

## *The analysis of the movie “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri”*

*“Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri”* - the movie that entered the top ten films of the year and hit the world in 2017. It had seven nominations and won two Academy Awards for Best Performances by an Actress in a Leading Role (Frances McDormand) and an Actor in a Supporting Role (Sam Rockwell).

The movie tells us about Angela Hayes who was killed and raped on the road leading from her house to the city of Ebbing. Her mother, Mildred Hayes, kicks herself for being rude to her and believes that she indirectly committed this crime. She can't accept what happened and the fact that the police department is unable to investigate a crime. She decides to sell her ex-husband's car to pay for billboard inscription about his daughter's death on that same road where the murder was committed. She believes that it is the best way to attract police officers' attention because billboards directly demonstrate their unwillingness to solve this case and, as subsequent events demonstrate, that she is right. Despite the fact that billboards are located far away from the town, they still irritate police officers and those citizens who believe that this action is too cruel. Especially since officers don't idle and try to find even the smallest lead, but all in vain: this case is too complicated for them considering lack of witnesses and evidence. Nonetheless, both sides of conflict start the war and the town becomes a real battleground between an embittered woman and the same obdurate policemen.

It would be logical to start from **acting** bearing in mind all the awards that actors won. Frances McDormand and Sam Rockwell who got not only Oscars, but also Golden Globe, BAFTA and Sag Awards, left the lasting impression of integrity and openness first and foremost for the audience. Beside them, I should also mention the brilliant acting of one of my favorite actors – Woody Harrelson. The cast played a big role in the movie's quality,

because the main actors are not just stars who confirmed their professionalism many times, but those actors who fully dedicate their life to work. They know that in addition to just being good actors with recognizable faces, they should also thoroughly prepare for their roles. For example, Sam Rockwell is from California and he had to work on his southern Missouri accent. He also spent some time with policemen and had a lot of ride-alongs to understand the process of their work. Not in the least, some roles were written for the certain actors only, considering their strong and weak parts of acting. Also, a couple of actors had already worked with the director (McDonagh), which precisely helped them to more easily collaborate with him. In one of Woody Harrelson's interviews he said: "I have this unwritten rule in my life that I'll do anything Martin asks." (Durkan, 2018) It made a great contribution, because their work was agreeable and as a result it was highly productive.

The usage of different types of **sound and narration** made the movie provoke various emotions. The first minutes of the movie: the director shows us three billboards in a dull and foggy day. The intrinsic opera that we were listening to during this scene caused the feeling of oppression and exposure. It is a great example how score (background music) can influence our perception. We hear the same opera one more time when Mildred burns the police-station and have the same feelings as at the beginning of the movie. Nonetheless, music doesn't appear often here. As Mildred Hayes is a woman who is not afraid to speak her mind, the external sound becomes the dominant in the whole movie. She is not afraid to start the monolog or involve somebody in a sharp dialogue. We hear the internal sound a couple times only when characters read letters that William Willoughby left for them to read after his death. Almost all the vocal sounds are not accompanied by music and silence that remains after their severe phrases leaves a strong feeling of frustration. One example of such a scene is when Mildred comes back home where she meets Father Montgomery who wants to talk with her about the billboards. After her monolog about the life and vices of priesthood, the

silence lasts a couple of seconds, but it helps to show Montgomery's perplexity and loss. Also, it helps to focus more on Robie's emotions and how he is proud of his mom's boldness.

If we talk about the dominant **color** of the movie, I would precisely distinguish green. Many scenes were filmed outdoors, especially in the wild: lush meadows, mountains that are covered with trees and the grass that grows in the field where ominous billboards are located. Even if we talk about clothes, Mildred wears her green jumpsuit for a greater part of the movie. Furthermore, the weather through the window is always sunny and bright. Colors are mostly warm, especially when characters uphold their point of view and feel confident. For me, it creates a dissonance between luminous environments and atrocious events. Of course, not the whole movie is so shiny, here are some scenes, where cold and dark colors predominated. For example, the scene where sheriff Willoughby goes to his horses after hearing about the installation of billboards. We still see the green nature, but it seems cold, gloomy and repulsive. He looks disappointed and frightened. The next scene he is coming to Mildred's house and the weather becomes normal again. Each time when characters are discouraged and don't know what to do – the weather changes. It doesn't happen very often, because mostly they know what they want and are certain in their actions.

The detail that I mentioned about **mise-en-scene**: it many times revolves around the blood. There are three scenes that have the same object. Willoughby has cancer and the doctor draws blood from him to make some tests. Willoughby stays calm and has a pleasant conversation with a doctor. As soon as the doctor starts to speak about three billboards, Willoughby throws the test tube against a wall and spills the blood. One more scene is when Mildred has an appointment with a dentist, Geoffrey, who shows his disagreement with her deed. Everything is smooth till the moment he starts to talk about Bill Willoughby and his friends. Woman becomes furious and drills the hole in the dentist's nail - at this moment we see blood again. The last scene when this symbol appears is the one where the sheriff talks

with Hayes about what she's done with a dentist. Then as soon as he switches to the questioning about billboards, he coughs up blood. There is a direct correlation between this symbol and horrific events that happened with Angela. And it is understandable, because blood is something we never want to see, because we have dreadful associations. Same happens with characters who don't want to talk about the crime and billboards with someone else. They constantly live with these thoughts and worries, and don't want to raise them only because somebody wants that.

The way the director uses **flashbacks** in the middle of the movie makes the story clearer for the viewers. He shows us the situation that happened right before the murder. Mildred and Angela have a conflict. Mildred is furious because of her daughter's behavior and doesn't allow her to use her car. They argue a lot and at the end the mother tells her daughter to go by foot and wishes her to be raped along the road. Angela leaves the house and after a while her raped and burned body is found near that exact road. It explains why Mildred feels such a heavy guilt and wants to find out who killed Angela even if she needs to cross all the moral borders. It is the only one scene where this transition is used, but it was crucially important for the full understanding of the mother's internal feelings.

The **story** finishes with an **open ending**. At the café Dixon hears strangers' discussion about the crime that one of them committed about nine months ago. The details of this murder are the same as Angela's. He gets his DNA and gives hope to Mildred. Unfortunately, all the test results show that the murder is not the same person who was at the café. Dixon doesn't want to accept these results, because he sincerely believes that he is right. He also knows murder's car number and decides that even if that man hasn't killed Angela, he has done it with somebody else and needs to be punished. Dixon and Mildred discuss the situation and decide that they need to go Idaho where the murder lives. They start their trip discussing whether they really want to kill him or not. At this moment the story stops and

leaves a lot of questions. Is Dixon right and that guy is a murderer? Will they kill him or will they finally stop their aggression? Will Dixon become a real detective after getting a letter from Willoughby or will he stay with the same behavior? The director doesn't give any answers and each viewer has to decide for himself what is his truth for this story. Of course, everyone wants to know whether they've solved a crime and Mildred could sleep peacefully, but it makes this movie even more mysterious and provocative.

This movie is an excellent example of **classicism**. It is all about ideal acting, sound and image, but in the form of a real world. It reveals the painful subject of the loss, coexistence with your sorrow and constant feeling of despair. Here the director demonstrates the important moments of repentance and switches from hatred to love. Each character has their own truth, pain and opportunities for feats and meanness. A brilliant cast that deservedly got many awards made all the viewers believe them. All the dialogues and monologs were well thought-out and ideally performed. Here should have been a drama about a fight between a policeman and a citizen, but the sheriff is terminally ill and the problem is not even him, but the fact that it is difficult to catch the criminal without any supportive evidence. Here should have started a melodrama about two persons who have a conflict and then forgive each other, but Mildred doesn't even care about William's illness. The world of Martin McDonagh is full of endless twists and the director denies the predictability and complicates everything he can: the policeman doesn't finish his examination and coughs up blood, Red gives a glass of juice to Jason even after finding out who he is, one person threatens another with a knife and then they turn the table up together – all these actions show a real and unpredictable world. It is a movie where you can't find a protagonist and antagonist, each character has a full spectrum of good and evil in their souls. All the events influence them, but never fully change their personality. The director plays with image, showing us a blaze of color in contrast with people's coldness. All the heroes are equal in

their rigidity and they don't really care for social roles that are imposed on them. It is a breathtaking movie that can't leave anyone indifferent and where words that are written on the huge red background mean less than what everyone says quietly to themselves.

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