

Painfully Slow 'Mary Reilly' Leaves Audience Gasping for Breath

In the tradition of movies such as "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein" and "Bram Stoker's Dracula," director Stephen Frears attempts to revive a classic tale of suspense and horror on the big screen — with dastardly results.

"Mary Reilly," based on the book of the same name, tells the familiar story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde as seen through the eyes of the doctor's maidservant, Mary Reilly. But what at first appears to promise an interesting, fresh perspective falters under the weight of what should be the crux of the film. Instead of focusing on the development of the characters of the doctor and his alter ego and the effect these idiosyncrasies have on Mary Reilly, the director relies on mood-making devices to carry the movie, succeeding only in making "Mary Reilly" a thoroughly unenjoyable viewing experience. Roberts stars in the title role as Dr. Jekyll's loyal maid, who becomes romantically captivated by the doctor as she becomes increasingly entangled in his shady dealings. She is the representative of innocence in the film, inexplicably drawn to both the tenacity of Dr. Jekyll and the utter evil of Mr. Hyde.

MELISSA MILIOS
Movie Review
"Mary Reilly"
D

John Malkovich's dual role as tortured doctor and lusty assistant is tailor-made for

the actor, whose very presence adds a sense of foreboding and imminent peril to any film. At once convincingly depraved and repressed, Malkovich portrays the doctor as a driven alchemist looking first hopefully for a potion to release his inhibitions and later frantically for a counteractive to control the ever-strengthening Mr. Hyde before both doctor and "assistant" are destroyed. As Reilly, Roberts is a mute observer of these horrors, relying on wide-eyed looks of fear and stupefaction to build her character. In the two-hour long film, she has precious few lines of dialogue, making it hard to understand what is going on behind those hollow eyes and leaving motivating factors for her actions unclear. Despite her haunted past, Ms. Reilly obviously has no sense of self-preservation, as she, much to the dismay of the audience, wanders blindly into one horrific situation after another. When Reilly does finally open her mouth, what comes out is an unfortunately contrived Scottish accent, which is not complemented by Roberts' habit of swallowing her words. Malkovich does not attempt an accent, but as the doctor, his measured sentences and carefully pronounced dialogue create about him a maddening aura of urgency and intrigue. Again, the scarcity of dialogue overall leaves many of the characters' actions unbelievable and even ridiculous.

Appearing in a bit part as warehouse

madam, Glenn Close is effectively repulsive, her sneer and painted red lips making the audience queasy. But against the dreary backdrop of the film, the color red jumps out in even more unexpected and offensive points in the movie. Bloody scenes abound, and the excessive gore is distasteful and sickening, including tight shots of the skinning and hacking of a writhing eel and close-ups of carcasses at a slaughterhouse. Blood-saturated handkerchiefs with the initials "HJ" also appear sporadically throughout the movie.

The pace of the film is painfully slow, and although some gravity is understandable in such a tale, only so many scenes of Mary Reilly wandering through the hollow rooms of the estate are necessary to establish a mood of gothic loneliness. Impressive cinematography — muted colors, oppressive fogs, subtle lighting — compounds this mood, but the overall result is more uncomfortably claustrophobic than effectively unnerving. Relentless music tries too hard to make every scene weighty, consequently downplaying the intensity of the more intentionally dramatic scenes.

If Frears' goal was for viewers to leave the theater feeling suffocated and gasping for breath, his mission has been accomplished in "Mary Reilly"; however, viewers deserve a reward for their endurance of this oppression, and this reward is painfully absent in "Mary Reilly."



A past scarred by violence and pain has given Mary Reilly (Julia Roberts) a core of strength and endurance.

Chan Invades America With 'Rumble in the Bronx'

In the early eighties, Jackie Chan agreed to be exploited by Hollywood in an attempt to become a worldwide star, but sadly he received none of the benefits of the "partnership."

TODD GILCHRIST
Movie Review
"Rumble In The Bronx"
B+

After "The Fearless Hyena" and some other crazy animal-named films, he returned to China. Now, using one of his own foreign films as a domestic vehicle, Chan is attempting to revive American interest with "Rumble In The Bronx."

Chan stars as the nephew of a Chinese storekeeper in — you guessed it — the

Bronx (never mind that mountain range in the background). His uncle is going away on his honeymoon, and Chan is left to take care of the shop while he's away. When some badly-dubbed hoodlums try to steal from the store, he is forced into action and ends up getting involved with a major New York gang (and they are tough — when Chan calls them "garbage," they collectively hang their heads in shame). Then more stuff happens involving a hovercraft, a Lamborghini and more of Chan's breathtaking acrobatics.

One has to give up on the story altogether to make it through "Rumble In The Bronx," but this in no way diminishes the film's entertainment value. Although the

film lacks in substance, Chan delivers one of the most kinetic performances ever shown on screen.

I doubt that any American director of the past twenty years could create such a rapid-fire succession of motions as Chan choreographs himself. Chan does all of his own choreography and stunts, as described in the previews, and once you watch the film you'll understand why no one will insure him. He doesn't just get into fistfights; he will kick your ass with a refrigerator, a shopping cart, a pinball machine, metal fencing or any other piece of his environment within reach. Still, he takes a lickin' just as well as he gives one, and it shows in the closing credits; he gets hurt in several

scenes (as shown by outtakes), and, in fact, broke his foot before the film was completed and had to wear a tennis-shoe shaped sock over a cast to finish.

Whether Chan becomes a true international star remains to be seen; the most pressing concern, however, is if people will subject themselves to such mediocre dubbing. Even the characters who speak English don't seem to be matched up with their words (this is partially attributed to the fact that the sound for most Chinese pictures is recorded in post-production). Still, "Rumble In The Bronx" is as damn near enjoyable as movies get these days, and well worth whatever price you pay to see it.

Regurgitation of Traditional Clichés Plague 'Night is Falling'

In Patricia Rozema's movie "When Night is Falling," characters whip out the sort of inane poetic idioms that in real life would plummet so quickly you would think they were made of lead, not stardust. The characters say things like "I'd love to see you in the moonlight with your head thrown back and your body on fire," or "I love everything about you... I love you."

AZIZ HUQ
Movie Review
"When Night is Falling"
B

In real life as well as reel life, this is more often the not the cue either to burst into laughter or to put that "fight-or-flight" instinct to use. In Rozema's film, however, the situation is slightly different. In these quotes, a man is not speaking to a woman — a woman is speaking to a woman.

Rozema takes the standard clichés of melodrama and tells a new story with them: a love story between two women. The appropriation of time-worn heterosexuality conventions to reaffirm the reality and strength of homosexual bonds is not a new strategy. By expressing homosexuality in the same idiom as heterosexuality, Rozema celebrates the triumphant finding of lesbian freedom, although she is not setting out in any way a cultural "space" for "lesbian art."

Like Tony Kushner's epic play "Angels in America," "Falling" could be called a "gay fantasia." Rozema and her cinematographer find, in the honeyed light of Canadian afternoons and the whittled shapes of gnarled and dashed oaks in gathering dusk, a visual style that is captivating and appropriate. Every shot resonates with vitality and beauty. Indeed, if one were to remove the plot and keep only the play of light and shadow, strung together by the Nyman-esque score, one would have a worthy short film.

As it goes, the plot is rather thin, threadbare from centuries of boots trampling upon it. Camille (Pascale Bussieres), the teacher and prospective dean of a Calvinist Christian college, is the good girl — tight lipped and fragile, with eyes so limpid you could dive right in them. She is traumatized at the beginning of the film by the unexpected death of her dog and the realization that she no longer loves anything more in the world, including her fiancé. One can hardly blame her. Henry Czerny, as Martin — the "intended" — oozes a thick, radioactive menace. The sentiment of violence drips from his bulldog jowls and congeals under his dirty brown raincoat.

Petra (Rachael Crawford) is the girl from the wrong side of the tracks — a

circus performer, to be precise. She comforts the weeping Camille in the blank sterility of the Laundromat, falling immediately in love (just?) and doing a "switcheroo" in their laundry, forcing Camille to come to the circus to find her — and to find her own self. In the best fairy tale tradition, the "Scius of Sorts" is a phantasmagoria of the weird and wonderful, freaks and femmes which serve to catapult Camille out of her placid and staid lifestyle. The circus is the perfect place for a transformation, since Camille, as a teacher of mythologies — a rather unlikely subject to be teaching at a Christian college — is obviously in need of a "transformation." Echoes of Angela Carter, rather than Barnum, ripple through the circus scenes.

The film moves in clockwork certainty from the point of their meeting, Camille fluctuating between Petra's love and the freedom of the circus and the conformity of the choolroom. Rozema, if for nothing else, must be congratulated on the sheer number of clichés she's managed (as writer and director — an open invitation to self-indulgence) to cram into the film: The triangle of the reputable lady caught between two lifestyles. The "crazy" lover who provokes and delivers the unexpected and the exotic. The reserved and solid husband-to-be — dependable but boring.

Some moments strike such a discordant note, however, that one cannot help but laugh. Camille, in one scene is being interviewed for the prestigious post of chaplain. In the course of this interview, she unexpectedly busts out with a round of doubts about the homophobia of the church.

Rozema, one resumes, wants to reassure us that Camille is no hypocrite — but this makes her out to be just plain dumb. The theme of homosexuality within the church was handled far more successfully by Antonia Bird's "Hest." In "Falling" it gets short shrift. Rozema, in a scene where Camille finds herself unable to pray, suggesting that Christianity and homosexuality are irreconcilable — a position many would find dubious.

A film's worthiness as a social project does not necessarily guarantee its success as an artistic venture. Open, social concerns can obscure rather than uplift the content of a film. Such is the case with "Falling"; the wholesale regurgitation of harlequin clichés eventually sticks in the throat. That films with a lesbian theme can transcend heterosexual clichés has already been shown by the wonderful "Go Fish." "When Night is Falling" simply isn't in the same league. However, for a good old-fashioned tear-jerker that'll get your handkerchiefs nice and wet, it can't be beat.

Genuine Thrills Save 'Unforgettable' From Mediocrity

I will admit that I have a certain biased admiration for the modern film noir director John Dahl. His "Red Rock West" was a heady little film that had its share of hits and misses, while "The Last Seduction" pretty much kicked ass every which way but loose. So I was hoping that his first crack at non-noir would sustain the appeal of his previous efforts. The straight-up thriller "Unforgettable" combines in its story elements of both "The Fugitive" (an innocent man consumed by attempts to find his wife's killer) and "Strange Days"

BRENT SIMON
Movie Review
"Unforgettable"
B-

(virtual sensory experience). But "Unforgettable" is anything but.

Ray Liotta stars as Dr. David Krane, a Seattle medical examiner who turns up a clue and begins his own personal search for his wife's real killer. Linda Fiorentino plays Dr. Martha Briggs, a university researcher who, using lab rats, unlocks the secrets of neuroelectrical impulse transfer.

Our most noteworthy memories are stored in cerebral spinal fluid (CSF) and can be shared not unlike a middle school lunch when injected into the blood stream, jumpstarted with an outside stimulus and counterbalanced with the right combination of drugs. Conveniently enough, CSF is routinely extracted and saved during all

medical autopsies. So Dr. Krane "borrows" a little of his dead wife's fluid in an attempt to experience her last few minutes alive and track down her murderer, thus proving his innocence.

Complex story line aside, the film's stars deliver fine performances. True, Liotta does mainly blink instead of act, but that is due mostly to the film's structure — he's required to behave in that manner in which men in movies always seem to grieve. Fiorentino, in a departure from previous roles, plays plain and simple Dr. Briggs with such natural charm that the viewer can't help but be more interested in her character than in Liotta's. Christopher McDonald and Peter Coyote also turn up

in supporting roles as police detectives.

Dahl does a good job with what he's given, but Bill Geddie's script is mostly a convoluted rehash and patchwork job with a couple of neat gimmicks found in the science fiction trappings. Instead of interesting character background, what we seem to end up with are a lot of shots of Liotta grimacing and injecting himself with various concoctions. Also, Dahl uses jolting flashbacks — often the same series of shots — to the point of numbness. If I had to offer up a thumbnail analogy, this film's flashbacks: John Woo's "The Killer" bullets.

Ultimately, "Unforgettable," while catchy, fails to completely live up to its name.

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