



Emma Thompson, as a magical nanny, says goodnight to the Brown children in the dark fable "Nanny McPhee." AP PHOTO

Acting, warts stand out

Emma Thompson finds success with writing, starring roles

By PHIL VILLARREAL
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Beware, bratty kids. When you least expect it, the mystical Nanny McPhee floats into your life to give you a magical slap-down and force you to see the error of your ways.

"When you need me and don't want me," the homely nanny tells you, she'll be there. But "when you want me but don't need me," she must leave.

Before you start to wonder whether it's appropriate to take life lessons from someone who isn't up on personal hygiene — McPhee's face is pocked with warts and boils, she's overweight, a single tooth protrudes from her upper lip and hair puffs out of her ears — she has you under her spell.

With the tap of a cane, McPhee turns your badness upon you. Try to stay in bed too late, and you're stuck there all day.

Refuse to say "please," and she'll threaten to catapult your baby sibling.

The film is just as spellbinding as its subject. What initially feels like a knockoff of "Mary Pop-

MOVIE REVIEW

'Nanny McPhee'

• **Rating:** PG for mild thematic elements, some rude humor and brief language

• **Stars:** Three out of four

pins" blossoms into something else entirely, an assured spunky story with such a resonant feel that it seems to have been pulled from an ancient fairy tale.

Apparently set sometime near the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the film is based on Christianna Brand's 20th-century Nurse Matilda books.

Emma Thompson, the only person ever to have won Oscars for both screenwriting ("Sense and Sensibility") and acting ("Howards End"), fills both roles here, not only starring as the snaggletoothed title character but also providing a witty, intelligent script.

Thompson is solid in her performance as an oblique shamanistic figure who magically forces children to learn to behave. But it's her writing that truly stands out.

The script is loaded with entertaining humor that manages to engage adults and children alike on the same level, without resorting to the well-worn Disney

method of packing in slapstick for kids and appealing adults with glib pop culture references.

McPhee descends into the cluttered Brown house with its seven troublemaker children, fabled throughout the countryside for running off nannies of all sorts.

In McPhee, the kids have met more than their match. The ring-leader is the oldest boy, Simon (Thomas Sangster), who stubbornly continues to agitate against McPhee even as she wins over his siblings.

The befuddled father, often absent due to his work commitments as an undertaker, is Cedric (Colin Firth), a sad and lonely widower.

He's told by his benefactor, domineering Great Aunt Adelaide (Angela Lansbury), that he must marry within the month or lose financial assistance, without which the family would be forced to split apart.

Waiting in the wings is the adoring servant (Evangeline Kelly Macdonald), who secretly hopes she can catch Cedric's eye before loudmouth spinster Selma Quickly (Celia Imrie) becomes the wicked stepmother the children fear.

McPhee, who loses one of her many blemishes each time the kids learn a lesson, oversees the brood with kindly persistence.

You may not want her. You may not think you need her. But she's there for you anyway.

• Keith

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1)

all those fires out. There are so many of those ignorant rants about that that you just have to ... (Trails off)

I've done 60 shows in Iraq. I go over every year for 15 or 16 days and play for our troops. Me and the USO have a great friendship. And Fox ran a whole thing on the entertainment that goes on with the USO, and they never even mentioned me.

That's because I don't go out and crow about it. But that's something I dedicate my time to.

I don't get paid. Most of the people go over there get paid; I don't get paid one nickel. I don't ask for no nickel. I don't ask for no special treatment.

And I don't just go land in the green zone and play for the troops and just jump out. I go to Mosul, Tikrit, Fallujah.

I go right into the heat and go find those boys. And I've played Afghanistan several times, too.

It ain't somethin' I go out in

every interview and crow about and say, "Look at me." That is my dedication to our troops. I won't be hypocritical about it. I was doing it before 9-11. I'll do it after the wars are over.

TNT: You mentioned how people paint you with this broad stroke as being extremely right-wing and jingoistic. Can you point to a belief that you have that might surprise people?

TK: This is my favorite one. I'm a lifetime registered Democrat. That completely freaks people out. I helped to campaign in Oklahoma (for Democratic Gov. Brad Henry) ... And he's done great.

I always vote for the guy who can get it done. And it ain't nobody's business who I vote for, but I voted for Clinton twice. And that just blows people's minds when they hear that.

And here's the thing: Just because you're pro-troops doesn't mean you're pro-war. And just because you're anti-war don't mean you're anti-troops.

Just because you don't support the war people think you're anti-troops and you're a bad guy. And just because you go support the troops and rah-rah the troops up

all of a sudden you're pro-war.

TNT: Have your views on the war changed from going over there so many times?

TK: No, it's just a terrible place to be. Any war zone is. You know, when Clinton took care of (Slobodan) Milosovic I stood at this river outside of Sarajevo and was getting a history lesson.

And they said Milosovic and his soldiers exterminated every male between the ages of 11 and 65, and they threw 'em in that river to get rid of 'em.

But now you go in there, you ... go down Bill Clinton Highway and you see Statues of Liberties on top of people's houses, and people are very grateful.

I think this war we're in now, I don't think these people are grateful as a whole even though I see 'em wavin' at the chopper.

I don't know if that country can be helped. No matter right or wrong, whatever the reasons they decided to go in there, I just don't know if that country can be helped.

If you pulled out of there and just let 'em go, I think they would just go right back to where they were.

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