

# British Theatre Guide

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## The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh

Patrick Lonergan

Methuen Drama

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Patrick Lonergan is a great rarity in the field of theatre and performance academia. He is able to write cogently and meaningfully for a general audience, not feeling the need to baffle his readers with a language that would not make sense to any except those colleagues and competitors who regularly delight in using it.

This accessibility to the common reader may not be an important factor to the publishers, since the fighting is very much for the college library market.

*The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh* is, for the most part, an exemplary book that takes apart and analyses the work of one of the most talked about but satisfying playwrights and filmmakers to have emerged in the last couple of decades.

In order to derive full benefit from this work, it would probably help to have seen all of Martin McDonagh's works or, at the very least, have tested out a sample, for example Joe Hill-Gibbins's remarkable and deservedly successful revival of [The Beauty Queen of Leenane](#) at the Young Vic or McDonagh's first full-length film, *In Bruges*. For anyone who has not seen some of the works described, the author's descriptions and contextual analyses will still prove both valuable and entertaining.

Dr Lonergan's insightful analysis will give readers a really deep understanding of the thoughts and motivations of Martin McDonagh in creating not only his stream of challenging and at times controversial plays but the two films as well.

Despite apparent critical disdain, McDonagh is one of the most important playwrights currently at work. In addition, he is a highly promising filmmaker whose best may still lie ahead, although *In Bruges* is an amazing debut movie.

Dr Lonergan's efforts are initially followed by an informative interview with Garry Hynes. She was the artistic director of the Druid Company in Galway and can reasonably claim to have discovered the playwright, having put his first three plays on to a public stage and transferred them around the globe.

Thereafter, approximately quarter of the book is devoted to critical essays on McDonagh from a series of academics. Regrettably, after the impressive clarity that is a trademark of this volume's author, these sections are very narrow, covering topics of seemingly dubious relevance such as gender and eco-criticism. To compound doubts about the need for this section, each essay is written in the kind of language that might well be unintelligible even to those working in the field.

Moving back to the core, this book is particularly good at considering responses to the work of a playwright who has always been controversial. It attempts to distinguish between his writing and

reactions to it, which are often extreme and it is suggested this might say considerably more about those reacting than McDonagh's writing.

It also takes a good look at influences such as Harold Pinter and J M Synge, not to forget Quentin Tarantino, as well as the impact of the writer's Anglo-Irish background.

For the most part, *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh* not only presents a good read but also does what every book of this type should. It makes readers desperate to see McDonagh's plays and, more easily, send readers back to the DVD of *In Bruges* for a fresh look.

**Reviewer:** [Philip Fisher](#)