



FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Supervisor's Report

Jan Doleček, "Morality and Responsibility in the 'Non-Irish' Works of Martin McDonagh"
(BA Thesis)

Jan Doleček's Bachelor's thesis addresses a central point in the critical discussion of Martin McDonagh's plays and films; it is a difficult topic for a number of reasons, including McDonagh's famous propensity for multiple unexpected twists in the plot, and his consistent tendency to provoke audiences and reviewers alike. Doleček's decision to discuss ethical issues in McDonagh's recent work through an analysis of characters, as opposed to, for instance, the author's notoriously unreliable statements concerning his intentions, is a laudable one. The argument of the thesis is clearly structured, as much as the selection of three plays and three films has necessitated exceeding the customary length of a BA thesis significantly.

The quality of writing is mostly fine and lucid; however, language mistakes are rather frequent in a number of passages (including the Czech abstract) and informal register is used rather too often. The final paragraph of the conclusion fails to connect with the argument that precedes it.

The research is based on an acceptable range of secondary sources (excluding the remarkable absence of Eamonn Jordan's later work), which are used judiciously and are always appropriately acknowledged. Formatting of the references and the bibliography is mostly satisfactory.

The chief strength of the thesis lies in the meticulous analysis of the beliefs and actions of McDonagh's characters which frequently features interesting parallels and contrasts both, including between the plays and the films. The central hypothesis that McDonagh's work displays individual moral relativism (p. 10) is well supported by subsequent analysis. However, there seems to be some confusion as regards the use of central terms such as "ethics" and "morality". For instance, "morality" is defined with the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as a guide to behaviour provided by a group, but this is not how the term is always used in the subsequent discussion of McDonagh's work. Moreover, "morality" is described as "overriding" in the same passage (p. 11) – but it is not clear how this may be harmonised with the individual moral relativism discussed on p. 10. Related to this, it would be interesting to hear the candidate's final verdict on the issue of McDonagh's alleged "nihilistic relativism" (an accusation referred to – among others – by José Lanters). Furthermore, a line that requires some additional development concerns McDonagh's tendency to provocation that I have mentioned above and which Patrick Lonergan has discussed poignantly in relation to *The Behanding in Spokane* (as quoted on p. 25). This tendency is intrinsically connected to humour, and while the candidate has made some effort



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to consider the role of humour in relation to ethical issues, it remains to be convincingly argued that McDonagh's jokes about non-white, handicapped, or gay people expose prejudice as absurd (cf. p. 14) and cannot really offend anyone.

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade it as "very good" (2).

Prague, 19 August 2020

Prof. Ondřej Pilný, PhD