

Gone Girl (2014) Fincher

P Michell, Aug 2019

Part of the 2014 screened films for 2019.

A recent successful mixture of cinema genres. Strong cast. Script by book's author.

On the occasion of his fifth wedding anniversary, Nick Dunne reports that his wife, Amy, has gone missing. Under pressure from the police and the growing media frenzy, Nick's portrait of a blissful union begins to crumble. Soon his lies, deceits and strange behaviour have everyone asking the same dark question: Did Nick Dunne kill his wife?

Director

David Fincher

Writers

Gillian Flynn, Gillian Flynn (novel)

Stars

Ben Affleck, Rosamund Pike, Neil Patrick Harris, Tyler Perry, Carrie Coon

Running Time

2h 29m

David Fincher – Director.

Many notable films.

His films often center on people with poor social skills and few friends: The Narrator in [Fight Club](#) (1999), Mark Zuckerberg in [The Social Network](#) (2010), Lisbeth Salander in [The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo](#) (2011), Amy Dunne in [Gone Girl](#) (2014).

Fincher uses fluid tracking camera which can access anywhere; a digital age innovation in camera movement pioneered by David Fincher and [Kevin Tod Haug](#) along with BUF Paris (perhaps inspired by earlier developments of [Max Ophüls](#) and [Stanley Kubrick](#)). One of the founders of 'Propaganda Films'.

While growing up in Marin County, one of his neighbors was [George Lucas](#). He later worked on the special effects crew of [Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi](#) (1983), produced and written by Lucas.

Like one of his main influences Stanley Kubrick, he demands a high number of takes for each scene in attempt to familiarize the cast with the film sets and dialogue as well as deconstructing their carefully constructed performances in favor of a more genuine performance.

Shoots a lot then selectively edits (see below Trivia).

Ben Affleck - Nick

Prolific film maker / actor. Projects vary in quality.

Wears many hats – producer, actor, director. Occasional writer.

Rosamund Pike – ‘Amazing’ Amy

British actress from a musical family. *Pride and Prejudice* (2003).

Described ‘From Bond Girl to Gone Girl’ as she appeared in *Die Another Day* (2002).

Friendly with Chelsea Clinton from Oxford days. Both fluent in German. Pike also in French.

[David Fincher](#) had her undergo a rigorous boxing training with welterweight champion Holly Lawson for her role in [Gone Girl](#) (2014).

Trivia

[Ben Affleck](#) postponed directing *Live By Night* (2016) in order to work on this film with [David Fincher](#), even stating, "He's the only director I've met who can do everybody else's job better than they could." On-set one day, Affleck changed the lens setting on a camera an almost indiscernible amount, betting a crew member that Fincher wouldn't notice. Affleck lost the bet as Fincher brought up, "Why does the camera look a little dim?"

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[Ben Affleck](#)'s weight fluctuates in the film with him being of fairly average build, to being muscular, as a result of being cast as Batman in [Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice](#) (2016).

[David Fincher](#) explained that one of the reasons he cast thirty-five-year-old [Rosamund Pike](#) as Amy, was that she was of unclear age in her appearance, and could pass for an older or younger woman. Rosamund's revelation that she was an only child also proved to be a very appealing aspect for Amy's character in Fincher's opinion.

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[Reese Witherspoon](#) obtained the film rights from [Gillian Flynn](#) in June 2012, and decided to produce under her new production label "Pacific Standard" as she would to be able to play the role of Amy. However, after her initial meeting with [David Fincher](#) on his vision of the film, Witherspoon withdrew from contention, realizing that she wasn't the right person to play the female lead. Still one of the producers.

[David Fincher](#)'s musical brief to [Trent Reznor](#) and [Atticus Ross](#) was based upon a visit he paid to a spa wherein the music meant to relax him he perceived as creepy and made him feel uncomfortable. This gave him the idea to set the music as though it is passive and relaxing, but actually instills a sense of dread.

The film has become [David Fincher](#)'s highest grossing domestic box-office film, beating prior leader [The Curious Case of Benjamin Button](#) (2008).

[David Fincher](#) shot an incredible five hundred hours of material over the one-hundred-day shoot, an average of five hours per day.

Gillian Flynn the author of *Gone Girl* has been accused of being misogynistic since the villains of three novels *Gone Girl*, *Sharp Objects* and *Dark Places* have all been female. This is particularly true with the psychopathic Amy Dunne; the villain who fuels the jeopardy in *Gone Girl*: "'To me, that puts a very, very small window on what feminism is," she responds. "Is it really only girl power, and you-go-girl, and empower yourself,

and be the best you can be? For me, it's also the ability to have women who are bad characters ... the one thing that really frustrates me is this idea that women are innately good, innately nurturing. In literature, they can be dismissably bad - trappy, vampy, bitchy types - but there's still a big pushback against the idea that women can be just pragmatically evil, bad and selfish ... I don't write psycho bitches. The psycho bitch is just crazy - she has no motive, and so she's a dismissible person because of her psycho-bitchiness." Writing on her website, she concedes that hers is "not a particularly flattering portrait of women, [but that's] fine by me. Isn't it time to acknowledge the ugly side? I've grown quite weary of the spunky heroines, brave rape victims, soul-searching fashionistas that stock so many books. I particularly mourn the lack of female villains." It should probably be added that her lurid plots make no claim to social realism: to interpret her evil female characters as somehow representative of their real-life gender, you must willfully overlook hundreds of pages of other people"

Contemporary Reviews

No Job, No Money and Now No Wife ...

Manohla Dargis, New York Times, Sept. 25, 2014

“Gone Girl,” the latest from that dark lord of cinema, David Fincher, opens with a man softly talking about his wife’s head. The image of his hand caressing a woman’s sleek blond hair in close-up indicates that it’s a lovely head, a lovely wife, too. Yet the violence of his words — he speaks of cracking her skull open and “unspooling” her brain — wakens an unease that trembles throughout this domestic horror movie. Those familiar with Mr. Fincher’s work may wonder, perhaps with a shudder or a conspiratorial smile, whether this head will share the fate of another head belonging to another pretty wife, a gift that was boxed and delivered in one of the hellish circles girdling his shocker [“Seven.”](#)

Unspooling is such an inapt word — can brains, after all, be unspooled? — that it immediately puts dread in check. No matter how brutal the images generated by these words, surely there’s more in store than blunt-force entertainment. Well, yes and no, which is sometimes the case with Mr. Fincher. One of those filmmakers whose technical prowess can make the mediocrity of his material seem irrelevant (almost), Mr. Fincher is always the star of his work. His art can overwhelm characters and their stories to the point that they fade away, leaving you with meticulous staging and framing, and edits as sharp as blades. It’s no accident that the first time you fully see Nick Dunne (Ben Affleck), the man who had been discoursing so vividly about his wife’s head, he’s alone. (“Gone Girl” opens the 52nd New York Film Festival on Friday and opens in theaters next Friday.)

“Gone Girl” is set in the recessionary present in a small fictional Missouri town, North Carthage. Around the time you meet Nick, Mr. Fincher folds in some typical snapshots of desperate Anytown, U.S.A.: empty shops, vacant streets and homeless people tramping into the void. Nick and his wife, Amy (Rosamund Pike), aren’t headed for Brokesville

quite yet, but they're clinging hard to the status quo. They're leasing their big, ugly house, and their bank account is running on fumes. The screenwriter, Gillian Flynn, adapting her novel of the same title, was a television critic for Entertainment Weekly who was laid off, and her characters share the same hard-knock fate: Nick, some kind of magazine writer, lost his New York job, as did Amy, who wrote quizzes for women's magazines. (Was that a job? A. Yes, B. No, C. I doubt it.)

Times are hard, kind of, for Nick and Amy, but, as you discover in a series of flashbacks, they moved to North Carthage only when Nick's mother received a cancer diagnosis. She died, and shortly after, so did the bloom on the marriage, though how it fades depends on who's confessing and complaining. In the book, the narrative duties are fairly evenly distributed between Nick and Amy, who recount alternating versions of their happy times and unhappily ever after, with him taking you through events as they happen in the first person, while her point of view comes into focus partly through her detailed diary entries. The movie more or less duplicates this he-says, she-writes pattern, although with a critical difference: Nick's story doesn't unfold wholly through his first-person account.

Mr. Fincher, for all his modern themes and bleeding-edge technologies, is a classicist, and in "Gone Girl," he creates a sense of Nick's subjectivity the usual way, mostly by placing the camera next to the character and deploying point-of-view shots that are seamlessly integrated with shots of, and generated by, other characters. Shortly after the movie opens, the plot fires up, as you watch Nick return home to find that Amy has gone missing. You see him pick up their cat and watch him fling open doors, roam the halls and discover a broken glass table. In other words, here you know what Nick knows, which, as it will turn out, isn't much. Amy is gone, and as Nick, the police, the town, the news media and the country shift into progressively more hysterical crisis-and-circus mode, she stays gone.

Mr. Fincher's compositions, camera work and cutting are, as always, superbly controlled. Working again with the cinematographer Jeff Cronenweth and the production designer Donald Graham Burt, he fashions an ever more haunted, haunting world that wavers so violently between ordinariness and aberration that, as in his other movies, the two soon blur. Nick may feel at home in North Carthage, but, from that first shot of him alone in front of his house — and from his first conversation with his sister, Margo (Carrie Coon), in which they trade insults about Amy — he comes across as alienated, lost. Mr. Fincher underlines that isolation by showing Nick both alone in the frame and in his house, where he's at times dwarfed and almost swallowed up by its generic, oversize rooms. Amy's voice-overs disrupt the movie's inaugural seriousness. In flashbacks introduced by her scribbling in her diary, she reveals that she's the inspiration for a beloved and profitable book series about a girl, *Amazing Amy*, created by her psychologist parents, Rand and Marybeth (David Clennon and Lisa Banes). Like Hannibal Lecter (a psychiatrist), Amy's parents have profited from messing around in other people's heads. (Your parents plagiarized your childhood, Nick says with husbandly commiseration.) They're cartoons, but then, so is Amy, whose narration Ms. Pike delivers in an affectedly hushed, conspiratorial voice that's so arch that you can picture Amy's lips curling at the edges. Mr. Fincher doesn't show you her sneer; he doesn't have to. It imbues every word

she says, instantly casting her as an unreliable narrator.

Given that the first half of [“Gone Girl”](#) is structured as a mystery, this unreliability presents a problem because it throws everything Amy says into doubt. Along with Mr. Affleck’s supple, sympathetic performance, Amy’s voice-over tips the scales so far in Nick’s favour that it upends Ms. Flynn’s attempt to recreate the even-stein dynamic from her book. Then again, the movie is on Nick’s side from the start, making the case for him, from the way he services Amy sexually to the gentle way he treats their cat. He sometimes explodes, as when he throws a glass to the floor while talking to two cops, Boney (an excellent Kim Dickens) and Gilpin (a dryly funny Patrick Fugit). The Nick here, like so many noir heroes, is simply, too simply, a decent, deflated, ordinary sap with serious woman problems.

The same is true of this movie. At its strongest, “Gone Girl” plays like a queasily, at times gleefully, funny horror movie about a modern marriage, one that has disintegrated partly because of spiraling downward mobility and lost privilege. Yet, as sometimes happens in Mr. Fincher’s work, dread descends like winter shadows, darkening the movie’s tone and visuals until it’s snuffed out all the light, air and nuance. As Nick becomes mired in the search for Amy, she confides how romance gave way to marital dreariness, accusations, his mounting loathing, her growing fear. One minute, he was leaving empty takeout containers strewn about and playing video games; the next, she says, he was raising a hand to her and she was cowering in their bed. She has the victim thing down cold.

By the movie’s second half, you may wish that Amy would stay gone. Ms. Pike has some fine scenes in this section, notably with a pair of hilariously sly lowlifes, Greta and Jeff (Lola Kirke and Boyd Holbrook), who, taken with a pompous, wealthy fool (Neil Patrick Harris as Desi), suggest that the movie is about to go deeper, that it will surprise you or stir you or say something, anything, maybe by making good on its scene-setting images of empty American stores. That never happens, and instead, the movie just hums along like the precision machine it is, even after it shifts tones again and enters Grand Guignol territory, with a flashing knife, gushing blood and surveillance footage of a seemingly tortured, horrifically abused and screaming woman. It’s a ghastly vision, although not for the reasons this movie would like.

“Gone Girl” is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian). Extreme violence.

David Fincher tackles a marriage made in hell in this hot-button take on Gillian Flynn’s bestselling thriller

PETER TRAVERS – Rolling Stone, Sept 23, 2014

David Fincher's shockingly good film version of *Gone Girl* is the date-night movie of the decade for couples who dream of destroying one another. Expect a stampede at the box office. *Gone Girl* is a movie of its cultural moment, an era when divorce won't cut it if there are options for lethal revenge and aggravated assault. In the toxic marriage of Nick Dunne (Ben Affleck) and Amy Elliott (Rosamund Pike), both partners are equal-opportunity liars and cheats. Or almost equal. Arguments between the sexes are going to be heated.

In her 2012 bestseller, Gillian Flynn made wicked sport of marriage in the new millennium. Working from an incisively shaped script by Flynn herself, director Fincher (*Fight Club*, *Seven*, *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*) goes right for the jugular. No one does moral rot like Fincher. And with Affleck and Pike around to put a beautiful face on Mr. and Mrs. Wrong, the stage is set for diabolical fun that stings like a muthafucker.

Affleck's Nick is a New York journalist jobbed out by the economy and forced to crawl home to Missouri, where he opens a bar with his twin sister, Margo (an indelibly vivid Carrie Coon), and goes to seed. Pike's Amy, Nick's socialite wife, is a trust-fund baby who's also out of a writing career and way out of place in the Midwest.

Flynn, downsized from her trade as a writer and critic (a good one) for *Entertainment Weekly*, knows from the job-and-money squeeze. She structured her book as a he-said/she-said, starting on the day of the Dunnes' fifth anniversary. It's also the day Amy disappears amid signs of a bloody struggle at home, and Nick becomes a person of interest in the suspected murder of his missing, pregnant wife. Got it? Spoilers would kill the mystery, for those not among the more than 6 million who've read the book.

What you can know is that *Gone Girl* has the impact of a body-slam, hitting home in every scary, suspenseful, seductive particular. It's a movie inferno with combustible performances. Affleck is terrific, undermining his good looks to suggest the soulless shallows that define Nick. For Pike, a Brit best known for supporting roles (*Pride & Prejudice*, *An Education*), this is a smashing, award-caliber breakthrough you'll be talking about for years. Does she possess the role of Amy, or does the role possess her? Either way, she's dazzling, depraved and dynamite.

All the actors have killer moments – Tyler Perry as Nick's shark lawyer, Kim Dickens and Patrick Fugit as the cops on the case, and a stellar Neil Patrick Harris, who miraculously finds the romantic soul in a stalker perv from Amy's past. On the tech side, Fincher vets, including cinematographer Jeff Cronenweth, editor Kirk Baxter and composers Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross, artfully escalate the seething tension.

Like the book, the movie begins with a man wanting to crack open his wife's skull to find out, among other things, "What have we done to each other? What will we do?"

Gone Girl gives us a portrait of two vipers spitting venom at each other across the landscape of a recession-busted, morally bankrupt America. Even with Fincher's

unflinching gaze and Flynn's incinerating wit, shards of humanity remain. Shards in which we might even see ourselves. It's not a pretty picture.