

3 Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri [15]

2017 | UK/USA | 115 min

UK release date	12th January 2018
Director	Martin McDonagh
Screenplay	Martin McDonagh
Cinematographer	Ben Davis
Cast	Frances McDormand (Mildred); Woody Harrelson (Willoughby); Sam Rockwell (Dixon); Lucas Hedges (Robbie); Peter Dinklage (James); Clarke Peters (Abercrombie)

Life and death, heaven and hell, damnation and redemption collide in this blisteringly foul-mouthed, yet surprisingly tender, tragicomedy from British-Irish writer-director Martin McDonagh. Lacing a western-tinged tale of outlaw justice with Jacobean themes of rape, murder and revenge, McDonagh's second American-set feature finds a grieving mother naming and shaming the lawmen who have failed to catch her daughter's killer.

The subject is no laughing matter, but as with his 2008 debut feature, *In Bruges*, McDonagh's Chaucerian ear for obscenity provokes giggles, guffaws and gasps in the most inappropriate circumstances. More importantly, he underpins the anarchic nihilism of his narrative with a heartbreaking meditation upon the toxic power of rage. When characters, struggling to make sense of all this chaos, utter platitudes such as "anger just begets greater anger" and "through love comes calm", it seems less like a killing joke than a weirdly sincere mission statement.

Seven months after her daughter, Angela, was abducted and killed, Mildred Hayes (Frances McDormand) emblazons the roadside billboards of the title with signs taunting police chief Willoughby (Woody Harrelson) about the lack of arrests. For Mildred, the Ebbing police force is "too busy going round torturing black folks" to solve crime. "I got issues with white folks too," declares bozo cop Jason Dixon (Sam Rockwell) after throwing someone out of a window – a bravura one-shot sequence pointedly orchestrated to the lilting strains of *His Master's Voice* by *Monsters of Folk*.

Beneath the cracker caricatures, however, even Ebbing's most apparently unsympathetic residents have complex lives. While ad man Red Welby (Caleb

Landry Jones) pointedly reads Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, family man Willoughby looks beyond his own mortality, attempting to find the best in everyone, including the aggressively infantile Dixon. And the righteously angry Mildred has her own demons, torturing her bullied son, Robbie (Lucas Hedges), with her guilt-driven vendetta, wrestling with the awful possibility that "there ain't no God, and the whole world's empty, and it doesn't matter what we do to each other".

With its tolling-bell nods to *High Noon* (amplified by composer Carter Burwell's spaghetti-tinged guitar themes), and cheeky references to the American gothic of *Psycho* (Sandy Martin's domineering Momma Dixon seems to have walked straight out of the Bates Motel), this magical-realist parable finds McDonagh far more in tune with the US landscape than in his disappointing *Seven Psychopaths* (2012). From the opening morning-mist shots of those lonely billboards to the flames that evoke the burning crosses of the KKK, cinematographer Ben Davis perfectly captures the film's knife-edge balance between humour and horror, mayhem and melancholia.

Whether these characters are on a road to redemption or ruin is left open-ended. McDonagh's rejection of clear-cut moral certainties has already provoked a backlash; a recent Huffington Post article, for example, argued that Dixon is essentially "the racist uncle whom white liberals fear and love". Yet I was not left contemplating the film's thorny racial politics, but instead remembering the closing moments of *Straw Dogs*; of the chaos left in the wake of violence and the wistful possibility (however remote) of transcending its awful legacy.

After: Mark Kermode, *The Observer*, 4 Jan 2018

Coming Soon....

A Fantastic Woman (15) – Monday 4th June

120 Beats Per Minute (15) – Monday 11th June

For more information about all our films and more, go to our website

www.buxtonfilm.org.uk

Buxton Film is a Registered Charity no. 1165040



admin@buxtonfilm.org.uk



@buxtonfilm



BuxtonFilm