

High-Level Acting, Broad Themes in ‘Gone Girl’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on October 2, 2014 - 11:28pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – How can a sudsy, Lifetime TV Movie-type plot capture the resonance of our current information age? By twisting it by the ears and having gutsy, high-level performances. “Gone Girl” is a marvelous invention of media satire, celebrity culture and the perfect casting of Ben Affleck.

Taken from the popular novel by Gillian Flynn – who also does the screenplay adaptation – and directed by the enigmatic David Fincher, “Gone Girl” revels in its mysteries and belief systems. While pulling us in with a “wife flight” story that could be at home on a soap opera, it creates commentary on society and media culture. If those cultural images seem familiar in the story, it’s because the reflection from the screen is in our own image. The casting is precise and in many way glorious, especially Affleck, Rosamund Pike and two minor but important portrayals of TV show hosts, portrayed with an extreme bravado by the underrated Sela Ward and Missi Pyle. Admirers of the novel will certainly see the film for the familiar plot, but will end up noticing the implications of the overall story.

Affleck portrays Nick Dunne, a writer and bar owner in his small Missouri hometown, who has moved back there from New York City with his wife Amy (Pike). Amy had drifted a bit in life, she is a trust fund baby from a series of children’s novels her mother wrote based on her life – “Amazing Amy” – and is experiencing a dissolution of her marriage.



Amy (Rosamund Pike) and Nick (Ben Affleck) in ‘Gone Girl’

Photo credit: 20th Century Fox

Nick comes home one morning to find his home in disarray and Amy missing. The evidence is spotty, but keeps pointing towards a suspicion that Nick has something to do with the disappearance, and it explodes in the media. Detective Rhonda (Kim Dickens) and Officer Jim (Patrick Fugit) work to unravel the case, while Nick's twin sister Margo (Carrie Coon) consoles her brother, and famous lawyer Tanner Bolt (Tyler Perry) counsels the accused.

All the characters in the film are strong types, common to broad TV dramas, which adds to the unique atmosphere. Director Fincher has positioned the portrayals as almost hyper-realistic symbols, with hidden motivations and back stories. Both Nick and Amy are all about questions rather than answers, and the story keeps us guessing as to who they really are. This interplays nicely with the media frenzy associated with the disappearance – think O.J. or Casey Anthony levels – and the bizarre and true nature of our current society.

Fincher also got a top drawer performance from Affleck, who seemed fully present in embodying Nick. Both director and actor are skewering Affleck's media persona and brand name through the character, and there are moments of clarity in the portrayal that are downright momentous. Pike is also up to the challenge of formulating Amy, and completely has both her conniving nature and vulnerabilities down cold, in the sense of frosty devious.

The supporting cast is spot on. The investigating team, played by Dickens and Fugit (grown up from "Almost Famous") need their own movie – they have a memorable subtlety. Amy's parents, especially the worried author mother portrayed by Lisa Banes, were perfect in protecting "Amazing Amy" first and foremost over their real missing daughter. Carrie Coon uplifts what could have been a background role as the twin sister, and even Tyler Perry has his moments, if he'd only get over the habit of looking like he's reading cue cards while acting.



Nick's Sister Margo (Carrie Coon) and Lawyer Tanner Bolt (Tyler Perry) in 'Gone Girl'

Photo credit: 20th Century Fox

One exception to all these performance acclaim is Neil Patrick Harris. His portrayal as Amy's former boyfriend Desi feels as though he wasn't paying attention to it, and his decisions in creating the persona are a bit too Norman Bates (or Patrick Bateman from "American Psycho"). But it did open a window to Amy's past, and added another layer to the girl who lived partially as a fiction, and was now trying to readjust the facts.

This is terrific entertainment, in the tradition of contemporary films that also comment on the current scene. And Affleck's performance is a promise towards anticipations to come, like his upcoming portrayal of Batman. He's got the tired smile of a downtrodden hero clearly revealed.

"Gone Girl" opens everywhere on October 3rd. Featuring Ben Affleck, Rosamund Pike, Neil Patrick Harris, Tyler Perry, Patrick Fugit, Kim Dickens, Carrie Coon and Lisa Banes. Screenplay adapted by Gillian Flynn, from her novel. Directed by David Fincher. Rated "R"



[15]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [16]

Senior Staff Writer

HollywoodChicago.com

pat@hollywoodchicago.com [15]

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