

“It’s Only a Diary”: A Comparative Analysis of Fictionalized Accounts  
 of Women’s Journals in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (2001)  
 and *Gone Girl* (2014)

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**Abstract**

The diary, understood as both a practice of communication and a writing format, has enjoyed a prominent position among the discursive strategies employed by the American feminist culture of the past two centuries. Adrienne Rich has aptly referred to it as “that profoundly female, and feminist, genre” (Rich, 217). In looking at the diary as a crucially feminist instrument of self-conceptualization and self-actualization, one might also assume that to some extent, changes in journaling practices reflect larger developments within the feminist project itself. In this essay, I offer a comparative textual analysis of two fictionalized accounts of women’s diaries. Both case studies – Sharon Maguire’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (2001) and David Fincher’s *Gone Girl* (2014) – originate from contemporary Hollywood cinema. Adopting the historical trajectory of the feminist diary as my starting point, I use the selected films’ treatment of the diary to discuss two contemporary variations – postfeminist and post-recessionary, respectively – on feminist understandings of female identity and agency.

**Keywords:** *journaling, postfeminism, neoliberalism, Bridget Jones’s Diary, Gone Girl*

**Journaling as Feminist Practice of Resistance**

Our present-day collective imagination tends to conceive of the diary<sup>10</sup> through the cultural stereotype of ‘girl’s secret and loyal confidant.’ However, throughout the course of modern history, diaries were not always written by women, concerned with private circumstances, or

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<sup>10</sup> To avoid repetition, this essay employs the terms ‘diary’ and ‘journal’ as synonyms. While the two words allude to similar writing activities, different nuances exist in everyday language. For instance, ‘diary’ is most often used to describe the mechanical act of record-keeping for the purpose of tracking events, while ‘journal’ usually refers to a more intimate exploration of one’s own thoughts, emotions, and experiences. In academic discourse, ‘journal’ is often considered to be a more scholarly, respectable linguistic choice than ‘diary.’ For an in-depth account of the tensions between the two terms, see Cynthia Gannett’s book *Gender and the Journal. Diaries and Academic Discourse* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 1992).



even meant to remain concealed. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for instance, diaries served as semi-public documents, where collective life events would be logged by men to be then made available to the community. A limited number of female diarists were tasked with compiling smaller logbooks, where major private life events, such as deaths and births, would be recorded. It is only at the dawn of the twentieth century that journaling becomes a predominantly female endeavor, and the self gradually replaces domestic and collective life as the main subject of diary writing. These changes in diary-keeping habits are inevitably a product of society-wide shifts occurring around that time. The public and private spheres are starting to grow separated; the private domain is increasingly associated with the realm of emotion and psychology and entrusted to women; the very notion of self is rapidly transforming under the combined influence of Romantic secularism, the Industrial Revolution, and the emergence of psychoanalysis (Culley, 1989, pp. 15-16).

In her comparison of two women's diaries written in the late 1700s and early 1900s, Margo Culley (1989) traces the transition of the diary from female duty to feminist right. Culley observes that the diarist's persona shifts from impersonal recorder to complex subject. At the same time, the writing style changes from chronical to "Whitmanesque." Overall, the purpose of diary-keeping evolves from externally imposed "lady's accomplishment" to authoritative exploration of the diarist's own nascent sense of a free-flowing self (pp. 16-17). Significantly, Culley argues that through journaling, the female diarist always performs a politically pregnant act of self-affirmation, regardless of how conscious she might be of doing so. It is in fact the very choice to record one's existence that contains in itself a doubly radical potential. On one hand, it is tantamount to affirming that one's life is worth recording. On the other hand, it is an attempt to minimize the obliterating effects of time-passing and decay by establishing continuity between the diarist and her past self, as well as between the diarist and her future readers (p. 20).

Laura Baker Shearer's (2002) analysis of the working-class diaries of Lizzie Goodenough provides a compelling example of 'female' logbook blossoming into 'feminist' memoir. Lizzie, a domestic worker living in the second half of the nineteenth century, did not think of her diary as simply a record of the everyday tasks and activities to which she must attend. Rather, she regarded it as her "symbolic home" (Shearer, 67). In and through her journal, she is able to explore and affirm her sense of self and agency through the self-praise of the hard work she carries out in the house, and she "clears a space of stability and security through language" (Shearer, 63). Her diaries do not reveal an internalized "cult of domesticity" (Shearer, 62), which would require her to passively chronicle the accomplishment of others. On the contrary, her journals become antidotes to the threat of self-effacement: Lizzie locates the source of her self-value in her labor rather than in her relationship with others (Shearer, 63), suggesting a strongly delineated perception of self that finds its validation from within rather than in the approval of external judgments. A similar mechanism characterizes war diaries, where expatriate women could forge meaning and connection in relevant ways. In fact, not only did war diaries serve to record, prove, and digest the trauma their authors were forced to undergo; they also allowed for the creation of "provisional subjectivit[ies]" meant to surrogate the sense of kinship and network traditionally provided by geographically contiguous communities (McNeill, 100-02).

The academic investigation of women’s diaries as feminist instruments is a relatively recent phenomenon, promoted by a general realization that journals possess “intrinsic qualities [that] embody feminist practice” (Huff, 6). Structurally, the diary format resembles feminist critique tactics in multiple ways. It is loose and open-ended, with no set boundaries (Huff, 6); mysterious in its operating according to spontaneity rather than rational criteria (Huff 7); and hybrid as it merges previously distinct experiential modes (Gannett, 280). Like other feminist signifiers, it is also Freudianly uncanny, familiar and unfamiliar at the same time; as Cinthia Gannett has put it, “in their very commonality they elude us, [they] seem mysterious because they epitomize connection” (Gannett, 280). Diaries are also intrinsically liminal, lying at the margins of both literary and communicative territory (Gannett, 280).

In this sense, “journaling can foster a movement toward reflection and reflexivity and away from a simplistic notion of autonomous, contained, singular self as ‘knower’” (Gannett, 279). Gannett, among other authors, calls to “unlock the concept of journal or diary as part of the larger, ongoing feminist project of liberating the traditional discursive practices of women [...] from a variety of myths and assumptions that have traditionally marginalized and devalued them” (Gannett, 278). By enabling a reflective and reflexive process whereby women come to understand themselves as subjects, the diary thus represents a “quintessential form of feminist writing” (Schiwy, 236). As a practice, it is holistic (conflating events, actions, and thoughts), inclusive (conferring equal importance to ordinary and extraordinary occurrences), and simultaneously “fragmented and whole” (Schiwy, 236-37).

### **Postfeminist womanhood: *Bridget Jones’s Diary***

Postfeminism famously escapes and condemns rigid understandings of female subjectivity. More broadly, it is often taken to signal a shift in the collective perception of gendered identities, categories, and relations. In postfeminist culture, the gendered selfhood is unprecedentedly fragmented, dispersed, contradictory, disjunctive, and perennially ‘in progress’ – consistently with other essentially ‘post’ (-modern, -structural) subjectivities. In recent years, postfeminism has been negatively linked to hyper-individualistic, entrepreneurial regimes of neoliberal capitalism. Specifically, it has been argued that postfeminism, like neoliberalism, sponsors a model of living in which competitive, self-organizing subjects derive much of their (perceived) power and freedom through the exercise of consumerism (Genz and Brabon, 23). As a result, postfeminism tends to promote a new female selfhood, inextricably tied to notions of self-regulation and self-discipline. Crucially, it also distances itself from prior feminisms by choosing to operate with(in) dominant modes of cultural production (e.g., popular media) rather than exclusively against or outside of them – thus begging the question of whether feminism can ever be mainstream *and* subversive (Genz and Brabon, 30). In popular cinema, developments in the characterization of female characters have been found to reflect the postfeminist “complex resignification” of womanhood as it was previously known and understood (Genz and Brabon, 32).

Based on Helen Fielding’s 1999 novel of the same name (also written in the form of a personal diary), *Bridget Jones’s Diary* follows the vicissitudes of a thirty-two-year-old singleton living in London. Bridget successfully embodies a “product of modernity” (McRobbie, 261) and leads a fairly enjoyable urban life thanks to her economic independence.

However, like many women her age, she has internalized the urgent imperative to ‘upgrade’ her womanhood. She spends most days planning to become a better-looking, more socially presentable, more *comme il faut* version of herself: her main concern is that she will not find the right man and settle down unless she decides to change herself. Everyone around her seems to share her same preoccupation. Family and friends regularly inquire into her love life, only to cruelly remind her that her biological clock is ticking, and that she will “never get a boyfriend if [she] look[s] like [she’s] wandered out of Auschwitz” (Fielding et al., 2000).

The judgmental way in which the people around Bridget respond to her circumstances reveals at least two unexamined assumptions. Firstly, Bridget’s failure to comply with satisfactory standards of feminine presentation results in the stigmatization of the ‘woman type’ she represents, e.g., the woman who does not put enough effort into looking sexy and is consequently unable to catch a man’s attention. Single status is therefore conceived as logical punishment to one’s lack of self-care. Secondly, the reality of being single and older than thirty years old is virtually pathologized. This second presumption is so infectious that Bridget measures time itself against her sentimental status: we meet her during her “thirty-second year of being single” (Fielding et al., 2000). In this case, single status becomes a dreadful diagnosis as well. A few minutes into the film, we witness Bridget’s first, painful realization. As she overhears her love interest, Mark, describe her as a “verbally incontinent spinster who smokes like a chimney, drinks like a fish, and dresses like her mother” (Fielding et al., 2000), it becomes clear that her self-esteem has hit rock bottom. She now *must* turn her life around: as the soundtrack verbalizes, she does not want to be all by herself anymore.

Hence, the decision to buy a personal diary. Bridget understands the diary as both a self-monitoring tool for recording her physical progress and a place where she can “tell the truth about Bridget Jones. The whole truth” (Fielding et al., 2000). Her journal is thus promptly introduced as one of the “tropes of freedom and choice” (McRobbie, 255) supporting the larger postfeminist project of self-improvement. On the one hand, it is designed to dutifully keep track of Bridget’s new, supposedly healthier lifestyle characterized by self-restriction, e.g., diet, exercise, no smoking or drinking, and the likes. On the other hand, the diary is configured as a (seemingly) feminist instrument in the search for self-integrity, as Bridget’s commitment to digging for the “whole truth” about herself aligns with the feminist intention to investigate “unheeded aspects of our connections with others, with ourselves” (Huff, 12).

However, this apparent alignment is questioned and undermined from the very start. Bridget’s journal is tied to a well-defined deadline (it will last one year from purchase); goal (it will lead to finding a partner); and methodology (it will record Bridget’s changes in habits and physical appearance). Its features are therefore reminiscent of the teleological trajectory commonly associated with “White-Western-Male-Bourgeois autobiography” (Benstock, 10 qtd in Schiwy, 236). A feminist use of the journal would instead require that “history unfold [...] around the diarists, day by day, with no known outcome [...] with its daily entries that can only imagine and project a future” (McNeill, 102). Additionally, as mentioned before, the decision to journal presupposes the worthiness of what is being recorded. Bridget’s resolution seems to originate from an opposite premise. She does not start a diary out of a desire to legitimate, celebrate, and immortalize her existence. Rather, she is moved to action by an externally imposed obligation to face her current lifestyle down to the most embarrassing details, so that her current reality can be replaced with a more promising, rewarding, and

socially acceptable one. It is with shame and guilt, rather than pride and confidence, that she tends to the task.

There seems to be no inner sense of self-worth here, and the diary is expected to fix just that: by rigidly monitoring Bridget's life, it will *make* it worthy. Worth is not innate: it, too, must be produced or acquired – at least, that is what life has taught Bridget so far. Feminist diary keeping, instead, works toward expanding one's self of identity; allow for cathartic expression without fear of censorship or recrimination; provide a safe testing ground for questions and half-formed thoughts and insights; stimulate creativity and the flow of ideas by removing the fear of premature critical judgment; and build confidence through the gradual emergence and evolution of the diarist's written voice [...] The very process of rendering her experience into language prompts the journal writer to take herself, her life, her experience, and her written voice seriously" (Schiwy).

In defiance of such indications, Bridget's diary is meant to restrict, repress, and regulate. Her subjectivity is saturate, as signified by the physical excesses she finds comfort in: she eats, drinks, smokes, talks – in a word, *is* – too much. Similarly, the promise to disclose "the whole truth" has very little to do with catharsis. Bridget's current daily routine will be disclosed only to be dismantled. Her self-growth will require adherence to a pre-established, unpleasant schedule, rather than her own creativity. The diary constitutes a safe space only insofar as Bridget commits to the demanding make-over work she is made to feel she needs. Ultimately, her journal is merely a self-management tool that, far from celebrating the cathartic possibilities of self-release, amplifies "the censorious voice that criticizes our every move" (Bowles, 266).

To some extent, the neoliberal, postfeminist society in which Bridget lives overturns the traditional sociocultural scheme according to which women are made to feel shame for focusing on themselves rather than their loved ones (Shearer, 62). Here, women such as Bridget are stigmatized for *failing* to take care of themselves – that is, of the visible aspects of their womanhood. Bridget's preoccupation with strictly pragmatic duties and achievements is symptomatic of this trend. Her psychological and emotional life is directly associated with practical activities, the outcomes of which are, in turn, quantified in units. Her typical diary entry is a bullet-point record of daily fluctuations in body weight, number of smokes, and alcohol consumption; such obsession with numbers and lists become descriptive of her general mood.

Exploring her own subjectivity and agency in ways that are not mandated by the constraints of societal pressure is not an option that Bridget seems keen on contemplating. Her very first diary entry, for example, schematically juxtaposes the goal to "find proper man" (Fielding et al., 2000) to tangible operations, such as completing chores around the house. By associating sentimental fulfillment with a satisfactory execution of domestic labor, the film comes close to suggesting that finding a suitable (heterosexual) partner is to be regarded as an achievement that can and should be pursued rather mechanically. Moreover, the quest for love amounts to a draining, inconvenient endeavor that *must* nonetheless be pursued by any adult woman who wishes to be read by society as a functional, productive, and accomplished citizen. Consistently with the dictates of late capitalist environments, marketing principles end up governing human emotions and desires. The neoliberal culture of self-promotion obliges Bridget to commodify herself before the eyes of potential husbands/buyers. She must look

impeccably feminine while also sounding erudite; she must calculate risks and benefits with near-mathematical accuracy; she must transform into a ‘can-do’ girl who should, and will, have it all.

Rather than flowing freely under the gentle guidance of inner analysis, Bridget’s sense of identity changes abruptly according to an either/or logic founded solely upon her relationship status; left with no in-between alternatives, she is either “tragic spinster” or “girlfriend of bona fide sex god” (Fielding et al., 2000). Upon the painful realization that the latter has been cheating on her, she can only think of two remaining options: “To give up and accept permanent state of spinsterhood and eventual eating by Alsations, or not. And this time I choose not” (Fielding et al., 2000). As a quintessential postfeminist subject, not only can Bridget choose; in order to survive, she must choose. As McRobbie has effectively stated, “choice is surely, within lifestyle culture, a modality of constraint” (McRobbie, 261). Bridget’s awareness of being a “responsible agent in the world” (Gannett, 278) is dependent upon her efforts to take charge of her destiny by producing the most marketable and profitable self-image possible. Unsurprisingly, a second make-over session crowns this moment, accompanied by additional sets of self-care routines: Bridget throws out all of her alcohol, works out until she faints, and gives her self-help bookshelf its own make-over.

The last fifteen minutes of the film work especially hard to prevent Bridget from achieving a full “renaissance in [her] revision” (Huff, 12). Following the latest romantic disappointment, Bridget sits alone with the diary in her hand. She crosses out the old title, “Bridget Jones’s Diary,” which she replaces with “Diary of Bridget Jones – Spinster and Lunatic” (Fielding et al., 2000). Such act of rewriting, although symbolic and sarcastic, alludes to Bridget’s renewed self-consciousness, as she seems to surrender to the two disparaging lenses through which everyone around her is used to seeing her. Despite her apparent resignation, however, Bridget might now be faced with an unprecedented, more complex decision: Will she be complicit in reducing her womanhood to being single and eccentric? Or will she actively adopt the harshness of these external judgments as a starting point for a new, personal journey of deeper self-exploration?

The question is meant to remain unanswered. Mark, her current love interest, rings the bell and interrupts Bridget’s most intimate moment, depriving it of its promise. After letting him in, Bridget leaves the room for a few minutes and forgets her diary behind, flipped open on the kitchen table. Mark sees it and can’t help reading some of the older entries, where he is blatantly ridiculed and discredited. Narratively, it is a crucial moment: Mark has come back to Bridget, and she has finally secured the man she has been looking for. Facing the possibility that Mark might leave again due to the misunderstanding caused by the diary, Bridget fears that all her efforts have been vain; familiar anxieties start creeping back in as the prospect of a lonely life ahead begins to resurface. Mark does appear offended as he leaves the house, confirming her fears. Suddenly, the diary – the prime signifier of Bridget’s right to privacy, insight, and self-analysis – has become the main obstacle to conquering love.

The film’s very last scene will restore the two lovers’ trust in each other while further downplaying the importance of Bridget’s diary. In a last, desperate attempt to win Mark back, Bridget bursts out, “For Christ’s sake, it’s only a diary. Everyone knows diaries are full of crap” (Fielding et al., 2000). In part, her crude disavowal of diary keeping implies that she is willing to renounce her self-project, as long as Mark will stay. In reality, she soon discovers

that he had left the house to go buy her a new journal, as he suggests that it is “time to make a new start, perhaps” (Fielding et al., 2000). In a way, Mark’s gesture constitutes a blatant male appropriation of Bridget’s main tool for self-exploration. Additionally, her appreciation of his gesture proves that she has found her personal balance and peace of mind in a form of retreatism to the traditional (heterosexual) romance fantasy.

Indeed, it is ultimately her love interest that legitimizes and absolves Bridget’s ‘failure’ to perform femininity in a supposedly adequate way. It is him who establishes that her alleged weaknesses are, after all, lovable: at the end of the day, she is worth loving “despite appearances” and “just as she is” (Fielding et al., 2000). Undoubtedly, to a degree, the film’s ending shows that Bridget’s denunciation of and refusal to comply with rigid standards of female beauty is rewarded with the gift of ‘true love.’ However, Bridget is far from advocating for the ‘unorthodox’ womanhood she spontaneously personifies: “I already feel like an idiot most of the time anyway” (Fielding et al., 2000), she tells Mark. Furthermore, the value of her womanhood seems to be rooted in her ability to provide others with comic relief through her awkward manners. But what would have happened to Bridget, had Mark been unwilling to ‘accept’ her as the person and woman she is?

### **Post-recessionary Womanhood: *Gone Girl***

Romance wise, *Gone Girl* picks up precisely where *Bridget Jones’s Diary* left off. The film begins by introducing Amy, a “crazy, stupid happy woman” who feels lucky to have married Nick, “a great, sweet, gorgeous, cool-ass guy” (Flynn, 2013). Set in urban Missouri in the aftermath of the 2008 Great Recession, *Gone Girl* sets out to answer “the primal questions of any marriage: What are you thinking? How are you feeling? What have we done to each other?” (Flynn, 2013). Nick feels unable to break into his wife’s head figuratively, so he daydreams about doing so literally – a desire that gestures toward widespread cultural assumptions about the innate violence of the male mind and the innate unknowability of the female one.

Perhaps, then, answers to these questions might be found in Amy’s diary. The object is immediately presented through the lenses of female and feminist self-discovery: a woman’s diary should be a place uniquely “for herself, about herself, and in which to comfort herself” (Shearer, 67). Amy’s journal recalls the feminist concept of diary as “symbolic home” (Shearer, 67) in which to find shelter as soon as she starts feeling unsafe in her physical house and “frightened of [her] own husband” (Flynn, 2013). Once Amy becomes the titular gone girl, the diary also appears to be a key element in solving the mystery of her disappearance.

Throughout the first half of the film, the diary is responsible for framing Amy as a terrified victim of Nick’s violent temper. Their marriage has already been put to the test by the financial crisis – “Want to test your marriage for weak spots? Add one recession, subtract two jobs. It’s surprisingly effective” (Flynn, 2013), she writes in it. Things get even worse when the couple leaves New York City in order to assist Nick’s dying mother in his hometown. Here, Amy’s presence amounts to “something [Nick] loaded by mistake, something to be jettisoned if necessary, something disposable” (Flynn, 2013). It is only a matter of time before she can feel herself turning into the “kind of woman [she] used to mock” (Flynn, 2013) – neglected, taken advantage of, cheated on. A private re-enactment of the “idealized domestic space”

(Shearer, 67), the diary returns as an antidote against self-effacement caused, in Amy's case, by marital abuse.

In some ways, Amy shares Lizzie Goodenough's condition. Her livelihood "depends on her ability to act. She must be clear about her own agency in order to live." Her journal celebrates "sustained moments of self-revelation" through which she acknowledges her current status of victim, while also producing the "history and appreciation" that her husband is unable to provide (Shearer, 67-68). The function of the diary is thus strictly associated with the need and desire for survival – both physical and psychological. As with war diaries, Amy's journal is a safe place where hurtful events are proven, digested, interpreted, survived. In its apparent denunciation of a larger plague of domestic violence, of which Amy is merely one victim, her diary keeping is also "a social act, albeit displaced" (Summerfield, 34 qtd in Gannett, 279). In keeping with the grand tradition of feminist critique, the intentional validation of problematic personal experiences leads to wider reflections on gender roles within male-dominated societies. As Schiwy writes, "keeping a personal journal is a powerful and effective means of deconstructing our assigned roles as women in a patriarchal society [...] Through reflecting on the concrete reality of our own immediate experience, and through giving voice to our perceptions, intuitions, and 'felt sense' of things, we create ourselves anew" (Schiwy, 234).

However, the film's major plot twist utterly denies this conceptualization of Amy's diary, instead showing it for what it is: fake, deceitful, and dangerously misleading. Halfway through, the narrating voice-over undergoes a shocking change. It is no longer Amy's diarist persona speaking, but the 'real' Amy, who prides herself on having made false allegations against Nick, as well as having staged her own pregnancy, rape at the hand of two ex-boyfriends, and death. The image of Amy presented by the diary so far is discovered to be a remarkably fraudulent one. All along, her journal has been nothing but the vehicles of her lies, a calculated expedient aimed at framing her "lazy, lying, cheating, oblivious" (Flynn, 2013) husband as violent murderer. Commenting on the strategic use of diary writing, she reveals:

"You need a diary. Maximum 300 entries on the Nick and Amy story. Start with the fairy tale early days; those are true, and they're crucial. You need Nick and Amy to be likeable. After that, you invent: the spending, the abuse, the fear, the threat of violence. And Nick thought *he* was the writer. Burn it – just the right amount. Make sure the cops find it." (Flynn)

In fact, the police do find the diary and employ it as major evidence against Nick. Detective Rhonda Boney, the lead investigator, keeps it on her desk and repeatedly reads through its pages. When called in to be questioned, Nick is even quizzed on some of the diary entries and asked to evaluate whether Amy's statements are true or false. As detective Boney reads the very last entry – "This man of mine may kill me" – he sarcastically observes that Amy has left a rather "convenient endnote," yet at this stage no one is willing to believe his innocence (Flynn, 2013). It is only after Amy's masterful plan is uncovered that everyone will join Nick in condemning his wife as "a mind-fucker of the first degree" (Flynn, 2013). Nevertheless, no one, including the police, will be able to penalize her actions, and the film's ending points to Nick's resignation to take her back into his life.

All throughout *Gone Girl*, there is a consistent implication that Nick and Amy's relationship epitomizes the "slacker-striver romance" – a highly gendered, post-recessionary couple model formed by an "infantilized male and his hyper-responsible, high-achieving female partner" ((Negra and Tasker, 349). In mediating the repercussions of the Great Recession, genre cinemas have been representative of cultural anxieties around an alleged crisis of masculinity. The latter, in turn, seems to have been brought about by the "deeply alienating, indeed effectively feminizing" (Negra and Tasker, 354) consequences of men's loss of financial supremacy in their roles of partners and citizens. Around this time, men may not be more likely than women to lose their jobs, but they are found to suffer more severe psychological distress as a result of unemployment. In media depictions, their destitution is recast as an opportunity for self-reinvention. On the contrary, post-recessionary femininity, which enjoys far less visibility, is presented as "adaptive and resourceful" (Negra and Tasker, 347); however, women's greater resilience is punished through a pathologizing approach. Following the "perceived inversion of gendered clichés" (Cobb and Negra, 758) within the heterosexual couple, the woman is "problematically male-identified" (Cobb and Negra, 759): financially successful, emotionally stoic, and uninterested in developing friendships with other women. Her psychosis is the result of a reversed feminine mystique, where the "narrowness of forced domesticity" (Cobb and Negra, 762) leads to oppression, which in turn determines the appropriation of a traditionally masculine societal role.

Nick's house, car, bar, credit cards, and utilities are all under Amy's name – according to police officers, an unsurprising yet humiliating reality. Detective Boney hopes to get a murder confession out of him by further striking the sore wound of his marred masculinity: she jokes about how a "type A" woman like Amy might end up driving a "type B" man like Nick crazy (Flynn, 2013), should he realize that he will never be as successful as her. Nick voices his frustration over "being picked apart by women" (Flynn, 2013) and, in fact, at nearly every turn he does appear to be put under attack by the women in his life. His sister Margo, although genuinely concerned, frequently questions and condemns his decisions. His mother-in-law does not seem to particularly like him. Detective Boney regards him as a potential killer. Lastly, a Nancy Grace-inspired television host goes out of her way to convince her (female) viewers of Nick's involvement in Amy's disappearance. Collectively, these women have effectively appropriated conventionally masculine traits in their judgmental and often predatory attitudes toward Nick, a "flyover boy" who could not even afford to divorce Amy, seen how she is "the owner of his bar, his only line of credit, the bitch with the prenup" (Flynn, 2013).

The "difficulty in conceptualizing a meaningfully female-centered capitalism" (Cobb and Negra, 762) is here made manifest through the demonization of Amy's character, almost as if she *must* turn into "the nagging shrew, the controlling bitch" (Flynn, 2013) so that Nick can despise her without consequences. Ultimately, there is no need for Nick to murder Amy because, in a way, the film itself does so on his behalf by disaffirming her trustworthiness. By the end of *Gone Girl*, the innocent victim has metamorphosed into a creepily robotic, evidently deranged woman who, after killing an ex-lover falsely accused of sexual violence, has even managed to secretly impregnate herself using Nick's sperm. The diary itself has taken on murderous connotations: all along, it has facilitated the impeccable execution of Amy's meticulously calculated plan. Amy's dishonest use of the diary violates its supposedly sacred

space by emptying it of any feminist significance; again, as victim turns into perpetrator, identity becomes diagnosis.

Amy's characterization suggests a failed attempt at calibrating the capabilities of the male-identified woman she embodies – desirable and frightful at the same time:

”Nick loved a girl I was pretending to be: Cool Girl. Men always use that, don't they, as their defining compliment. She's a cool girl. Cool girl is hot. Cool girl is game. Cool girl is fun. Cool girl never gets angry at her man. She only smiles in a chagrined, loving manner, and then presents her mouth for fucking. She likes what he likes. [...] When I met Nick Dunne, I knew he wanted Cool Girl. And for him, I'll admit, I was willing to try. [...] I can't say I didn't enjoy some of it. Nick teased out in me things I didn't know existed: a lightness, a humor, an ease. But I made him smarter, sharper. I inspired him to rise to my level. I forged the man of my dreams.” (Flynn)

Ultimately, then, this representation of post-recessionary womanhood is marked by the exaggeration, pathologization, and demonization of Amy's entrepreneurial spirit. “She annexed me. She made me her business” (Flynn, 2013), one of Amy's ex-lovers, whom she also falsely accused of rape in the past, tells Nick. Deep-seated anxieties emerge around the unprecedented economic power gained by female citizens within the “climate of new permissiveness” (Cobb and Negra, 758) of the Great Recession aftermath. Again, the diary serves to build a female character with seemingly great feminist potential; the latter, however, is evoked only to be restrained. Amy's mind remains impenetrable. Once the psychotic nature of her heinous actions is revealed, her character is also denied empathy. In fact, as events unfold, it is Nick, the post-recessionary “boy-man” (Negra and Tasker, 349) re-inventing himself from abuser to abused, who has earned his right to empathy.

## Conclusions

At first glance, *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Gone Girl* are two very different films with little in common. The first is an early 2000s British romantic comedy directed by a woman; the second is a mid-2010s American psychological thriller directed by a man. However, as this essay has sought to illustrate, both plots revolve around the diary-writing habits of a captivating female protagonist. Initially, in both films, journaling is presented as a self-affirming and self-empowering activity, meant to assist each of the two characters in conquering her fears and insecurities.

Soon enough, however, this same activity is nonetheless downplayed and sabotaged by the narratives themselves in ways that contain the subversive potential of the journal, e.g., through the use of retreatism (*Bridget Jones's Diary*) and unreliable narration (*Gone Girl*). Bridget's ‘excessive’ femininity is effectively contained by recourse to self-irony and authenticated by a male's determining approval of her ‘eccentricities.’ Amy's womanhood, in a way, is never properly explored, and the motives behind her despicable actions remain unintelligible.

In this sense, both movies choose to reject the feminist project of genuine self-exploration that the practice of journaling would have enabled. Over the course of each film,

the two diarists and their respective life projects are recast through recourse to postfeminist irony and post-recessionary psychosis. Ultimately, *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Gone Girl* fail to fully conceptualize a feminist subjectivity independent of male anxieties around the progressive disruption of gender roles and hierarchies typical of contemporary Western societies. Rather than encouraging and celebrating the “renaissance in our revision” (Huff, 12), they revise their own trajectory, inhibiting their own potential, disowning their once-precious diaries, abdicating their own female, feminist selves.

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