

Seven Psychopaths (2012)

Rated R. Our ratings: V -9; L -8; S/N -3. Running time: 1 hour 50 min. Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of anger will fail. Proverbs 22.8

*You have ploughed wickedness,
you have reaped injustice,
you have eaten the fruit of lies.
Hosea 10:13*

*Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever
you sow.
Galatians 6.7*

Writer/director Martin Marty, Hans, and Billy McDonagh's follow up to his (holding Bonny).

wonderful In Bruges is more cartoonish than his earlier 2012 CBS Films cerebral take on the gangster genre. The script depicting the gory events swirling around the frustrated screen writer Marty (Colin Farrell) seem like what would result from the Coen Brothers, Quentin Tarantino, and Sam Pekinpah had teamed up with Martin Scorsese, plus a case of Johnny Walker's. I add Scorsese to the mix because Marty is the movie screenwriter's first name, and the full name of the character played by actor Sam Rockwell is Billy Bickel.

Marty (that of this movie) has sold a studio on just the title of his script but has encountered writer's block. The camera

tells us why when we hear the telephone voice of his worried agent ask why he hasn't turned anything in other than the title, and it focuses on a whiskey bottle. Billy Bickle, Marty's best friend, wants to help him with the script. A part-time actor, Billy is a partner with Hans (Christopher Walken) in a scheme of kidnapping pets of the wealthy and demanding a hefty ransom. They make the mistake of dognapping a Shih Tzu named Bonny. This little dog is the only connection that its psychopathic owner Charlie (Woody Harrelson) has with his heart. The gangster sets forth on a vengeful quest to find and kill the culprits. The poor dog walker, Sharice, this cameo role filled by the star of Precious, Gabourey Sidibe, is the first to feel his wrath as he enjoys teasing with her life during her interrogation.

There are so many wild and wacky scenes, some of which come from Marty and Billy's attempt to fill out the script, and some from what happens to themselves during the last part when Charlie is tracking them down in the desert. One of the craziest characters is Tom Waits' Zachariah, a psychopath who constantly cradles a rabbit in his arms. He was once teamed up with Maggie (Amanda Mason Warren), a black woman, the two of them being serial killers of serial killers—yes, you read that right. However, Maggie proved far too sadistic and brutal in the killings, so Zachariah walked away from her, an act he would come to regret in the resulting loneliness of his life. As In Bruges, Gandhi is again referenced, first by a large wall poster of the Mahatma that we see when Zachariah and Maggie bloodily kill a serial killer (I think it was the Zodiac Killer).

Later our other psychos, Marty and Billy, engage in an argument over Gandhi's famous statement about vengeance, that if we follow the "eye for an eye" dictum, we will all be blind. Gandhi's influence can also be seen when Billy (I think) proposes an ending to his film, one centering on a Vietnamese Buddhist monk (Long Nguyen) bent on bloody

vengeance against all Americans because his loved ones during the Vietnamese War were slaughtered—just how and where I will leave you to find out. Anyway, the ending proposed is to be in contrast to the violent first half of the script. Billy of course is repelled by this, and... This is a guy's movie, true to the criticism made of Marty's script-in-progress, that his women are all cardboard figures with few lines to say. And yet despite the violence and such, there are some tender moments, such as the episode when Hans' critically ill wife Myra (Linda Bright Clay) is visited in her hospital room by Charlie, who has discovered that Hans is one of the pair that kidnapped his Bonny. Myra leads Charlie on at first, not admitting that she is Hans' wife, and telling him that Hans had been there recently to visit her roommate. Realizing that Charlie does not believe her, she turns her back on him and sees Hans below, carrying a bouquet of flowers for her. With no pleading the life-weary woman calmly accepts her fate. A few minutes later Charlie and Hans pass each other in the hallway. Much later Hans confronts death at the hands of Charlie's chief henchman with the same resignation that his wife did.

There is so much taking place—so many crazy people in crazy situations—that I can only describe a portion of the film. The climactic shootout at a national park where one of our antiheroes takes refuge on a tall outcrop topped by a cross could have come from either a Western or a rise-and-fall crime caper of the Thirties. For many, especially for people of faith striving to be peacemakers, there will be far too much blood and gore in the film. This usually includes yours truly, but the film is so much like *Pulp Fiction* in its plot twists and wacky dialogue, with an occasional moment of insight and tenderness, that I was totally drawn in, even though I knew it was the same kind of cartoonish fantasy as Chuck Jones' Roadrunner and Wiley E. Coyote shorts.

For Reflection/Discussion

1. Do you have a favorite psychopath, and if so, who and why?
2. In the last paragraph the film is compared to the old short cartoons featuring the Road Runner and Wylie E. Coyote. To sample these delightfully crazy shorts from Warner Brothers go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsD-sePT3tY> After watching several of these, what acts of violence do you see in them? How does the cartoon format make these more acceptable than those in a film like Seven Psychopaths? Perhaps, too, the moral of the tales is more visible" Which is? (See Psalm 35:8 & 12; Psalm 119:110; Proverbs 5:22.)
3. How might ruthless Charlie's feelings for little Bonny be his one trace of humanity?
4. What irony do you see in the poster and the discussion of Gandhi by the characters? What were the references to the Indian leader in In Bruges?
5. How might Billy's ending of the script be a better one than Marty's? What surprised you about the Vietnamese monk sequences?
6. How do we see the wisdom of the Scripture passages in this lurid tale?