



GONE BABY GONE

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Season
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Crimes involving children touch on our deepest emotions and though we've seen numerous films about infant abduction over the past 50 years, ranging in tone from *Seance on a Wet Afternoon* to *Murder on the Orient Express*, the subject is peculiarly affecting at the moment in the light of the publicity given to the cases of Shannon Matthews in Dewsbury and Madeleine McCann in Portugal. In fact, the British release of Ben Affleck's directorial debut *Gone Baby Gone*, a thriller centring on a child abduction in Boston, has been held up for more than six months because of the McCann affair. To add to the anxiety, there is an uncanny physical resemblance between Madeleine McCann and the film's four-year-old Amanda McCready.



This thoughtful, highly accomplished film is set in the south Boston suburb of Dorchester, initially settled in the 17th century by Puritans from the west of England, but now largely working-class with a core population of Irish-Americans.

The film has a sinuous, labyrinthine plot and what begins as a combination of police procedural thriller and private-eye mystery turns into a complex moral fable about the conflict between what appears morally right and what society deems to be lawful. Is there a case for bending the law in the interests of some higher purpose, and who is in a position to make such decisions? This becomes the motor of the plot and a question for debate. It is also a matter of style, as Affleck uses frequent aerial shots of Boston to suggest some higher, God-like view of the human events, often cruel, brutal and arbitrary, being enacted down there in the bars, tenements, mean streets and back alleys.

Philip French, The Guardian