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**The Death of Authenticity: Gender and Identity  
Performativity in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl***

Zánik autenticity: Performativita genderu a identity v románu

Gillian Flynn *Zmizelá*

Bakalářská práce

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## **Anotace**

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**Název práce:** Zánik autenticity: Performativita genderu a identity v románu Gillian Flynn *Zmizelá*

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## **Abstrakt**

Cílem této bakalářské práce je představit román *Zmizelá* (2012) současné americké spisovatelky Gillian Flynn a vypořádat aplikaci konceptů postmoderní feministické teorie performativity genderu na hlavní postavy románu. Tato teorie vychází z práce feministicky orientované filozofky Judith Butler. Analýza postav se dále zabývá rozšířením této teorie na genderové role, které postavy ztělesňují, a jejich celkovou identitu. Aplikací teorií feministické kritiky tato práce poukazuje na to, jak Flynn zobrazuje negativní vlivy posíleny masmédií a sociálními sítěmi, které limitují vyjádření genderu a identity.

## **Klíčová slova**

Gillian Flynn, *Zmizelá*, americká literatura, literatura 21. století, genderová studia, Judith Butler, feminismus, performativita genderu, genderové role, performativita identity, analýza postav

## **Annotation**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to introduce the novel *Gone Girl* (2012) by the American contemporary author Gillian Flynn, and to examine the application of the concepts of post-modern feminist theory of gender performativity on its main characters. The theory is based on the work of the feminist scholar Judith Butler. The character analysis is furthermore concerned with extending this theory onto the gender roles the characters embody, and their whole identity. By applying the theories of feminist criticism, this thesis points out the way Flynn portrays the mass and social media enforced negative influence of limiting gender and identity expression.

### **Key words**

Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl*, American literature, 21<sup>st</sup> century literature, gender studies, Judith Butler, feminism, gender performativity, gender roles, identity performativity, character analysis

## **Prohlášení**

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucí práce a uvedla úplný seznam citované a použité literatury.

V Olomouc dne .....

Podpis .....



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I would also like to thank prof. Marcel Arbeit for allowing me the access and possibility to study the sources of his personal library.

Finally, I would like to thank Gillian Flynn herself for writing such an inspiring novel and blessing her characters with complexity few possess in real life.

*“It’s a very difficult era in which to be a person, just a real, actual person, instead of a collection of personality traits selected from an endless automat of characters.*

*And if all of us are play-acting, there can be no such thing as a soul mate, because we don’t have genuine souls.*

*It had gotten to the point where it seemed like nothing matters, because I’m not a real person and neither is anyone else.*

*I would have done anything to feel real again”*

– Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl*, pages 74–75

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## Introduction

June 2022 marks the ten-year anniversary of the publication of Gillian Flynn's third novel *Gone Girl*.<sup>1</sup> Its enormous commercial success and critical acclaim vouch for its cultural importance as well as the public interest, which has not diminished even up to this day. The seemingly undying relevance this novel has held ten years ago and still holds at present could be assigned to many factors, starting from the fresh feeling of the untraditional narrative going against the pile of suspense novels echoing the same old story retold a thousand times and not ending with the bold representation of female characters, typical for Flynn's work. Due to the unconventionality of its main female character, Amy Dunne, *Gone Girl* is more often than not analysed from a feminist standpoint, where the recreational readers unite with academic scholars in an effort to decide whether to praise the novel for its accurate portrayal of female dissatisfaction or condemn it, based on the subdued presumption that an immoral female character is a representation with solely women-hating motive in mind.

This thesis is not looking to decide the validity of these claims, but rather to focus on one of the many readings that could be employed when conducting an analysis of the complex and multi-dimensional characters of *Gone Girl*. The main characters are Nick and Amy Dunne, a seemingly ordinary married couple. The objective of this thesis is to carefully examine the portrayal of gender and identity in the post-modern world where dynamics previously seen only in mass and social media contexts spill out into the real-world interactions. Gender performativity is a concept first introduced in Judith Butler's research, and which this thesis is looking to connect with the societal expectations of an individual succumbing to gender roles, and the expression of identity. It shall be argued that as a result of rigid gender standards for men and women and others, as well as the influence of media in everyday life, individuals have no choice but to forge different identities for different situations in order to fit in.

As it will be demonstrated on the characters of Amy and Nick, a person, under the pressures of western values, may lose touch with their authentic self and become lost in the sea of artificial personalities they have been creating since childhood to fit into their given community. The destruction of one's true self will be argued to be portrayed in *Gone Girl*'s characters, both in its initial and final stages of decay. Subsequently, the characters may go to absurd and unthinkable lengths to regain at least superficial control they feel they have lost with the self-induced destruction of their authentic self. As this phenomenon may become

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<sup>1</sup> Flynn, Gillian. *Gone Girl*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2012.

gradually more widespread outside of fictional narratives, as a side effect of the constant presence of social media in a person's life, it is critical to become aware of gender and identity performativity tendencies. Particularly in times where a person's complex identity can be reduced to 280 characters of a tweet or a hashtag, it is important to become protective of one's authentic self. The opposite scenario of which is depicted in the characters of *Gone Girl*, who may give into destructive actions, to themselves and others, to make up for the loss of control they feel over their assigned gender roles and identities.

The thesis shall be divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 seeks to introduce the author for the discussed novel, Gillian Flynn, and outline the plot of *Gone Girl*. It furthermore analyses the structure and narration of the novel. The section is included as the overall structure of the work significantly contributes to the understanding of the presentation of the characters, the point of interest for this thesis. Another element of discussion is the genre. *Gone Girl*'s unconventional approach of the traditional genre novels is considered. The reason being is that it is what renders the novel so different from its contemporaries and resulting in its distinctive cultural impact. Chapter 2 is devoted to introducing the main characters of *Gone Girl*, Nick and Amy. It is important for the reader of this thesis to have a broad idea of their background and general mindset. The goal is to summarize the characters' motivations and ways of thinking in order to make the analysis in the following chapter fully comprehensible to those who have not read *Gone Girl* themselves.

As mentioned, chapter 3 consists of the analysis of Nick and Amy and is the core of this thesis. The feminist reading applying Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is explained and employed. More space is dedicated to Amy, as she is the more puzzling character who provides a clearer demonstration of Butler's theory in all its aspects. The chapter considers Amy's motives for her behaviour as well as a brief comparison of Amy and a different character from Flynn's debut novel *Sharp Objects*,<sup>2</sup> illuminating the author's development regarding the depiction of female characters. Chapter 4 also focuses on the transformation of Nick's personality under the influence of media and even Amy herself. Thanks to the detailed analysis of both characters, their comparison from multiple angles is provided.

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<sup>2</sup> Flynn, Gillian. *Sharp Objects*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2018.

# 1 Introduction of the Author and the Novel

## 1.1 Gillian Flynn

Gillian Flynn was born in 1971 in Kansas City, Missouri, into the family of two community college professors. She describes her childhood as a perfectly happy one, although the impact the environment of the American Midwest had on her works is undeniable. “To me it’s great, underexploited literary terrain that’s fun to roam around in,” Flynn says. “It has a strangely exotic feel to it because it’s so underwritten and underused in literature.”<sup>3</sup> She studied at the University of Kansas and then completed a master’s degree in journalism at Chicago’s Northwestern University<sup>4</sup> with the intention of becoming a crime reporter.<sup>5</sup> She was employed for ten years at *Entertainment Weekly*, an American magazine based in New York City, as a film and TV critic.<sup>6</sup> Shortly before the publication of her second novel *Dark Places*<sup>7</sup> in 2009, Flynn was one of the staff made redundant by the magazine and turned to writing full time, focusing entirely on her most successful novel yet, *Gone Girl*.<sup>8</sup>

Flynn’s debut novel *Sharp Objects* only seized the attention of the audiences on a large scale after the massive commercial success that its youngest sister, *Gone Girl*, enjoyed in 2012. However, it is impossible to miss the interconnectedness of the themes presented in this novel, which have later been reinterpreted in Flynn’s following works. The protagonist of *Sharp Objects*, Camille Preaker, is an underperforming Chicago journalist plagued by issues stemming from her childhood, be it the coldness of her relationship with her mother, the tragic death of her younger sister, or the harmful ways Camille has dealt with these wounds. Camille is forced to face her long-ignored anguish, softened by the cushions of alcohol and self-harm, after she is sent back to her small hometown of Wind Gap, situated “at the very bottom of Missouri, in the boot heel”<sup>9</sup> to cover a recent string of child murders. *Sharp Objects* is, beyond doubt, a study of pain and how it may be dealt with by different individuals,

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<sup>3</sup> Murphy, Bernice M. “‘We Will Have a Happy Marriage If It Kills Him’: Gillian Flynn and the Rise of Domestic Noir.” (Essay. In *Twenty-First-Century Popular Fiction*, edited by Bernice M. Murphy and Stephen Matterson, 158–69. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 159.

<sup>4</sup> Murphy, “We Will Have a Happy Marriage”, 159.

<sup>5</sup> Burkeman, Oliver. “Gillian Flynn on Her Bestseller *Gone Girl* and Accusations of Misogyny.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, May 1, 2013. Accessed 27 April 2022.

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/may/01/gillian-flynn-bestseller-gone-girl-misogyny>.

<sup>6</sup> Grossman, Lev. “Gillian Flynn’s Marriage Plot.” *Time*, Time, 25 Sept. 2014. Accessed 27 April 2022. [time.com/3429666/gillian-flynn-marriage-plot/](http://time.com/3429666/gillian-flynn-marriage-plot/).

<sup>7</sup> Flynn, Gillian. *Dark Places*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Pallardy, Richard. “Gillian Flynn”. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 20 Feb. 2022. Accessed 27 April 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gillian-Flynn>.

<sup>9</sup> Flynn, *Sharp Objects*, 5.

predominantly female characters of various ages. Most importantly, it is a novel cleverly challenging the expectations that are in play regarding female violence, gender stereotypes, or motherhood, and doing so in a neatly wrapped package of a chilling crime thriller.

Flynn's next novel *Dark Places* (2009) similarly portrays a female protagonist, Libby Day, who is forced by the circumstances to re-examine traumatic events of her childhood. Similarly to Camille, due to her past experiences, Libby is alienated from general society and haunted by both mental and physical trauma. These two novels are very similar in structure and are written in first-person point of view, which heavily contributes to the readers' capacity for sympathy for the narrating character.<sup>10</sup> With *Gone Girl*, Flynn has taken a brave spin on both the structure of the novel encompassing the expectations readers have of the genre itself, which she commented on in Lev Grossman's article for the *Time* magazine: "We thought it might be too much of a genre for people who didn't like genre, and not enough of a genre for people who did like it. It's going to fall in the crack in the middle, and no one's really going to read it."<sup>11</sup> *Gone Girl* would go on to debut at No. 2 on the *New York Times* best-seller list, stay on it for 91 weeks,<sup>12</sup> and be nominated for the prestigious Women's Prize for Fiction (now the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction), a nomination not likely to be received by a thriller writer.<sup>13</sup>

Gillian Flynn was named after a character from a 1958 film *Bell, Book and a Candle*.<sup>14</sup> Like the character played by Kim Novak, Gillian pronounces her name with a hard [g]. Coincidentally, it is exactly this word that could perfectly describe her literary work so far: hard; hard-hitting, hard to forget, and presenting a cold hard look at many issues that plague today's society – gender norms, intramarital problems, or the influence of mass media on everyday life. And that is just to name a few, which shall be elaborated on later in this work, dedicated to deconstructing some of the elements presented in Flynn's third novel *Gone Girl*, a novel that undoubtedly invigorated her career as a full-time novelist and became "a major cultural talking point on both sides of the Atlantic."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Kane, Rebecca. *This Is a (Wo)Man's World - Subverting Gender & Femininity in Gillian Flynn's Novel Gone Girl*. (Dissertation, ResearchGate, 2019. Accessed 27 April 2022.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341096189\\_This\\_is\\_a\\_Woman%27s\\_World\\_-\\_Subverting\\_Gender\\_Femininity\\_in\\_Gillian\\_Flynn%27s\\_novel\\_Gone\\_Girl](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341096189_This_is_a_Woman%27s_World_-_Subverting_Gender_Femininity_in_Gillian_Flynn%27s_novel_Gone_Girl)), 10.

<sup>11</sup> Grossman, "Gillian Flynn's Marriage Plot," online.

<sup>12</sup> Grossman, "Gillian Flynn's Marriage Plot," online.

<sup>13</sup> Murphy, "We Will Have a Happy Marriage", 158.

<sup>14</sup> Grossman, "Gillian Flynn's Marriage Plot," online.

<sup>15</sup> Murphy, "We Will Have a Happy Marriage", 158.

## 1.2 *Gone Girl*

*Gone Girl* and its plot differ significantly from Flynn's preceding novels. It could be argued that this work is a testimony to the crystallization of the themes and character tropes present in the author's writing preceding the publication of *Gone Girl*, which shall be described in the forthcoming segments, but what gives more immediate insight to how *Gone Girl* managed to surpass all expectation set by Flynn's work up until the publication of the novel in June 2012,<sup>16</sup> is the shock and controversy that surrounds its perception until this day. With the creation of *Gone Girl*'s protagonist Amy Elliot Dunne, dubbed by some "the most controversial female character in twenty-first-century popular fiction,"<sup>17</sup> Flynn ultimately caused a wave of moral panic as readers rushed to decide which character of *Gone Girl* is morally superior and whether the novel is "a sexist portrayal of a crazy woman or a feminist manifesto," as ponders a Times reporter Eliana Dockterman in "Is *Gone Girl* feminist or Misogynist?".<sup>18</sup> A decision that this thesis is not looking to make and may even be considered, frankly, redundant as the novel is not attempting to make a point in the discussion of gender equality, but rather to analyse the different roles different genders are expected to play in the society.

### 1.2.1 Plot

The narrative of *Gone Girl* picks up on the fifth wedding day anniversary of Amy and Nick Dunne. Nick spends a lot of his time in his hometown in Missouri, at a bar he owns together with his twin sister that was bought with the rest of the money of the Dunnes. Both Nick and Amy used to work as journalists in New York City, but both had been laid off, resulting in another factor that is adding weight to their financial crisis. Nick dreads coming back home to face his wife as their relationship has grown cold over the years, when he is informed by a neighbour that the Dunne's house looks suspicious, as if it has been broken into. After rushing home, Nick discovers that his wife Amy has gone missing.

From this point on, the novel follows a traditional police investigation as presented through the chapters narrated by Nick, which alternate with entries taken from his wife's diary painting a picture of not only troubled marriage, but also a witty and slightly naive woman trapped in an abusive relationship. As more and more pieces of evidence start to pile up against

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<sup>16</sup> Murphy, "We Will Have a Happy Marriage", 158.

<sup>17</sup> Murphy, "We Will Have a Happy Marriage", 158.

<sup>18</sup> Dockterman, Eliana. "'Gone Girl' Movie Feminist or Misogynist? on Cool Girls and Psychopaths." Time, Time, 6 Oct. 2014. Accessed 27 April 2022. <http://time.com/3472314/gone-girl-movie-book-feminist-misogynist/>.



Nick, the prime suspect in the case of his wife's possible murder, the media take interest in this exemplary case of a beautiful upper-middle class white woman gone missing, and both the public and the reader's suspicion towards Nick grows. The chapters documenting this part of the story are narrated by Nick himself who does not do the least to defend himself or ameliorate the reader's opinion of him: "It was my fifth lie to the police. I was just starting." (Gone Girl, henceforth cited as GG, 41) It is around this time, the middle of the novel, where the old diary entries giving the readers an inside into Amy's home life cease, and the case is, at least for the readers, solved.

"I'm so much happier now that I'm dead," Amy starts out her narration, picking up on the day of her and Nick's anniversary. (GG 210) She proceeds to lay out her plan she has been slowly setting up for exactly a year; faking her own murder, framing her own husband. Amy's idea of revenge has been put in motion after she saw Nick with his much younger lover Andie, and decided that Nick is neither keeping up his part of the deal (marriage), neither good at, at the minimum, pretending that their marriage is a happy one, and for that he must be punished: "... framing your husband for your murder is beyond the pale of what an average woman might do. But it's so very necessary," Amy explains after revealing herself as the true mastermind behind her disappearance. "Nick must be taught a lesson! He's never been taught a lesson!" (GG 223)

With Amy still officially missing, Nick, to save his own skin, polishes his behaviour at a true crime TV show interview and manages to win his wife back with an apology, and pleads for her to return to him. And eventually, Amy does indeed come back home, after successfully manipulating her husband to take on the role of the perfect partner, the pursuit of which had been her true wish all along. Nick himself secretly writes a novel, so that he may expose his wife's scheming, but his reach for control is soon stopped by Amy's announcement: "Congratulations, Dad." (GG 387) Amy has impregnated herself with Nick's sperm that they had been saving at the sperm bank and without Nick's consent. Their unborn baby becomes a means of keeping Nick, who has always wanted a child, docile, while the Dunnes both play their part in their performance of the perfect relationship.

### **1.2.2 Structure and Narration**

In general, the structure of a novel is something that can be a major decisive factor, making it a masterpiece or rendering it fully dysfunctional. The format of the novel draws a large difference between *Gone Girl* and Flynn's previous works. Both *Sharp Objects* and *Dark Places* are told in chronological order, in 17 and 43 chapters respectively, and both feature one

first person narrator. The female protagonists are not conscious of their role as narrators, and do not deliberately trick the reader or present untrue information. In contrast to the first two novels, while working on her third novel, Flynn chose a much more complicated and bold way of presentation, and as a result “no one expected her slippery new novel to capture the public imagination.”<sup>19</sup>

Despite all this, *Gone Girl* captured public attention in 2012 and still holds it to this day, arguably thanks to its clever disjointed structure and presentation of its key plot elements. What was very fresh and unprecedented compared to past Flynn’s work was the presence of a male narrator; both Dunnes, Amy and Nick, take turns to depict the plot from their point of view. Both Amy and Nick are aware of their roles as narrators. They are what would be called in Wayne C. Booth’s terminology, presented in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* as “self-conscious narrators,” who are “aware of themselves as writers.”<sup>20</sup> Both Amy and Nick, in fact, frequently turn to the reader, in Amy’s case doing as much as trying to prove her intellectual superiority even to the reader: “. . . watching her husband and me trade cash for keys. (That is the correct grammar, you know: her husband and me.)” (GG 224) This stylistic choice ensures that the readers feel more emerged in the story, and therefore all twists and betrayals elicit a stronger, more personal reaction.

Nick and Amy’s narratives partially complement each other but, particularly in the first half of the novel, heavily contradict each other. This is caused by Nick’s accounts taking place in the present, opening with Amy’s disappearance, while Amy’s narration starts in the past, even before her and Nick’s relationship officially begins. It is also in the first part of the novel that Amy’s chapters, presented as entries from her old diary that the police discover, are completely fabricated. “I wrote her very carefully, Diary Amy,” Amy comments on her false fictional persona invented specifically for the false diary. (GG 226) Amy’s diary specifically fabricated to deceive the authorities, as well as the readers. Amy is therefore a manipulative narrator; she intentionally presents false information to the reader. Although it is impossible to discern what extent the false information presented in Amy’s diary spans, some it is based on true events from Amy’s past while other parts are completely made up. Amy as a narrator intentionally blurs the lines between fiction and fact, performativity and authenticity.

Whereas Amy supplies the reader with made up facts, Nick on the other hand is premeditating as a narrator in a much subtler manner. He carefully chooses what information

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<sup>19</sup> Murphy, “We Will Have a Happy Marriage”, 159.

<sup>20</sup> Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 155.

he can share and what is better to be kept from the reader until he has no other choice.<sup>21</sup> “Now is the part where I have to tell you I have a mistress and you stop liking me,” Nick directly addresses the reader. (GG 140) Such untrustworthy storytelling technique results in “problematizing the readers’ perception and forcing them to re-evaluate their loyalty to the protagonists.”<sup>22</sup> What furthermore complicates the story is that due to complete lack of objectivity – not only in relation to the two main characters – is that the reader has little insight of what other characters are like without the ever-present filter of the narrator in charge. Amy is a good example of this problem; due to her self-centred nature and a strong belief in her own superiority, she often sees other women in a very judgemental and over-simplifying manner. She frequently generalizes others, most notably women, based on physical appearance: “ugly girls can be such thunder stealers” (GG 246), or demonstrates her one-dimensional and limiting way of her perception of women who are not her: “[Andie] doesn’t post photos of herself ‘partying,’ . . . I’d prefer the media find photos of her doing shots or kissing girls or flashing her thong; this would more easily cement her as the homewrecker she is.” (GG 237)

“For a book with a lot of female characters, it’s frustrating to see each and every one so flat, one-dimensional and stereotypical,” writes Nile Cappello, author of the article “How *Gone Girl* is Misogynistic Literature”.<sup>23</sup> However, one must remember that, in a novel, even something so elemental like character depiction would be heavily influenced by the subjective point of view of a first-person narrator, an unreliable one at that. The difference in how characters, for example Nick’s lover Andie, are portrayed tells the reader significantly more about the narrators, Nick, and Amy themselves, than about Andie, whose portrayal is, indeed, significantly less meaningful to the plot of *Gone Girl*. “She is a little slut, she is not to be pitied. I cannot believe anyone would feel sorry for Andie,” Amy comments on her husband’s lover. (GG 311) Similarly, through Nick’s view of his lover, as presented in chapters narrated by him: “I began thinking of Andie as an escape, an opportunity,” (GG 144) and “When I thought about Andie, my stomach didn’t hurt the way it did with my wife – the constant dread of returning to my own home, where I wasn’t welcome.” (GG 144) The reader is, as the author has intended, told much more about Amy, Nick and their relationship, the true central points of the plot of *Gone Girl*.

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<sup>21</sup> Llorente, Alicia Muro. *Lie to Me: The Unreliable Narrator as Creator of Identities*. (Dissertation, ResearchGate, 2016. Accessed 27 April 2022. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328163199\\_Lie\\_to\\_Me\\_The\\_Unreliable\\_Narrator\\_as\\_Creator\\_of\\_Identities](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328163199_Lie_to_Me_The_Unreliable_Narrator_as_Creator_of_Identities)), 29.

<sup>22</sup> Kane, *This is a (Wo)man’s World*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Cappello, Nile. “How ‘Gone Girl’ Is Misogynistic Literature.” HuffPost, HuffPost, 8 Sept. 2014. Accessed 27 April 2022. [www.huffpost.com/entry/how-gone-girl-is-misogynistic\\_b\\_5572288](http://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-gone-girl-is-misogynistic_b_5572288).

### 1.2.3 Genre

*Gone Girl* has been tirelessly marketed as a thriller that redefines the genre as a whole – a claim easily proved by a quick scan of its editorial review on the amazon website: “An ingenious and viperish thriller,”<sup>24</sup> says Jeff Giles of *Entertainment Weekly*. Nevertheless, it would be inadequate to omit the influence the novel has had on the postmodern emergence or re-exploration of the genre of domestic noir. At present, the term “thriller” has become an umbrella term for many different kinds of works. There is no concise definition of the genre, although many authors are fighting for its appraisal by the academy or prestigious book awards; for example, Gary Hoppenstand, editor of *Critical Insights: The American Thriller* and author of its introduction, claims that “the typical thriller narrative as one in which the story’s antagonist attempts to construct a criminal conspiracy, while the protagonist simultaneously attempts to detect (or solve) the villain’s conspiracy” and as a result “dramatic tension and a sense of unease are created within the reader.”<sup>25</sup>

Hoppenstand goes on to list more conditions that should be met to create the typical thriller, but even just from the short quotation above one may be able to tell that *Gone Girl* does not fit these requirements very well. Firstly, Flynn, unconventionally for a thriller, reveals the perpetrator of the crime in the middle of the novel rather than by its end; and secondly, through the extreme subversion of roles a reader would expect from a thriller, the perpetrator unmasks themselves, very proudly one might add: “I’ve always thought I could commit the perfect murder,” while also playing the role of the victim. (GG 224) That is if even the reader is willing to accept these roles as, on paper, the crime they have been led to believe has happened was fabricated. The function of a genre should be contingent on what a reader expects from it. A question arises whether a novel even fits a genre in case when these expectations are entirely subverted, and additionally, in *Gone Girl* outwardly mocked.<sup>26</sup>

In his book on the analysis of literary formulas *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*, John G. Cawelti explicitly mentions the plot structure “boy meets girl – boy and girl have a misunderstanding – boy gets girl” as one of the most commonly used.<sup>27</sup> It is therefore no surprise that Flynn appropriately titled each

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<sup>24</sup> Giles, Jeff. “Gone Girl.” EW.com, 6 June 2012. Accessed 27 April 2022. [ew.com/article/2012/06/06/gone-girl-review-gillian-flynn/](http://ew.com/article/2012/06/06/gone-girl-review-gillian-flynn/).

<sup>25</sup> Hoppenstand, Gary. *Critical Insights: The American Thriller*. (Ipswich, Massachusetts : Salem Press, 2014), xii.

<sup>26</sup> Frow, John. *Genre*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 101-102.

<sup>27</sup> Cawelti, John G. *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 5.

part of her novel to reference these common structures. *Gone Girl* is divided into three segments: “Boy Loses Girl”, “Boy Meets Girl”, “Boy Gets Girl Back (Or Vice Versa)”. These titles are supposed to allude to the typical plot structures that are simultaneously overthrown by their unconventionality: in “Boy Loses Girl” the girl fakes her death to frame the boy, in “Boy Meets Girl” the boy is discovering the true (and unpleasant) nature of the girl, and in “Boy Gets Girl Back (Or Vice Versa)” the couple does rekindle their relationship, however, does so in a way that definitely does not correspond to the unconditional love and happy ending typical narratives would be expected to incorporate.

Considering how strongly Flynn goes out of her way to dismantle most presumptions of what makes a thriller a thriller, it is reasonable to ask whether one should, by that logic, treat it as such. It is more productive to read the novel instead as the – probably less marketable but – more appropriate, as Laura Joyce declares it, “archetypal domestic noir” of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>28</sup> In her essay ““We Will Have a Happy Marriage If It Kills Him: Gillian Flynn and the Rise of Domestic Noir”, Bernice M. Murphy goes on to point out the reaction of some reviewers to *Gone Girl*, marking it as “no ‘ordinary’ genre novel.”<sup>29</sup> In her review of the novel, *New York Time’s* film and literary critic Janet Maslin notes on the plot of *Gone Girl*: “Perhaps these sound like standard-issue crime story machinations. They’re not. They’re only the opening moves for the game Ms. Flynn has in mind.”<sup>30</sup> What comes as no surprise is therefore the overwhelming boost of popularity of “female-focused psychological suspense novels” that followed the publication of *Gone Girl*, proving its cultural values.<sup>31</sup>

“What has always scared me is the danger close to home,”<sup>32</sup> Flynn says in Lev Grossman’s article “Gillian Flynn’s Marriage Plot” and *Gone Girl* reflects this statement more than well. “But I know I’ll never sleep again. I can’t close my eyes when I’m next to her. It’s like sleeping with a spider,” Nick tells the reader by the end of the novel. (GG 382) The unpredictable threat lurking inside one’s own house, inside one’s own bed, is certainly a factor which heavily contributes to the disturbing yet gripping thrill that the novel induces. The reputation of the literary predecessors of *Gone Girl*, such as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) or Daphne Du Maurier’s *Rebecca* (1938), prove similar themes to be ever-present in our society. Such conclusion begs the question whether the collective fascination with domestic

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<sup>28</sup> Joyce, Laura, and Henry Sutton. *Domestic Noir: The New Face of 21st Century Crime Fiction*. (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 4.

<sup>29</sup> Murphy, “We Will Have a Happy Marriage”, 158.

<sup>30</sup> Maslin, Janet. “The Lies That Buoy, Then Break a Marriage.” *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 29 May 2012. Accessed 27 April 2022. [www.nytimes.com/2012/05/30/books/gone-girl-by-gillian-flynn.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/30/books/gone-girl-by-gillian-flynn.html).

<sup>31</sup> Joyce, *Domestic Noir: The New Face of 21st Century Crime Fiction*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Grossman, “Gillian Flynn’s Marriage Plot,” online.

noir fiction – the feelings of vulnerability in one’s own home or the thought of one’s significant other hiding paralysing secrets – stems either from the appeal of the unknown or, the more alarming, ability to relate to the stories of domestic peril.

## 2 Introduction of the Characters

### 2.1 Nick

Nick Dunne is the first narrator of the couple the reader encounters. He is an average man approaching his middle age, a bar owner, who is currently out of a stable job. He used to be a journalist for a men's magazine in New York City but had lost his job due to the 2008 recession. Nick is largely defined by his relationship to his parents; to his mother, who before the events of the novel passed away from breast cancer, and his father, a violent man suffering from Alzheimer's, who occasionally breaks out of the caretaking facility to descend upon Nick like a ghost haunting its victim. Nick himself is a deeply conflicted character. His inner struggle seems to stem from the different treatment he was used to receiving from his parents. He was excessively "mothered" as Nick's wife Amy puts it, by his mother, while his women-hating father demanded Nick to live up to his expectations of masculinity. (GG, 179)

Despite Nick trying to distance himself from the glimpses of his abusive father he sees in himself, he cannot help but prize his masculinity, which is jeopardized by certain factors beyond Nick's control, like the loss of a job, and by factors he feels he should be able to control like his wife Amy, who constantly proves her superior intellect over Nick's. One of the direct proofs of this dynamic is the Dunnes' anniversary tradition: a treasure hunt that Amy prepares for Nick. She prepares a set of clues, which Nick has to solve in order to proceed to the next location, the final location revealing his anniversary gift. This tradition infuriates Nick. The first reason being that Nick often has trouble deciphering Amy's clever clues, usually filled with double meanings and their old inside jokes he pays less and less attention to as years go by. "No matter how many clues I solved, I'd be faced with some Amy trivia to *unman* me," he says. (GG 132, my emphasis) The second problem Nick has with the treasure hunt is that this tradition comes from Amy's parents, where Amy's father would prepare the hunt while her mother searched. ". . . don't think I don't see the gender roles here, that I don't get the hint," Nick tells the readers, pointing to his insecurity regarding masculinity and hyperawareness of gender roles. (GG 24)

As a result of Nick's feelings of emasculation, brought out by his father's strict opinions, his wife who challenges him very change she gets, and the patriarchal society in general, he seeks out a way to restore it. He does so by finding a much younger lover and engaging in an extramarital affair for a year prior to the events of *Gone Girl*. And as a man, he feels much better when his lover Andie is: ". . . asking me questions about myself that Amy never had,

not lately. Making me feel like a worthwhile man, not the idiot who lost his job, the dope who forgot to put the toilet seat down.” (GG 143) However, this also makes Nick realize he is a bad husband, which only intensifies the tension in his marriage. “You are a cheater. You have failed one of the most basic male tests,” Nick thinks to himself. (GG 147) As it is revealed later in the novel, it is also Nick’s cheating that provokes his wife to proceed with her villainous revenge plan, which may come as shocking to some readers, as Nick’s worst crime is infidelity and lack of emotional presence in the marriage, something that might be, sadly, considered normal by outdated stereotypical perspectives that expect men to have a higher sex drive and less emotional attachment, compared to women.

## 2.2 Amy

Amy Eliot Dunne comes from a family more influential than Nick’s, but she too has lost her job as a journalist, and because of Nick’s mother’s illness and financial struggles Amy has been forced to move from her beloved New York to Nick’s home state of Missouri, which she despises. Amy has always been used to being perfect. “My wife had a brilliant, popping brain, a greedy curiosity. But her obsessions tended to be fuelled by competition: She needed to dazzle men and jealous-ify women. . . She needed to be Amazing Amy, all the time,” is how Nick describes her. (GG 48) On a different occasion he, however, refers to her as “brittle, bitter Amy.” (GG 51) This disjointed image Nick has of his wife is a direct result of Amy’s habit to adjust her personality in order to act in accordance with the expectations her family and community may have. This characteristic of Amy’s will be further explored in the following chapter, where Amy’s distinct identities will be mainly referred to as: Diary Amy, as the character Amy presents in the previously mentioned fabricated diary entries; Real Amy, as her authentic personality; and Amazing Amy, as the fictional character invented by Real Amy’s parents.

As has been acknowledged in the previous chapter, *Gone Girl* is a novel that caused a significant amount of controversy and discussions upon its publication. Most of the disagreements among the readers are rooted in the perception of Amy’s character. Some claim that the character of Amy is a misogynist portrayal of a female character, simply because she is not a good role model. To these accusations Flynn has had the chance to react in many of her interviews and articles reviewing the novel. In *The Guardian*’s “Gillian Flynn on her Bestseller *Gone Girl* and Accusations of Misogyny” written by Oliver Burkeman, Flynn says: “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.”<sup>33</sup>

The preposterous yet perfectly calculated lengths the character of Amy Dunne can go into are an affirmation of what could be said about Flynn’s convictions about the flaws of traditional gendered narratives. She seeks out to portray women who are just as morally corrupt as a wide range of male characters and believes that “a truly equitable representation of women means acknowledging that they are just as capable of villainy as men. Amy’s revenge plot . . . situated her within the ‘evil genius’ pop culture pantheon more commonly occupied by male characters such as Hannibal Lecter or Moriarty.”<sup>34</sup>

Finally, what remains to be said is that what, in the first place, shocks the audiences of *Gone Girl* is Amy’s deceit of not only those close to her but her masterful manipulation of the public opinion. Anyone potentially could use the way the system is set for their own gain. Amy manages to exploit the notion of female victimhood, expectations of female identity and gender roles to trick the whole nation into believing her story rather than her husband’s. What scares many about the character of Amy Dunne is that she boils down to, as said in yet another *The Guardian* article by Emine Saner “The *Gone Girl* Backlash: What Women Don’t Want”, “a thousand of misogynist myths and fear about female behaviour.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Burkeman, “Gillian Flynn on Her Bestseller *Gone Girl*,” online.

<sup>34</sup> Murphy, “We Will Have a Happy Marriage”, 163.

<sup>35</sup> Saner, Emine. “The *Gone Girl* Backlash: What Women Don’t Want.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 7 Oct. 2014. Accessed 27 April 2022. [www.theguardian.com/film/2014/oct/07/gone-girl-backlash-david-fincher-misogynist-feminist](http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/oct/07/gone-girl-backlash-david-fincher-misogynist-feminist).

## 3 Performativity

### 3.1 Gender Performativity

Gender performativity is a feminist theory first introduced in 1990 by the well-respected feminist scholar Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.<sup>36</sup> Near the end of the book, Butler introduces the idea of gender being a culturally and sociologically induced performance put up by its agent. This theory is brought about by a famous passage from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."<sup>37</sup> While pondering the implicit meaning of the words above, in the introduction of her theory, Butler poses multiple questions ranging from how gender of a person can be constructed to "[a]nd, perhaps most pertinently, when does this mechanism arrive on the cultural scene to transform the human subject into a gendered subject?"<sup>38</sup>

In its core, the gender performativity theory suggests that each person's expression of gender (whether feminine, masculine or agender) is a behaviour learnt from the given society and culture and constructed through observed "specific corporeal acts."<sup>39</sup> In Butler's own words from an essay titled "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" published in 1988 gender "is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts."<sup>40</sup> Butler claims that gender is ultimately a concept that a person can never fully internalize, not only because it is unstable and fluid but also because it is, at its root, a repetition of unauthentic social acts that are brought about by the circumstantial culture and society the individual occupies and therefore are comparable to a theatrical performance.<sup>41</sup>

One of the aforementioned goals of this thesis is to illustrate how Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* may be read employing Butler's theory of gender performativity, although, another intriguing topic is that the Butlerian reading can be enlarged and applied on the studied characters without the limitations of the image of masculine or feminine gender, especially in the case of the protagonist, Amy Elliot Dunne. It is a valid point to observe Flynn's portrayal of the main character through the lens of performativity but rather than concentrating solely

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<sup>36</sup> Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

<sup>37</sup> Beauvoir, Simone, and H M. Parshley. *The Second Sex*. (London: J. Cape, 1956), 273.

<sup>38</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 52.

<sup>39</sup> Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." (*Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519–31. Accessed 27 April 2020. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>.

<sup>40</sup> Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,"), 519.

<sup>41</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

on the issue of gender, zooming out and focusing instead on her whole identity, and more specifically, the lack thereof. A Butlerian reading of *Gone Girl* would shed light on how a person's authentic identity is inherently abandoned for the sake of conforming to gender norms, and the different expectations such roles may carry for different genders. Furthermore, it may illustrate how the one-dimensional labelling of an individual's existence causes the fragmentation of their inner self, and the struggle for control over the multiple roles co-existing within one person. A struggle that can quickly turn violent and unsavoury, but, nevertheless, necessary to comprehend for a postmodern reader.

### 3.1.1 Amazing Amy

In the previous chapter dedicated to the introductory analysis of Amy Elliot Dunne, a substantial amount of space has been devoted to Amy's gift, or rather curse, of switching between varied identities. She performs these personality changes all throughout the novel and her life in order to attain her goals, most notably framing her own husband for her murder. After the reader finally meets the somewhat Real Amy in the middle of the novel, they discover that the Diary Amy they had trusted all along has been just one of the many carefully constructed personalities Amy has used to get what she wants. "Diary Amy. . . She was meant to be likable," Real Amy comments on the function of Diary Amy, her public alter ego. "Meant for someone like you to like her. She's easy to like." (GG 225) Half of what the readers are told about Amy is a lie targeted towards any reader of the infamous diary, meaning not only the police, the public, but also the reader themselves. A lie which is just the tip of the iceberg of the pretence that Amy has been feeding the people in her life, the media and, most importantly, herself.

Like many other literary "bitches" of the contemporary novel, Amy has developed in the character portrayed from her initial role of a victim. The author of *The Bitch is Back: Wicked Women in Literature*, a book dedicated to analysis of unlikeable literary female characters, Sarah A. Aguiar notes: "The bitch often refuses to accede to the demands of a patriarchal society; she develops a strength that assists her in overcoming victimhood."<sup>42</sup> But unlike a considerable number of female characters, who must have undergone shocking, typically sexual, trauma to be, in the eyes of the common reader, "entitled to" an unlikeable personality and/or self-centred intentions – staple characters being Lisbeth Salander from *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2008) or Sansa Stark from *A Game of Thrones* (1996) – the trauma that has accompanied Amy throughout her life is of a different kind.

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<sup>42</sup> Aguiar, Sarah Appleton. *The Bitch Is Back: Wicked Women in Literature*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), 11.

While a disturbingly wide spectrum of female characters has been portrayed to battle traumatic experiences in which their body or mind would undergo use and abuse, Amy's life has been misused in a different way by her parents taking advantage of her life and identity in order to gain status and wealth. Amy's parents, Rand and Marybeth, used their only daughter as an inspiration for a children's book series' character "Amazing Amy". Although they would never admit it, Amazing Amy has become a means of psychological torture of their child, who has never had a choice but to involuntarily compare her accomplishments to the ones of her "literary alter ego", as Amy herself calls it, "my paperbound better half, the me I was supposed to be." (GG 31)

At the very moment of her birth, Amy becomes the most special little girl, being born alive and healthy after her mother's multiple miscarriages, and simultaneously a never-ending let down held against impossible standards set by her unborn older sisters, who tragically never even got the chance to fail. This sentiment is reflected upon by Amy in her introduction in the middle of the novel: "I've always been better . . . I was the one who made it. But I've always been jealous too. . . They get to be perfect without even trying, without even facing one moment of existence, while I am stuck here on earth, and every day I must try, and every day is a chance to be less than perfect." (GG 212) Such conditions that Amy has been born into cause her to feel, on the one hand, unique as the only child born healthy, and, on the other, inadequate when compared to both, the legion of her unborn sisters (all of whom were named "Hope") and Amazing Amy.

"And yet I can't fail to notice that whenever I screw something up, [Amazing] Amy does it right: When I finally quit violin at age twelve, [Amazing] Amy was revealed as a prodigy in the next book," Amy comments on her feelings towards the role model she is being put up against. (GG 31) These feelings may not sound so harsh; many people must face certain expectations set up, e.g., by an older sibling. However, upon a deeper reflection, a question may arise how one might live up to the image of one own's idealized self, a self that does not even exist, and is an all-capable abstract concept that does not solely reside in the mind of Amy's parents, but a whole generation of people: Amy's peers who have grown up with the Amazing Amy children's books.

As time passed, Amy got older, so did the readers of the children's book series and even Amazing Amy herself, when the newest, and due to lack of interest probably last, Amazing Amy book is released: "Amazing Amy is getting married!" (GG 31) Even long into adulthood Amy (whose marriage is nowhere in the near future) is plagued by her parents' implicit criticism: "Rand and Marybeth couldn't resist. They've given their daughter's namesake what

they can't give their daughter: a husband!" (GG 31) Amy is self-conscious of her "perpetually single state", and whether her parents' jab in this direction is well-meant or no is of no importance (GG 31); intentionally or not, they suggest that Amazing Amy is better than Real Amy because she is desirable as a wife. As a result of this passive and continuous public scrutiny, which Amy has been painfully aware of since her childhood, she has gradually abandoned her flawed but authentic self, in order to live up to her perfect first but not last alter ego: Amazing Amy.

### 3.2 The Death of Amy's Identity

Growing up while trying to mimic an idealized version of herself, Amy is acutely conscious of the lack of authenticity in her own identity. ". . . I'd never really felt like a person, because I was always a product," she expresses her feelings of self-objectivization. "Amazing Amy has to be brilliant, creative, kind, thoughtful, witty, and happy." (GG 214) Amy becomes keen on pushing away anyone who could challenge or place doubts upon her act. This defensiveness of the imaginary persona Amy has forced herself to live as, in order to please her parents and avoid critique, is unveiled as Nick confronts one of Amy's childhood friends. "I feel like Amy wanted people to believe she really was perfect. And as we got to be friends, I got to know her," she tells Nick. "And she wasn't perfect. . . Which was fine by me. It just wasn't fine by her. She got rid of me because I knew she wasn't perfect." (GG 277).

Amy has pushed herself to take on more and more identities the older she got. Her motivations were either to conform to current trends, highlighted particularly by the latter part of Amy's enumeration: "Preppy '80s Girl. Ultimate-Frisbee Granola and Blushing Ingenue and Witty Hepburnian Sophisticate. Brainy Ironic Girl and Boho Babe (the latest version of Frisbee Granola)," or to conform to what certain people wanted her to be. (GG 225) "Nick loved a girl who doesn't exist. I was pretending, the way I often did, pretending to have a personality," Amy explicitly mentions the absence of her identity. "I can't help it, it's what I've always done." (GG, 212) What follows in the text is Amy's articulation of the "Cool Girl", "the most widely circulated and culturally resonant passage from *Gone Girl*" as Emily Johansen, associate professor at Texas A&M University, refers to it in her article "The Neoliberal Gothic: 'Gone Girl', 'Broken Harbor', and the Terror of Everyday Life".<sup>43</sup> In this passage, Amy explains yet another personality she had taken on to appeal to men,

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<sup>43</sup> Johansen, Emily. "The Neoliberal Gothic: 'Gone Girl, Broken Harbor', and the Terror of Everyday Life." (*Contemporary Literature* 57, no. 1 (2016): 30–55. Accessed 24 Apr. 2022. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24735057>), 43–44.

particularly to Nick. “Cool Girl”, a label ironically analogous to the title of the novel, is the epitome of the perfect partner in modern-day men’s eyes.

Being the Cool Girl means I am a hot, brilliant, funny woman who adores football, poker, dirty jokes, and burping, who plays video games, drinks cheap beer, loves threesomes and anal sex, and jams hot dogs and hamburgers into her mouth like she’s hosting the world’s biggest culinary gang bang while somehow maintaining a size 2, because Cool Girls are above all hot. Hot and understanding. Cool Girls never get angry; they only smile in a chagrined, loving manner and let their men do whatever they want. *Go ahead, shit on me, I don’t mind, I’m the Cool Girl.* (GG 213)

### 3.2.1 Cool Girl

Cool Girl is interesting to a feminist reading from many angles; it comments on the “market logic”<sup>44</sup> that modern relationships fall victim to – with the woman, again, posing as the product – or how men, and society in general, expect women to perform certain behaviours, no matter how stylized or inauthentic they may appear to be. Amy herself reflects on the other party of this one-sided relationship that “Cool Girl” is a part of: “Men actually think this girl exists.” (GG 213) In addition, she comments on how similar bizarre expectations are never placed on men: “I waited patiently – years – for the pendulum to swing the other way, for men to start reading Jane Austen, learn how to knit, pretend to love cosmos, organize scrapbook parties, and make out with each other while we leer.” (GG 213–214) The novel, at first, seems to be constructed to criticize men who believe in the true existence of “Cool Girl” but also turns against women, who deliberately pretend to be them, “And the Cool Girls are even more pathetic: They’re not even pretending to be the woman they want to be, they’re pretending to be the woman a man wants them to be.” (GG 213) This is one of the first instances where Amy illustrates her understanding of post-feminist society on both sides; the men and their male gaze, and the women and the consequent deliberate self-surveillance.<sup>45</sup>

The behaviour model of “Cool Girl” is something that can be described very nonchalantly and directly, the demonstration of which is the aim of the quotation choice of Amy’s “Cool Girl” monologue above. “Cool Girl” is an image of a woman that today’s western society globally accepts and embraces as accurate. Amy’s observation is that women

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<sup>44</sup> Johansen, “The Neoliberal Gothic,” 44.

<sup>45</sup> Osborne, Patrick, ““I’m the Bitch That Makes You a Man”: Conditional Love as Female Vengeance in Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl*.” (2017), 19.



are forced to conform to the image of femininity that is desirable, or they will be labelled as deviant. Amy even mentions the pressure women may feel regarding this phenomenon: “Every girl was supposed to be this girl, and if you weren’t, then there was something wrong with you.” (GG 214) Furthermore, it is an example of many labels used to limit and contain women, rather than paint a full picture of an individual.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, to Butler’s concept of gender and its culturally tied performance, the characteristics of each personality that Amy imitates, such as “Preppy ‘80s Girl”, “Ultimate-Frisbee Granola” or “Boho Babe”, are shallow and de-personalized; they are easily describable in a few bullet points, defined materialistically through fashion choices and most of all, evolve, gain, or lose popularity according to current cultural trends. Amy, one after the other, presents her personalities to others in socially accepted bite-size portions or limited glimpses of herself, rather than her true, complex identity.

### 3.2.2 Fashion and Physical Appearance

Despite all potential for complexity and exceptionality, Amy has become the example of a female identity becoming “something to be consumed, something that can be as easily trialed, worn, and discarded as an item of clothing.”<sup>47</sup> Moreover, in his article “Layers of Textual Femininity in Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl*”, Richard Leahy, a senior lecturer at the English department of University of Chester, argues that fashion, promoted by the consumer-base society, is one of the most distinct ways of identity and gender expression. Fashion is something that can be put on and taken off with ease, and it is with such ease that Amy puts on and takes off various roles and personalities. The result of the co-existence of multiple identities is that “Amy’s personality becomes so distorted that nobody knows who the real Amy is, including herself,” as writes Hoai Anh Pham in her thesis “The Influence of Mass Media on Self-Presentation”.<sup>48</sup>

The notion of gender identity being manifested through fashion and manner of clothing, which is severely dependant on the current cultural trends, is widely agreed upon. Susan B. Kaiser in her book *Fashion and Cultural Studies* writes, “Becoming visibly gendered . . . involves engagement with complicated, shifting coding systems of colours fabrics, trim, forms

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<sup>46</sup> Lauter, Estella, and Carol Schreier Rupperecht, eds. Introduction. *Feminist Archetypal Theory: Interdisciplinary Re-Visions of Jungian Thought*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1985, 7.

<sup>47</sup> Leahy, Richard. “Layers of Textual Femininity in Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl*.” *Ohio.edu*, Ohio University, 1 Sept. 2016. Accessed 8 March 2022. [www.ohio.edu/cas/parlour/news/growlery/femininity-gillian-flynns-gone-girl](http://www.ohio.edu/cas/parlour/news/growlery/femininity-gillian-flynns-gone-girl).

<sup>48</sup> Pham, Hoai Anh. “The Influence of Mass Media on Self-Presentation: The Case Study of *Gone Girl*.” (Thesis, Academia.edu, 2017. Accessed 27 April 2022. [https://www.academia.edu/34156067/THE\\_INFLUENCE\\_OF\\_MASS\\_MEDIA\\_ON\\_SELF\\_PRESENTATION\\_THE\\_CASE\\_STUDY\\_OF\\_GONE\\_GIRL](https://www.academia.edu/34156067/THE_INFLUENCE_OF_MASS_MEDIA_ON_SELF_PRESENTATION_THE_CASE_STUDY_OF_GONE_GIRL)), 32.

shapes, and pattern and other body fashioning's. These systems are not natural; rather, they are arbitrary and vary by time and space, history, and culture."<sup>49</sup> Amy is self-aware enough to recognize these patterns in her behaviour that are analogous to those around her. "The way some women change fashion regularly," she says. "I change personalities . . ." (GG 212) In this quotation she also draws a line between herself and other women, but her changes of identity are also closely tied to fashion and physical appearance in general.

In the chapter which documents her first day after having faked her disappearance, Amy describes the adjustments in her appearance she makes in order to look less like Amy Dunne and more like Dead Amy, a nameless woman on the run: she cuts and dyes her hair, wears dull clothing and accessories and drives a cheap car. "I have dark skin, my mouse-colored helmet cut, the smart-girl glasses," Amy describes her transformation. (GG 238) Another change that Amy's body undergoes is that she had gained weight to physically differentiate her new identity, Dead Amy, from the perfect Amy Dunne, whose missing person photos, as Amy realizes, would be shown in media outlets, "I gained twelve pounds in the months before my disappearance . . . and already another two pounds since. I was careful to have no photos taken of me in the months before I disappeared, so the public will know only pale, thin Amy . . ." (GG 238)

Amy, even though in other ways demonstrates extreme self-awareness and intentionality in gender and identity expression, puts utmost value on her weight. One of the factors proving her self-proclaimed perfection has always been her, by American standards, "perfect body". "My body was a beautiful, perfect economy, every feature calibrated, everything in balance," she describes it. (GG 238) Amy's obsession with weight relates to overall physical appearance and the importance and value her and the society place on it. On several occasions Amy implicitly expresses the notion that she, a beautiful white woman, is better than others, or even better than her potential flawed, imperfect self. This shows that Amy continuously compares herself to other women: "She is much prettier than I am, right now, in this place," is how Amy talks about another woman whom she meets after her physical transformation to Dead Amy. (GG 265) Another comparison Amy draws is between herself, Amy Dunne, the perfection personified, and the mere idea of her imperfect self: "Nick and I would never have married if I had looked like [Dead Amy] when we met." (GG 225)

Amy's ability to shift between various identities, the transformation from Real Amy to Dead Amy having been described above, is heavily dependent on the control she holds over

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<sup>49</sup> Kaiser, Susan B. *Fashion and Cultural Studies*. (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2011), 175.



her physical appearance, particularly such a visually based world, where the physical appearance of a person dictates their value. “I’m not just pretty anymore, I am pretty for my age. It is the truth: My value has decreased,” Diary Amy writes in one of the diary entries. (GG 197) This fact is inarguably one of the reasons why the disappearance of Amy Dunne attracts such enormous media attention. The appearance, race, and gender of a missing person dictate the way their case gets exposure in media coverage.

In an article “Bad girls and gone girls: Why the media tired of ‘missing white women’” *The Washington Post* reporter Paul Farhi claims that the media’s focus on white female victims has been so prevalent in recent years that the cultural critics even came up with a term to describe such media turmoil: Missing White Woman Syndrome.<sup>50</sup> Whereas the predominant missing victims – non-white men – have rarely received such attention, the Missing White Woman Syndrome reached its peak in 2015,<sup>51</sup> just a couple years after the publication of *Gone Girl* in 2012, which skilfully captured the exploitation of ideal victimhood, and emphasis the media and its consumer base put on physical appearance of women. It is noteworthy that the concept of the ability to accommodate one’s fashion expression and physical appearance with the intention to exploit societal standards did not firstly appear in *Gone Girl* but also is touched on in Flynn’s debut novel *Sharp Objects*.

### 3.2.3 Amma, Amy’s Literary Predecessor

As it has already been mentioned, Amy Dunne is not the first portrayal of female identity performativity in Flynn’s work. It is possible that *Sharp Object*’s character of Amma, the teenage younger sister of the protagonist and narrator Camille Preaker, was the literary predecessor of Flynn’s inspiration in relation to conscious co-existence of multiple identities in one person. Amma, with even her name reminiscent of Amy’s, is in the novel’s epilogue revealed to be more than the helpless victim of her and Camille’s mother’s mental illness; she is the perpetrator of the two gruesome murders as well. Therefore, it is also Amma’s role as the perpetrator of the crimes that set the plot in motion is analogous to Amy’s, however, what is more of interest for this argument is her premeditated ability to switch between the personas she performs in order to attain control and power in the limiting environment she inhabits.

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<sup>50</sup> Farhi, Paul. “Bad Girls and Gone Girls: Why the Media Tired of ‘Missing White Women’.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 13 Dec. 2015. Accessed 27 April 2022. [www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/bad-girls-and-gone-girls-why-the-media-tired-of-missing-white-women/2015/12/09/5660fb52-9934-11e5-94f0-9eeaff906ef3\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/bad-girls-and-gone-girls-why-the-media-tired-of-missing-white-women/2015/12/09/5660fb52-9934-11e5-94f0-9eeaff906ef3_story.html).

<sup>51</sup> Farhi, “Bad Girls and Gone Girls,” online.

Amma's behaviour is stylized from the first time Camille meets her after many years of no contact. She encounters Amma spending time with her girl-gang while a search for a missing girl is happening. The act Amma puts up around her peers is what crime researcher and writer Leigh Redhead frequently refers to as "the Lolita act" in her essay "Teenage Kicks: Performance and Postfeminism in Domestic Noir":<sup>52</sup> "[Amma's] flushed face had the roundness of a girl barely in her teens and her hair was parted in ribbons, but her breasts, which she aimed proudly outward, were those of a grown woman. A lucky grown woman."<sup>53</sup> Amma's confident sexualized performance around her friends, peers of opposite gender and even adult men is heavily contrasted with the mannerisms she adopts once she is around her mother Adora. "A little girl with her face aimed intently at a huge, four-foot doll-house . . ." Camille describes her sister's appearance. "She looked entirely her age – thirteen – for the first time since I'd seen her. Actually, no. She looked younger now. Those clothes were more appropriate for a ten-year-old."<sup>54</sup> Notably, much emphasis is assigned to Amma's physical appearance.

Amma is fully aware of her performance. "I wear this for Adora. When I'm home, I'm her little doll," Amma explains to Camille immediately upon noticing her sister's observation.<sup>55</sup> Her performance to please her mother is fully intentional and reflects the deeper motive behind Amma's various personas: she does not, like one could expect from a teenager, act different around her friends out of a need to rebel against her mother's wishes but to exploit to its maximum capacity her ability to act in a way that would grant her control in each role she occupies. The hometown of Camille and Amma and the setting of the novel is a small midwestern town with rigid patriarchal standards that expect women to perform their pure femininity, and collectively regard them as the weaker sex. "Too much for her. Girls shouldn't be out here anyway, not as things stand," one of the Wind Gap men tries to turn Camille away from the search for the missing girl.<sup>56</sup> As a result of growing up in such a limiting environment, Amma, in contrast to Camille, performs different identities to please and manipulate people who surround her. Similarly, Amy's intentions in *Gone Girl*, although originally stemming from the desire to fulfil the expectations others may have, turn narcissistic and the fragmentation of her identity allow her to use them as the means to achieve control.

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<sup>52</sup> Joyce, *Domestic Noir: The New Face of 21st Century Crime Fiction*, 124.

<sup>53</sup> Flynn, *Sharp Objects*, 12.

<sup>54</sup> Flynn, *Sharp Objects*, 38.

<sup>55</sup> Flynn, *Sharp Objects*, 38.

<sup>56</sup> Flynn, *Sharp Objects*, 13.

### 3.2.4 Control

In the following segment, it will be argued that Amy's loss of identity is what ultimately allows her to emerge victorious in the power struggle of her and Nick's relationship, which the readers watch unfold among the events of *Gone Girl*. The reason for Amy's lack of identity has already been discussed, however, it has not yet been mentioned how this void has granted her perfect control over the roles she chooses to play. It would be imprecise to say that Amy is an empty shell; she might not have a sense of a stable identity, but she still has a strong set of inner motives, beliefs, and ambitions. Although, the ambition she is most passionate about is the conservation of the facade of her false perfect life.

When this facade starts falling apart – when Nick starts cheating on Amy – she finds herself embodying a new identity, being stripped of the perfect persona she spent her life creating. “I had a new persona, not of my choosing. I was Average Dumb Woman Married to Average Shitty Man. He had single-handedly de-amazed Amazing Amy,” Amy describes the role she has been assigned without her approval. (GG 222) So, once Amy feels she has started losing control in her married life with Nick, she begins the careful construction of the life and identity of Diary Amy, a woman presented to the public after Real Amy's disappearance through the means of diary entries documenting the life of Diary Amy and Diary Nick. Diary Amy may have been based on what was once true but, in order to sway the public opinion, gradually leans away from the truthful portrayal of domestic life of Nick and Amy to a false testimony of fear and abuse.

What is interesting is that after years of having her life written by her parents through the means of the Amazing Amy books, once Amy's dissatisfaction with such a life reaches its peak, her idea of reclaiming control is very similar: she writes her own story with a stylized version of herself, Diary Amy, not a faultless children's book character but a believable image of a beautiful kind woman. She comments on her gaining independence from her parents' story, “I don't care about the rebuilding of their pathetic empire, because every day I get calls to tell my story. My story: mine, mine, mine.” (GG 377) Amy is reclaiming the narrative in a very literal way. This theme is resurrected by the end of the novel, when Amy secures a book contract in order to share her story as a kidnapping victim, taking control of not only her life, but also over Nick's version of events of *Gone Girl*: “I have a book deal: I am officially in control of our story. It feels wonderfully symbolic,” she says. “. . . Nick will have to smile and agree. I will write him the way I want him to be . . .” (GG 383)

Amy's upcoming book would be called "Amazing", which is yet another commentary on Amy's loss of identity, as Richard Leahy points on in his aforementioned article "Layers of Textual Femininity in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*". "She is no longer a person, no longer a noun. Instead, she is an adjective, a quality. Amy has been erased from 'Amazing Amy'. She no longer wants, and potentially is not capable of having, an identity – instead she is just a story to be read and consumed," Leahy writes.<sup>57</sup> The transformation of the character from Amazing Amy to Amazing is not completely drawn out in the novel as it comes to an end at the birth of Amy's own novel. Amy has fully taken over the authorship, the authentic narrative voice would no longer be up to her liking, because Amy and everything surrounding her must become the epitome of perfection. Diary Amy is the transition point that marks Amy's independence from her parents' narrative. She adopts this new identity which she had constructed to exploit on a larger scale.

In his essay "'I'm the Bitch that Makes You a Man': Conditional Love as Female Vengeance in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*" Patrick Osborne claims that "Diary Amy is the embodiment of emphasized femininity."<sup>58</sup> She is designed to appear to the eye of the American middle class, hungry for violence coated as entertainment coated as social injustice. Subsequently, after successfully selling her story to the media – "It's sort of like a talent competition," as Real Amy comments on true crime TV shows – Amy exploits the system that has been built against her by seemingly playing by its rules and twisting reality to her advantage. (GG 247) In her dissertation "This Is a (Wo)Man's World - Subverting Gender & Femininity in Gillian Flynn's Novel *Gone Girl*" (2019), Rebecca Kane captures Diary Amy as a performance put up in order to capitalize "upon societies' readiness to add [Amy] to the stockpile of women who have fallen victim to male violence."<sup>59</sup> With the successful ploy of Diary Amy, Real Amy gains control of the narrative, which will be used to frame Nick for her murder. "[Amy] envisions her life as a 'story', which becomes materialized in the form of her diary," Leahy notes.<sup>60</sup> The sensationalist story of domestic abuse and an uncaring violent husband, who in stereotypical narratives ends up murdering his wife (examples may include Shakespeare's *Othello* or the character of *Sweeney Todd*), is what, as foretold by Amy's calculations, draws in the attention of public and the following point of discussion, the media.

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<sup>57</sup> Leahy, "Layers of Textual Femininity," online.

<sup>58</sup> Osborne, "I'm the Bitch That Makes You a Man," 16.

<sup>59</sup> Kane, *This is a (Wo)man's World*, 15.

<sup>60</sup> Leahy, "Layers of Textual Femininity," online.

### 3.3 The Decay of Nick's Identity

The way the mass media influence the course of the investigation Flynn presents should be considered shocking to say the least, and even more shocking is the realization that this is how real-life cases are usually handled; with the detectives under the prying eyes of the public, where a small shift in public opinion can determine a suspect's conviction. All these factors have been accounted for by Amy, and it is her perfect manipulation of the public opinion via the fictive persona of Diary Amy that she almost succeeds in her plans. Amy is knowledgeable not only about how to influence the media and their narrative from the shadows but also is able to predict Nick's probable poor reactions to it. She knows this part of him very intimately, "Nick's nightmares have always been about being wronged, about being trapped, a victim of forces beyond his control," Amy says. (GG 236) In the character of Nick, the readers may observe how a person becomes subdued by a performance of a persona artificially forced upon them which is indisputably an important point of discussion, considering the widespread use of mass and social media today.

At first glance, Nick does not seem, especially in comparison with his wife, to have fallen victim to the concept of identity performativity. However, upon closer inspection, one might start noticing the transformation his character undergoes during the events of *Gone Girl*. The novel starts out showing Nick's inability to play along the narrative of the media that is in the sequence where Nick first comes into contact with – what this thesis will refer to as – Public Nick, which reads: "When I saw the broadcast later, I didn't recognize my voice. I barely recognized my face . . . I had worried about my voice wavering, so I overcorrected, and the words came out clipped, like I was reading a stock report . . . Utterly unconvincing, disconnected." (GG 65) Nick is uncomfortable with the persona of Public Nick, he does not know how to control his expression or behaviour on camera, where he must play the doting husband Amy requests.

As the story continues, the pile of evidence against Nick grows, the public disapproves of him more and more, and he is forced to overcome his aversion to the media performance by learning how to play by its rules; with the help of other characters, Nick manages to forge a new identity to wear when the cameras are rolling. "I looked like a man who loved his wife," Nick reflects upon his second, saving interview. (GG 313) "I was the ultimate hollow man: the husband that Amy always claimed couldn't apologize finally did, using words and emotions borrowed from an actor." (GG 314) What is interesting in this choice of words is that Nick models his apology after Hugh Grant, who in 1995 saved his career after being arrested

for “lewd conduct” after using the services of a sex worker by apologizing in an interview on *The Tonight Show* with host Jay Leno. Grant’s handling of the scandal has been dubbed “one of the greatest celebrity mea culpas in modern history”<sup>61</sup> by a culture reporter for *The Independent*, Adam White, in his article “‘What the hell were you thinking?’: How Hugh Grant’s arrest for ‘lewd conduct’ changed the way celebrities say sorry”. Similarly, Butler in her theory also chooses to make the analogy of gender performativity and “theatrical contexts”:<sup>62</sup> “a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief.”<sup>63</sup>

By the end of the novel, the readers have witnessed Nick go from confused by the attention of the media to nearly mastering his Public Nick performance. As a result, Nick’s personality also splinters, not in such an extreme way as Amy’s, but he does become, as Sahand Hamed Moeel Ardebil, the author of an essay called “Distortion of reality in *Gone Girl*” words it, “torn apart between his real identity and the identity that Amy and the media created out of him. In the end it seems he is both of them and neither of them since . . . there is no such thing as a unified character in the postmodern world.”<sup>64</sup> What is more is that Nick, despite having been forced to distort his identity, gets attached to his performance, his new Public Nick persona, which is demonstrated in his attachment to the media camped outside his house, in a segment where Nick describes his curiosity about one of the cameramen’s love life. “The camera crews parked themselves on my lawn most mornings. We were like rival soldiers . . . achieving some sort of perverted fraternity,” Nick describes it. “There was one guy . . . whom I’d become attached to . . . He was dating a girl he really, really liked. . . I wanted to hear how the story ended.” (GG 347–348) Nick’s final willingness to comply with Amy’s perfect life facade is scattered in many times towards the conclusion of the novel. There are examples of Nick’s inner mental processes, when he considers his strength as a man that was brought about by Amy, “I was a callow boy, and then a man, good and bad. Now at last I’m the hero.” (GG 389) And when he realizes the necessity of Amy’s presence in his life

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<sup>61</sup> White, Adam. “‘What the Hell Were You Thinking?’: How Hugh Grant’s Arrest for ‘Lewd Conduct’ Changed the Way Celebrities Say Sorry.” *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, 25 June 2020. Accessed 27 April 2022. [www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/hugh-grant-arrest-divine-brown-sex-worker-nine-months-elizabeth-hurley-a9584341.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/hugh-grant-arrest-divine-brown-sex-worker-nine-months-elizabeth-hurley-a9584341.html).

<sup>62</sup> Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” 521.

<sup>63</sup> Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” 520.

<sup>64</sup> Ardebil, Sahand Hamed Moeel, Zohreh Taebi Noghandari, and Mahmood Reza Ghorban Sabbagh. *Distortion of Reality in Gone Girl*. (Conference Paper, ResearchGate, 2020. Accessed 27 April 2022. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343889960\\_Distortion\\_of\\_Reality\\_in\\_Gone\\_Girl](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343889960_Distortion_of_Reality_in_Gone_Girl)), 9.

for the continuation of his new carefully tailored persona of the perfect husband: “. . . I can’t imagine my story without Amy,” he says. (GG 390)

A question a reader of the novel may pose is what the motivating factor behind Nick’s actions and goal to appease Amy is. The explanation for his behaviour could be backtracked to the identity performance stemming from childhood that had been discussed in the introducing part to this chapter. One may think that one of the core differences between the characters of Amy and Nick is that Amy has been subjected to identity performativity since her childhood in the aspiration for absolute perfection while Nick has been able to live as his authentic self for his whole life. This understanding may not be entirely true.

It has been argued that Amy’s lack of stable identity grants her great control over her performativity, but Nick is certainly quick to catch up with her game. Considering this, it is not hard to see that Nick, although not consciously or under such extreme conditions, has done his fair share of reshaping his personality to fit the environment he occupies. Most notably, this inauthenticity is observable in the fact that Nick’s “whole purpose in life is not to become his misogynist father,” as notes Alicia M. Llorente, author of “Lie to me: The Unreliable Narrator as Creator of Identities”.<sup>65</sup> Throughout the course of the novel, Nick’s character is under constant underlying pressure to avoid doing anything which could draw similarities between him and his abusive father who has shaped Nick’s idea of the aforementioned gender performativity.

“I involuntarily turned steel. My father again: Men don’t cry,” is how Nick describes his inability to appropriately respond to a deeply emotionally charged moment, when discussing his missing wife. (GG 65) Nick’s father is also the very personification of Nick’s inner self-scrutinizing voice: “I could feel my dad twisting his lips at the very idea. Well, there are all kinds of men, his most damning phrase, the second half left unsaid, and you are the wrong kind.” (GG 13) Nick and Amy’s roles are, both as characters and as husband and wife, are connective while essentially contrastive. With this in mind, it becomes clear that the distinctions and similarities between these two characters have been crafted more masterfully than it might seem on the surface: while Amy has been pretending to have the qualities of Amazing Amy – to be another person, Nick has been pretending to not have the qualities of his father – not to be another person.

It is no coincidence that the two events of Nick’s father’s death and Nick’s giving in to Amy’s conditions nearly correspond. In the novel presented by Nick as “My father *finally*

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<sup>65</sup> Llorente, *Lie to Me: The Unreliable Narrator as Creator of Identities*, 29.

died,” the passing of Nick’s father is significant in Nick’s passing from his father’s control to Amy’s. (GG 385, my emphasis) Nick realizes that Amy is what prevents him from becoming like his father: “I had spent my life comparing myself to my father, and now he was gone, and there was only Amy left to bat against.” (GG 385) Nick is borderline grateful to Amy for forcing him to (pretend to) be a better person and this belief is very explicitly demonstrated in Nick’s conversation with Margo, his twin sister:

“You don’t think you’ll kill her? You want to turn into Dad?”

“Don’t you see, Go? This is my guarantee not to turn into Dad. I’ll have to be the best husband and father in the world.” (GG 389)

Ultimately, Nick and Amy’s future child is the deciding factor against Nick’s revolt from Amy’s rules. He holds the safety of his unborn child, one that was conceived without his consent, above his own feelings of safety in his home. “I was a prisoner after all,” he says. “Amy had me forever, or as long as she wanted, because I needed to save my son.” (GG 388) Although, it is arguable if Nick’s motives are as selfless as he presents them to the reader. “This is my Guarantee not to turn into Dad.” (GG 389) This quote of Nick’s is so important, important enough to be repeated. The reader can observe that Nick is not thinking of what he can do for his child but what his child can do for him: become the ultimate confirmation that Nick has completely turned away from the parenting methods of his father’s. Unlike her husband, Amy has not done anything to break away from what she has been subjected to in her past, inarguably dooming her child to the same fate she has underwent as *Amazing Amy*. Under such dysfunctional and disbalanced power dynamic of the parents, Nick and Amy’s child will undoubtedly become the unrecognized true victim of the events of *Gone Girl*.



## Conclusion

Gender performativity as it has been described by Judith Butler is a concept that Flynn has portrayed in her characters going beyond gender but extending onto the whole of their identity. It has been demonstrated how in the character of Amy the shattering and dislocation from the authentic self results in her drive to achieve perfection in the eyes of others and has caused her to develop fake personalities to “wear” instead of her absent and abstract persona. The “others”, about whom Amy must stay constantly vigilant, are originally her parents, whose expectations she wants to live up to, but as she gets older her audience starts including her friends, and more dominantly men, whose attention Amy wants to attract. Amy’s control over her life is from the start taken away by the ever-present shadow of Amazing Amy and Amy seeks to reclaim the narrative of her life by creating the persona of Diary Amy. Through this newly constructed identity, she overthrows her role of the one being manipulated by fiction to the one manipulating others by fiction in order to preserve her sense of existence.

It is clear that the disconnection from Amy’s own identity is a direct result of her dehumanization since childhood exercised by her parents and the dislocation and simplification of female identities exercised by the patriarchal society. Consequently, Amy continues to stride away from her authentic self, which is then swallowed in the sea of other Amies, ranging from “Boho Babe” to “Cool Girl” to “Loved Wife” to “Unloved Wife” to “Gone Girl” – very much in the literal sense, and in the sense of an absence of identity. Amy’s performance of her personalities is essentially identical to the phenomenon of gender performativity as it has been explained by Butler, except Amy’s act goes above and beyond the manifestations of gender. One may view the perfect image of Amazing Amy to represent the unrealistic expectations that women are demanded to adhere to in everyday life. The character, as a result, garments herself in alternative personalities which allow her to twist the narrative to her own advantage, and thus exploit the ways the society views, treats and objectifies women like Diary Amy.

Not only does *Gone Girl* portray the aftermath of the gradual process of loss of identity but also how a person may be forced, under the pressures of media attention, subsequent constant self-surveillance and stylization of one’s identity expression, to create an alter ego, as illustrated by Real Nick and Public Nick. The aim is to cope and comply with the rules set by the post-modern society, which puts extreme value on the public opinion and has the tendency to label or categorize individuals without exploring their full depth. Unlike Amy, this is the first time Nick has encountered the concept of identity performativity. It has been

mentioned that Nick has been performing the absence of his father's traits in his own personality. "I stopped trying to block my father's voice for once and let it throb in my ears. I was not that man . . .", he says, ". . . that didn't make me my father." (GG 337)

Unless Nick fancies being sentenced to death for allegedly murdering his wife, he has no choice but to forge a new identity of his own and play the game by Amy's rules. Nick's character transformation and the media's positive reaction to Public Nick proves that one's truth and emotions are only worth telling if the person is able to perform them correctly. This furthermore confirms the fact that, in the current times of "alternative facts" and hyperrealities, one must be able to make a sacrifice of their honest self to avoid becoming deviant. The identities and gender roles people choose to embody are essentially solely consequential once they are performed correctly, not whether they are morally correct or come from a genuine place. To conclude, the source of the plotline of the novel is firmly grounded in the gender roles its characters (fail to) perform. The consensus of what a positive or a negative gender role is has an immense impact on how the characters shape their entire lives and identities. The importance of performing the "correct" gender role (the Perfect over the Uncaring Husband) is what, in the novel, effectively saves Nick in a literal life or death situation.

Gender and identity performativity essentially function as terms to help describe the blurred borders between what is real and what is pretend. It is thanks to the characters of *Gone Girl* that one may observe and realize the postmodern decay and subsequent death of authenticity in all its stages that are portrayed in the characters of Amy and Nick. Even now, 10 years after the book's release, and particularly now, in the time of the ever-present blue light coming from telephone screens, the readers of *Gone Girl* may find the behaviour patterns and shattered personalities of Amy and Nick eerily familiar.

## Resumé

V červnu roku 2022 uplyne deset let od vydání románu *Zmizelá* (2012) od americké spisovatelky Gillian Flynn. Tento román je již jejím třetím, avšak nejúspěšnějším. Žebříčkům bestsellerů dominoval po celý rok svého vydání a ani dnes jeho kulturní význam neslábne. Důvodů komerčního úspěchu a oblíbenosti mezi čtenáři je mnoho – román se v mnohém vymyká typickým narativům soudobých thrillerů. Od klasických struktur žánrových románů se liší především inovativními vypravěčskými postupy a zajímavou prací s postavami. Právě hlavními postavami románu *Zmizelá* se tato bakalářská práce zabývá. Po úvodní kapitole věnované autorčině životě, předchozí tvorbě a nastínění děje rozebíraného románu následuje část, kde jsou čtenáři postavy krátce představeny.

Vzhledem ke komplexitě románu není z rozměrových důvodů bakalářské práce možné rozebrat všechny jeho prvky navzdory tomu, že si pozornost zaslouží. Bylo tedy rozhodnuto jádro práce zasvětit studii postav románu, a to s použitím feministické teorie, kterou na začátku 90. let představila ve své knize *Gender Trouble* (1990, slovenský překlad: *Trampoty s rodom: Feminizmus a podryvanie identity*) Judith Butler. Jde o teorii performativity genderu. Tato teorie definuje gender jako část lidské identity, kterou si ale osoba upravuje podle současných kulturních trendů. Gender tedy není vrozený, ale formuje se během života, a to hlavně v závislosti na společnosti či na fyzickém vyjadřování a stylizaci těla. V rámci bakalářské práce je vyjádřena myšlenka, že performativita genderu se dá pozorovat i v postavách románu *Zmizelá*. Tento koncept se dále vztahuje na genderové role a performativitu identity, která se v různých stavech pokročilosti vyskytuje u obou hlavních postav. Vliv očekávání společnosti a blízkých osob přispívá ke štěpení identity postav, což je dáno jejich touhou tuto očekávání naplnit, nebo se jim naopak vzepřít. Následně dochází ke ztrátě kontroly nad svou vlastní autenticitou, která taktéž zaniká. V touze získat zpět ztracený pocit kontroly se postavy snižují k destruktivním činům. Jejich pravé já však takto není znovuzrozeno a postavy dále postupují ke kompletní fragmentaci osobnosti.

Po úvodu práce následuje kapitola 1, kde je představena autorka a nastíněn děj románu *Zmizelá*. Část této kapitoly se také věnuje rozboru struktury a vypravěčských postupů v románu, jelikož ty významně přispívají k tomu, jak jsou postavy prezentovány. Dále se práce pozastavuje nad změnami, které jsou netypické pro žánrový román tohoto typu, avšak Flynn se pro jejich využití při psaní svého románu *Zmizelá* rozhodla. Kapitola 2 se zabývá představením hlavních postav, Nicka a Amy, jelikož pochopení sociálního pozadí a motivací postav je důležité i pro následující kapitolu, kde jsou rozebrány detailněji. Cílem je analýzu prezentovat způsobem

srozumitelným i pro čtenáře, kteří s románem nejsou obeznámeni. Jak již bylo zmíněno, kapitola 3 se věnuje podrobné analýze, při které využívá feministické teorie performativity genderu. Větší prostor je věnován postavě Amy, jelikož její chování je pro potřeby využití této teorie jasnější. V druhé části této kapitoly je popsána proměna postavy Nicka.

Ve výsledku je možné postavy porovnávat a popsat tak způsob, jak Flynn zobrazuje rozklady identity v odlišném stádiu. Cílem této práce bylo popsat zdroj a okolnosti ztráty identity, ale také poukázat na negativní vliv, který na tuto deformaci osobnosti mají masová a sociální média. Je nevyhnutelné, že pokud se jednotlivec stane mediálním tématem, přestává být komplexním člověkem. Existuje zde tendence více a více škatulkovat a zjednodušovat individualitu člověka, dokud se osoba nestane ničím než písmenky na displeji telefonu. V realitě je možné se s tímto fenoménem setkat stále častěji. Postavy románu *Zmizelá* jsou varovným příkladem případu, kdy se jedinec poddá tlaku společenských norem a je jimi o svou autentickou identitu okraden.

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