



FILM: **THREE BILLBOARDS OUTSIDE EBBING, MO**

FDG RATING: 4.1 ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Martin McDonagh: *director, writer*  
Frances McDormand, *actress, Mildred Hayes*  
Woody Harrelson: *actor, Sheriff Willoughby*  
Sam Rockwell: *actor, Jason Dixon*

DATE: December 17, 2017

## DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THREE BILLBOARDS OUTSIDE EBBING, MISSOURI**

"I want to be her" said one of our virtual film discussion participants referring to gritty resolve of Frances McDormand who won the Best Actress Golden Globe for portraying the feisty, determined, don't-mess-with-me, Mildred Hayes in Three Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri. Mildred's teen age daughter was raped and killed several months earlier and the police, headed by Sheriff Willoughby (Woody Harrelson), have not identified nor found the killer and their efforts seem to have stalled. Desperate to find her daughter's murderer, she takes measures into her own hands and uses her savings to rent 3 large billboards on the road entering town to blast the grimness of her daughter's ugly unsolved murder and shame-blame the police, specifically Sheriff Willoughby, for not solving the crime.

Writer and director, Martin McDonagh, known for his edgy cinematic style and characters (7 Psychopaths, In Bruges), populated Three Billboards with the cream of the crop, including Sam Rockwell who was outstanding as Dixon, a racist bully, loud mouthed cop.

Guilt, rage, grief, despair, anger, and a desperate quest for justice, in a rural Midwestern town, bursts in each scene stirred up by Mildred's emotions. Credit to the actors and director for pushing the range of their characters to the limit, allowing their flaws to almost explode on the screen. And for Mildred, quite literally, when she angrily tosses a fire bomb at the police station.

We might expect Sheriff Willoughby to be the macho, tough as nails officer of the law, but instead, he provides an emotional contrast to the blistery Mildred, quietly explaining that he'd do anything to catch the guy who did it but "the DNA don't match no one who's ever been arrested." He also confides that he is dying of cancer which would normally prompt a compassionate reply, but Mildred, defiantly trumps it by saying his condition should be motivation to get her daughter's case solved sooner rather than later.

Some of us commented that the overarching theme is about letting go of anger. Willoughby almost assumes a Christ like role in his ability to change Dixon, and to some extent Mildred, putting them on a better path through the letters he wrote them. He deeply cares about people. But a few resident reviewers thought he was a bit too saintly.

Another interesting observation is that the film was an homage to the 1967 film In the Heat of the Night.

The director skillfully weaves threads of humor along the grim story line such as when Mildred's ex-husband appears with his ditzy young girlfriend who like a dutiful school girl reads the quote on her bookmark, "Anger begets anger" which preaches a main message in the film.

Mildred is dressed for battle in her Rambo-esque shabby coveralls. She has always been hard-nosed but blaming herself for her daughter's murder, makes her even more of a bad ass. Until she put up the billboards, no one knew the extent of her rage.

The unpredictable story line keeps you hooked. And just when the tense gritty ugliness might push you over the edge, McDonagh throws in a brief moment of tenderness such as when Dixon pats his horrible, verbally abusive mother on her head. And then there is Mildred's almost invisible son, Robbie, who is hurting from the loss of his sister but completely overshadowed by swirling wake of Mildred's emotions. Luca Hedges' understated performance was exceptional.

Most of us felt Three Billboards had a satisfying, if inconclusive end, and each character seems to have evolved. The cast was absolutely stellar. A few discussion participants thought the film a bit heavy handed, too saintly, and one wanted the movie to explore bigger ideas. But completely captivating and entertaining, our resounding score of 4.1 deserves to be on a 4th billboard, based on our scale of 1-5. (5 is the best)



See you at the movies!

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Film Discussion Group: [www.filmdiscussiongroup.com](http://www.filmdiscussiongroup.com)