

BY DUNCAN H. BROWN

MOVIE REVIEWS

The Lady in the Water, starring Paul Giamatti

The Lady in the Water is a beautiful, sometimes scary, adult fairy tale/myth about an apartment-complex maintenance man who meets a curious visitor from another realm.

A quirky collection of people live in this complex, and the film takes time to introduce us to them by following Giamatti as he fixes various problems with plumbing, electrical, and a big bug.

M. Night Shyamalan creates dense, symbol-rich movies. I think this is the best and most accessible of his films since *The Sixth Sense*.

I can't describe too much of the plot; suffice to say that it's an engaging tale of the intersection of a world of myth and magic with our own sometimes curious world.

One of the pleasures of viewing this movie is to see the slow wonder that unfolds in Giamatti. He's moving up on to my "A" list of actors to watch for. At the beginning of the movie we see a shy, stuttering man simply doing his job. By the end, we know him a lot better, and we see a man's passions and hopes and need for community given voice as he reaches out to many of the apartment dwellers to aid on the quest.

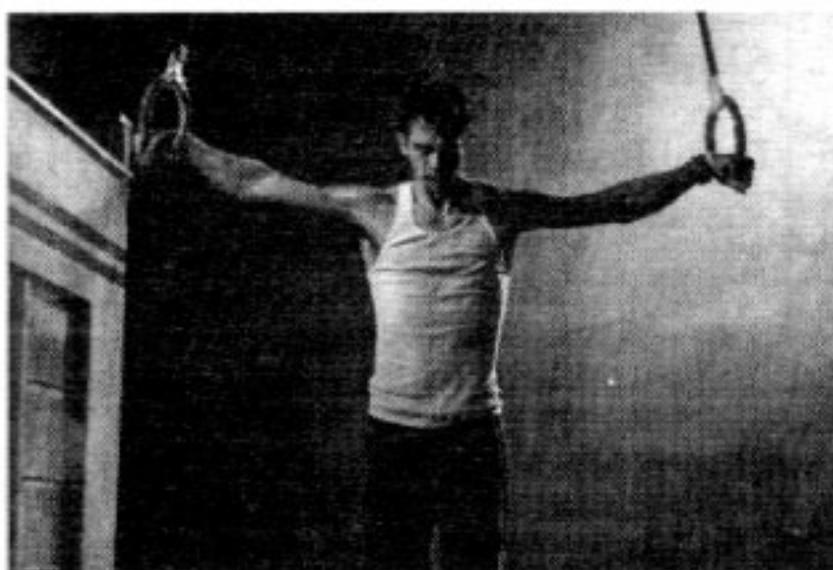
There are some great supporting performances, including Bob Balaban as a movie reviewer, and Cindy Cheong's hilarious dialogs with her Chinese-speaking mother.

Along with the drama there's a lightness and humor in the movie; Shyamalan is relaxed enough to let it all happen step by step—no slave to story, he. Shyamalan also appears as one of the characters in the story; we sense a bit of autobiography at play.

This is a fine movie for all audiences. The scary parts are not emphasized unduly, and, overall, a sense of wonder develops that carries us along.

The Peaceful Warrior, starring Nick Nolte and Scott Mechlowicz

The Peaceful Warrior is the story of an unusual teacher and a young, troubled gymnast. What makes the teacher (Nick Nolte) unusual is that he is a gas station attendant. His student (Scott Mechlowicz) is a crack gymnast from the University of California, who's training for the Olympic tryouts.



The gymnast (Dan Millman) is having trouble sleeping, and wanders out at night and happens upon Nolte's gas station. After hearing a bit of what sounds like philosophy from the gas station attendant, Dan starts calling him Socrates. As Dan is leaving, he sees (or doesn't see, actually) Socrates do something that absolutely intrigues him.

The rest of the movie shows Dan coming grudgingly to respect Socrates, and learning from him how to knit his life together into a satisfying whole instead of a frustrating and unhappy series of parts. Also, Dan suffers an accident that puts his gymnastic career in peril. Socrates has his work cut out for him.

It's easy to compare this film to *The Karate Kid*. It's a fun movie to watch, with only a few confusing touches like the dream sequences. Also, the director (or someone associated with this movie) seems to think that heightened states of consciousness should be broadcast with dramatic music, loud sound effects and slow motion. (Perhaps in a previous life he made martial arts movies.)

This movie is appropriate for all audiences. Some of the gymnastic scenes are very beautiful, and the relationship that develops between Nolte and Mechlowicz is a pleasure to watch. Also, watching Mechlowicz, I was reminded of Tom Cruise early in his career.

Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby, starring Will Ferrell

Talladega Nights is a broad comedy that parodies car races and the men who race the cars. It's a hilarious collection of racing and talking about racing. Ricky Bobby is a person born to drive; his first words aren't "Mommy" or "Dada," they're "I want to go fast!" On top of his racing game, Bobby is challenged by a gay Frenchman. Will he rise to the challenge? You bet.