

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLOMOUCI

PEDAGOGICKÁ FAKULTA

Ústav cizích jazyků

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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**Unbeatable Heroes, Unique Environment and
Inimitable Englishness in Dick Francis's Novels**

Olomouc 2019

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Čestné prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem závěrečnou práci vypracovala samostatně pod vedením
Mgr. Petra Anténeho, Ph.D. s využitím pramenů, které jsou uvedeny
v bibliografii.

V Olomouci, 28.5.2019

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vlastnoruční podpis

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Mgr. Petr Anténe, Ph.D. for his great patience, support and valuable comments on my final project, and to my family for their understanding and immense help.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this bachelor's project is to analyse the literary work of Dick Francis, a British writer of crime novels. It describes shortly his life story and some of the people who were important for him in his life and writing. The main part of the project focuses on his books from three perspectives : the specific qualities common to his main characters, the environment of the British horse racing where his characters operate, and the descriptions of the everyday life in the English society of the second half of the twentieth century, the era when and about which Francis wrote his books.

A VERY PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

For a significant part of my working years I had a chance to be a personal assistant to a special lady. One of my tasks was to accompany her on her many business trips abroad, and, as she was only able to speak Czech, to be her voice in English and French.

Her subordinates of all levels, many of whom were grateful to her for giving them a chance in certain turning points of their lives, used to call her “the Iron Lady“. She was then in her sixties, a powerful, highly successful, efficient, intelligent, and a feared manager of a large, later even international business. I was twenty. A rookie.

Nevertheless, she entrusted herself to me fully, and I did my best to never betray this huge trust in any way. She tend to unnoticeably force the best qualities out of the people around her. After many years, I still feel that she was my greatest teacher and should I have to work for her without being paid for it, I still would. She was always fair and her moral code was high in all respects.

This remarkable lady had a passion for books. Especially for those written by Dick Francis. What could be so interesting about detective stories from British racing, I remember thinking. Additionally, such literature did not fit to her professional image. She was more of a Machiavelli type.

Years passed. The Iron Lady retired. I left the job. One long, now distant, evening in February, I was looking for something to read in my mother’s library and chose *Hot Money* by Dick Francis. The next morning found me still reading the last pages of that book. I was caught.

I haven’t stopped reading and loving Francis’s books since then. Now I know what could be so interesting about detective stories from British racing. It is the writer’s insight, his ability to draw the reader into the middle of events and keep them hooked, to make them forget about time and the real world. It’s the unique environment he describes, the inimitable Englishness that

cannot be extracted from it, it is his unbeatable heroes with the moral code built deep inside them.

I remember my former boss every time I begin reading another Francis's book. For age and distance reasons we rarely talk or meet these days, but I know where to find her no matter the conditions or a daytime. Her favourite author created a character of Maisie Mathews in his book *In the Frame*. I still can't believe Mr. Francis and my boss have never met.

This thesis focuses on the literary work of Dick Francis, a 20th century English writer of crime novels. It explores his books in order to describe his way of creating believable and persuasive heroes who operate in a very specific environment of a very specific country. The thesis tries to highlight such features of Dick Francis's books that have been since their first arrival in our country especially attractive to their Czech readers.

The first part of the thesis describes the events that had impact on Francis's life, his writing career, and three people important to his success.

The second part of the thesis is dedicated to Dick Francis's books. His literary work is observed from three points of interest: The main characters in his novels and their qualities, the world of English racecourses, and the subtle mentions referring to the English society as such.

1. FRANCIS - A MAN OF FOUR CAREERS

Richard Stanley Francis was born on 31 October 1920 in Coedcanlas, a farm in Pembrokeshire, in Wales. His family were farmers, jockeys, and huntsmen, his father a jockey, a horse trainer, and later also a stable owner. Richard, called “Dick”, and his older brother Douglas, grew on a farm, and they began to ride donkeys and ponies at a very young age of five.

1.1 Youth

Francis himself describes his carefree childhood in his biographical book *The Sport of Queens*, his first book that he wrote in 1957. In his biography, he gives a colourful account of his growing up with the horses, of his youth desire to be riding with the grown-ups more than spending time at school, and of his father who was his first employer and riding tutor. Then, in 1935, Francis tasted his first victory at a horse show, replacing his ailing father unexpectedly in the saddle of Ballymonis, “a petulant creature with an unpredictable will,” as J.M. Davis describes the horse in Francis’s biography in 1989. Trusted but rarely praised by his father, young Dick is expected to follow in his parent’s footsteps.

1.2 War years and homecoming

However, the Second World War redirects Francis to another career of his life: the army. The business at his father’s stables was not thriving during the war years and Dick decided to join the army. Although he wanted to be a pilot, he was assigned to the job of an airframe fitter and spent a lot of his army service in North Africa. Not happy with such a position, he kept applying for a pilot service, and later succeeded.

After the war, Dick Francis returned home where his father expected him to take over his horse business. But, as he admitted in his biography, the war had changed his view of the world he had grown in:

The change was in me. After six years of an existence when on occasions even life itself was from minute to minute uncertain, the opinion of two men

on which six horses was the best shape seemed to me to be so unimportant as to be ridiculous. (*Sport of Queens*, 1969, p. 49)

Stubborn, Francis decided to begin a jockey career despite the different opinions and wishes of his family.

1.3 The Champion Jockey

The whole jockey career of Dick Francis, from his first raced horse Russian Hero to his fateful horse Devon Loch, is described by himself in his first book, the biographical *The Sport of Queens* (1957). From an amateur jockey, he managed to achieve the title of the Champion Jockey in 1954, winning 76 of 331 races (Davis, 1989). He also managed to experience many serious injuries during these years, just his collarbone got cracked nine times in racing. But the crucial moment of his third life career was then yet to come.

1.4 Aintree, Liverpool, March 1956

Just one season after having gained the title of the Jockey Champion, Francis participated in probably one of the most important races of his career, the famous Grand National which has been run on last March or first April Saturday in Aintree racecourse in Liverpool. In 1956, Dick Francis was wearing Queen Mother's colours riding her horse called Devon Loch. Both the horse and the jockey were heading for a certain victory when, shortly before reaching the winning post, Devon Loch made an inexplicable unnatural movement, described later by his jockey in *The Sport of Queens*:

He fell flat on his belly, his limbs splayed out sideways and backwards in unnatural angles, and when he stood up he could hardly move. (1969, p. 210)

That moment marked the break point in Francis's long and successful jockey career. As he claimed in his autobiography and many interviews, it took him a long time to recover from that moment of an absolute loss of hope and unwanted attention. Many pages in *The Sport of Queens* are dedicated to this particular race and its consequences as well as to speculations regarding the reasons of Devon Loch's behaviour. Francis even claims there that the horse's

name would be found engraved on his heart after his death and that his epitaph might read: “The jockey who didn’t win the Grand National” (p. 218).

1.5 The champion writer

One year later, in February 1957, Francis decided to retire from racing. The Grand National incident was still fresh, and literary agent John Johnson asked Francis to write his own autobiography. Davies (1989) describes the outcome of this request: “In December 1957, *The Sport of Queens* was published and sold out in a week” (p. 13). In the same year, Dick Francis began his cooperation with the magazine *London Sunday Express*, submitting articles from the racing environment for the following 16 years. After the success of *The Sport of Queens*, Francis tried his skills for writing in a crime novel *Dead Cert*, which was published in 1962. His second novel, *Nerve*, was published in 1964 and since then, new books by Dick Francis continued to appear, one in almost every year, until 2006.

Francis wrote 46 books of which 43 were crime novels, one was an autobiography, one book (*Field of Thirteen*, 1998) consisted of 13 short stories previously published in various magazines, and one was a biography written upon request of his fellow jockey, Lester Piggot – *Lester: A Jockey’s Life* (1986). His literary work was awarded with many prizes both in Britain and abroad. He is the only writer who was awarded three times the Edgar Award, a prize for the best novel given by the Mystery Writers of America association (in 1970 for *Forfeit*, in 1981 for *Whip Hand*, and in 1996 for *Come to Grief*). Francis himself was knighted an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1983 and promoted to Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 2000.

Dick Francis died on 14 February 2010 on Cayman Islands at the age of 89, having spent a life full of unexpected twists not unlikely as the heroes of his books.

2. MARY, FELIX, JAROSLAVA

Davis (1989, p. 14) is convinced that writing appealed to Francis because it is a lonely activity, just like his previous life occupancies were. Francis enjoyed being alone in an airplane or on a racetrack with his horse. However, for the novel writing Francis always had a collaborator.

2.1 Mary Margaret – wife, partner, and companion

In 1945, Dick Francis met Mary Margaret Brenchley, whom he married two years later. Mary Francis was her husband's supporter during his racing career, and, according to *The Sport of Queens*, she was the force that persuaded Dick to write his autobiography himself, instead of a ghostwriter proposed by the publisher. During his writing career, Mary was an indispensable aide to Dick Francis and he gave her his credit as a co-writer of his novels. She was not only his editor but also a resourceful researcher who acquired many interesting skills during the preparation of a new book. In an interview with John C. Carr (1983, p. 225) Francis said that his wife loved doing research on a novel. She learnt photography for *Reflex* (1980), and she took a course on flying for *Flying Finish* (1966). In the same interview (p. 219) Francis explains that most of his stories are based on some real events. One very autobiographical event regarding Mary Francis can be found in the novel *Forfeit* (1968): the wife of the main character James Tyron is seriously ill and spends her days locked in a medical equipment called iron lung. Mary herself had to spend five weeks in such an equipment in 1949 when she got infected with polio. At that time, her condition was complicated by the fact that she was pregnant. In the interview with Carr (1983), Dick Francis admits that

She wanted the child. She was given the opportunity to have him... taken away from her, but she wanted the baby because we thought we might never have another one. (p. 215)

Mary recovered from her illness and gave birth to their first son, Merrick. In 1953, their second son, Felix, was born. After Mary Margaret died in 2000, it was Felix who fully took her place in Dick Francis's creation.

2.2 Felix Francis – the next generation

Felix Francis studied and later taught physics. According to Felix's official biography, his father consulted him as an expert for the *Twice Shy* (1981). In this novel, the main hero Jonathan Derry is a physics teacher. His experience as an international marksman was used in Dick Francis's *Shattered* (2000) and *Under Orders* (2006). The last four books of Francis's career (*Dead Heat*, 2007, *Silks*, 2008, *Even Money*, 2009, and *Crossfire*, 2010) were written in cooperation with his son Felix, whose name appeared in the books together with his father's.

Felix Francis has continued writing crime fiction novels after his father died in 2010. Despite the fact that his own previous career was not connected to racing, he bases his work on the racing environment, too. He also follows his father's pattern in publishing one book per year, and since his first independent novel *Gamble*, published in 2011 with the subtitle "A Dick Francis Novel," he has written seven others with the same subtitle so far (until 2019).

2.3 Jaroslava Moserová – Davidová – his Czech voice

Jaroslava Moserová was born on 17 January 1930 in Prague. From 1947 to 1949 she studied in the USA, and after she returned to her home country, she became a doctor, specialized in burns treatment. She was one of the doctors who tried to save the life of the Czech student Jan Palach after he had immolated himself in protest against the Soviet occupation and the following lethargy of the Czechoslovak society on the Wenceslas Square in Prague on 16 January 1969. She was not only a doctor, her activities entailed writing of books and plays, illustrating children's books as well as *The Atlas of Plastic Surgery*, and translating from English. After 1989, Jaroslava Moserová also became an active politician: a Czech ambassador in Australia and New Zealand in 1991-1993, a vice-president of the Czech Senate during 1996-1998, in 2003 she was one of the unsuccessful candidates in Czech presidential elections, internationally she was active in UNESCO committees.

Her first translations were purely scientific, she translated academic texts related to her profession. As she describes it in her memoir book *Historky – Na koho se nezapomíná* (*Anecdotes – Of those not forgotten*, published in 2003), Moserová desired to use her gift of language also in belles-lettres. She had no contacts among editors but one, who worked in sports publishing. He advised her to find an author writing about sports as this was the only topic his publishing house was allowed to produce. During her stay at the medical congress in England she happened to buy a book by Dick Francis. Attracted by his narrative style, she made her first Francis translation in 1972 and *Odds Against* was published in former Czechoslovakia under the title *Poslední šance*. Since then, her name has appeared in all the Czech translations of Francis's books.

She, Dick, and Mary Francis became friends and met several times. Their friendship and affection is described in her memoir book (2003), where she writes about Dick Francis staying in her husband's cottage in Krkonoše in 1973 and also about their visits to the Czech painter Josef Jíra, Moserová's friend. At that time, Dick Francis considered writing a book with a painter character, and, as Moserová implies, he wanted to locate it in Czechoslovakia. The book was written in 1976 and Francis named it *In the Frame*. However, according to the *Introduction* to this book found in its 1993 edition, it was not Josef Jíra whom Francis used as a model for his main character. This is Francis's description of one of the meetings during which Francis, his wife Mary, and Jarmila Moserová watched Jíra paint:

I came away shaken. I couldn't imagine being *him*. I needed a less driven artist for my protagonist. I thought I could manage a painter of horses. (*In the Frame*, Introduction to 1993 edition)

However, Moserová confirms that Jíra's image is present in this Francis's book, representing "the flamboyant genius of his [main hero's] long-time friend, Jik." (Introduction to 1993 edition).

Jaroslava Moserová-Davidová died on 24 March 2006, four years earlier than her friend and favourite author Dick Francis. To him, Jara, as she was known among her foreign friends, was a “remarkable lady” (*In the Frame*, Introduction to 1993 edition) who “impersonated the temperament of the whole Czech nation – courage, honesty, and perseverance. She has achieved so much in her life while maintaining her incredible and disarming humility.” (My own translation of Dick Francis’s quote, mentioned in his obituary by Jan Kábrt, 2010).

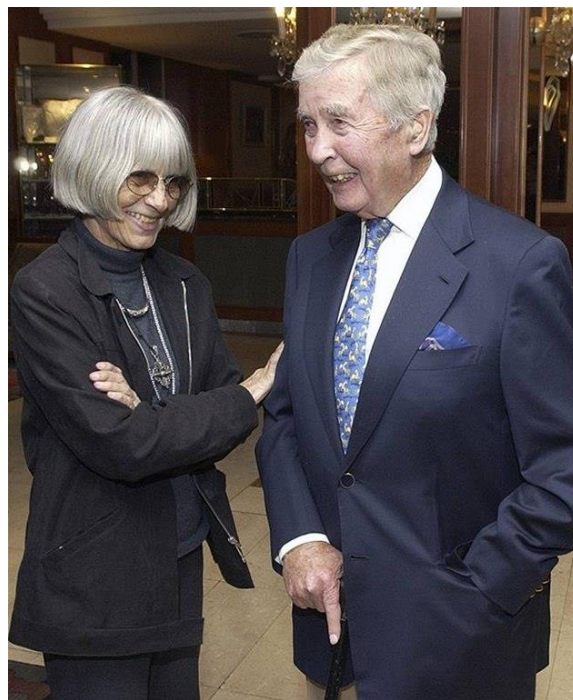


Fig.1: Jaroslava Moserová-Davidová and Dick Francis in Prague, 7 October 2004. Photo: Marta Myšková, ČTK

(Source: https://www.idnes.cz/kultura/literatura/francis-o-prekladatelce-moserove-jara-zosobnovala-povahu-ceskeho-naroda.A100214_210431_literatura_jaz)

3. UNBEATABLE HEROES

3.1 Ordinary men

J. M. Davis (1989) practically summarized the issue in one sentence:

Much of what makes Francis one of the best in his genre is his deliberate attempt to complicate the main hero. (p. 25)

Francis's main heroes, who always narrate the story in the first person (the only exception are Francis's short stories), are complicated men. Either their childhood was not easy and full of love, or their relationships with their fathers are complicated or not existing at all (as in *Hot Money*). In other cases, they had chosen their career against the wishes and expectations of their families. They have "crosses to bear" (Wagner, 2010) and secrets to hide. This, though, seems to be their main strength for the readers, the reason why they are so popular: the readers can identify with them because they are not super heroes. They are ordinary men living in the real world. They are believable, sometimes even degrading themselves, like the jockey Derek Franklin in *Straight* (1989) who unexpectedly inherited his brother's blooming gemstone business:

"On the whole," I said mildly, "jockeys are like anyone else. Would you feel I was better able to manage here if I were, say, a piano tuner? Or an actor? Or a clergyman?"

She [his brother's assistant] said faintly, "No."

"OK, then. We're stuck with a jockey. Twist of fate. Do your best for the poor fellow." (*Straight*, 1989, p. 77)

However, these ordinary men who let the readers see their worries and doubts inside their heads and who confess to them their inner fears and pains later discover some sort of power in themselves which forces them to overcome all those weaknesses when it is needed in quest for finding the truth and justice. Francis doesn't make his heroes unbeatable from the start. He forces them to undergo a long (and often physically very painful) process to grow into such

personalities and he invites his readers to go along, follow that process of change and to 'keep their fingers crossed' for the brave ordinary man who happened to be chosen as the truth finder.

3.2 A hero is born

Dick Francis's special gripping trick on readers is his mastery of catchy first lines and first pages:

Gordon Michaels stood in the fountain with all his clothes on.

"My God," Alec said. "What is he doing?"

"Who?"

"Your boss," Alec said. (*Banker*, 2010, p.5)

"I stood on the outside of disaster, looking in." (*In the Frame*, 1993, p. 1)

"I looked at my friend and saw a man who had robbed me. Deeply disturbing. The ultimate in rejection." (*High Stakes*, 1977, p. 5)

A lot of his books reveal the crime immediately after the reader begins reading them. The very first page presents the crime scene or the plot very plainly and unexpectedly. Not only to the readers but also to the surprise of the main character who is supposed to face the situation calmly and to gradually become the force that will bring the law and order back into it, no matter who he is at the moment. And the main characters don't seem very certain that it should be them, that they possess the abilities to do it, that they are entitled to do it, neither do they feel in charge of taking such a dangerous task on. Many of them seem to metaphorically 'look over their shoulders' hoping that there may be somebody more competent to take care of the whole issue. But there isn't. At the moment when the protagonist realizes it, a hero is born.

A perfect example of a forced-to-be hero is Jonathan, a physics teacher at the college and former professional sports shooter from *Twice Shy* (1981). He experiences the collapse of his wife's friend after she was found guilty of having kidnapped a baby. Then her husband dies in an explosion of a boat.

Opposite to his wife, Jonathan seems to be indifferent to these events. Later he stands face to face with unexpected armed extortionists in his living room. A tired, sarcastic and slightly cold-hearted middle age man who has resigned to both his marriage and career improvement suddenly refuses another, life-threatening resignation and uses his sportsgun in defence against the intruders, commenting on his act to the reader that "There was a time for boasting, perhaps. And that was it." (1991, p. 37)

3.3 Fathers and sons

There are at least seven protagonists whose parents died unexpectedly in various accidents, usually a long time ago, in the heroes' early years. Good relationships between father and son are very rare in Francis's novels and Davis (1989) finds only one such example in *Dead Cert*. The element of the estranged father figure was so significant for Francis that his novel *Bonecrack* begins with his explanatory introduction on the topic, noting that his own father was good and loving and that the complicated father-son relationships are purely his matter of interest.

Bonecrack is his masterpiece on this topic. It portrays two different fathers and their two different sons who met because the spoilt one simply wants to ride a famous horse and his powerful father can force other people to fulfil his wishes. Neil Griffon, the courageous other son, refuses to be forced to obedience and through his calm and courage he finally reaches something more valuable than a mere wish come true:

"To defeat the father, I have changed the son. Changed him at first as a solution to the problem, but later also because the emerging product was worth it." (*Bonecrack*, 1978, p. 221)

3.4 Sid and Kit – the returning heroes

Francis used only two of his main characters in more than one story: Sid Halley and Kit Fielding.

Sid Halley first appeared in Francis's third book *Odds Against* (1965). He reappeared 14 years later in *Whip Hand*, then after another 16 years in *Come to Grief*, and his last chance to tell a story came in 2006, in the very last book the author wrote alone – *Under Orders*. The author's son, Felix Francis, brought Sid Halley to the scene once again in his follow-up book *Refusal* (2013). Sid Halley is also one of the few Francis's protagonists for whom the crime solving represents their real profession. There are only six of them among main heroes of Francis's novels – the private investigator Halley, three different Jockey Club investigators (*The Edge*, *Slayride*, *For Kicks*), one government security agent (*Blood Sport*) and one anti-kidnapping consultant (*The Danger*).

Kit Fielding appears in two Francis's books published consequently: *Break In* (published in 1985) and *Bolt* (published in 1986).

Sid Halley could be considered as Francis's most successful hero. *Odds Against* was an Edgar Award Nominee in 1967, *Whip Hand* and *Come to Grief* won Francis the Mystery Writers of America Award in 1981 and 1996 respectively. Books featuring Sid Halley were also acknowledged in the Far East, having been awarded the Japan Adventure Fiction Association Award: *Come to Grief* in 1996 and *Under Orders* in 2006.

The Yorkshire Television produced a six-episode television series *The Racing Game* with Sid Halley as the main character, played by the actor Mike Gwyllim. While the first episode of the series was based on *Odds Against*, the following five were written by various other authors. The episodes were aired in Britain on the Yorkshire Television TV channel between November 1979 and January 1980, i.e. after the first two Sid Halley books were published. As Dick Francis admits in his autobiographical book *The Sport of Queens*, it was the

resemblance of Mike Gwylim to Sid Halley that inspired him to write other books with this significant protagonist.

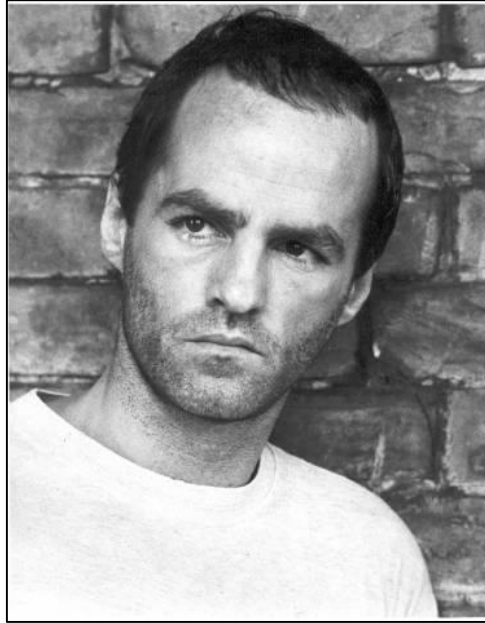


Fig.2: Welsh actor Mike Gwylim

(source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2f/Mike_Gwylim.jpeg)

3.4.1 Sid Halley

Sid Halley is a former jockey and steeplechase champion who gave up his racing career after a serious injury and after his marriage ended he became a private detective. He can be an ideal prototype of all Francis's unbeatable heroes. All the features that are common to them are concentrated in Sid Halley. While Francis's heroes are (or become during the process of searching for justice) perceived by their surroundings as tough, persistent, resourceful and intelligent, Sid Halley is the toughest of them all. His former wife, Jenny, confirms it in *Whip Hand*, in a desperate speech about the reasons that led to the end of their marriage, and she accuses Sid of being tough, even to himself, and cruel, unable to show his real feelings to those who love him and hiding them behind a wall. Halley's toughness is also confirmed in the last line of this book: The villain, Trevor Deansgate, holding a gun in his hand, informs Sid in a tense scene about the reasons that made him give up the revenge against Halley:

“Isn’t there *anything*,” he said bitterly, “that you’re afraid of?” (*Whip Hand*, 2009, p. 292)

What is unknown to Sid Halley’s surroundings is made accessible to the readers: Sid’s inner life, his mind and his feelings. The readers should sympathize with the protagonist and it wouldn’t be contrived easily would a hero be ‘as hard as a stone’, tough, heartless and emotionless. Apart from being perceived as the toughest, Sid Halley is also the most damaged and physically disabled. He lost his left hand, and for the plot’s purposes, it had to be a gradual and painful loss that left not only physical scars.

3.4.2 Kit Fielding

The character of a young active jockey Christmas ‘Kit’ Fielding appeared in two books Francis wrote consequently: *Break In* (1985) and *Bolt* (1986). The author created Kit Fielding much more optimistic than Sid Halley. Kit has no major life troubles, his jockey career seems to be at its peak and he enjoys some more great victory days at the races throughout the book. Not a beginner any more, experienced in his job, self-confident, liked by horse owners for his skills and good manners.

While Sid Halley searches for justice because of his profession and his damaged self-esteem, Kit’s motives to get involved in such a quest are purely altruistic: his twin sister and her husband are trapped in uninitiated troubles in *Break In* and Fielding’s main employer, Princess de Brescou and her disabled elderly husband, both of them people of firm moral standards, face unacceptable violence in *Bolt*.

The working methods of these two recurring heroes also differ. While Sid Halley finds the necessary information and clues himself, often through presumably risky ways, Kit gracefully uses his racing world acquaintances, often highly positioned horse owners content with his riding performance. Kit is effective, bold, brave, and stubborn. Should he have any personal worries, they concern only his future career or his fiancée.

However, Kit Fielding and Sid Halley share one common thing together and with most of the main jockey characters created by Dick Francis: Horse racing is everything to them, it is the meaning of their life.

3.5 Dr. Watson – Francis’s way

The well-known sentence ‘Elementary, dear Watson’, ends many of the seamless, crime explanatory soliloquies of Arthur C. Doyle’s famous character Sherlock Holmes. Doctor Watson is portrayed as the less gifted, less skilled, and more ordinarily thinking one in Doyle’s pair of the crime solvers. His function is to arrange what is necessary, to collect evidence that only his ingenious colleague can then put into the correct place in the crime puzzle. But his main role seems to be reflecting and magnifying the uniqueness of Holmes’s brain like a mirror.

Hercule Poirot, an infallible detective character in Agatha Christie’s books, also uses his old friend, Colonel Arthur Hastings, to spread the astonishment for Poirot’s brain wit.

Such a model seems to work well in many detective stories by various authors: A genius teams up with a simpler one in order to emphasize the exceptional intelligence of the first.

Francis does not use such stereotypes that may be deflating. His heroes usually operate alone and protect others from risks. However, in many cases there appears an acquaintance, a friend, or a representative of some reliable authority (be it for example a Jockey Club officer, doctor, or a Police detective) who offers priceless expert knowledge from some specific field and brings insight into the case. It’s very often them who are used by the author for giving the necessary insight to the mechanisms of various environments both to the main hero and the readers, making it more a natural explanation and less a boring scholarly lecture. These expert characters are always appreciated by the main protagonist, although their own view on the hero’s both past and future decisions and actions might be reserved.

Only rarely does the main protagonist have a colleague or somebody that could be understood as holding the role of the ever-present and true partner

for crime solving. One rare example can be found in the character of Chico Barnes, in *Whip Hand*. In this book, Chico is a firm partner to then already famous and well-known Sid Halley, a retired jockey who co-owns a private detective office with him. In contradiction to the usual Holmes – Watson pattern, used by many other writers, Chico and Sid are equal in their partnership, both bringing in their best specific qualities and knowledge. Sid himself is too renowned in the racing world, both for his past great jockey career ended by his damaging hand injury and the following successful activities as a detective. These reasons, at the same time, represent new business opportunities for their detective agency. His work partner Chico, with his completely different background, can work in the same racing environment without being noticed and through his peculiar methods of getting important information he brings key clues to their cases. Sid relies on Chico heavily, he has his complete trust despite the fact that they don't share much information on their private lives. When in *Whip Hand* both of them get very painfully beaten as a kind of warning, Sid's biggest worry is Chico's condition and he feels a deep and sincere regret that it was him, Sid, who allowed his workmate to undergo such a life threat:

“Sorry,” I said.

I wondered whether I was really apologizing for disturbing him at that moment or more basically for having tangled his life in mine, with such dire results. (*Whip Hand*, 2009, p. 261)

Another tasks that the minor “partner characters” are assigned in Francis's books are to provide first aid, finance, shelter, or safe hiding place to the protagonist. These acts of support are also appreciated by the otherwise independent main hero. In some cases these expertise and support providers are women.

3.6 Women

In the opening line of her essay on the evolution of female characters in crime fiction (2013), Professor Rohan Maitzen states:

Up until about 1982, I wouldn't have wanted to be a woman in crime fiction. The options were so limited: spinster, dame, victim, *femme fatale*. Yes, there are exceptions – the deceptively unthreatening Miss Marple, for example, or P. D. James's Cordelia Gray.

After two paragraphs, she continues:

To be a woman in a Dick Francis novel, on the other hand – now *that's* something I would consider.

According to this essay, Francis introduced a new kind of heroines in his books “straightforwardly intelligent”, independent women who find fulfilment in their profession, who are good at what they do and who do not need men's approval and applause for it. To the surprise of the essay author, women in Francis's books are

...allies, collaborators, resources for their heroes – and sometimes love interests, but their appeal as lovers is precisely their autonomy and strength: Francis never sets romance up as a rescue scenario.

Indeed, there are many brave and independent women characters to choose from in his books. Pen Warren from *Banker* (1982), for example, is a pharmacist. Without her expert knowledge the main protagonist, a banker by profession, would never be able to solve the mystery of foals born damaged. Ursula Young, another female character in *Banker*, is a bloodstock agent and clarifies “the economics of owning a stallion” to him (*Banker*, 2010, p. 75). Concerning women in his stories, Francis does not follow any age, beauty, or social status restrictions. His descriptions of women are short and precise, be

it for the useful experts on heroes' ways to find the truth or the objects of their desire. However, the description of these two kinds of women varies:

The above mentioned Ursula Young is described by Tim Ekaterin, the protagonist of *Banker*, in the following words:

She was fifty, tough, good-looking, dogmatic and inclined to treat me as a child. (*Banker*, 2010, p. 75)

Concerning women who are present in the book for romantic reasons, their description notices different features: clothes, perfume, hair and figure. However, *Forfeit* also includes a different description:

She had never loved, I thought. Sex, often. Love, never. Not what I liked, but what I wanted. (*Forfeit*, 1999, p. 21)

Gail, a woman described in the above words, becomes later the secret lover, or, in more precise words, a sex and pleasure provider to the main protagonist who spends all his free time caring for his loved but ill wife, captive in bed with artificial lungs. An obvious similarity can be found here with Francis's real life. His wife Mary had to suffer similar captivity when she was ill with polio in 1949 (Davis, 1989).

It is also notable that James Tyron, the protagonist in *Forfeit*, is the only one in the line of morally high heroes who regularly commits adultery.

4. THE UNIQUE WORLD OF BRITISH RACING

There probably isn't any other country in the world more famous for its racing sport than Great Britain. And there probably isn't any writer more skilled than Dick Francis in describing the British racing to the rest of the world. Every single component of this sport can be found in his books, drawn in vivid colours and presented to the readers in a language that makes it easily imaginable what is it like to take part in it, no matter which role one chooses. There are the most famous racing places, the ordinary Sunday racegoers, bookmakers, journalists, racecourse staff, those who rule the sport and make decisions in it, and those who could be called real insiders – the horsemen. Francis allows his readers to learn something about each of the above mentioned. He describes their specific view on the racing world, and places his villains and heroes freely in any of the three main groups of racing world people – the outsiders, the insiders, and the rulers.

4.1 The scenery

The key places related to racing which appear in all Francis's novels, occasionally taking on the role of the crime scene, could be divided in three groups: There are the shiny racing tracks, most of them concentrated in the south of England, bearing famous names like Ascot, Lambourn, Cheltenham, Plumpton, and Newmarket, the "capital of racing", according to *Wild Horses*. Then there are not so attractive stables of the four-legged champions with all the caretaking staff, and the third place essential for books about the racing life are the plains.

The stables of different sizes and quality represent the centre of horse breeding and training life, the meeting place of horse trainers (and usually stable owners in one person), horse owners who arrive to inspect their living properties and expect to be treated appropriately, the jockeys arriving for their daily routine work, and the habitat of stable lads, those invisible but irreplaceable people who do the most difficult work and occupy the lowest places of the social ladder. The condition of stables usually indicates the

qualities of their trainer and the wealth of their customers. In case there happens to be some abandoned place of this kind in Francis's book, it serves well for a scene of torture or imprisonment for the brave main hero who usually manages to escape such a deadly trap after a very painful torment.

The wide plains surrounding the stables are of the same importance for Francis's stories. In his books, Francis brings groups of horses here for their daily work in the morning mist or evening sun, being observed by groups of punters who assess the form of champions for the next racing event with binoculars. The author uses this open space for another kind of crime, too, employing a remote, therefore invisible shooter (as in *Bonecrack*, 1971), but giving a chance to the possible victim to find a hiding place in hedges and small forests around.

The British racecourses themselves represent the places most open to the public, those with the most of the glory and fame. In some of his books, Francis acquaints the reader also with the racecourses in other countries, e.g. *In the Frame* describes a big racing event in Australia, and other books mention races in France, Russia, and the USA. But it is the British racecourses that Francis knows best and he describes their facilities in many details, from the boiler room and jockey weighing rooms to the VIP lounges. In *Decider* (1993), Francis clearly explains through the words of a course manager character what makes a good and successful racecourse:

The punters stay away if you don't get the bars right, and if the owners and trainers aren't pampered and comfortable, the buggers will run their horses somewhere else. This lunatic of an architect looked totally blank when I asked him what he thought the crowds did between the races. Look at the horses, he said. I ask you! And if it's raining? Shelter and booze, I told him, that's what brings in the customers. (*Decider*, 1993, p. 11).

An expert's insight, valid probably not only on the British Isles.

4.2 The insiders and the rulers

The environment where Francis is an expert due to his previous jockey career is very specific. Nevertheless, in his writing he makes the racing accessible and understandable to any reader, no matter their own experience. In more than ten of his books, the main hero is a jockey, either professional or amateur, former or active. Together with stable staff, horse owners, trainers, and stable owners, these people are the closest to horses. They are the real insiders and Francis shows their lives with real insight. Although a stable lad has never become a main character, there are plenty of mentions concerning their lifestyle: Many of them are young, single and uneducated, share the poorly equipped staff rooms, migrate from one stable to another, and they usually spend their evenings in the village pubs. They are lucky if they find a good stable owner who cares for his staff. In *Bonecrack* (1971), the stable lads have oat porridge for breakfast in their canteen and this fact is used to add to describe their overall misery. There are drunkards among them as well as reliable and responsible workers. A usual hobby of a stable team is betting on horses from their stables and then blaming the jockey when the bet does not bring the expected little wealth. This animosity might be the reason why Francis never let any stable lad become the main hero in his book.

The rulers of the racing sport seem to occupy a different position in the class ladder. The members of the elite Jockey Club, a long existing elite organisation of British racing sport founders consists of noblemen who are expected to be the bearers of noble values and behaviour. However, Francis uses some of them as villains, reasoning in his interview with Carr (1983) that “if you give the villains aristocratic names, people don’t immediately have suspicions about them.” (p. 214)

In the same interview Carr and Francis discuss the impact one of Francis’s books had on the real Jockey Club:

When I was riding, if they had someone in front of them at an enquiry, they were the defenders and the prosecutors at once. It was bad. When I was

halfway through *Enquiry*, they decided the accused could be legally represented because they knew I was making quite a fuss about it in the book, and other people were making a fuss. (Carr, 1983, p. 213)

It might be surprising that a retired jockey could have had such an impact on the sport where rules have been unchanged for generations. However, it has to be remembered that the Jockey Club wants to be perceived as a guardian of fairness in the British horse racing. And Francis himself pays his credit to such a guardian role in some of his books, too, creating a character of David Cleveland, the Jockey Club investigator in *Slay Ride* (1973) or Tor Kelsey in *The Edge* (1988) having the same occupation. Francis's heroes are fair-play men and both Jockey Club detectives are not any exceptions.

4.3 The outsiders

Considering the amount of people and variety of professions related to British horseracing it can be effortlessly concluded that it is not a mere sport but a specific branch of the country's industry. The occupations involved in it are countless, from veterinarians, bloodstock agents, horse transport managers to pilots transporting both jockeys and valuable horses, bookmakers, or racecourse chefs. Many horseracing related jobs are presented in detail and insight to the readers of Dick Francis. However, Francis does not limit his writing to the environment he knows perfectly from his previous occupation but he introduces other professions, as the already mentioned painter, diplomat, architect, glass blower, film director, anti-kidnapping consultant, toy inventor, or the owner of a gemstone import firm. In his interview with Carr (1983) Francis admitted that every time he intended to allocate the main character a job not connected to horseracing, he consulted an expert in the field or even tried the profession himself. Very often it was his wife Mary Francis who did the research by taking on the job in question (p. 225).

No matter what is the profession of the main character in the novel, Francis always invents a plot that brings the hero to the racing world. The specific skills and knowledge from the out-of-racing occupation are then used by the

hero for finding the truth through them, for his defence, or for saving his life in crucial moments of the story. There is one specific feature which all of Francis's main characters share, regardless whether their professional background is related to racing or not: They are passionate in what they do or have done and if they lose it, they lost all.

5. INIMITABLE ENGLISHNESS

In addition to the exciting horse racing environment and irresistible heroes themselves there is an ingredient in Dick Francis's novels that adds on attractiveness, especially for their foreign readers: Short sentences of no major importance to the story itself illustrate the life and daily habits of various members of the English society. The author probably did not include them in his narration with an intention to surprise the readers and to give them a lesson in English society trivia. More likely, they appear very naturally, as a statement that adds some graphicality to the situation that is being described.

However, these small pieces of information were probably quite interesting to Francis's readers abroad, for example in the former Czechoslovakia, where people lived in a very different environment and society with restricted sources of information and limited traveling experiences possible. These small notes allowed them, as they still do nowadays, to imagine the life in England in the second half of the 20th century.

5.1 What defines an Englishman

The predominantly male environment of Francis's books provides more space for describing men. The elements that help both the writer and the reader determine who are those men are the character's age, general look, his profession, but also his accent, clothes, shoes, and the places where the Englishman got his education, eats his lunches and spends his nights. That determines the Englishman's wealth and the position in the society but not necessarily his character or his role in the story.

5.2 Classes

Apart from the races themselves there might be nothing more British in Francis's novels than the social classes. The differences between them do not serve the writer only as another credibility and colour-adding ingredient. As Rachel Schaffer mentions in her essay (1994), Francis uses a class conflict as a

source of violence and he is “a keen observer of social manners and attitudes and has mined class differences successfully in most of his books.” However, Francis is democratic in his choice of villains and saviours: They come from various social classes from the lower up to nobility. In *For Kicks* (1965), it is the wealthy and well-positioned horse owner Adams who sadistically enjoys his superior position above the stable staff, vilifying them at his pleasure; in *Flying Finish* (1966) it is Billy, an ordinary worker in horse transport company who targets his hatred towards upper class on Henry, the son of an English earl.

For a foreign reader, the class distinction soon becomes familiar because of Francis’s ability to sketch his characters. This is his description of a horse owner from *Forfeit* (1999, p. 18):

Harry was big, sixtyish, used to authority, heavily charming, and unshakably Tory. I guessed that he read the *Telegraph* and drove a three-litre Jaguar. With automatic transmission, of course.

There is the lower class, consisting of stable staff, jockeys, and ordinary racegoers. This class also includes the Irish, usually good with horses but always suspicious, and field journalists, many of them alcoholics, corruptible or both. Then a large middle class, consisting of the jockey champions, horse trainers and stable owners on the lowest steps of this social ladder, followed by veterinarians, doctors, horse owners, bank managers and owners of small businesses. The upper places in the society are reserved for court judges, newspaper owners, members of the Jockey Club, business tycoons and lords with estates, butlers, secretaries and private chauffeurs.

Each class seems to have an unwritten list of jobs that are perceived as suitable for them. Some characters around the famous jockey champion Sid Halley try to humiliate him by mentioning the fact that his father not only died three days before marrying his mother but also that he was a mere window washer. In *Hot Money*, Donald, the son of a millionaire, came to “harbour at length as secretary of a prestigious golf club”, a job that “had proved

ultimately satisfactory in social standing, which was very important to his self-esteem." (*Hot Money*, 1987, p.118)

Despite friendly relationships that occasionally develop between members of different classes, Francis makes his characters respect the social borders. While an elderly princess Casilia of *Break In and Bolt* does not have any problems with encouraging her jockey before the race and joyfully go through the race details after his victory, she is not "that democratic" to watch the race itself with the crowd of the ordinary and resorts to her private racetrack rooms. Her favourite jockey, Kit Fielding, shares the enormous joy of winning with her but at the same time admits that it would be impossible for class reasons to embrace the princess out of such a sheer joy even if he wished to. Later in the story he becomes slowly accepted by her noble family as the fiancé of their niece and even more as their protector against uncontrollable evil, but the writer uses the comments of other noble family members to mark that such a thing is not usual and easily acceptable.

Nevertheless, Dick Francis proves to be more "democratic" than his Princess de Brescou and allows some of his characters forget about the expectations of the social class they come from. For example Ian Pembroke of *Hot Money* is the son of a millionaire. Benedict Juliard of *10lb Penalty* is the son of a politician. Both of them exert an activity that is far below their social status and understanding of their families. Both of them do it because they would not be able to do anything else, they would not find anything more fulfilling. To little surprise, both of them are jockeys.

5.3 Possessions

A car brand and a house with its equipment are usual tools used for demonstrating one's social status, not only in English or British society. Concerning the cars, jensens and landrovers for those who work with horses and jaguars or mercedeses for those "better off" are typical. For the accommodation, the formula "the more bedrooms and bathrooms the higher the owner's social status" works without any further explanation needed.

What may surprise the foreign reader of Francis's novels is his interest in the quality of furniture. Remarks concerning a table from Armada times (*Bonecrack*), or an antique sheraton desk (*In The Frame*), appear often in room descriptions, accompanied by details about curtain patterns and wallpaper colours. It could seem unusual in books written by a man as men probably pay little attention to such details. As Francis reveals in his biography *Sport of Queens*, his mother used to be an antique expert and Francis's wife Mary assisted him in writing the novels. However, such items like sheraton would have been hardly imaginable and they bring more exoticism to the ordinary Czech or Slovak reader in the Iron Curtain era of the 1970's and 1980's.

5.4 Food and drinks

Plenty of food mentions can be found in Francis's novels. From a modest hospital breakfast consisting of "steamed haddock and weak tea" that is served to the injured journalist James Tyron in *Forfeit* to a usual weekly lunch menu for bank managers presented to Tim Ekaterin in *Banker*:

'Always lamb on Wednesdays... some sort of chicken on Tuesdays, beef wellington most Thursdays. Henry never eats the crust.' Each day there was a clear soup before and fruit and cheese after. Alcohol if one chose, but most of them didn't... Quite a change, all of it, from a rough-hewn sandwich at my desk. (*Banker*, 2010, p. 65)

Francis describes the above weekly meat list to emphasize the general position change happening to his protagonist when he is promoted. From now on, he won't be just a member of the bank staff but he will belong to that elite group of directors who eat their lunches in a separate dining room. He has been accepted.

Description of dinners is used frequently to demonstrate the wealth of their consumers (as in *Hot Money*) or to mark a special celebration moment of success. However, lunches with invited guests sometimes also serve Francis as a first meeting point between the main hero and his future allies or enemies. People get introduced to each other by the host or hostess and the guests'

behaviour during such an event could be a source of information for an attentive observer. Many of such lunches take place in private boxes of wealthy horse owners during important race days. As readers learn from *Banker*, strawberries with cream and numerous bottles of good quality champagne have to be present every time. Another place for information exchange over a tasty lunch, followed by coffee, brandy and cigars, are the gentlemen's clubs. These are reserved for the upper class members, usually judges, Jockey Club officials, or former admirals, such as Sid Halley's ex-father-in-law Charles Rowland.

Food and drinks are also mentioned in life-saving situations. In a moment of complete breakdown, after finding his wife murdered in their house, Donald is offered a glass of brandy, but as it has been stolen then a cup of tea with some more cooking brandy – "a strong, sweet liquid." (*In the Frame*, 1993, p. 4). Holly, Kit Fielding's twin sister who desperately needs to talk to her brother in *Break In*, is sent by him to a bar to have a triple gin to make her calm down and wait for him to complete the race. Depending on who is in crisis, Francis serves through the hands of his heroes either strong black sweet tea (usually to women) or brandy, whiskey, and gin in larger amounts. Champagne is a drink of winners at the races, of lovers during passionate evenings, and also a kind of currency to pay racing sport journalists for important information.

In cases where the protagonist is a jockey, the element of food is used differently, as an additional source of pain for him. All the jockeys have to watch their weight and from Francis's remarks the readers get an impression that they practically don't eat or drink at all. Kit Fielding of *Break In* faces the amusement of the rich race watcher concerning his jockey diet just like many other Francis's heroes do:

One of the woman guests picked up a plate of small, delicious-looking cakes and offered it to me.

"No, thank you," I said mildly. "Not this minute."

"Not ever," the princess told her friend. "He can't eat those. And don't tempt him. He's hungry."

To her naive question concerning the content of his diet, Kit shortly answers:

“Lobster, probably.” (*Break In*, 2005, p. 25)

In his description of a dinner with Dick Francis, J. M. Davis (2016) mentions that the famous writer ate very little at this occasion and describes his dish as “a single, tapas-sized bruschetta on a saucer”. Francis’s wife Mary, unsurprised, confirmed then to Davis that such a diet is the result of her husband’s previous jockey years.

CONCLUSION

One of the reasons for reading is a need for entertainment. People want to be entertained, puzzled, they want to read a good story. And they have always been attracted to reading about mysteries and crime, happening to someone else. Crime readers want to be taken along in the story, let to be a part of it, following the path leading the intelligent, witty, and unbeatable main hero or heroes to the solution of the crime.

Dick Francis didn't bring any revolutionary pattern of a remarkable, unforgettable, extraordinary or unbeatable hero to the world of crime fiction. Although the protagonists of his books are all properly named, their names are not remembered nor are they important (probably apart from Sid Hailey). If asked about their favourite book, the readers of Francis's books might not be able to produce any title. He wrote his books following the same scheme.

However, there is something unique that distinguishes his works from the others and that brought his books so many fans worldwide: The implication that anybody can be a hero, no matter how much is he prepared or physically equipped for such a role. Based on his own, real and painful racing life experiences, following the same hidden pattern in all his books, Francis wrote books that could be called sincere, believable, yet interesting and thrilling at the same time. Dick Francis offers his readers a good story every time. In the 21st century, his books might be considered old-fashioned, taking into account especially the technology tools available to Francis's heroes, but people have probably not changed much since the days when his books were fresh. And here lies the reason for which Francis deserves to be still read: This storyteller presents heroes with solid moral code, men with whom the readers can identify with, who share their weaknesses and pains sincerely with them, and tell their stories the way that makes their "listeners" believe it and ask for more.

In addition to this, Francis invents his stories in the frame of the inimitable and genuine British society of his era, with all the specific features, class

stratification, habits and prejudices. He does it in such a manner that even foreigners soon feel familiar and “at home” there and they want to repeat their visits in this distinctive environment.

Apart from a mere crime and justice description, Francis, through his books, did also an enormous job in favour of the racing sport and showed the world the beauty of it with all its losses and victories, pain and freedom. He would probably not be able to create such vivid pictures of this specific environment without his own rich life experience in it, including the Devon Loch incident in 1956 which he probably wished the world would forget about. His life story is well known and it is often reflected in his books. And this is the added value and message to the ordinary readers of his crime stories which will remain mere crime stories and will never be considered any deeply philosophical literature: No matter how things seem to be bad and the powers and resources limited, there is a courageous hero inside every man.

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RÉSUMÉ

Bakalářská práce představuje specifika díla Dicka Francise, britského spisovatele detektivních románů z dostihového prostředí druhé poloviny 20.století. Krátce představuje jeho životní dráhu a spisovatelskou kariéru, zmiňuje i překladatelku jeho děl do českého jazyka, paní Jaroslavu Moserovou.

Práce popisuje a uvádí příklady tří specifík Francisových knih: modelu kladného hrdiny s pevným morálním profilem, atraktivního prostředí britského dostihového sportu a prvků, jenž autor používá k popisu reálií britské společnosti své doby.

Závěrečná kapitola shrnuje autorův osobitý příspěvek do literárního žánru klasické britské detektivky.

ANOTACE

Jméno a příjmení:	Zlata Hrubá
Katedra nebo ústav:	Ústav cizích jazyků
Vedoucí práce:	Mgr. Petr Anténe, PhD.
Rok obhajoby:	2019

Název práce:	Nepřemožitelní hrdinové, jedinečné prostředí a nenapodobitelná anglickost v románech Dicka Francise
Název v angličtině:	Unbeatable Heroes, Unique Environment and Inimitable Englishness in Dick Francis's Novels
Anotace práce:	Bakalářská práce analyzuje literární dílo Dicka Francise, britského autora detektivních románů z dostihového prostředí. Franciseovy knihy popisuje z hlediska vlastností Franciseových hrdinů, zaměřuje se na prostředí britského dostihového sportu, ve kterém se jeho postavy pohybují a na anglickou společnost druhé poloviny dvacátého století, jak ji Francis ve svých knihách líčí.
Klíčová slova:	Dick Francis, detektivní román, britský dostihový sport, detektivové, britská společnost
Anotace v angličtině:	The bachelor's project analyses the literary work of Dick Francis, a British writer of crime novels from the racing sport environment. It focuses on Francis's books from the perspective of qualities of his main characters, the environment of the British horse racing where his characters operate, and on the English society of the second half of the twentieth century as Francis describes it in his books.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Dick Francis, crime novel, British racing, detectives, British society
Přílohy vázané v práci :	CD
Rozsah práce:	43 stran
Jazyk práce:	Anglický jazyk

