alcoholic	1103/1327
feminist	7
misogynist	3

Note. Counts are based on keyword searches across all publicly accessible Goodreads reviews for *The Woman in the Window* (N = 64,615). Terms were searched in their exact form unless otherwise indicated (e.g., *hallucinat* = wildcard search capturing hallucination, hallucinating, etc.). Counts represent raw frequencies and do not account for context, sentiment polarity, or reviewer intent. For subsequent qualitative analysis, we selected the top thirty reviews for each category with more than thirty hits, resulting in a subsample of 270 reviews.

Table A2. Frequency of Selected Terms in Goodreads Reviews of *The Girl on the Train*.

Metric/Term	Count
Total number of reviews (at time of data collection)	135,047
hysteria/hysteric	872
depressed	874
sad	2130
unreliable	5972
liar	590
gaslight*	334
pathological	115
pathetic	1555
drunk/alcoholic	5587
blackout/blacked out	813
stereotype/stereotypical	195
feminist	132
misogynist	23

Note. Counts are based on keyword searches across all publicly accessible Goodreads reviews for *The Girl on the Train* (N = 135,047). Terms were searched in their exact form, with paired terms counted together unless otherwise indicated. Counts represent raw frequencies and do not account for context, sentiment polarity, or reviewer intent.

For the qualitative component of the study, we subsequently selected the top thirty reviews for each category with more than thirty matches, yielding a subsample of 360 reviews. Reviews could appear in more than one keyword category if they contained multiple search terms; duplicate reviews were removed prior to thematic coding.

To connect the quantitative and qualitative components of the study, we used the keyword frequencies to identify the most salient evaluative clusters and then examined the top thirty reviews in each category with more than thirty matches. This subsample formed the basis for the pattern-identification steps detailed below. In the first step of our analysis, we identified the main descriptive patterns for each novel.

The Woman in the Window:

- (1) labeling the narrator as “crazy”;
- (2) navigating what is true and false in the narration;
- (3) pleasure in “craziness” and gaslighting dynamics;
- (4) sympathy or empathy for the narrator combined with doubt about her credibility;
- (5) assessments of the novel as a truthful portrayal of mental health issues;
- (6) recognition of generic clichés surrounding female unreliable narrators and mental illness;
- (7) critique of stereotyping from feminist and mental-health perspectives.

The Girl on the Train:

- (1) diagnostic and pathologizing readings;
- (2) realist/mimetic engagements with trauma, addiction, and gendered pressure;
- (3) identification and empathy;
- (4) cognitive suspense and the pleasures of unreliability;
- (5) recognition of gendered stereotyping and misogynist tropes;
- (6) feminist and resistant readings.

In the next step, we integrated the patterns from both datasets and identified the following overarching themes:

“Making up”: pathologizing readings (Section 4.1); Cognitive suspense and the pleasures of unreliability (Section 4.2); Mimetic readings of mental illness and trauma (Section 4.3); Empathic ambivalence and conditional identification (Section 4.4); Trope recognition and genre fatigue (Section 4.5); Feminist and resistant readings (Section 4.6).

References

1. Cheung, K. Amber Heard’s Mental Health Is Being Weaponized to Deny Her Credibility, Experts Say. *Jezebel*, 28 April 2022.
2. Gilbert, S.M.; Gubar, S. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*; Yale University Press: New Haven, CT, USA, 2020.
3. Merritt, S. The Cult of the Unreliable Female Narrator Must Be Stopped. *The Guardian*, 19 February 2018.
4. Zahavi, D.; Loidolt, S. Critical Phenomenology and Psychiatry. *Cont. Philos. Rev.* **2022**, *55*, 55–75.
5. Ritunnano, R. Overcoming Hermeneutical Injustice in Mental Health: A Role for Critical Phenomenology. *J. Br. Soc. Phenomenol.* **2022**, *53*, 243–260. [CrossRef]
6. Finn, A.J. *The Woman in the Window*; William Morrow: New York, NY, USA, 2018.
7. Hawkins, P. *The Girl on the Train*; Random House: London, UK, 2015.
8. Foucault, M. *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*; Pantheon Books: New York, NY, USA, 1978.
9. Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*; Vintage Books: New York, NY, USA, 1995.
10. Hacking, I. Making up People. In *Reconstructing Individualism. Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*; Heller, T.C., Brooke-Rose, C., Eds.; Stanford University Press: Stanford, CA, USA, 1986; pp. 222–236.
11. Hacking, I. *The Taming of Chance*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 1990.
12. Hacking, I. The Looping Effects of Human Kinds. In *Causal Cognition: A Multidisciplinary Debate*; Sperber, D., Premack, D., Premack, A.J., Eds.; Oxford University: New York, NY, USA, 1996; pp. 351–383.
13. Hacking, I. Kinds of People: Moving Targets. *Proc. Br. Acad.* **2007**, *151*, 285–318.
14. Fricker, M. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2007.

15. Lanser, S.S. *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*; Cornell University Press: Ithaca, Island, 1992.
16. Warhol, R.R. *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel*; Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, NJ, USA, 1989.
17. Page, R.E. *Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology*; Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, UK; New York, NY, USA, 2006.
18. Warhol, R.R.; Lanser, S.S. (Eds.) *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions*; Ohio State University Press: Columbus, OH, USA, 2015.
19. Showalter, E. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980*; Virago: London, UK, 1985.
20. Appignanesi, L. *Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present*; Virago: London, UK, 2008.
21. Schuilenburg, M. *Hysteria: Crime, Media, and Politics*; Routledge: London, UK, 2021.
22. De Marneffe, D. Looking and Listening: The Construction of Clinical Knowledge in Charcot and Freud. *Signs J. Women Cult. Soc.* **1991**, *17*, 71–111. [[CrossRef](#)]
23. Harrington, A. *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine*; WW Norton & Company: New York, NY, USA, 2008.
24. Schimek, J.G. Fact and Fantasy in the Seduction Theory: A Historical Review. *J. Am. Psychoanal. Assoc.* **1987**, *35*, 937–965. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
25. Burke, E.; Clarke, C. Introduction: Domestic Noir. *Clues* **2021**, *39*, 5–11.
26. Philips, D. Gaslighting: Domestic Noir, the Narratives of Coercive Control. *Women A Cult. Rev.* **2021**, *32*, 140–160. [[CrossRef](#)]
27. Wisker, G. Houses of Death: Ruth Rendell's Domestic Gothic and the Emptying out of Romance. *Contemp. Women's Writ.* **2017**, *11*, 66–84. [[CrossRef](#)]
28. Miller, E.V. "How Much Do You Want to Pay for This Beauty?": Domestic Noir and the Active Turn in Feminist Crime Fiction. In *Domestic Noir: The New Face of 21st Century Crime Fiction*; Springer: Cham, Germany, 2018; pp. 89–113.
29. Whiteley, S.; Canning, P. Reader Response Research in Stylistics. *Lang. Lit.* **2017**, *26*, 71–87. [[CrossRef](#)]
30. Bell, A.; Ensslin, A. *Reading Digital Fiction: Narrative, Cognition, Mediality*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2024.
31. Georgakopoulou, A. Small Stories as Curated Formats on Social Media: The Intersection of Affordances, Values & Practices. *System* **2021**, *102*, 102620. [[CrossRef](#)]
32. Canning, P. Text World Theory and Real World Readers: From Literature to Life in a Belfast Prison. *Lang. Lit.* **2017**, *26*, 172–187. [[CrossRef](#)]
33. Nuttall, L. Online Readers between the Camps: A Text World Theory Analysis of Ethical Positioning in We Need to Talk About Kevin. *Lang. Lit.* **2017**, *26*, 153–171. [[CrossRef](#)]
34. Kidd, I.J.; Carel, H. Epistemic Injustice and Illness. *J. Appl. Philos.* **2017**, *34*, 172–190. [[PubMed](#)]
35. Jones, P.; Soderlund, G. The Conspiratorial Mode in American Television: Politics, Public Relations, and Journalism in House of Cards and Scandal. *Am. Q.* **2017**, *69*, 833–856. [[CrossRef](#)]
36. Mittell, J. *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*; New York University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2015.
37. Gill, R. Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility. *Eur. J. Cult. Stud.* **2007**, *10*, 147–166. [[CrossRef](#)]
38. Keen, S. A Theory of Narrative Empathy. *Narrative* **2006**, *14*, 207–236. [[CrossRef](#)]
39. Gill, R.; Scharff, C. (Eds.) *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*; Palgrave Macmillan: London, UK, 2011.
40. Van de Ven, I. Trust in Stories: A Reader Response Study of (Un) Reliability in Akutagawa's "In a Grove". *Literature* **2025**, *5*, 24. [[CrossRef](#)]
41. Pignagnoli, V. *Post-Postmodernist Fiction and the Rise of Digital Epitexts*; The Ohio State University Press: Columbus, OH, USA, 2023.
42. Garden, R. Disability and Narrative: New Directions for Medicine and the Medical Humanities. *Med. Humanit.* **2010**, *36*, 70–74. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
43. Lathrop, B.; Kasambira-Emerson, M.M.R.; Squires, V.; Santibañez, S. Empowering Communities that Experience Marginalization Through Narrative. In *Narrative Ethics in Public Health: The Value of Stories*; Springer International Publishing: Cham, Germany, 2022; pp. 35–45.
44. Slatman, J.; Van de Ven, I. Gut Feelings: Depression as an Embodied and Affective Phenomenon in Houellebecq's Serotonin. *Med. Humanit.* **2021**, *47*, 257–265. [[PubMed](#)]
45. Woods, A. The Limits of Narrative: Provocations for the Medical Humanities. *Med. Humanit.* **2011**, *37*, 73–78. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.