

‘Nocturnal Animals’ Takes Two Stories to New Levels

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on November 19, 2016 - 12:08pm

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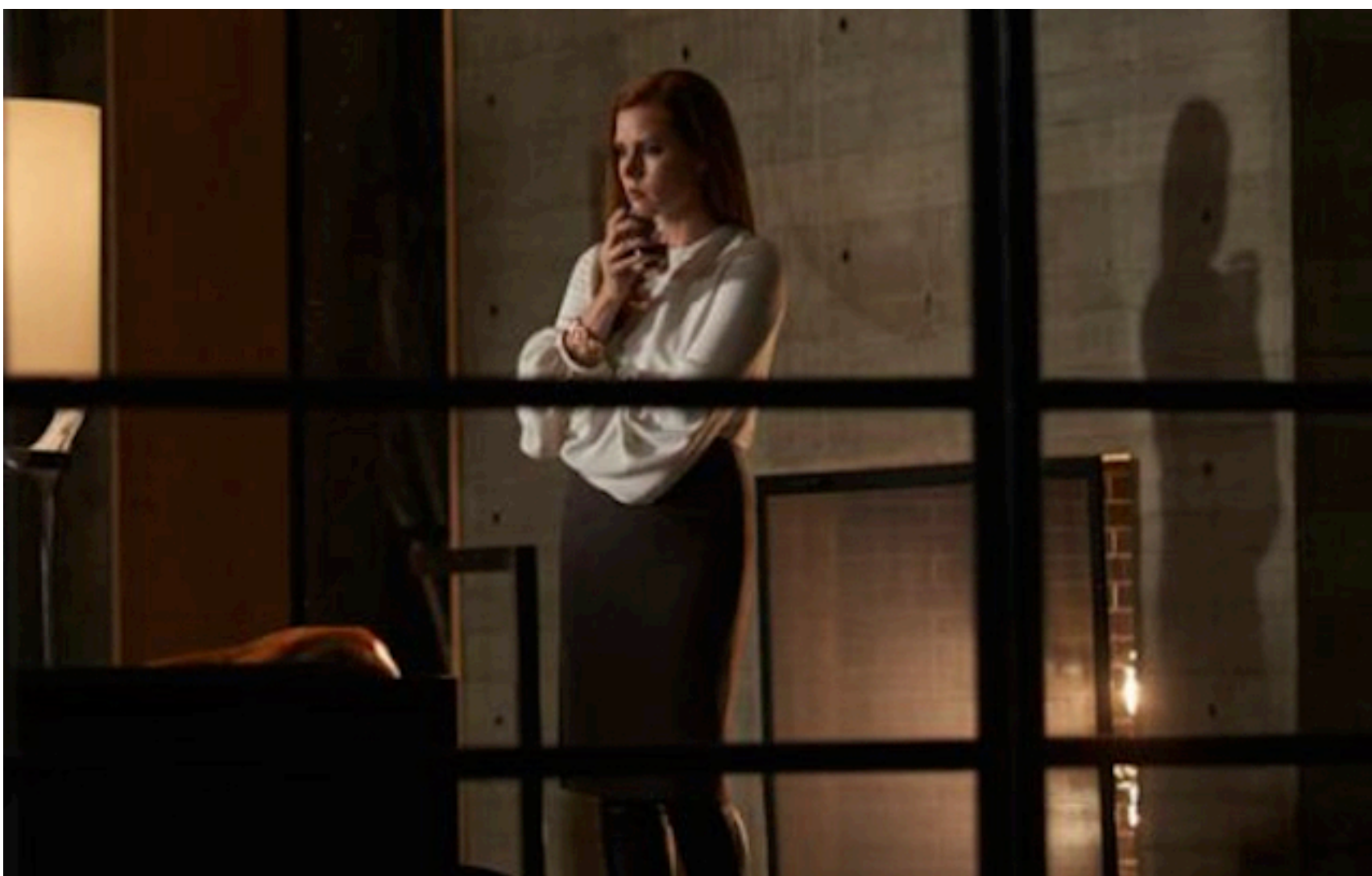


Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Reality and fantasy have separate rules, and in fantasy there are no rules. This is the philosophy of “Nocturnal Animals,” a wild character study that exists on the reality/fantasy planes. And it has the bonus of the Amy Adams/Isla Fisher mix-up and Jake Gyllenhaal at his Gyllenhaal-iest.

There are two stories in ‘Nocturnal Animals’ – written and directed by Tom Ford (“A Single Man”) – each having ultimately to do with the Amy Adams (not Isla Fisher) character. The Adams persona is going through a crisis of money and marriage, and reconciles this by obsessing over a new novel by her ex-husband. The novel is actualized as a onscreen story while she reads it, and the great Michael Shannon is at the centerpiece of it. The novel part satirizes the extremities of fiction and prose, and the characters inhabiting the book contrast nicely with the so-called real world of Amy Adams (both the present and in flashback). This is a terse and authentic character overview, culminating in a simple emotion within a perfect conclusion.

Susan (Amy Adams) is living a life in transition and crisis. Her husband Hutton (Armie Hammer) is bleeding money from a bad deal, her art gallery (horrid and hilarious through Tom Ford’s designer eye) is nearly bankrupt and her marriage is splintering. Through this all she receives a package from her ex-husband Edward (Jake Gyllenhaal), who had published his first novel. She begins to read it.



Susan (Amy Adams) Contemplates Her Fate in ‘Nocturnal Animals’

Photo credit: Focus Features

The novel’s story comes to life through her consciousness. It involves Tony (Gyllenhaal again), and his wife and daughter (Isla Fisher! and Ellie Bamber). The women are kidnapped on a remote Texas road while Tony ineffectually looks on, and are raped and murdered. The only link for justice is a strange lawman named Bobby (Michael Shannon). While Susan reads on, the story serves as a reminder of her own life, told in flashbacks and in the present day.

The balance between the two aspects of film become more interesting as both stories push forward. The novel realization is played out extremely – exposing the author’s penchant for melodrama over true grit – and becomes a very effective satire of pop literature. As we learn about Susan’s ex-husband/the author through flashbacks, and the source of his art consciousness is explained. It is both raw and emotive, and results in a deeper understanding of his character.

There has to be a wink and a nod toward the mix-up between the actresses Amy Adams and Isla Fisher (although Adams has emerged as the bigger star), as Adams is the real inspiration for the novel’s character played by Fisher in her consciousness. Adams is also effective portraying the younger (in flashbacks) and middle aged version of herself. As her present world collapses around her, she remembers the simpler love she had for Edward, and it expresses itself through an escape toward it, which culminates in the effective conclusion.



Director Tom Ford, Jake Gyllenhaal and Michael Shannon On Set for ‘Nocturnal Animals’

Photo credit: Focus Features

Jake Gyllenhaal and Michael Shannon are also highlights, especially as they duel as characters in the novel. Whether Gyllenhaal is in too many films, or he picks the scripts that emphasize his softer sensitive persona, this is either too much Gyllenhaal or an outrageous (like the Adams/Fisher thing) nod towards too much Gyllenhaal. Michael Shannon is becoming the great American icon as an actor – always representing more than what is on the surface, and creating a variety of personalities while he is interpreting his roles. His lawman Bobby is an extravagant hoot.

What the film does best is catalog regrets. The regret of decisions made in haste in our youth, or that certain paralysis that occurs when a crisis emerges in our middle age. In either scenario, it is how we react to it that defines our character, and defines this great Tom Ford drama.

“Nocturnal Animals” opens in Chicago, New York City and Los Angeles on November 18th, and wider on December 9th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Amy Adams, Jake Gyllenhaal, Michael Shannon, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Isla Fisher, Ellie Bamber, Armie Hammer and Laura Linney. Written and directed by Tom Ford. Rated “R”



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [19]
Writer, Editorial Coordinator
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [18]

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